

Philippians 2:1-11

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Sermon notes/follow-up

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(There was no sermon recording this week due to technical difficulties. These are *very* rough notes from which the material of sermon can be drawn.)

As Ralph Martin put it, "The Christian church was born in song." Christianity has always been a singing faith. Song has been woven into the fabric of Scripture from the very beginning.

When Adam awoke from his sleep to find God had given him a wife as his helper and companion, he broke out into a song, "Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." When God delivered his people out of Egypt in the exodus, they sang the song of Moses to celebrate God's victory. King David was a singer and song writer. Indeed, the Psalter, largely composed of David's musical poems, is the longest and largest book in the Bible. David wrote songs crying out to God for help when times were hard, and he wrote songs of thanksgiving after God rescued him.

One of the things pagans noted about the early church is that their assemblies were filled with loud and joyful song. In fact, song became a kind of metaphor for the life of the church, as the members of the community were called to live in harmony with one another. One church father, Ignatius, considered music so integral to the life of the church, he compared the whole congregation to a choir and called on them to "sing in tune" in their life together. That is, their singing in worship on the Lord's Day, as their voices blended together into one, as they conformed their voices to the same words, was to be a picture of their unity and fellowship in everything else they did.

One of the earliest descriptions we have of an early Christian worship service comes from about 110 AD. The Roman Empire had become suspicious of Christians, seeing them as social subversives. The Roman government thus wanted to know just what went in the secret meetings of Christians. A Roman official by the name of Pliny spied around and caught a couple of deaconesses, and interrogated them. He wrote to his superior, the Emperor Trajan,

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to **meet on a fixed day** before dawn

and **sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god**, and to **bind themselves by oath**, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to **partake of food**--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

Out of curiosity, we might wonder: What songs did those early Christians sing when they came together? What songs did they use to praise Christ as a God?

Certainly, they kept singing songs from the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the Psalter – although they now sang them with a new understanding. They came to see how these songs spoke of Christ, how they prefigured his sufferings and resurrection.

But no doubt the early church also composed new songs to celebrate the new thing God had done in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. It was time to sing a new song to celebrate the coming of the new creation.

Now, some of those new songs are found right in the pages of the NT. For example, Revelation has several such songs. Luke's gospel opens with a flurry of musical compositions, a kind of musical eschatology in which various saints sing God's new creation into being. But one of the most famous of these new hymns is found in Phil. 2:5-11. This hymn may have already existed, and Paul is quoting from it. (That's what most scholars today seem to think). Or, Paul might have composed it himself. It is known as *Carmen Christi*, the Christ hymn.

This song tells a story – the story of the incarnation, of God's Son becoming man, suffering, dying, and rising again for the salvation of his people. This song celebrates the successful mission of the Son, moving from his incarnation, to his death, to his exaltation. But the song is given to us within a larger context in the letter to the Philippians. The letter is situated within a framework, as part of a larger argument. The previous verses set the scene. Paul is calling the Philippian church to unity/community. Indeed, Paul is passionate about the unity of the church. He says their unity will make his joy complete. Plus, he knows that their unity as a body is vital to their Spiritual health/welfare as well as to their

witness/mission. In fact, in Phil. 1:27, Paul gives what is probably best understood as the theme for the entire letter: “Do this one thing—Order your common life in a manner worthy of the gospel” (paraphrased). For Paul, that means the community must be united. It means they must contend as one man for the gospel, striving towards like-mindedness in all things. The many members of the church truly share a common life, faith, and mission.

In 2:1-4, Paul shows that whereas pride causes contention, disruption, division, and disunity, humility is the key virtue that makes unity possible. Humility is indeed the pathway to unity, the essential ingredient to unity. Paul tells the Philippians to reject selfish ambition and vain conceit, which are just synonyms for pride. Instead, he tells them to pursue and embrace like-mindedness, each considering others more important than himself. Of course, those actions are just manifestations of the virtue of humility.

It is at this juncture, after giving these positive and negative commands, that Paul brings in the Christ hymn. He wants to give them the ultimate model for humility, God himself, God in human form.

Consider: *Do you think of God as humble?* We talk about God’s majesty, glory, power, righteousness, wisdom, love, holiness, grace – but how often do we talk about God’s humility? Do we even think of humility as a divine attribute? And yet that’s what this hymn is about! Let me show you that – and after we’ve looked at the hymn we can come back and talk about the exhortations in v. 1-4, especially focusing on how the virtue of humility builds up community.

