

## **GOD AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Ted Schroder, Trinity Sunday, May 30, 2010**

Personal relationships are at the heart of God. Personal relationships are at the heart of being made in the image of God, of being truly human, as opposed to being merely animal. Human perfection, or maturity has to do with healthy personal relationships. Our understanding of the nature of God impels us to make harmony in personal relationships a high priority in our lives. Love of God necessitates love of neighbor. When a person claims to be a follower of Christ and does not value personal relationships he or she has a false understanding of God. A person may know the Bible, and may be a leader or faithful member in the church, or an accomplished theologian or an outstanding preacher, or committed to sacrificial service, or a missionary, but if he or she is hard to get on with, and is selfish, and ignores other people, then he or she isn't truly reflecting the image of God. People who have poor relational skills, or don't seem to be interested in other people, or are indifferent to them, often have little, if any, affinity or interest in God. There is a connection between indifference to God and indifference to others. In fact, lack of sense of others, can be the consequence of lack of sense of God.

Listen to how St. Paul ends his second letter to the Corinthians, who are dealing with divisions in their congregation. "Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints send their greetings. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:11-14)

The understanding of God as a Holy Trinity, one being in three persons, that developed in the New Testament, and was proclaimed by Jesus in his baptismal formula of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19), is best likened to a family, community or society of persons. This social analogy of the mystery of the Godhead is a model for church and society. If such an understanding of God is true then we need to reflect in our relationships this image of God. By doing so we will fulfill the purpose of our creation.

"The social conception of the Trinity offers a fundamental vision of God as a giving and open community of divine persons, one that invites us through Christ's sonship into its loving embrace as our true home. This divine communion of love appeals to the deepest longing of the human heart, and defines the meaning of life as the risky and arduous project of learning to love." (T.R. Thompson, *Trinity*, New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics)

God, the source of life in the universe, the reason for our existence, the prime mover of our destiny, is described in personal relational terms. If we are to aim for perfection in our lives, to become all that we are meant to be, then we will reflect these three characteristics of the Holy Trinity. What are they?

First, the *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace comes *from* the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of grace. He is the giver of grace. He brings, and is in himself, the free gift of God's salvation. "For by grace we are saved through faith." (Ephesians 2:8) As we are freely given, so we are meant to freely give to others. As we have been freely forgiven through the Cross of Christ, we are meant to freely forgive others. Jesus said that we should forgive others seventy times seven! At the heart of God is the ability to give, to dispense mercy and compassion to those in need, to those who are unworthy. For grace means a gift that is unearned. Grace is the miracle of unconditional acceptance, the beauty of reconciliation, the tearing down of barriers that divide us from God and one another. Grace feeds the hungry. Grace washes the feet of the

poor. Grace is blind to the ugly. Grace covers a multitude of sins. Grace says, “He who is without sin cast the first stone.” (John 8:7) Grace does not judge, “for in the same way you judge others, you will be judged.” (Matthew 7:2) No, “for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:8) Grace is the open hand of God that always gives. How grace-filled is your life?

Second, the *love* of God. Love comes *from* God. God the Father is the source of love. The dynamic of the Holy Trinity is essential to the sharing of love between the three persons: the Father loves the Son through the Spirit. Love cannot be static or introverted. Love must express itself to others in personal relationships. We are made for love, to love others. Salvation liberates us from self-love and self-hatred so that we can love others. Love creates new worlds. The love of God throws off an ever-expanding universe. Love of God in us procreates, multiplies, loves children, and seeks to serve others. Love is the glue that binds us all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:14) “Knowledge puffs up but love builds up.” (1 Corinthians 8:1) Love encourages and affirms others. Love does not try to tear others down. Love is constructive. Love is ever life-giving not life-denying. The love of God is patient, kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. The love that comes from God is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. The love of God does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. The love of God always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. The love of God never fails. The love of God never stops, never ceases, never ends. Love is the open heart of God that is never closed to us. How loving is your life?

Third, the *fellowship* of the Holy Spirit. We live in the company of the Holy Spirit who makes possible the fellowship of the church. “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit.” (Ephesians 4:3,4) When we are born of the Spirit we enter into the covenant family of God whose members are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We have a common life together which we share. *Koinonia* is the Greek word for fellowship or communion, or community. The church is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. “To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7) Our spiritual gifts are given us for the good of other members of the congregation. We bring into the congregation all our gifts. In the early church, after the coming of the Holy Spirit in power, “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as he had need.” (Acts 2:44,45) They shared everything they had. As they shared in their experience of God, as they received the blessing of God’s grace and love, they gave to one another. Christian fellowship is Christian caring and sharing. We do not ignore the needs of one another but seek to help one another as we are able to do. When we gather around the Lord’s Table for Holy Communion we have communion, or fellowship with God and communion or fellowship with one another. As we feed by faith on the Body broken and the Blood shed of Christ, we are made into one Body of Christ and love one another as Christ has loved us. Where there are destitute brothers and sisters it is the responsibility of Spirit-filled believers to alleviate need and abolish poverty in the new community of Jesus. We are meant to look out for one another.

How do you relate to others? How do you get on with one another? Do you know one another? What do you know about one another? What kind of fellowship do we have? How deep is it? How much do you care for one another? How much grace is there in your relationships? What is the quality of your love for one another? May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

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