

5 – The Community of the Godhead: *The Trinity in Relational Community*

Relational Elders Training

20130925

This training session and all corresponding sessions were developed and written by Mark Hoeffner and Royce Curtis for CB Northwest's "Relational Elders Training".

All contents copyright © 2010, 2012 by Mark Hoeffner and Royce Curtis. All rights reserved. No part of this document or the related documents may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, by any means, without the prior written permission of Mark Hoeffner and Royce Curtis.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible® (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

*To provide feedback to CBNW about this training, e-mail your comments or questions to
RET@cbnw.org.*

For more information about CB Northwest and its ministries, visit www.cbnw.org.

Introduction

Relationships and community are to properly function to reflect both God's design and God himself. Biblical community has at least six relational characteristics that reflect the Godhead's perfect community. Understanding these six relational characteristics will help us understand God's intention for our expressions of community.

On Your Own – *Before* Group Instruction

In this part of this training session you will personally interact with new training concepts and prepare to work with others during the group instruction time. You are to complete the following activities before the group instruction time:

Read

Step 1 – Read the article “The Trinity in Relational Community” (at the end of this session).

As you read:

- A. Place the letter “N” in the margin near information that is “New” to you.
- B. Underline what strikes you as very significant.
- C. Circle terms or ideas you might need to have clarified.
- D. Write down any questions you might have in your Learning Journal for this session.

Think

Step 2 – Take some time to think about the following aspects of the article you read for this session. Write your thoughts in your Learning Journal and be ready to discuss these during the group instruction time.

Think about the six relational characteristics described in “The Trinity in Relational Community”.

- A. In what ways is it different (or even strange) for you to think of God in “relational community” with Himself?
- B. Which of these relational characteristics of the Trinity seems to stand out to you as possibly most significant to your growing in your knowledge of God?
- C. Think about your own life. What are some strengths and some weaknesses you have in regard to each of these relational characteristics?

With Others – *During* Group Instruction

In this part of this training session you will work together with others to gain understanding of the key truths of this session. You are to complete the following activities during the group instruction time:

Connect

This section is oriented to “connect” you to:

- God through prayer,
- Each other through sharing, and
- The session content through review and discussion

Step 3 (In Triads) – Pray together, asking God to graciously provide His direction, protection, and presence during the group instruction time.

Step 4 (In Triads) – Share experiences, outcomes, and “Aha Moments” from the personal application activities from the last session (Steps 13, 14, 15, 16).

Step 5 (In Triads) – Have each person share his observations and answers to the **Read** (Step 1) and **Think** (Step 2) sections of this session.

Step 6 (With the Whole Group) – Have someone from each triad summarize to the whole group:

- A. a few outcomes and experiences from the personal application activities from the last session.
- B. a few **Read** and **Think** observations or answers discussed in his triad (Step 5).
- C. any questions or concerns that came out of the triad sharing time.

Analyze & Interact

This section will direct you to dig deeper into the Scriptures and truths of this session.

Step 7 (With the Whole Group) – Think about the six relational characteristics described in “The Trinity in Relational Community”.

- A. List reasons why it is important that role and responsibility always go together.
- B. Describe a situation that you know where someone had a role (like husband, father, employee, church member, etc.) but was negligent with the corresponding responsibilities. What was (is) the result?
- C. What is the importance of understanding that submission is an acknowledgment of role and responsibility, not worth, when it comes to your:
 - i. present position in the church.
 - ii. marriage and/or family.

Step 8 (With the Whole Group) – Read the article “Mission of the Godhead” out loud together and answer the following questions:

- A. Why is it important that we recognize that the Trinitarian Godhead had these conversations before anything else existed?
- B. Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. According to this passage, what are the things:
 - i. God is doing?
 - ii. We are supposed to do?

Step 9 (On Your Own) – Summarize what you have learned from this training session (so far). Record your personal summary in your Learning Journal.

Step 10 (With the Whole Group) – After everyone has had time to write a personal summary, have each person share his summary with the whole group.

Integrate

This section will guide you to incorporate truths from this session into your life in tangible and relevant ways.

Step 11 (In Triads) – Think about what you have read and discussed in this session so far. Use the following categories to help you think through various aspects of your life.