Jesus is God; Jesus is man. The hymn begins with the incarnation of the pre-existent Son of God. The one who came in the form of man previously existed in the form of God. That’s unique: None of us pre-existed our bodies, but he did. As Son, he was equal with God from all eternity, with all divine glory, powers, privileges, and rights. And yet, as the song goes on to tell us, he willingly gave all that up, in becoming man and in becoming obedient to the point of death. He gave it all up to serve you and me. He didn’t cling to his divine rights, he didn’t clutch his divine prerogatives. Instead, he used all his divine power for the good of others, in order to serve those weaker than himself.

In v. 7, the hymn says he *made himself nothing*. In reality, it means he *emptied himself* (echoing language from Isaiah’s servant songs). Jesus is being used as a model and we find in the next chapter that Paul has emulated that model. In 2:17, Paul says he poured himself out a drink offering; just like Jesus, he emptied

himself for the sake of others. Then in Phil. 3, he shows us what all that self-emptying involved. He was a Jew of first rank, Pharisee of Pharisee, with all kinds of honors and privileges. Yet he renounced all that and counted it as nothing in order to further the ministry of the gospel and serve the good of the church.

Think about what the Son of God did – the arc of his ministry. The Creator entered his creation. The eternal God became an embryo. The one from heaven was born into the lowliest of earthly circumstances, a family so poor they could not even afford the ordinary purification offering at the temple. The one with infinite riches became an impoverished, homeless itinerant preacher. The one who sat on a throne in heaven became a political refugee and outcast among his own people. The eternally righteous one chose solidarity with sinners, dying a sinner's death, indeed a criminal's death, for criminals as a criminal. The one who made the trees was hung upon a tree. The one who had all glory and honor submitted to the cruelest mockery and shame. The immortal one died on a cross. He allowed himself to be murdered so that murderers might be forgiven. Why did he do it? All to redeem us, to serve us, to rescue us. He loved *you* more than he loved his own life. He used everything he had, all his powers and privileges, not to exalt himself, not for his own comfort and security, but for the good of others, for their comfort and security and salvation. His loss was our gain. He gave himself to get close to us, to rescue us, to deliver us.

But the hymn goes on: Because he humbled himself even to the point of death on the cross, the Father raised him up, exalted him, and graciously gave him the name above every name. And, thus, at the last day, willingly or grudgingly, every creature, including all men and angels, will confess that Jesus is Lord. The lowest humiliation has brought about the ultimate exaltation. The hymn ends with a cosmic (and indeed, very political), declaration of Jesus' absolute lordship and supremacy. Even Caesar will bow the knee. The one who humbled himself is now King of kings!

Note that "every knee will bow" is an allusion to Isa. 45. In Isa. 45, God declares he will be vindicated against his enemies. He shows he will not share his glory with another. He will defeat the rival gods. But here, *the Father is sharing his glory with the Son*. In other words, Father and Son share the same Godhood, the same glory, the same divine life. Again and again in the NT, you find OT passages about YHWH applied to Jesus. Paul is still a monotheist, but his doctrine of God includes more than one person. (As N. T. Wright has said, if the early church

fathers had not come up with the doctrine of the Trinity, it would have had to be invented to accommodate all that Paul says about the Godhead in his letters.)

It might be easy to think, “Well Jesus is God and man, and so in his death, we see the weakness and frailty of his humanity, and in his exaltation we see that he’s really God after all.” Some theologians have tried to use that logic, as though you could carve up the gospel story into man bits and God bits. He dies as man; he reigns as God. But that’s precisely the opposite of the point the hymn actually makes. Jesus didn’t cease being (or revealing) true God when he died and he didn’t cease being (or revealing) true man who he was exalted. To be more specific, the hymn, from beginning to end shows what it means to be God, what it means for God to enter into union with humanity.

The subject of the entire hymn is the God-man. It’s the same person who was born, lived, died, and was exalted. The humility of Jesus *is* the humility of God. Indeed, the hymn shows us it is precisely in the suffering of the cross that we see most fully who God is. Jesus didn’t stop being God on the cross; rather on the cross, his Godhood/Godness was most fully on display. You want to see who God is? Look at the cross and say, “This is the true meaning of who God is!” This is God’s ultimate act of self-expression, his ultimate self-revelation. God has opened up his life for all to see inside. God has disclosed his heart to us in Jesus; thus, we can never conceive of God apart from Jesus.

When God became man in Jesus Christ, he did not stop being who he already was, he did not become other than himself. All that he did (including washing feet, suffering mockery and shame, and ultimately his humble death), he did as the God-man.

