

God Reveals His Plurality

Genesis Sermon 9 Genesis 1:26

Theme: Having filled the earth with man's further (fish and birds) and nearer (land animals) neighbor souls, God now sets about making His representative for whom earth was made. In so doing, God reveals His nature as both a **unity** and a **plurality**. The Bible further reveals God's plurality as a trinity, yielding the doctrine we call the Trinity.

Gen 1:26 And God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..."

I. Genesis answers man's **big questions**: ~~Who~~ who are we? • God's creation, divided from Him by our sin. ~~How~~ how do we return to God? • God retrieves us, promising Christ from the start, Gen 3:15.

How retrieved?

• Justification by faith, Gen 15:5-6

~~Where~~ where are we going?

• Judgment is coming again, like the Flood. Christ is the only ark.

II. Outline of Genesis

I. Creation	1-2	IV. Renewed creation	9
II. Fall	3	V. A <u>Touchstone</u> Covenant	12
III. Judgment	6-8	A. <u>ABRAHAM</u>	12-25
		B. Covenant with Isaac	25-27
		C. Covenant with JACOB	27-36
		VI. A New Nation: Jacob's 12 Sons	37-38
		VII. Blessing to the <i>Nations</i> : JOSEPH	39-50

Kid-speak: What does Genesis mean? Genesis means "beginning."

III. Genesis Lessons so Far

A. Creation is the foundational teaching of the Bible, an account Jesus believed, Mk 10:6-8.

B. Redemption teachings *keep* and *build on* the doctrine of Creation, a cause for praise.

C. John 1:1-3 repeats "In the beginning," making Christ Mediator of Creation and Redemption.

D. The days so far

1. Day 1: Earth & heavens in darkness, v 1-2. **Light**, its division from darkness; their new names, v 3-5. • The better work of Christ shining God's knowledge into us, *2 Cor 4:6*.

2. Day 2: Upper & lower waters separated by an expanse called the heavens (our sky), v 6-8. • The work of distinguishing given to us as an aspiration, *2 Tim 2:20-21*.

3. Day 3: Earth and its produce. • We are sown to be sowers, *Jms 3:18*.

4. Day 4: **Light** (v 2) embodied. • We who were darkness are now light in the Lord, *Eph 5:8*.

5. Day 5: Souls for sea and sky. • *All in all* realms will ascribe glory to the Lamb, *Rev 5:18*.

6. Day 6: Land souls near us as teachers. • Called to praise God with us, *Ps 148:10, 14*.

Kid-speak: What day of creation are we looking at? The sixth day. What is God about to make? People- us!

IV. The Idea of God's Plurality: When God calls Himself "Us," He reveals something about His eternal nature. He has always been a *plurality*, **and** He has always been *one* God. From the full testimony of Scripture, we have come to define this as ONE GOD IN THREE PERSONS: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

V. God's Momentous Pronouncement Yet Again

A. "And God said"

1. As He spoke before, in 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, and now here, v 26.
2. The phrase will occur again in 1:29, then not again until 6:13 (grand total, 26x, 20x in Genesis).

B. God is a speaking God.

1. God is not condescending or accommodating us to speak. Speech is natural to Him.
- ☆ 2. We know this because of His communications *within the Trinity*, which is now quoted.

VI. "Let Us": a New Revelation

A. Previous to this, God revealed Himself mainly three ways:

1. Through His title, *Elohim* (Hebrew), translated "God";
2. As the Spirit, v 2. (Interesting that the Spirit is the first person of the Trinity specifically revealed);
3. Through His *method* of creation and organization and His *power* in executing it.

Kid-speak: God is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. What does He call Himself in Genesis 1:26 that tells us that He is more than one? He calls Himself "Us."

B. So far, God has been referred to in the *singular*, all the verbs describing God's activity being singular.

1. Starting in v 1, "In the beginning, God created (singular)..."
2. Even with "And God said" here in v 26, "said" is singular.

C. The Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, has a plural ending *-im*, but it takes singular verbs.

1. Other examples: Song of Solomon 5:16, *machmadim*, "lovely"; and 1 Kings 18:29, *hatzhurayim*, "midday/ noon."
 - a. These may be intended to convey emphasis.
 - b. Just as Elohim may be presenting God with the "plural of majesty," as it is called.
2. Still, it is hard to rule out the plurality of the word *Elohim* itself as a possible reference to God's plurality.

Kid-speak: Is there just one God? Yes, the Father, Son, and Spirit together are the *one* God.

VII. “Let Us” Elsewhere in the Old Testament

A. Gen 3:22.

B. In Isa 6:8, God refers to Himself as both “I” and “Us.”

VIII. God as a Plurality

✳ A. When God calls Himself “Us,” we gain a further insight into Him. He is not just one, but also more than one person: “Us.”