- Knowledge – your understanding, beliefs, and convictions about what is true and not true
- Values – your priorities and the things of high worth or importance
- Attitudes – your feelings, preferences, or points of view, especially towards others
- Practices – your actions actually done, especially with regularity, including the routines you keep or habits you have
- Relationships – your personal interactions and connections with others, especially the people close to you (spouse and family) and those combined with you (church and work)

Then thoughtfully and honestly answer the following three questions. Record your answers in your Learning Journal.

- A. What does the truth of this session look like in my life now?
- B. What could the truth of this session look like in my life:
 - i. one month from now?
 - ii. one year from now?
- C. What is at least one thing you can do that will enable you to integrate (apply) the truth of this session into your life?

Pray

Step 12 (With the Whole Group) – Spend some time praying with each other and for each other. Pray specifically for God to guide you and enable you to integrate the truths of this session into your lives (Step 11).

On Your Own – *After* the Group Instruction

In this part of this training session you will apply what you are learning to your personal life. You are to complete the following activities outside the group instruction time:

Assignment

Step 13 (On Your Own)

- Think about your roles as husband and father. (If you are not a husband and/or father, think of two present primary life roles, like family member, employee, student, etc.)
- List at least five responsibilities you have for each of these two roles.
- Pick one responsibility that needs improved performance.
- Identify one thing you can do this week that would enable you to fulfill this responsibility.
- Do it.

Interact

Step 14 (With Your Wife) – Discuss with your wife:

- the main ideas of this session.
- your answers to the assignment questions (Step 13).

Summarize the main points of your discussion in your Learning Journal.

Reflect (Think)

Step 15 – Prayerfully think about what you have learned with regard to the truths of this session, your experience during the assignment (Step 13), and your conversation with your wife (Step 14). Use the questions below to guide your reflection (thinking). You do not necessarily have to write out answers to all of the questions but take the time to prayerfully think about each one and then write down some thoughts pertaining to one or two of them. Be ready to share your thoughts and insights during the next group instruction time.

- A. Do you need to repent of any disobedience? If so, what?
- B. Do you need to acknowledge any unbelief? If so, what?
- C. What biblical truth do you need to trust to be true for you?
- D. What promises of God can you trust in and expect Him to keep?
- E. What signs of growth do you perceive in your life?
- F. What can you give thanks to God for?

Step 16 – Record any “Aha Moments” from this session (i.e. insights gained that are important for you to remember). Record this in your Learning Journal.

Step 17 – What is something you should research or talk about with someone else? Record this in your Learning Journal.

The Trinity in Relational Community

Introduction

Relationships and community are to properly function to reflect both God himself and his design. Biblical community has at least six relational characteristics that reflect the Godhead's perfect community. Understanding these six relational characteristics will help us understand God's intention for our expressions of community.

Relational Community within the Godhead

Earlier we saw that the Trinity is a perfect community. It is a relational community of the Godhead. Now we are going to give some extended attention to how the community within the Godhead functions.

It is important to think of God in Trinitarian terms — as one God who is in three persons. Sometimes we can be so Christ-centric that we focus exclusively on Jesus Christ and miss the richness and the fullness of the Trinitarian God. Getting to know God requires we know God as he reveals himself in the Scriptures, which is as a Triune God.

It is also important we understand God in his revealed Trinitarian terms because this will help us understand how God intends human relationships and community to function. If he is the “perfect community”, then understanding who he is and how he relates to himself within the Trinity will provide needed insight into what healthy and properly functioning relationships and community look like. In other words, we want to study the “right side up” community so that we can correct our living in our prevalent “upside down communities.”

Although we can apply what we learn from the Trinity relationship to a variety of types of human relationships (such as marriage, parenting, etc.), we will primarily view the truths and principles through leadership (elder) eyes and will apply them to leadership relationships.

We will now look at six relational characteristics within the Trinity:

- Role
- Responsibility
- Communication
- Submission
- Unity
- Intimacy

Role

The first relational characteristic of the community of the Trinity is “role.”

Key Points:

- There is one God in three persons with different roles.
- Each person of the Trinity understands and functions in specifically-defined roles.
- Each person of the Trinity understands and cooperates with the roles of the other persons of the triune community.

One God in Three Persons with Different Roles

The three persons of the Trinity are clearly distinct from each other in their roles and their titles – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Just because each person of the Godhead has different roles, it does not mean any one of them is less than the other ones. They are equal in essence. They all possess the full complement of the attributes of God. When you look at the Father, you have God. When you look at the Son, you have God. When you look at the Holy Spirit, you have God. They are not each a third of God. Each person of the Godhead is God. But the Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Father. The Father and the Son are not the Holy Spirit. They each have unique and distinct roles, which they understand.