What, then, does the cross show us about God?

Our God is a humble God who stoops to serve, a God who does nothing out of selfish ambition and vain conceit, a God who esteems others above himself, a God who humbles himself enough to become one of us and rescue us at great cost to himself. God’s humility is not a sign of weakness, but of absolute strength. Robert Letham puts it this way: “The point is that when we have to do with Jesus Christ we have to do with God. His presence in the world is identical with the existence of the humiliated, obedient, and lowly man, Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, the humiliation, lowliness, and obedience of Christ are essential in our conception of God.”

Now, someone might object: "Wait a second! Doesn't the Bible say God does everything for his own glory? And that we should live to glorify him? That doesn't sound very humble!"

I think many of you know how I would answer both of those questions. Think about this: How does God glorify himself? What does that mean? God doesn't need the world to get glory. God didn't make the world to fill some need he had for companionship or praise. He created because he wanted to share his joy, because he loves to love, he loves to serve. He didn't create out of deficiency but out of excess. Remember, God existed from all eternity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and all three have been humbly loving, serving, and glorifying one another from all eternity. This hymn is about the Son, but note that the Son is not centered on himself. He comes to do the Father's will, to glorify the Father. He could have said, "Father, I am your equal – you can't tell me what to do!" But instead he says, "I have come to do your will – even if it means my death." In John 4, he describes his Father's will as "my food." He lived for the glory of his Father.

And what of the Father? He exalts the Son, he praises the Son, he glorifies the Son, he shares his honor with Son, he pours out his blessing upon the Son. The Father is Son-centered, not Father-centered.

All that to say: God (= the Trinity) is not a self-centered being. There is no Father/Son rivalry here, no competition for glory, no selfish ambition, no self-centeredness. Instead there's self-giving and mutual love, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit glorify one another. The three persons of Trinity are humble, and therefore dwell together in perfect unity. They are like-minded, of one accord. Humble servanthood is a key part of the divine identity/unity.

See, what happens in the incarnation and cross is the life of God is turned inside-out. But this is who God has been from all eternity. When the Son of God died on the cross, he wasn't acting out of character. His service of us is just an extension of his service of his Father within the life of the Trinity. C. S. Lewis describes this well: "The Father gives all he is and has to the Son. The Son gives himself back to the Father, and gives himself to the world, and for the world to the father, and thus gives the world (in himself) back to the Father." In other words, at the center of the universe, at the center of history, is God's self-giving love. Given the nature of God, redemption had to take the shape of a God-man giving himself on a tree for his fallen creatures.

To sum up: When God commands us to be humble, he's really just saying, "Be like me. Live like I do. Treat others like I do. Imitate me." He's saying, "You were made in my image, so image me in your actions as well, image me in your community. Make humble servanthood the core of your identity even as it is the core of my Triune identity."

The theologian B. B. Warfield preached a sermon on this passage entitled "Imitating the Incarnation." But really, you could say the text is about more than that. It's about imitating God's life, living as God has lived, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from all eternity. It's about treating one another as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit treat one another. Our God is humble; how dare we be proud!! We are called to imitate and follow after a God who stoops to serve, who has given himself sacrificially for the sake of the world. When God asks us to be humble, he's not asking us to do anything he hasn't already done himself. He says, "Be humble...here, let me show you how."

What about worshipping God? God commands us to glorify him; how is that not a self-serving command on his part? How is that not a power play? "I'm bigger than you; therefore, you must pay me homage!!" But God is not bullying us when he commands worship. We have to understand what we were made for. We were made for a relationship with God. We were made to know him. But to know him is to love, and to love him is to praise him. Because we are creatures, we have an inescapable impulse to worship someone or something. If we put anything besides the Triune God at the center of our being, we will destroy ourselves, we will dehumanize ourselves. When God commands worship, it's just like all his other commands: It's for our good, it's for our joy. God's command to praise him cannot be construed merely as a self-seeking, selfish demand. There's more to it. God commanding our praise is like a parent telling his child to eat his veggies or not play in the street. Ultimately, God is seeking *our good* when he commands us to glorify him. The fact that our good and God's glory coincide just shows us the wisdom of the divines plan.

Moreover, whatever we praise we offer to each of the three persons is deflected from one to the others. The Son does not absorb our praise and keep it to himself; he reflects it to the Father and Spirit, like light bouncing off a mirror. The persons of the Trinity do not suck up worship and adoration, as if they were "black holes"; instead, our praise redounds from one person to the others.

