



"Community in the Godhead"
Genesis 1

Idea: Man exists as a living reflection of God, who exists in eternal community.

Intro: *"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him."* – Colossians 1:16

The Apostle Paul reminds us that we were created to be in community with God. We hear a lot of talk about community today both inside and outside the church. Do you know what it is or what it looks like? Do you understand how it is attained or how it affects the church and the culture in which we live?

Community can simply be defined as "a unified body of individuals." Another way of describing community is *one-together*. This definition is helpful, but as Christians we must always strive to understand things biblically. So we want to understand the concept of biblical community, and I

understand things better when I can see it depicted. God gives us an image of community in His Word. Read Acts 2:44-47.

Here in this passage the Lord gives us a clear picture of biblical community. Does it seem a little strange to you? They were *together* and had *all* things in common. They continued in *one mind* in the temple and enjoyed spending time with one another. Why would this seem peculiar to us? It shouldn't be. Read Ephesians 2:14-22. The reason it seems strange is because too often we approach life as individuals rather than as a body of followers of Christ. The reality is that Christ has made us one body...one community of faith who is being built together.

Inquiry: Over the next several weeks, I will be addressing the biblical concept of community. Now, I understand that when a preacher speaks of community, fellowship, or a similar term he usually is going to relate it to the small group ministry in an attempt to bolster attendance. I will connect community to our small group ministry. In fact I will connect it to groups smaller than our small groups. But this is not an attempt to increase our attendance. Our small group attendance is strong. My goal is bigger than increasing the number of groups and attendance in our church. I want to reestablish the basis for community and why it is, and always has been, essential to the Christian life. Due to the fact that community takes sacrifice and intentionality, our view of community must be bigger than a way to belong, making church feel smaller, or closing the back door of the church. We need to see the eternal purpose in order to inspire the devotion to community that we see in Acts 2.

In this study of community we will look at the Bible's depiction of it in the creation of mankind, the call and establishment of Abram and Israel, the expression in the NT, and its outworking through evangelistic small groups. Today, we begin with the foundation of community...God himself.

Now before you decide that community is unneeded or only needed by women, hear me out. C. N. Kraus in his book, *The Authentic Witness* wisely states,

"The most conspicuous weakness of evangelical Protestant theology has been its lack of understanding and witness to authentic community as the fulfillment of the believer's personal relation to God (p. 109)."

The truth is Christians should be concerned about community because it traces its origins directly back to God. The essence of community finds its roots deep in biblical-theological soil. Without God there would be no community. Some people equate community with small groups and claim that the act of instituting small groups is biblical.

There is a difference between small groups and community. Do we find small groups used as a methodology in Scripture? Yes. Does that make the methodology of grouping a few people together for some purpose biblical? Not necessarily. Boats were used in Scripture for various purposes, but we don't consider boats biblical. Small groups may become a means to an end. They can provide for the experiencing of community. Some people spend hundreds, even thousands, of hours in groups. But they may experience glimpses of community in only three or four of those groups or perhaps not at all. While community is God's intended purpose for when his people get together, it is not automatically present, nor can it be created on demand. Community takes time, commonality of commitment, and openness to the formation of the Spirit. Groups may or may not become wombs of this birth of community among members.

When groups are viewed simply as a technique or program, they lose their essence. In his book *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, G. W. Icenogle, asserts, "Most of the current small group activities in the church is not organic but technical and curricular. Churches do groups because they work" (p. 11). Within the perspective and purpose of

community, small groups can become sirens that beckon us to return to the nature of what God created us to be.

God created and calls us to oneness. When we pursue that we move from a collection of players to a winning team; from instruments labeled woodwinds, strings, percussion, and brass to an orchestra that produces the sounds of music; from artist, color, shapes, canvass, paint, and subject to masterpiece. No one would think to claim that the canvass, the instruments, or the positions were the sought-after end. When we are together in community (harmoniously combined in oneness), we reflect our Creator.