These designations are not simply an accommodation that God makes to us so that we can understand him. They speak a truth about God, whether or not he ever created humanity. God did not say to himself, “Since earthly family already exists, and in order to communicate with humanity, we are going to pretend that I am a Father, Jesus is a Son, and the Holy Spirit is the conformer of character.” It was not that way at all. God was NOT going to pretend that He was those roles. Instead, He said, “When we create the universe, it will be on a family pattern, like us, where there is a Father, a Son, and a Holy Spirit.”

Distinct Roles in Creation and Redemption

We will discuss later how the persons of the Godhead had conversations about creation and redemption before anything was ever created,. They not only had these conversations with each other, but each person of the Trinity had a role in both creation and redemption.

Scripture tells us that God (the Father) spoke the world into creation. For example, we read in Genesis 1:3, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” “And God said” is repeated throughout the description of creation. We also know, according to John 1:3, the creation process was carried out through the Son. “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” The “him” in this verse is the divine Word who became flesh and dwelt among humanity (see John 1:1, 14). In addition, we are told in Genesis 1:2b that “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” at the time of creation.

In a similar way, the three persons of the Trinity were involved in the redemption (salvation) of man, but in different ways (roles). We are told the Father loved the world

and sent his Son into the World to redeem it. The Son, sent by the Father, came into the world so it might be saved through him. The Father did the sending, and the Son did the going (see John 3:16-17). Also included in the redemption of man is the promised presence of the Holy Spirit (see John 14:16-17, 16:7) who is a guarantee of our inheritance of salvation (see Ephesians 1:13-14).

The above two descriptions of the roles of the persons of the Trinity in creation and redemption are brief summaries. They both can be expanded with much greater detail.

Each of the persons of the Trinity has roles unique to him. Although these roles are often coordinated and complementary, they are different from each other.

Below are some roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Father's Role

Scripture describes the role of the Father.

The Father is the head of the Trinity. As such, the Father is first (supreme) in position and authority. We are told the Father is the head of the Son. For example, when Paul explains authority in relationships he says, "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3).

The Father is the designer and planner of creation, redemption, and consummation. For example, God the Father is the planner of redemption and sent his Son into the world in order to redeem it (see John 3:16-17; Ephesians 1:9-10; Acts 2:23).

The Father is the giver of every good and perfect gift. James tells us, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). These good gifts include the Son to provide salvation (see John 3:16; 1 John 4:10) and the Holy Spirit who transforms our hearts and provides enabling gifts to the believers (see Acts 1:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 28).

The Father is the initiator of relationships. For example, the Father is the lover of the "lost" and sent his Son to redeem them (see John 3:16-17). The Father's role was to send him, the Son's role was to go.

The Father is the namer of every family in heaven and on earth (see Ephesians 3:14-15). So our name that was written in the book of life came from the Father. He knows us each by name. He is the head of the family.

The Son's Role

The Son is under the headship and authority of the Father. "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3). Jesus boldly said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.

And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:28-29).

The Son is the incarnate God. It was the Son’s role to empty himself, setting aside equality with God and to take on flesh to become incarnate (man), to become the God-man — 100 percent God and 100 percent man (see Philippians 2:5-8).

The Son is the Redeemer. In the Son there is redemption through his blood and the forgiveness of our trespasses (see Ephesians 1:7). The Son obeyed the Father and accomplished redemption (see John 8:35-40). The Father did not die for the sins of man, nor did the Holy Spirit.

The Son is the Permanent Priest and Intercessor. The author of Hebrews tells us “he [the Son] holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:23-25).

The Son is the head of the church. The Father has delegated authority to the Son to exercise on behalf of the church (see Ephesians 1:22-23; Matthew 28:18-20).

The Holy Spirit’s Role

The Holy Spirit is the Helper. The Holy Spirit is sent by the Son to help believers and to convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (see John 16:7-8).

The Holy Spirit is the Regenerator. The Holy Spirit is the giver of new life (see John 3:5-8, 6:63).