Now, let's talk about the virtue of humility – what it is, what it isn't, and why it's so vital to the life of the church. What we'll see is that the theology of the hymn

and practical instructions Paul gives fit together like a hand in a glove. Nothing is more Jesus-like, nothing is more God-like, than humility. Further, nothing serves the up-building of the church the way Christ-like humility does.

So what is humility? I think it was Lewis who said humility is not thinking less of yourself, so much as thinking of yourself less. Humility is not having a low view of the self – it's having an accurate view of the self. Humility comes when you learn to see yourself as God sees you, as God's Word describes you. The humble man asks not, "What can I do to make myself look good?" but "What can I do to make Jesus look good? How can I enhance his reputation?" The humble man is focused on God's glory and the good of the community, not his own glory and good.

Thus, the humble man asks not "How can I get credit and glory for myself, for my accomplishments?" but "How can I serve others? How can I use what God has given me for their good?" Humility is not self-focused, but others-focused.

God delights in humility because it is the mirror image of his own character in his creatures. But, as Proverbs says, he opposes the proud. He hates arrogance. He hates smugness and cockiness.

What does pride do to relationships?

Pride destroys community. Pride breeds strife and rivalry and dissension. Augustine called pride "the mother of all sin." If you are prideful, you will covet the success and possessions of others. You will compare yourself to others constantly. You will critique others. Pride is cut throat, whereas humility is willing to bleed for the other. But more than anything, pride is a focus on the self. The prideful person is totally self-centered. How do I look? What do people think of me? Is this cool? Does it help fill my "coolness resume"? How much credit am I getting? Am I getting what I deserve? Are my rights being respected? Am I underappreciated? Do others know how great and worthy I am? Am I being praised enough by others? Am I getting my due? How do I compare to others?

Of course, when we compare ourselves to others, we can come off feeling superior or inferior. It just depends on how we make the comparison and who we stack ourselves against.

This is why both the arrogant person and the person with low self-esteem both have the same problem. Superiority- and inferiority-complexes both stem from

the same source (as any good counselor could tell you). It's a pride problem, a problem of focusing on the self. Both are measuring themselves not by God's Word but by others. Both are getting their self-concept not from Scripture but from the estimation of others. This is why you can be arrogant around some people and insecure around others. You feel smug around inferiors and inadequate among superiors. But that's wrong on both counts. We should not try to figure out who we are simply by comparing ourselves to others; if we do so, we'll never be able to relate to others in a healthy way.

Pride is the mother of all vice. Humility on the other hand is the mother of all virtue. Humility focuses on the other. Humility is a deeply counter-cultural virtue. Someone pointed out to me recently that Bill Bennet's *Book of Virtues* does not include humility. Lewis once said he had never once heard an unbeliever accuse himself of pride; that kind of sin doesn't even show up on the non-Christian's radar screen. In the ancient world (e.g., Aristotle), humility was seen as a sign of weakness, not as a virtue. It took the Christianization of the culture to make humility a positive trait.

What does a humble man do? He lives transparently before God and he lives to serve his neighbor. The humble man doesn't cover his sin but confesses it. When critiqued, he doesn't retaliate, but asks, "What can I learn from my critics, even my enemies?" He is just as concerned with the rights of others as he is with his own rights. He doesn't compare himself with others to determine his self-image, but looks at himself in the light of Scripture. He receives his identity as a gift, given in baptism as the gospel announcement.

Now, we must be careful to not confuse humility with its cheap counterfeits. Don't confuse humility with false modesty. This is where the example of Jesus is so helpful. Jesus was humble, but there's no false modesty in him. Jesus was humble, but not spineless. He was not shy about declaring who he was and what he'd come to do. He'd perform a miracle and forgive sin; the Pharisees would say, "Why does this guy think he is – God?!!" and Jesus would say, in essence, "Yes, precisely." Jesus was not reluctant to talk about his true identity. His mission required it. He was humble, but also bold and honest. So humility does not mean denying real gifts, talents, and abilities God has given you.

False modesty is a moor problem, mainly because it's so much easier than genuine humility. I'm afraid some Christians don't know how to take a compliment. They're so concerned to not take any credit, if you say to them, "Hey you're really good at that" (when everyone knows they are), they're quick

to say, "No, I'm not." If you're good, and you get a compliment, just say, "Thank you" to the person for the compliment, and say "Thank you" to God in your heart for what he's given you. Humility does not mean you lack a sense of self-worth. In fact, if you see yourself that way, you're really insulting God, your Creator, who really has blessed you with significant abilities. So false modesty is not humility, it is a caricature of humility. (My hunch is that many who are "falsely modest" are actually in danger of taking pride in their apparent humility!)

