

The Big Picture

Sometimes it is hard to understand or see the Big Picture.

I have a friend named Tricia. We had lunch together last weekend in Western England. For many years, she worked for the Sultan of Oman in the Middle East as the person who set up the school system. She did such an amazingly great job, the Sultan put her to work over his investments. One day, she made such a great deal that she made countless millions of dollars for the Sultan. He was so grateful. He called her and said, "I must thank you. How can I say thanks.?" She said, "Oh, I was just doing my job." He said, "No, I must thank you. What can I get for you.?" She thought for a moment, remembering that in Middle Eastern culture, it is an insult not to allow someone to thank you. So she said, "well I have been learning golf. I would love a set of golf clubs." There was a very long pause...then the Sultan said, "How many clubs are in a set?" She said, "Usually 9." He said, "Then a set of golf clubs you shall have."

Weeks went by. She heard nothing. He was a busy man, she knew, so she let it go.

Then the phone rang. It was the Sultan. "It has taken me some time, but I have found you a set of 9 golf clubs. However, I have some bad news. They are not new and they have some flaws." She thought for a minute, and said, "that's ok."

He said, "Great..the first golf club is in Dubai but it does not have a pool. The second is in Bahrain and it does not have tennis courts. The third golf club is in Riyadh and is for women only...."

Last spring, in one of the small groups we have in the church, a person asked this question, "*If God is all powerful and all knowing, then God knows the future and knows my thoughts and actions-- what is the point of it all? Why pray? Why worry? Why act?*" Now that is a good question. We had a very lively discussion. During the discussion, another person in the group asked, "*why is it that it seems like I can't hear God and it does not seem like he hears me?*" Another great question. And actually, if you think about it, the answer to both questions would have to be related or at least correlated. Implicit in each of these questions is a desire to understand the nature of God. Who is he? Who are we? How are humans and God meant to relate and interact?

Today we are going to discuss what philosophers call the "First Order" or "First Cause" questions. Where did all this come from? What is the purpose of all of this? What is my purpose? Indeed, is there a purpose? What is the big picture and how do I fit into it.

An interesting note is that philosophy is from the Greek terms philos & Sophos, love of wisdom. It is also interesting to note, that philosophy can never answer the first order questions, only theology. Of course there would not be time to explain why this is so, but even the great Greek philosophers Plato & Aristotle understood this and turned to their pagan theology to answer their first order questions, like "where did we come from?" & "why do we yearn for love?"

So let's start by understanding what the Bible tells of about God.

From the very beginning, way back in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, we learn that God has multiple parts to his personality and, indeed, his personhood. Three distinct parts, in fact. We see this in an interesting discussion that happens Genesis, Chapter 1, verse 26. This is the first discussion—the first conversation—that happens in the history of the earth.

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make people in our image, to be like ourselves. They will be masters over all life—the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the livestock, wild animals, and small animals."

²⁷ So God created people in his own image;
God patterned them after himself;
male and female he created them.

Of course, the obvious question is, "who is the "us" since no people are about yet.

The answer is this: the "us" is the three parts, or personalities, of God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

We also see in this verse one of the answers to one of those questions above—what is the purpose of humans? One of the purposes, according to the Bible, is to be masters of all the LIFE in the earth. Funny, I find this to be the most easily understood concept by those people who would NOT call themselves Christians. I can't tell you how many atheist friends believe that humans have a responsibility to take care of the Earth. I also find one of the great contradictions, by the way, in atheistic thought that gives birth to evolution by natural selection. If there is no God and humans and all live evolved from the primeval ooze, then why should we care if the whales all die off? We won, right? I mean, a great contradiction would be a car with a bumper sticker promoting the idea of evolution while also have a bumper sticker sayings "save the whales." If the whales had evolved better, humans would not have naturally selected them for death. No, the very idea that humans must work to preserve creatures near extinction is one of the best philosophical arguments for a God. God put that idea in human hearts!

We also see in that simple verse more of the revealed nature of God. Humans look like God—our image is God's image—but that it takes both male and female to complete the image of God. Thank God. Can you imagine what a mess heaven will be if the entire management is male? Furniture skewed everywhere, not a single plate from the grate feast ever gets cleared. And the great feast would consist of hot dogs, canned chili, a bag of Doritos, Little Debbies, and a cold drink. I always use the masculine pronoun when referring to God, not because God is male, but because throughout the bible God refers to himself in a male pronoun—so I am just being polite. Theologically, there is nothing wrong with thinking of "mother God" but to call God by a female term is just being rude to him—like my kids called me "mom" instead of dad.

So God has three aspects, or parts, to him—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And humans are created, in part, to serve God by tending the world he created. Why is God in three parts and how does that aspect of God help us understand our original questions.

One of the best ways I have found to understand the nature of God in three parts is to think to understand God in terms of a location. That is to say, which part of God is where?

God the Father is and always has been in heaven. God the Son, with the exception of a very short period of time, has been sitting at this right-hand side in heaven. The third part of God—God the Holy Spirit—is not only harder to understand but is also harder to, if you will, locate. Because, you see, God the Holy Spirit is the person of God that has primarily interacted with the world—from creation right up until now.

We see this from the first few verses of the Bible.

¹In the beginning God created^o the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was empty, a formless mass cloaked in darkness. And the Spirit of God was hovering over its surface.