The Holy Spirit is the One who Empowers. It was the Holy Spirit who empowered the Son during his earthly ministry (see Luke 4:1, 14; Acts 10:38). It is the same Holy Spirit who empowers the believers in the Son (see Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

The Holy Spirit is the Revealer and Author of Scripture. He was promised by the Son to speak truth (see John 16:12-14), and he is the one who directed human authors as they wrote (2 Peter 1:20-21).

The Holy Spirit is not less than the Father or the Son; he simply has a different role.

Each member of the Godhead knows and understands his role. They embrace their roles with joy and majesty.

Responsibility

The second relational characteristic of the community of the Trinity is “responsibility.”

Key Points:

- Each person of the Trinity knows his part (responsibility) in the mission.
- Each person of the Trinity understands and cooperates with the responsibilities of the other members of the triune community.

“Responsibility” means something for which one is responsible; a duty, an obligation, or a purpose. Each person of the Godhead understood what he was supposed to be about and to accomplish.

We see the Father is the lover, the judge, the prime initiator. In creation the Father initiated what was going to go happen. The Father took responsibility for sending the Son (see John 4:34; 8:28-29).

It was not the Son’s responsibility to send or to initiate. It was the Son’s responsibility to go (i.e. to be sent) and to carry out the Father’s desire (see John 4:34; 8:28-29, 42). The Son is the Redeemer, the Intercessor, and the Head of the Church.

The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, Helper, and Sealer. It is his responsibility to empower and inspire.

The Son was full of the Holy Spirit, led by the Holy Spirit, and operated in the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14).

Role and Responsibility

When we think of role and responsibility, they are almost inseparable, aren’t they? It’s hard to talk about role without talking about responsibility. Not only did each person of the trinity perform his role perfectly, but he did his responsibilities perfectly. They never abandoned a responsibility, because they were perfect, holy, and righteous.

Lessons Learned from Roles and Responsibilities within the Godhead

Just like within the Godhead, our roles and responsibilities go hand in hand. We don’t get one without the other, even though we sometimes try.

For example, it’s hard to talk about the role of being a leader without talking about the responsibility of being a leader. In the same way, it’s hard to talk about the role of being a husband without talking about the responsibility of being a husband. When we embrace a role, we have to embrace the responsibilities.

Unfortunately, people take on roles, but then try to avoid the corresponding responsibilities. Do you know people who have a role but have not embraced their responsibilities? Do you know any irresponsible (“bad”) leaders, husbands, or dads? Not fulfilling responsibilities does not exempt a person from the role.

For example, when you are married, you can be a good husband or a bad husband, but you can't be a "non-husband." If you have children, you can be a good dad or a bad dad, but you can't be a "non-dad." If you have a role, you are either good at it or not, but you are not in a non-role.

Let's go back to the Trinity.

Communication

The third relational characteristic of the community of the Trinity is "communication."

Key Point:

- Within the Trinity there is perfect communication.

We have already seen that the persons of the Trinity must have had "conversations" before the creation of the world because they needed to "talk about" creating the world and redeeming the fallen world.

We also know the communication among the persons of the Godhead is perfect because they are perfect. Unlike human communication, within the Godhead there are never misunderstandings, confusion, secrets, or deceit.

Jesus' life and ministry give us glimpses into what the communication within the Trinity looks like. Jesus often went away by himself to pray to the Father to find out what the Father wanted him to do. For example, Jesus called all the disciples to him before selecting the twelve. We don't know how many disciples he called — maybe 50, 70, or 120. Jesus prayed to the Father before choosing disciples (see Luke 6:12-16).

In fact, so consistent was the communication between the Son and the Father, Jesus never said anything without first hearing from his Father (John 8:28; 12:49-50).

In the same way, the Holy Spirit says only what he hears from the Son and what the Son has received from the Father. It is this same Spirit who will guide us into all truth (John 16:12-15).

Submission

The fourth relational characteristic of the community of the Trinity is "submission."

Key Points:

- The Trinity knows who submits to whom, when and why.
- Submission is an acknowledgement of role and responsibility, not worth or value.

"Submission" is willingly yielding to the authority and direction of another.

If we look at the Bible carefully, we see the persons of the Trinity submitted to each other at different times, depending on the functioning of their roles and responsibilities.

The Son submitted to the Father. Jesus said, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38). Jesus never did anything without first hearing from his Father (see John 8:28; 12:49-50).

Even when Jesus struggled in the garden of Gethsemane with the weight of bearing the wrath of God for the sins of men, he both communicated with the Father about the impending events (which assumes he knew the Father’s will) and then yielded to the Father (Matthew 26:36-46).