Humility is not so much about self-deprecation as it is gratitude. It's not saying, "I'm a worthless worm. I'm a wretch in everything I try to do." Rather, it's saying "Thank you" to God for every gift he bestows. The humble man constantly has words of gratitude on his lips.

Flannery O' Connor was an extremely humble woman, almost humble and shy to a fault. She was also a very gifted writer, as many of you know. I remember coming across in one of her letters (I think) a place where she was answering the question why she became a writer. She said, "I write because I write well." I love that! Humility is not selling yourself short, it's not burying your talents, it's not an inferiority complex. Do what God has enabled you to do, and do it with excellence.

Nor does humility make you a pushover. Humility is not to be equated with spinelessness or cowardice. Humility does not mean you would never stand against injustice or wrongdoing, or fight for something valuable, or defend what needs defending. I think this confusion is why a lot of men have a hard time seeing humility as a virtue that is compatible with robust masculinity.

Humility actually gives you great confidence in doing those things because you're not doing them not just to look good or win approval. You're now doing them out of love, to serve others. Nothing is more "manly" than humbly bearing others' burdens, coming to the defense of the helpless, and doing for what others what they cannot do for themselves.

In Phil. 2, Paul calls us to humility as the road to true community. He wants Christians to be like-minded, and humility is the key to that. If their lives are going to blend together into a beautiful song, if their lives (and not just their voices) are going to harmonize, they have to practice the humility that belongs to them in Christ Jesus. They have to share in his mindset, in his heart posture.

How does humility build community? Humility focuses on the needs and interests of the other. And thus it bonds people together. If you're humble, you're not concerned with where you fall on the pecking order, or how you measure up in comparison to others. You're concerned with service.

Some people think: If I only think of others, won't I be miserable? It is one of the paradoxes of the gospel that we only become our true selves when we immerse ourselves in the lives of others. God wants our lives all tangled up with one another, he wants our lives entwined with one another because only when we know one another well can we really serve one another. It is precisely when you stop focusing on yourself that you find yourself – you find your true identity, you find true joy.

It's been said one of the best ways to solve your problems is go find someone with even bigger problems and serve them. Then your problems will largely dissolve away. And so it is. If we are humble enough to give ourselves for others, we will find amazing joy and peace. But if you just focus on becoming happy, you'll never find happiness.

Lewis makes this point as well. [I'm paraphrasing here]: If an artist focuses on being original, he'll never produce anything original, whereas if he just focuses on making art that is true and beautiful, he *will* end up being original as a by-product. If you just want friends you'll never have any friends – the very condition of having friends is wanting something *else*, and when someone else is pursuing that same “something else,” then you have a platform for friendship. But as Lewis says, those who are going nowhere can not expect to have any fellow travelers. Lewis said if you go into a situation hoping to make a good impression, you almost surely won't. But if you'll just “be yourself,” you probably will impress. Those paradoxes are all forms of what Jesus taught, “If you try to save your life you will lose it, but if you lose it you will find it.” It's when we give ourselves away that we find ourselves. It's when we quit trying to find our own joy that we discover it. It's when we stop trying to prove and justify ourselves, and focus on serving others, that we find true happiness. Lewis says, “Obedience is the road to freedom, humility the road to pleasure, unity the road to personality.” True personhood – in the sense of the happiness, fulfillment, glory, and joy that we were made for -- comes “when we occupy those places in the structure of the eternal cosmos for which we were designed or invented. As a color first reveals its true quality when placed by an excellent artist in its pre-elected spot between certain others, as a spice reveals its true flavor when inserted just where and when a good cook wishes among the other

ingredients, as the dog becomes [a true dog] only when he has taken his place in the household of man, so we shall then first be true persons when we have suffered ourselves to be fitted into our places." You find your true self not in pridefully trying to be a solitary individual (not even God defines himself in isolation – remember the Trinity!!), but by humbly immersing yourself in communal life.