B. Change in the narrative formula

1. In the previous verses, “And God said” led to a creation or an implementation.

2. Now “And God said” leads to God’s *inner communications*: “Let Us.”

3. It was apparently the same “Us” before this, but now “they” are communicating together. This is God in counsel.

☞ C. How do we know that “Us” isn’t a polytheistic reference: more than one God (not just more than one person within the one God)?

1. Because in the parallel statements in v 27, “created” (all 3x) is a *singular* verb.

a. V 26: “Let Us (plural) make”; (the pronoun is built onto the verb, per usual)

b. v 27, “God created (singular).”

2. Also, it is in “His” (singular) image that He made man in v 27.

3. So God is, without added explanation, **both** a PLURALITY and a SINGLE being.

a. The Bible never explains (I don’t think) God’s plurality + unity; it merely presents both.

b. And if God is eternal, that’s the way it’s always been.

¶ D. How do we know “Let us” is not God + the angels?

1. Again, look at v 27: “And God created...,” not “And God and the angels created.”

2. Even the word “create” in v 27 rules out the angels, since they have no power to create.

△ E. The Bible writers, then, may be simply proceeding from **God as the Ultimate Reality**.

1. That approach makes great sense philosophically (to me, at least).

2. There is no ‘getting ‘behind’ the idea or the reality, so just present it.

3. Nor is God’s nature presented as a contradiction.

a. I don’t even think the Bible addresses it as a paradox (an *apparent* contradiction).

b. “Apparent contradiction” means it *appears* contradictory on the surface, but on deeper examination, it isn’t.

Kid-speak: Do the Bible writers think that God calling Himself “Us” is weird? No, that’s just who God has always been.

IX. The Trinity

A. We now move beyond God’s Plurality + Unity to the particular manifestation of it we call the **Trinity**.

1. From the language of Genesis 1, I’m not sure we can discern *three distinct persons* in the “Us” who are creating.

2. The Spirit's activity is followed in v 2, but the language of Genesis 1 doesn't seem to differentiate the Father or the Son.
 3. If we move on to 3:18, I believe it is the Son who manifests Himself to Adam and Even in the Garden.
- B. Later in Genesis, I think we see the Father and Son revealed, though not by those names.
1. In Gen 19:24, there are two references to Yahweh, and they seem to reveal two distinct persons.
 - a. "Yahweh [the Son] rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah from Yahweh [the Father] out of the heavens."
 - b. The first "Yahweh" above was already identified as one of the "men" (Gen 18:2) who visited Abraham, but then was called "Yahweh" in Gen 18:33 (probably "LORD" all capitals in your Bible).
 - c. In Gen 19:24, then, the first Yahweh (the Son) seems to be calling on Yahweh in Heaven (the Father) to rain down destruction on Sodom.
 2. When Jesus said Abraham "saw His day," Jn 8:56, Gen 18-19 is the easiest placement for the reference.
- C. As a comment on Genesis 1, we have several verses in the NT which indicate God the **Father** as the ARCHITECT of creation with the **Son** as the BUILDER:
1. Jn 1:3, "came into being through Him"
 2. Heb 1:2, "through whom [the Son] He [the Father] made the Ages"; Eph 3:9.
 3. Col 1:16 has both "by Him" and "through Him."

Kid-speak: We're in Genesis in the Old Testament. Do we learn more about the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the **New Testament**? Yes.

- D. (We have to decide early on how much of the *rest* of the Bible is legitimate to use in explaining Genesis- or indeed how much *any* author can be used to explain *another*.)
1. Theologians have become guilty of 'atomization' (Sproul): separating Bible authors into separate theologies.
 2. This was begun in a spirit of objectivity, seeking not to read something into Moses that we glean from a later author, for instance.
 3. And we *should* keep Bible authors' individual thinking intact,
 4. but we must also recognize the Spirit's overriding authorship for all Bible authors, allowing our free use of *any Bible truth* to comment on and congeal with *any other*.)

X. Explaining the Trinity versus Presenting It

- A. The doctrine of the Trinity is amply attested in the Bible, the NT especially.
1. But this is not to suggest that there are no questions to be addressed, such as the Son's subordination to the Father.
 - a. But, again, there are *no contradictions* in the idea of the Trinity.
 - b. That is, God is not *one* in the same way that He is *more than one*.