The Father submitted to the Son. Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). Who gave Jesus all of the authority in heaven and on earth? The Father did. Then who now has all the authority? The Son (Jesus) does. Now the Father is going to submit to what the Son does. It does not mean that the Father lost headship. It just means that the Father will now submit to what the Son does.

The Son submitted to the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, was led by the Holy Spirit, and operated in the power of the Holy Spirit (see Luke 4:1, 14).

The Holy Spirit submits to the Son in guiding people into all truth. The Holy Spirit says only what he hears from the Son (see John 16:12-15).

The Trinity knew who submitted to whom, when and why. And they did this through communicating and knowing their roles and responsibilities.

Lessons Learned from Submission within the Godhead

If we think about how the persons of the Godhead submitted to one another depending on their roles and responsibilities, we can learn what submission can (and should) look like in our relationships.

For example, we can learn from the way the Son submitted to the Father. Remember, the Father and the Son are equal in essence. They are both equally, eternally, simultaneously, and fully God. The Son is in no way less God than the Father. However, the Son knowingly and willingly submitted to the Father.

The Father sent the Son into the world to redeem it. This involved humility and obedience on the part of the Son (see Philippians 2:5-8). If they are equal and have the same essence and if one is not more important than the other, then we learn that in no way does submission mean “less than” or less in worth. Submission is an acknowledgement of authority due to role and responsibility, NOT an acknowledgement of worth or value.

This is why we can submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (see Ephesians 5:21). Submission is a part of understanding our role and responsibility.

Christians are to obey and submit to their leaders not because their leaders are better than they are or have some special kind of higher value as people. They are to do so because the leaders have been given the role and responsibility to watch

over their souls, for which the leaders will be held accountable (Hebrews 13:17). Submission is an acknowledgement of role and responsibility, not worth.

This is also true of submission within the family. A wife is not less important than the husband because she submits to his headship. There are times when the wife needs to submit to her husband because of his role as head of the family. But there are times when a husband can submit to his wife. Every time the husband puts his feet underneath the dining room table to eat, he is submitting to her authority in the kitchen. When the husband sacrificially loves his wife, he does so in acknowledgment of his and her role (see Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1-4). Therefore, submission is an acknowledgement of role and responsibility, not worth.

This is why we can submit to public authorities when they are functioning within their God-ordained roles and responsibilities. They may not even acknowledge the kingdom of God, much less the gospel of Christ, but that does not minimize our responsibility to submit to them in their areas of role and responsibility (see Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1).

Submission and Upside-Down Thinking

Think about a hypothetical scenario where God the Father sends his Son to redeem the world, but the Son says, “Nah, I don’t think I want to go. It seems like it will be too much work. Maybe you should see if the Holy Spirit wants to do it.”

Since they are equal in all ways, in our upside-down thinking we might think this would be reasonable on the part of the Son. Yet what would be the result of the Son not submitting to the Father? No redemption of anyone. If any of the persons of the Godhead, at any point, decided not to submit or fulfill their roles and responsibilities, the whole redemptive plan of God would have fallen apart.

Thankfully, the Godhead only thinks in perfect “right-side up” ways. Therefore, they always function within their roles and responsibilities. This means that each one of them submits when it is his responsibility to do so. Submission is an acknowledgement of role and responsibility, not worth.

Unity

The fifth relational characteristic of the community of the Trinity is “unity.”

Key Point:

- Unity is the correct understanding and functioning of role and responsibility, communication, and submission.

What is unity? Remember we are talking about “Tri-unity;” a perfect community. It is the correct understanding of roles, responsibilities, communication, and submission.

God, in the Trinity, is where we find the definition and example for unity. This unity is not only because the Godhead is made up of three persons who are of the same essence; equally, eternally, simultaneously, and fully God. This unity extends to their existence in community — how they function within community and interact with each other. Their functioning in their roles and responsibilities is in perfect alignment and unison. Their

communication is perfect, everything is communicated and understood, with no secrets or misunderstandings. Their submission to each other is always appropriate and unreserved.

Lessons Learned from Unity within the Godhead

What should unity look like within the church if we are to mirror the unity within the Godhead? Unity in the church is when we clearly define — and people function in— roles and responsibilities, when we effectively communicate what really matters, and when we submit to one another. Unity is not some kind of mysterious presence that comes over us. Unity is not some mystical vapor that floats into the building influencing people’s attitudes and behavior. Unity is not yielding because of apathy nor is it dominating through coercion.