Our faith journey is one we make together. Community is the context for our growth, and it is a distinctively Christian concept.

Therefore, let's take a look at community in the Godhead or Trinity. To do so, we first must possess a basic understanding of the Trinity.

I. Understanding the Trinity

In his *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem defines the doctrine of the Trinity as: "God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God." This doctrine is progressively revealed in Scripture. It is never clearly articulated; instead images and allusions to it are given progressively. The word *trinity* is never found in the Bible, though the idea represented by the word is taught in many places. The word *trinity* means "tri-unity" or "three-in-oneness." It is used to summarize the teaching of Scripture that God is three persons yet one God.

In one sense the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that we will never be able to fully understand. We can, however, understand something of its truth by summarizing the teaching of Scripture in three statements:

- God is three persons.

- Each person is fully God.
- There is one God.

A. God is three persons.

Remember that this doctrine is progressively revealed to us in Scripture. What I mean is that as we move away from Genesis and closer to the Revelation, the doctrine becomes clearer and takes on an understandable shape. Our first glimpse of the Trinity is found in Genesis 1. Read Gen 1:1-2, 26. In verse one, the word translated God is *'Elōhîm*. It is the most common term (2750x) used in the OT referring to deity or God. This term is plural, and it can refer to pagan gods or of Israel's one God. When used of the one God, it commonly occurs with singular verbs as it is found here in verse one.

In verse two, Moses tells us that God's Spirit was moving over the surface of the waters as a divine protector of the infant creation. Then in verse twenty-six, God uses three plural pronouns in reference to himself and the creation of man. The best explanation for the use of the plural pronouns and the distinction of the Spirit of God, is that already in the first chapter of Genesis we have an indication of a plurality of persons in God himself. This is further illustrated in Genesis 3:22 ("Behold, the man has become like one of Us...").

When we come to the NT we find a more complete revelation of the Trinity. Read Matt 3:16-17. Here we find the three persons of the Godhead performing three distinct activities. We see God the Father speaking of God the Son. We see God the Son being baptized by John the Baptist. We also see God the Holy Spirit descending from heaven to rest upon and empower the Son for His ministry. In John 1, the apostle describes the Son as the creative agent through which the Father created all things.

The Bible is clear that God consists of three distinct persons (Father, Son, & Spirit).

B. Each person is fully God.

In addition to the fact that all three persons are distinct, the abundant testimony of Scripture is that each person is fully God as well.

First, God the Father is clearly God. This is evident from the first verse of the Bible, where God created the heavens and the earth. It is evident through the OT and NT, where God the Father is clearly viewed as sovereign Lord over all and where Jesus prays to his Father in heaven.

Second, the Son is fully God. Several explicit passages of Scripture affirm the full deity of Christ.

- John 1:1-4 - The "Word" was with God and "was God." The Greek text echoes the opening words of Genesis 1:1.
- John 20:28-31 - Thomas touches the scars of Jesus' and declares his deity. John writes so that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God.
- Colossians 1:15-19
- Titus 2:13 - Refers to "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."
- Hebrews 1:1-3 - Jesus is the exact representation of God.
- Isaiah 9:6 - "For unto us a child is born...his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God.'"

Finally, the Holy Spirit is fully God. Once we understand God the Father and God the Son to be fully God, then the trinitarian expressions in verses like Matthew 28:19 assume significance for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, because they show that the Holy Spirit is classified on an equal level with the Father and the Son. Another example is found in Acts 5:3-4. Peter

asks Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...? You have not lied to men but to God."

God is three persons. Each person is fully God.

C. There is one God.

Scripture is abundantly clear that there is one and only one God. The three different persons of the Trinity are one not only in purpose and in agreement on what they think, but they are one in essence, one in their essential nature. In other words, God is only one being. There are not three Gods. There is only one God.

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!" - Deut 6:4

"For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus..." - 1 Tim 2:5

James declared that even the demons know and believe that God is one (James 2:19).

How can three persons exist as one God?