- ◇ c. He is *one* in nature or essence; He is *more than one* in Person.
 - d. Somewhat like man's own makeup: many *parts* interrelated in a *single*, organic being. Only God is not in *parts* like us, but in *persons*.
- 2. The Biblical proof for the Trinity is very intriguing!
 - a. The evidence is lengthy, but it mainly consists of *OT* passages about Elohim or Yahweh referenced in the *NT* as speaking about the Father, the Son, or the Spirit.
 - i. The Father, Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 with Heb 1:5.
 - ii. The Son, Isa 44:6 with Rev 1:17.
 - iii. The Spirit, Isa 6:9-10 with Acts 28:25-27.
 - b. Plus, testimonies of each, distinct Person's divinity
 - i. The Father, Rom 1:7. Also, the phrase "God the Father" occurs 13x.
 - ii. The Son, Heb 1:8. Also, if Jesus is good like God, He must be God, Lk 18:19.
 - iii. The Spirit, Acts 5:3-4.

Kid-speak: Does the Bible tell us that the **F**ather is God, the **S**on is God, and the **H**oly Spirit is God? Yes.

- 3. But there is no 'silver bullet' verse that nails down the *doctrine* of the Trinity all at once.
 - a. There are verses where all three Persons are *named*, but none of those verses specifically identify all three Persons specifically as God.
 - b. Proofs such as those in X. A. 2. above are substantial. See Bickersteth, The Trinity.
- 4. Wanting a silver bullet got 1 Jn 5:7 introduced into a particular, very late NT manuscript.
 - a. The evidence is weighty that 1 Jn 5:7 (the Trinity part) was not in John's original epistle.
 - b. The Literal Version and the EMTV leave it out, even though, as Byzantine texts, they agree with Stephen's text (the basis for the KJV) most of the time.
- B. *Proving* the Trinity from Scripture is not hard, but trying to *explain* the reality of it might be.
 - 1. Here we do well to take our lead from Scripture writers themselves.
 - 2. The Bible neither *explains* the Trinity *nor* presents it as a contradiction or a difficulty.
 - a. That is, there is much information on the RELATIONSHIPS between the persons of the Trinity, but none that explain how there can be *three and one* at the same time.
 - ✍ b. Again, the Bible writers seem to start with this reality as THE foundational reality.
 - 3. Our best definition of it (to me) is merely a summary:
 - a. Our own church statement of faith explicitly seeks to summarize rather than explain. Here are points 4-6 in our 55-point statement of beliefs:
 - 4) We believe the Bible reveals three Persons as God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 - 5) We believe that these three Persons alone can comprise the one, true, living God.
 - 6) We believe that within this one God, there is no confusion of Persons (the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Father).
 - b. Again, this is an attempt to give only what is clear and basic about the Trinity.
 - 4. The good, historical confessions of faith include a bit more explanation. Here's the Philadelphia, chapter 2, Of God and of the Holy Trinity, point 3.

3. In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him.

- a. Most of the explanation is very helpful.
 - b. I'm not sure that the Son's eternally begotten nature is that easy to pin down.
- C. The word "Trinity" began to be used by the late second century.
1. Modern dictionaries say the Latin root of the word merely denotes "threefold."
 2. Whereas, Webster's original English dictionary breaks up the word into two components, "tri" for the idea of *three* + "unity" (Latin *unus*) for the idea of *one*.

XI. Worshiping, Loving, and Serving the Trinity

A. Living for the Trinity is part of NT thinking:

1. 2 Cor 13:14.
2. 1 Peter 1:2. [But neither verse is in our conventional order, Father, Son, Spirit!]

Kid-speak: Are we supposed to love the **F**ather, the **S**on, and the **H**oly Spirit? Yes.

B. Part of our Christian MATURATION can be measured in our *growing appreciation of the Trinity*

1. That is, we pray to the Father through Jesus, but then we learn that Jesus wants us to realize the Father's own love for us as well, Jn 16:26-27.
2. Or, like many Reformed Christians, I'm sort of a Johnny-come-lately to an appreciation of real-time communion with the Spirit.
 - a. Jude 1:20-21, praying in the Spirit is a means of keeping ourselves in God's love.
 - b. Gal 5:25; Rom 14:17.

C. But we shouldn't miss the centrality of **Jesus** to us.

1. The Father points to Him, Lk 9:35.
2. The Spirit points to Him, Jn 16:14.
3. When we have Jesus, we have the Father, 1 Jn 2:23.

D. The whole Trinity delights in us and in saving us.

1. Let's reciprocate the delight! Jn 15:16
2. 2 Thess 2:13 (Spirit), 14, (Son), 16 Father; Titus 3:4 (Father), 5 (Spirit), 6 (Son).

Vision: Each Person of the Trinity manifests love to us.

The Father did not preserve and protect His beloved Son, but sent Him to us.

The Son did not hold onto His glory in Heaven, but divested Himself of it to come and be the basis for our cleansing and rescue.

The Spirit comes to us, massages our hearts to life with His living hands, and continues to breathe the very life of God into our souls.

Believing this to a granular degree will make us warm and living with the Spirit's fire.