The degree of unity we have within the church reflects how much we understand and imitate the example of the Godhead (see Ephesians 5:1-2; Philippians 2:1-11). Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17 expresses this kind of unity in three ways: the Son and the Father, the Son and his disciples, and “those who believe in me through their [the disciples’] word” (v. 20), which is Christ’s church.

Why do churches frequently lack unity? It is usually because people are functioning outside their roles and responsibilities. Disunity is also the result of a lack of communication or submission (see 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; James 4:1-12).

In the same way, unity within marriage is when the husband and wife understand and function within their respective roles and responsibilities, as well as focus on good communication and appropriate submission (see Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7).

Intimacy

The sixth relational characteristic of the community of the Trinity is “intimacy.”

Key Point:

- Intimacy involves a love relationship and oneness.

The reason the Godhead can function in perfect unity is because the three persons of the Godhead have intimacy. They exist in a perfect love relationship. The reason they could be successful at creation and redemption is because they are in perfect community, perfect intimacy, and perfect oneness.

Do you realize it is impossible for God to “try” to love you? We all have times when we have to “try” to love others, even family members. Why do we so often struggle with loving others? Because we are not love. God is love (see 1 John 4:8). He does not have to work at it.

God’s love for us, and the redemptive work he did on our behalf, is the model and the motivation for our life and intimacy with each other (see 1 John 4:7-12).

Lessons Learned from Intimacy within the Godhead

True intimacy is what makes Christian relationships unique. Even non-Christian organizations and companies would like their people to know their roles and responsibilities, have good communication, submit where necessary, and have unity. But these organizations and companies would draw the line at requiring intimacy.

True intimacy is both the mutual expression of love and the willingness to be vulnerable. It is acknowledging our sin and our struggles and then allowing others to speak into our lives, whether words of correction or encouragement.

Mission of the Godhead

Conversations within the Godhead

When it was just the Trinity, before there was anything else, what did they talk about? There was nothing else other than the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — they were in perfect community. So what did they discuss? The Bible gives us some clues. We know the Godhead talked about (at least) two things: creation and redemption.

The Conversation of Creation

Before God created anything, the community of the Godhead had to have some conversation about creating things, since they all were involved. They said, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26). So a conversation before he created anything was a conversation of creation. God created out of nothing and spoke everything into being. Who did that? The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So, the community of the Trinitarian Godhead had a “conversation of creation.”

The Conversation of Redemption

There was another conversation among the persons of the Godhead. We know “he [the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ] chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (Ephesians 1:4; see also Titus 1:1-2). In other words, names were written in the Book of Life (Revelation 3:5; 13:8). For that to happen, it had to be determined who was going to the new heaven and the new earth and who was not (Revelation 17:8).

So, what had to be decided before our names were written in the book of life? God had to decide the Son would die for the sins of man to redeem man from his sin so man could have a right relationship with God for eternity. It was determined before the creation of the world that Jesus would die for our sins. This is called redemption.

For redemption to be planned before anything was created (and even before there was sin), there needed to be a conversation that involved all three persons of the Trinity, since they would all be involved in the redemption process.

The Conversations and the Story of God

Therefore, we know two primary conversations took place before the foundation of the world. The first conversation was about creation, the second was about redemption. These two conversations are what allow us to enter into life, both as created beings and as eternal beings. This is called “good news.”

The story of God includes not only the conversations before the foundation of the world, but also their working out and fulfillment through the creation and redemption of the world.

The conversations that the Godhead had before the creation of the world indicate the “mission” (purpose) of God in the world: to create and redeem.

The Mission to Create (Creation)

The Bible opens with the words, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Later God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). God, as Trinity, perfect in community, made man in his own image. Notice that God said, “Let us make man in our image.” (Note the “us” and “our” which is plurality language.)

Man Created for Relationship

We also are told in the early chapters of Genesis that even prior to sin, there was something that was “not good.” It was not good for man to be alone (see Genesis 2:18).

Right from the beginning of creation we see there is something important about relationship.

Prior to creating woman, God made man alone. He then said it was not good for man to be alone. Therefore, God made man perfect, yet in need of relationship and companionship. In other words, it is part of perfection to need relationship. God made us to be in relationship. God put man to sleep and took a piece from him to make woman (Genesis 2:21-22).

