

So far we've discussed the two dimensions, the time and space dimension we inhabit, and the eternal and spiritual dimension God inhabits.

- ◆ However there is one thing God has given to humans that transcends both dimensions and that is, the capacity for relationships.
- ◆ Despite the limitations of our four-dimensional world, God has given humanity the capacity to not only relate to other humans, but to also reach out and relate personally to the one true God (Acts 17:27-28).
- ◆ God has blessed humanity with a mind and consciousness which is unique in the four-dimensional world so we can relate to each other and more importantly with our Maker, Creator and Father.
- ◆ We also discussed a God who lives in a unique Trinitarian relationship characterized in the simple sentence, "One God in three persons".
- ◆ This one God in three persons can be summed up by the phrase, "Unity (One) in Relationship (Three) through Love".
- ◆ This unique relationship is united by and governed by the love that constantly flows between the three persons. This is why they are always in complete agreement.

But, because this loving relationship within the Trinity is so wonderful, so awe inspiring, and this is where the story gets personal, they just had to share this unique love inherent in themselves with other beings.

- ◆ Have you ever given any thought to where the emotion of love we humans enjoy originated from?
- ◆ Well, here is the answer.
- ◆ This godly love is an overflowing love, there is no limit to its capacity, the Trinity is the fountainhead of love.
- ◆ Jesus metaphorically describes this love that flows from God the Holy Spirit as "living water" in John 7.
- ◆ ***John 7:37 On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink."³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.***
- ◆ Later in Galatians 5 the first of the fruits ascribed to the Holy Spirit by the apostle Paul is "love" (Galatians 5:22).
- ◆ At the end of time, Jesus shepherds the redeemed masses to the healing "living waters" which flow from the throne of God.
- ◆ ***Revelation 7:17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water.' And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'***
- ◆ We can only imagine what it will be like for this great mass of hurting humanity to be engulfed by a flood of God's love at that time.
- ◆ We may experience brief moments in this life where we feel totally secure in the love of another person, the warmth, the comfort, the assurance, the security where we don't want for anything.
- ◆ But this will be the ongoing reality when humanity joins God in eternity.

So sometime back before the creation of chronological time, God came up with this incredible statement, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen 1:26).

- ◆ This effectively became God's mission statement.
- ◆ Martin Luther King had a dream that black and white children would walk together hand in hand as sisters and brothers.
- ◆ God's dream is much more ambitious.
- ◆ His dream from within the depths of the trinity has been to share His eternal existence with a bride who would respond to His overtures of love by saying, "yes" to Him and willingly participate in the great dance of triune love.
- ◆ So when God said, "Let us make man in our image," this is His goal – people who will respond voluntarily to his offer to "love as He loves."
- ◆ This is the type of person who will eventually occupy heaven, and it is precisely this quality of love that makes heaven, heaven.
- ◆ It's not the streets paved with gold or the buildings of precious stones. Heavens real jewels are the human beings in God's image who have accepted God's invitation to join Him in heaven "living love willingly".

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- ◆ And like the Psalmist we should be gob smacked by this honor of participating in the life and love of the Godhead itself.

Psalms 8:3 When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers— the moon and the stars you set in place— 4 what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? 5 Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor.

So once this momentous decision was made, then the question became, how do we go about creating man in our image? How do we go about creating sons of God who display the same qualities of love that we exhibit?

- ◆ This is a very important question because it gives us the context to explain all that subsequently follows.
- ◆ This does not mean we will always get a definitive answer, but at least it gives us something tangible to help us see the bigger picture especially when we confront the difficult questions of life, evil, pain, suffering and death.
- ◆ We might not like, agree with, or understand the process, but it helps us to understand all that is happening on this earth is for the sole purpose of creating man in God's image.
- ◆ However, one day when we arrive in heaven as the finished product, we will understand and be grateful to God for the process.

Before we get to man though, we need to back up and look at two other aspect of God's creation, as both of these will play a critical role in the process.