The Bible never presents us with an analogy to explain to us the Trinity, and any human analogy we use will prove to be inadequate or misleading.

Think of it this way:

$1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ 1 Father x 1 Son x 1 Spirit = 1 God

The Trinity or Godhead consists of three distinct persons (Father, Son, & Spirit). Each person is fully God, and the three persons make up one God.

II. Observing Community within the Trinity

When Scripture discusses the way in which God relates to the world, both in creation and in redemption, the

persons of the Trinity are said to have different functions or primary activities.

For example, in creation the Father spoke the creative words to bring the universe into being. But it was the Son, the eternal Word of God, who carried out these creative activities (John 1:3; Col 1:16). The Holy Spirit was likewise involved in a different way. He was hovering over the face of the waters sustaining and manifesting God's immediate presence in his creation (Gen 1:2).

In redemption, the Father planned redemption and sent his Son into the world (John 3:16). The Son obeyed the Father and accomplished redemption for man (John 6:38). It was the Son alone who died as a substitution for sin. Then after the Son ascended back to heaven, the Spirit was sent by the Father and Son to apply redemption to man. All three have differing activities.

So we may say that the role of the Father in creation and redemption has been to plan and direct and send the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is not surprising, for it shows that the Father and the Son relate to one another as a father and son relate to one another in a human family: the father directs and has authority over the son, and the son obeys and is responsive to the directions of the father. The Holy Spirit is obedient to the directives of both the Father and the Son.

Thus, while the persons of the Trinity are equal in all their attributes, they nonetheless differ in their relationships to the creation. The Son and Holy Spirit are equal in deity to the Father, but they are subordinate in their roles. They are equal in being but subordinate in role.

We discover in the Godhead the reality that community is rooted in the very nature of God's personhood. While

each of the Persons in the Trinity is unique, they represent interrelationship par excellence. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel says it this way:

"The three divine persons are not there simply for themselves. They are there in that they are there for one another. They are persons in social relationship. The Father can be called Father only in relationship with the Son; the Son can be called Son only in relationship with the Father. The Spirit is the breath of the one who speaks. The breath goes out from the Father in the eternal moment in which the Father speaks the Word, which in another relationship is called the Son...Being a person means 'being in relationship.'" (*Humanity in God*, 97)

III. Imaging the Community of the Trinity

Being a person means "being in relationship. God created you and me as "persons." Personhood is only known in relation to others. Our identity as relational beings is carved out of interpersonal relating. God made His creation capable of community because He knows and experiences community. You were made by God and for God. Adam was created with the capacity and necessity for relating to God. God made a creature with whom he could interact. Like an artist stepping back to admire his work, God surveyed what He had made and declared it was very good (Gen 1:31).

Read Genesis 1:26. Being made in God's image, we reflect our Creator. Made as persons we are made for relationship - with our Creator and with one another. Gilbert Bilezikian said it well in his book *Community 101*:

"Community as God ordained it was not an incidental concern of his...Community is deeply grounded in the nature of God. It flows from who God is. Because he is

community, he creates community. It is his gift of himself to humans" (p. 27).

As bearers of his image we hunger for community to fulfill that image. This reality is evidenced by the plethora of books on intimacy that fill our bookstores and our insatiable desire to be connected with others.

3 Truths of Community

1. God exists in eternal community within the Godhead.
2. I was created for community...to be in relationship with God and others.
3. I will experience complete satisfaction only by living in community with God and the church of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: The problem with imaging the community of the Godhead is the fact that each one of us has been marred by sin. We have within us an innate desire to be in community with others, but sin has disrupted that community...that oneness. Sin has deployed a different strategy in our lives. Sin always seeks to isolate what God has joined together. This isolation is personified in the Garden of Eden as Satan tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, leading to her and Adam's fall. Community with the Father was severed then and there.

However, God has made a way through the Son. Jesus came and died as a substitute for your sin, paying the sin debt that each one of us owed. Through Him we can again be one together with the Father and with one another.

We were created for community. This is one reason the Lord has given us the church.