The perfect companion for man was woman. God made man and woman needy for the exact complement. But the perfect companion is not an exact replica.

God created man with a need for the woman because when man was created, his need for community was missing something.

Did man have relationship with God before Eve? Sure he did. Did man have relationship with other created things before Eve? Sure he did. So when God said, “It is not good that man should be alone,” what was God saying? Since man already had established relationships, what is the aloneness to which God was referring? Man needed to express love in a complementary relationship, something more than the animals could provide.

Man Created to Express Love

Man (Adam) was in perfect relationship with God. Remember, there was no sin yet. Man was experiencing God’s love and man was loving God. But man was still incomplete. He was created with the need and capacity to express what he was experiencing. Therefore, if he didn’t have a relationship to express what he was experiencing with God, he would “explode.”

It’s like a balloon. God was breathing into Adam and Adam was expanding with the experience of being loved by God. If Adam didn’t have a way to express what he was experiencing, he would eventually be too filled and would burst. Why? Because God made us with the need to express that which we experience.

Think about this in terms of the Great Commandment. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-40). How are we going to love our neighbor? The only way to love our neighbor, if it is truly loving, is to love our neighbor as God loves us. So as we experience God’s love, what do we need to do? We need to express God’s love.

God created us with the purpose of experiencing and expressing love.

Sin Breaks Relationship and Inhibits Love

There is something that compromises both relationships and love – it is called sin. Man sinned. The sin in the garden was man not submitting to God's order. He did not submit to the role and responsibility for which God ordained him.

God had told Adam, "You can eat of any tree in the garden. But from the tree in the center of the garden you cannot eat, for if you do you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). The serpent came along and said, "Did God really say...? For when you eat it you will be like God" (Genesis 3:1-5). The serpent challenged God's authority. Satan would not submit to God's order and authority. So Satan came into the Garden and disrupted the relationship between God and man. Satan deceived Eve, and Adam willfully chose to disobey God.

Knowing that his creation would be devastated by sin, God also planned to redeem.

The Mission to Redeem (Redemption)

The mission of God is not only to create, it is also to redeem.

The Alienation and Corruption of Sin

Before the fall (i.e. before Adam sinned), God and man fit properly. Sin destroyed compatibility — a holy God and sinful man were incompatible. Immediately after sinning, Adam and Eve knew they were alienated from God. They hid themselves and blamed others for their sin (see Genesis 3:7-13). After they become incompatible, the only way the holy God could be connected to sinful man was to "reconcile" man's account.

After the fall, man was removed from the Garden of Eden and had to work by the sweat of his brow. He now could die a physical death (see Genesis 3:17-19).

When sin enters a relationship it drives us to "aloneness." And we have already seen "it is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). If we sin against God we are driven away from him. If we sin against our wife, we are driven away from each other. If we sin against other people we are driven away from them. Sin destroys relationships. It pushes us to aloneness and isolation.

Why do we like to be alone or away from people when we (or they) sin? Because we don't want to deal with sin and consequences. It is easier to be alone than it is to deal with all the sin that is piled up in our relationships. (This is actually a lie that the evil one tells us.)

The Reconciliation and Restoration through the Gospel

God was not caught off guard in the garden at the fall. God knew about the fall before the foundation of the world (see Ephesians 1:4). So, before he created man, God made a pathway for moving sinful man back into a righteous community.

God can damn man or he can demonstrate that which he is. He is love.

There is a word for what God does. It is “conciliate”, which means to bring together or unite. This is the foundation for the word “reconciliation.” When things or people are not reconciled, it means they are not compatible and cannot come together.

When we say we are going to “reconcile the books,” what are we going to do? We are going to bring the proper parts of the accounts together so that they match. “Conciliate” means things are compatible; they fit properly.

Think of the sin that flows from our lives to the cross at Calvary. If we could have a sin meter (counter) that counted our sins as they were applied to the cross, it would count a lot of sins. (It would be like McDonald’s “billions served.”) All these sins have to be reconciled. How do they get reconciled? The Father pours out his wrath on the Son at the cross for all ungodliness and for every one of our sins.

God had to reconcile sinful man to a holy God. Every sin has a just recompense (compensation), propitiation (punishment), and payment due. Jesus pays the price for every one of my sins. He paid a debt I could not pay (see 2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

So what is the Mission of the Godhead? It is to create and redeem.