In every situation, it is humility that makes community work. If we focus only on ourselves, we are bunch of disconnected individuals. But through humility, we can connect with one another in deep, mysterious, and profound ways. Take marriage as an example: If you are miserable in your marriage, there's a good chance that it's because you are more focused on yourself than your spouse, you're more focused on your needs than the needs of the other. If your focus is on your own desires, you'll always be running at a deficit in the relationship, you will always feel dissatisfied. Now, that's not to say you pay your own needs no attention at all – as humans I'm not sure we can do that. But I am saying that you need to put greater weight on the needs of the other. The best way to get your own needs met is to take the focus off those needs and put the focus on meeting the needs of your spouse.

Note also that I'm not saying the key to becoming humble is to focus on humility. If you're focused on your own humility, your focus is still on yourself and not on the needs of the other. So long as we focus on humility, it is impossible to actually become humble.

So humility is a key mark of the Christian life. This is how God has designed church community to work. The ethos, or culture, of the congregation is to be infused with humility. God designed us to relate to one another the way the persons of the Godhead relate to one another. We are to find our center of being outside ourselves. And we will not be happy, we will not be who God calls us to be, our lives will not work the way they are supposed to work, until we throw ourselves into meeting the needs of those in the community God has placed us. It won't happen until we put pride to death, and in humility adopt the mind of Christ towards one another.

Finally, consider again the Incarnational and Trinitarian basis of Christian community. This is a place where theology and application are very clearly united (cf. John Frame's dictum, "all theology is application"). The humility that makes Christian community "work" is displayed in Christ. That's the point of the hymn. But the humility of Christ is also the humility of the Father and the

Spirit, as each person practices submission to the others. Note the triad (plus one) of blessings Paul opens the chapter with: "if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Holy Spirit..." Any time we have a triad like this, we should look for Trinitarian connections (cf. 2 Cor. 13:14, which uses similar language). Because we have the comfort of Christ, the love of the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we also have "affection and mercy" towards one another in the church. We have been brought within the circle of Triune fellowship (Jn. 17). This affection and mercy is the sign that we are sharing in the Triune life. Because we know the Trinity, we live like the Trinity, we love like the Trinity, we share like the Trinity. But the life of the Trinity, as revealed in the life of the Incarnate Son, is a life of humble submission. The question is: Are you submitting to your fellow Christian, in Christ, as Christ submitted to his Father? Are you striving to be of the same mind with your other brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you displaying and pursuing single-mindedness with other believers? Are you making yourself a humble servant to others? In short, are you taking the Triune God as your model for communal life?

C. S. Lewis got it exactly right, so we will conclude with his words (p. 151ff):

"Before going on, notice the practical importance of this. All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that "God is love," But they seem not to notice that the words "God is love" have no real meaning unless God contains at least two Persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love. Of course, what these people mean when they say that God is love is often something quite different: they really mean "Love is God." They really mean that our feelings of love, however and wherever they arise, and whatever results they produce, are to be treated with great respect. Perhaps they are: but that is something quite different from what Christians mean by the statement "God is love." They believe that the living, dynamic activity of love has been going on in God for ever and has created everything else.

And that, by the way, is perhaps the most important difference between Christianity and all other religions: that in Christianity God is not a static thing-not even a person-but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance. The union between the Father and Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person. I know this is almost inconceivable, but look at it thus. You know that among human beings, when they get together in a family, or a

club, or a trade union, people talk about the "spirit" of that family, or club, or trade union. They talk about its "spirit" because the individual members, when they are together, do really develop particular ways of talking and behaving which they would not have if they were apart....

It is as if a sort of communal personality came into existence. Of course, it is not a real person: it is only rather like a person. But that is just one of the differences between God and us. What grows out of the joint life of the Father and Son is a real Person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God.

This third Person is called, in technical language, the Holy Ghost or the "spirit" of God. Do not be worried or surprised if you find it (or Him) rather vaguer or more shadowy in your mind than the other two. I think there is a reason why that must be so. In the Christian life you are not usually looking at Him: He is always acting through you. If you think of the Father as something "out there," in front of you, and of the Son as someone standing at your side, helping you to pray, trying to turn you into another son, then you have to think of the third Person as something inside you, or behind you. Perhaps some people might find it easier to begin with the third Person and work backwards. God is love, and that love works through men—especially through the whole community of Christians. But this spirit of love is, from all eternity, a love going on between the Father and Son. And now, what does it all matter? It matters more than anything else in the world. The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made. Good things as well as bad, you know, are caught by a kind of infection. If you want to get warm you must stand near the fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them. They are not a sort of prizes which God could, if He chose, just hand out to anyone. They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very centre of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you: if you are not, you will remain dry. Once a man is united to God, how could he not live forever? Once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die?"