In fact, it was the spirit of God who created the earth. And it was the spirit of God, after that conversation we discussed earlier, who came to earth to form humans and to breath the Breath of God into them.

⁷then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground,^o and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

So it is the Spirit of God that creates on the earth and brings life to the earth and to all things on the earth, including us. After creation, the spirit placed His creation in a beautiful garden that supplied all that we need. And each day, apparently, God and his created people would gather in full communion, fellowship, apparently for supper or something, each night.

⁸They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze...and the LORD God called to the people, and said to them, “Where are you?”

But the problem is, those first humans in that wonderful garden who were walking with God each day are just like us...they made choices that were different than what God desired. And those choices create a separation...and perhaps a silence...between God and humans.

Let me give you an analogy. Actually, this is not my analogy. It is God's. The analogy is that of a husband and a wife. Do you realize that God created marriage so that we could see on earth an image of what our relationship with God is meant to be like...both the good and romantic times and the times of separation? That is marriage—an image on earth of the sacred romance in heaven.

So, using God's analogy lets discuss this issue of why we don't hear from God. Now I am going to say something that every married man understands. Guys, what happens when you have offended or hurt your wife by something you have said or done? Even if you did not realize you had hurt her or offended her. Suddenly, there is a silence in the

relationship, right. You are heading down the road and you notice that no conversation is happening. You realize...hum...perhaps something is up.

Remember I said that God is both fully male and fully female? Well, this is one of the parts that is more visible to us in his feminine creation. When we offend God—when we make choices that our outside of his will—he retracts from us. He becomes silent. He, just like the wife above, is waiting for an apology. Guys, I have the three best words for a man to learn in a marriage. They were given to me many years ago. Are you ready? Here goes—“*Honey, I am so sorry for wrong choice I have made, I was wrong, and you were right all along, and I will never do it again.*” Let’s shorten that.. “*I’m sorry, I’m wrong, and I’ll never do it again.*”

Just as those words restore communication between a male and female on earth, they restore the relationship between humans and a God in heaven.

I think I should mention at this point that offense against God is not the only reason for God being silent. This is a mystery that not even the Bible explains fully. It is true that sometimes God is silent because his Spirit has been grieved, but many devout believers who have confessed and repented of all known sin still experience seasons of God’s silence and apparent withdrawal. Sometimes God is silent, or seems to withdraw, apparently as a means to test us or draw us to even closer to him by causing us to seek his face even more earnestly.

But know this for sure, the confession of sin, repentance, and the asking of God’s forgiveness does fully restore the relationship...sometimes it takes a bit of time for us to feel as though the relationship has been restored. Maybe that is a bit like marriage, too.

See when Adam ate the apple, sin, or wrong choices, were introduced in the world. And do know what...the Spirit of God largely left the earth at that time! We were on our own.

And you know how the story goes from there. Literally, all hell broke lose. So bad, in fact, that in a very short time, God decided to wipe the whole mess off the planet and start again—the flood of Noah. So bad, in fact, we had entire cities given over to horrible perversions—Sodom and Gomorrah.

But God did not give up on humans. He tried several times to win us back and to hear the apology. In fact, at times, would you believe the spirit of God would actually fall on—that means fill up—some humans and speak through them? You know their names—Moses, Joshua, Debra, Samson, Eli, Nathan, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah—just to name a few.

Finally, when we would not return, things got extra serious in heaven. Drastic times call for drastic measures. There apparently was another board meeting in heaven—we don’t have the minutes for this meeting but we know it happened and how the decision played out. The board decided to send another person of God—another part—Jesus, the son of God who sits at the right hand of the father, came to earth as a human being to point the way, to bring us back, to create a new path for forgiveness and reconciliation. The bible explains it real simply:

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it.

But do you know what? More happened as a result of Jesus coming. For those of you who are in one of the many bible studies we have been doing on the Gospel of John know exactly where I am heading.

Remember, I said that God the Spirit is a tricky one to nail down to a given address. Whereas the Father is and always has been in heaven and the son came down for 33 or so years, the Spirit of God keeps changing locations—and building his real estate portfolio. Because...drum roll please...the spirit of God was promised by Jesus in the Gospel of John to come to live in a new place...forever...inside of US!!!! That is correct, though hard to believe, but true...the spirit of God actually lives inside every human being who calls themselves a Christian—that is to say, those who say these words and mean them:

“I’m sorry God (for the wrong choices I have made), I will try to never do them again (that’s repentance), and I ask you to forgive me through Jesus.”

Upon that simple apology, thousands of years of human history and the destruction of creation are reversed...God returns to earth in human form...you!

Which gets to final question...what is our purpose? Why pray? We pray not for things that we need or for a future, those are fine prayers, but we pray to have a relationship with God...to walk with him again as though we are in the garden again...because, in fact, we are. Prayer is not connecting with the Cosmic Bell Hop who stands by to give us what we need. Rather, prayer is the continuation of a relationship. Remember the marriage analogy? How great would a marriage be if all of the talk were about what we wanted the other in the marriage to give us or about the future. No, a great marriage savors the NOW...is intimate NOW. And so that is what prayer really is...or as the Westminster Confession of faith says, “The purpose of a human is to love God and to enjoy his presence forever!!!” We pray to love god and to feel is love. Prayer is not about you...it is about God. For our relationship is a sacred romance, not a needy co-dependent relationship. Fall in love with God and all of life falls into place.

To the glory of God...amen.