

THE COMMUNITY OF CHRIST

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Do you talk to yourself? Ever have conversations with yourself? Do you talk yourself through complex tasks? Praise yourself when you do a good job? Encourage yourself when you bomb? Then, would you consider yourself to be a community-of-one?

Three God

God Himself is a community of sorts: the Trinity—one God in three persons.

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The word that is translated as “God” in this first verse of the Bible is *elohim*. The “im” ending indicates a grammatical plural, which, in the Hebrew language, is *three* or more. God is one, yet God is three. One in three; three in one. One shared heart, motive, aim.

One Humans

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.

Then, in the next verse it is recorded:

So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:27)

One God, one image; two creations—male and female. *He created them*. Created as one-in-two, two-in-one. Still incomplete without the third element: God.

Distinct Connections

One concept that will appear in each of these messages is a thoughtful distinction between *relationship* and *fellowship*. While the words are often used loosely and interchangeably, I hope you will consider a characteristic difference that offers fullness of meaning.

In a nutshell, it is this:

Relationship describes some *essential* connection between persons; for example, it may be biological (parent-child), marital (husband-wife), or economic (employer-employee).

Fellowship describes some *experiential* connection between persons, which may or may not include relationship; for example, it may include teamwork (sports, business), shared interests (hobbies, studies), mutual care (friendship, counseling), shared emotions (fear, relief).

Let's consider a first example of this distinction between relationship and fellowship.

Joyous Fellowship

1 John 1

³ *We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.* ⁴ *We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.*

At first glance, it may appear that John was writing about our new relationship with God through Christ, yet he used the word “fellowship.” And, clearly, he is writing about their *experience* (“what we ourselves have actually seen and heard”) with Jesus Christ.

Indeed, his entire focus is fellowship; the relationship is assumed, based on the address to which he sent the letter.

That relationship becomes clear as chapter 2 begins, “Dear children.” John wrote to a church which he fathered, a people he had brought to faith and pastored. He wrote to Christians—people who were already in relationship with God through Christ.

Our *relationship* to God, and to one another, is based on a new spiritual birth. If you have been born again through faith in Jesus Christ, you are *essentially* connected to God—you are His child—and to every other believer—we are brothers and sisters.

But to these Christians John wrote about fellowship. Because of their relationship with God, He invited them into *experiential fellowship*, since that is where fullness of Christian joy dwells.

John's aim was that he and those who read His words would have fellowship with one another, and that included fellowship with the Father and with the Son. And the result would be fullness of joy.

The ancient prophets described the Messiah-who-was-to-come as Emmanuel (meaning, God-with-us), a God of fellowship. Jesus is that God-with-us.

Christian fellowship is Godward (vertical) *communion* and mutual (horizontal) *community* in the church. Without this blended bond, fullness of joy cannot be realized.

Primary Plan

This fellowship was not an afterthought, it was a primary part of God's original plan.

From time to time God sought for a man to serve Him (Ezekiel 22:30), but He chose a *nation* to represent Him in the earth. It takes a nation of people. What is to be shown cannot be shown through a single person, since God Himself is not a single person. It involves both relationship and fellowship—and that means lots of people. Through *you* (plural)—otherwise ordinary people, living and working together—God wants to make Himself known.

Jesus did not come until that was evident—until it was clear among the nations that God had chosen to honor Israel alone with His presence and His promise. Not because they were the biggest, not because they were the strongest, not because they were the brightest—but because Abraham, their forefather, was willing and obedient. So, to his seed the promise was extended, if they, too, would be willing and obedient.

Jesus came *from* them before He came to them.

Galatians 4 (NIV)

⁴ But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

This is why Matthew and Luke were so careful to trace the lineage of Jesus—both through Mary, His mother, and Joseph, her husband—to show His biological and political connection to Abraham, and to God's promise.

Secondary Plan

In the secondary stage, after Jesus had come the first time, He called to Himself twelve, to be with Him, to represent Him, to go in His name. Before they could go in His name, that had to spend time with Him to get to know the One they were to represent. And before He left them on their own, they had to spend years in His presence, day after day.

Jesus created a community—a band of brothers—to carry His message and show His grace.

The death and resurrection of Jesus will benefit *any individual* who will surrender to Him in faith, but Jesus did not die or rise for any individual. We are converted today, one by one, but we are saved to become a *nation* of obedient disciples of Jesus Christ.

Jesus gave Himself *for the Church* to create a new nation of believers (1 Corinthians 12:13). He sent His Spirit *to the Church*, His followers, to give them one heart, one motive, one purpose,

like His own. He is coming again *for the Church*, not for single individuals, that we might receive the fullness of our salvation and reign with Him forever, together.

You and I are that people. He gave us His heart—the Holy Spirit. Now, it is up to us to let Him lead. Anything less, anything else, would be mutiny (sin), self-exaltation, idolatry.

Ultimate Plan

Of course, you and I are only *part* of that people. God's people include faithful followers from all Christian groups, from every tribe and language under the sun, from America to Zanzibar—red, yellow, black, brown, and even white. And that is just the part we can see.

The part we see is only part of that people, for it also includes all those before us, and those yet to come—all the faithful followers from Adam (the father of the human race) until the day Jesus returns. It is people in Heaven and people on earth.

Present Task

Now recall my words: Christian fellowship is Godward (vertical) communion and mutual (horizontal) community. Without this blended bond, fullness of joy cannot be realized.

Therefore, the challenge of your life and mine, from day to day, is to discover this fountain of irrepressible joy, and then to channel it through our lives by *building fellowship connections* with the other members of the body of Christ.

It is what you were made for. It is what you were born again for.

You have what it takes, if only you will *do* what it takes.

It is not a road without stumbling stones and pitfalls. Next Sunday's message will aim to help you navigate them successfully.

Finally, I have a question for you: what is your FQ (Fellowship Quotient)?

What is your regular level of Godward communion *plus* mutual community in the church?

Are you building communion with God, but neglecting community with the church?

Are you enjoying community with the church, but neglecting personal communion with God?

This month is all about raising our FQ! Are you with me?