- ◆ As mentioned, the goal of the whole process is the creation of a bride who would respond to His love by saying "yes" to Him and willingly participates in the great dance of triune love.
- ◆ So if love is the goal, then what are the circumstances that need to be in place to secure this outcome?
- ◆ The first and most critical aspect of love is, *it must be freely chosen.*
- ◆ Love by its very nature cannot be forced or coerced, it must be chosen.
- ◆ But in order for it to be chosen, there must, by necessity be the possibility of an alternative.
- ◆ This means creating agents with the freewill capacity to either accept or reject God's overtures of love.
- ◆ We will shortly see examples where freewill agents, angels and humans, exercise this prerogative to say "no" to God.
- ◆ However there is a risk involved. The choice to say "no" to God opens up the possibility of evil.
- ◆ You can put actors on the stage and give them a script, but there is no guarantee they will stick to the script.
- ◆ But notice this is only possible in the sense God chose to create a world in which love was the goal.
- ◆ It is the free agents choice to go off the script and say "no" to God that introduces evil.
- ◆ Evil therefore arises solely from creaturely freewill and cannot be attributed to a holy God.
- ◆ The possibility of evil then is the risk God was willing to take in order to obtain the higher goal of creating beings in His image that willingly say "yes" to Him and willingly participate in the great dance of triune love.
- ◆ God will even persevere with His goal of sharing His triune love with His creation even if it means tolerating this creaturely induced evil for a time and even subjecting Himself to it's horror so as to obtain His desired goal.

Love also implies a moral cosmos.

- ◆ In contrast to the indifferent universe proposed by atheists, we have a caring Creator who has engineered a cosmos where free agents have been given self-determining freedom and the power to make morally responsible choices.
- ◆ This is one of the marvels of creation we usually don't think too much about.
- ◆ We tend to focus on the beauty of creation without thinking too much about how God has orchestrated everything within that beauty to revolve around choice.
- ◆ This development is testimony to God's profound wisdom and His creative ability to engineer an environment whereby He balances two competing interests.
- ◆ On the one hand, God has to preserve the freewill of the agent so as not to control or predetermine his decisions, but on the other hand introduce a system whereby choices have consequences.
- ◆ A moral law achieves this goal.
- ◆ The agent is left free to make the choice but his choice may result in either good or bad consequences.

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- ◆ Agents who have been given this power have to operate in an environment that included viable options from which to choose and a time of temporary duration to exercise their influence for better or for worse.
- ◆ It is easy to see the operation of this moral system at work in our modern societies.
- ◆ We don't need to extrapolate too much but here are some examples where our choices can result in good or bad consequences.
- ◆ All of the following were given to humanity by God as a benefit, but we know each of them can be misused and can result in negative consequences: relationships, finances, health, sexuality, alcohol, drugs, food, possessions, industriousness, education, technology, political authority, entertainment.
- ◆ To see the design and consideration needed to engineer a creation that satisfies these moral criteria across such a broad spectrum of human behavior is one of the clearest proofs to me there is design behind our existence and that a Creator exists.
- ◆ This carefully designed system allows for two things to happen.
- ◆ It allows God to remain at arms length so as not to interfere with the agent's freedom to choose, but on the other hand there is a regulation or control on the agent's behavior in that pain and suffering act as a deterrent, while reward and gratification act as an incentive.
- ◆ The prime scriptural example of this process in action is the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).
- ◆ The father of the prodigal remained at arm's length in honoring his son's independent freedom to choose, while at the same time recognizing the path his son had chosen, although painful, would eventually aid in the process of bringing about reconciliation.
- ◆ But it also meant the father had to endure a period of his son's misuse of his freedom.
- ◆ Experiencing life without God will play a crucial role in the process of creating us in God's image.

There are a number of important points we should take from this section.

- ◆ First, God's goal in the whole process of making man in His image is the creation of a bride who will respond willingly to His love by saying "yes" to Him.
- ◆ Second, if love is to be genuine *it must be freely chosen*.
- ◆ Love by its very nature cannot be forced or coerced, it must be chosen.
- ◆ Choice by its nature implies an alternative, and this involves a risk, the possibility of the created agent saying "no" to God.
- ◆ This in turn opens up the possibility of evil.
- ◆ However this evil arises solely from creaturely freewill and cannot be attributed to a holy God.

This introduces the age-old question that has plagued theologians and philosophers for millennia, "If God is all-powerful, all-knowing and yet Omni-benevolent, why doesn't He do something about the problem of evil?"

- ◆ Well, as we have discussed, there must be something that is more important to His purpose besides the elimination of evil?
- ◆ As we saw, God's wish is to share His triune love with humanity, but love requires a response that is freely chosen.
- ◆ God is unwavering in His commitment that love will prevail despite the heavy cost of evil.
- ◆ If the free agent willingly chooses to say "no" to God, the path to God's goal becomes more torturous for both the free agents and for God, but that doesn't mean God abandons His plan.
- ◆ The story of Christianity is the story of God's response to humanity's "no".

There is a second aspect to this question of evil that now needs to be addressed as this too plays a critical role in understanding the process.