One of the trees in my backyard captures my attention. About two feet from the ground, the large trunk splits into five separate trunks. What I find particularly interesting is that when the sunlight shines directly on the tree, one of the trunks is a lighter shade of gray than the other four. The reason for this is that four of the trunks have rough bark, but one has bark that is mostly smooth. When I look up into the tree, all five of the trunks have branches and leaves that look alike; the only difference is the bark. All five trunks are part of the same tree, and all five are healthy and thriving. In the same manner, God created male and female. While there are physical differences, both are equally part of humanity and created in the image of God.
God Created a Community

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26–27, NRSV)

In Genesis, God speaks forth a community that is created in God’s own image, a community that includes both female and male. The Triune God is relational; therefore, the essence of being human is to be creatures of relationship. A relationship with God is never about God and me; a relationship with God is a direct reflection of our relationships with others, both male and female. Sin damaged these relationships, but Christ came to re-establish them, and called us to a ministry of reconciliation—to be reconciled to God and one another as the created image of God (2 Cor. 5:18–21). The image of God is evident in both female and male persons, but is illuminated as we share God’s love with one another.

God Created a Community of Mutuality

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” . . . God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Gen. 1:28, 31)

We are created to live among one another in a community of mutuality. God told them—female and male—to have dominion. In community, as co-laborers, male and female are to work together, live together, and worship God together. God did not divide certain areas of oversight to just one gender; both male and female were to be involved in all that God commanded. In all that was to be done, male and female were to be partners. One gender was not to dominate the other or to have a higher rank than the other. Male and female were equals; each required the other to be in community; it is a community of mutuality. We could argue that things did not remain this way; we cannot deny that sin entered the picture and distorted humankind’s relationship with God and with one another. However, in Christ, things are restored, and we are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, as ministers of reconciliation, we need to work together to restore the community of mutuality that God created.

God created a community where love for God and others would be a reflection of God’s self; it is a community of mutuality, not hierarchy. God created a community where love for God and others would be a reflection of God’s self; it is a community of mutuality, not hierarchy. Therefore, part of the ministry of reconciliation is to restore not only our relationship with God, but to restore believers to a community where people mutually submit to one another, live in mutual love for one another, and hold to egalitarian principles that do not limit the contribution of persons based on gender. God gave dominion to male and female at creation; therefore, both male and female are to minister together in all areas of the church. This means that there are to be no areas of ministry within the church that are gender-biased. Women are not to be excluded from positions of leadership or from teaching and preaching. It is male and female, created as equals, and created to be a community of mutuality that God said was good. When we establish limitations to a person’s involvement in God’s ministry based on gender, we hinder the entire community of God, and we refuse to live in light of what God says is good.

The church is not living in light of God’s community of mutuality when we fail to take the time to examine and reflect on the stories and points of view of women in the Bible. It is time for the church to seek and listen to the voices of women in addition to men. It is time for the church to live in light of the created community of mutuality in which women and men are equals.

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