

C. Function Within Sacred Space

The creation account – especially when considered in the light of the development of its themes in later revelation – shows the original creation to have been a shalomic order. Everything God created was perfectly conformed to itself and, therefore, to everything else; all was “very good.” And being characterized by such harmonious perfection, there was nothing more for God to add to His creation; the shalomic quality of the created order called for shabbat – creative rest.

As a part of God’s creative work, man, too, was characterized by shalom. Like everything else God had made, Adam existed and operated in perfect conformity to his own nature and role in the creation. But while the principle of shalom indicates man’s perfection with respect to his nature and role, it doesn’t provide any insight into what that nature and role are. The creation account itself supplies that information, and what it reveals is that man’s function within the sacred space of the first creation had two core components of which all others were subsets. Man’s shalomic function in God’s shabbat consisted of *communion* and *dominion*.

1. Communion

Although the matter of dominion comes to the forefront first in the creation narrative, the text presupposes man’s unique identity in presenting his role as ruler over God’s creation. This is evident in Genesis 1:26-27, where man’s functional role is framed by the declaration that he bears God’s image and likeness. Given that form necessarily follows function, it would appear at this point in the narrative that man’s designed role as creature-lord is the reason for his unique nature as image-bearer. In other words, God created man in His own image in order for him to be able and suitable to rule over His works. But dominion over the other creatures of the earth doesn’t absolutely demand that man bear the divine image and likeness. Any creature, if properly fashioned and ordered, can exercise dominion as the top of the creaturely order. This truth suggests that there is another functional aspect of human existence that lies behind man’s nature as image-bearer. The second chapter of Genesis illumines that function: Man bears God’s image and likeness in order to be able to relate to Him person-to-Person. *Man is image-bearer in order to be image-son.*

Man’s fundamental purpose is relational. It’s true that, in some sense, all of God’s creatures are related to Him; indeed, every created thing is bound to the one who created it in that, at the least, it reflects back upon its creator. In the case of God and His creation, the relationship also includes dependency. The created order doesn’t simply testify to God (Psalm 19:1-4); it looks to Him for its continuance and provision (Psalm 104). But the divine-human relationship reaches beyond these things to embrace *communion*.

- Human beings share in God’s attributes in order to be beings capable of and suitable for knowing Him and relating to Him in a personal, intimate way.
- No other created thing enjoys this capacity or privilege, for man alone bears the divine image. Not even the angels that serve in God’s presence are capable of knowing Him in this way.

This understanding of man shows the propriety of referring to him under the title of “image-son.” The first part of this designation speaks to his created nature, while the latter part speaks to the purpose for his nature. And since function stands behind and determines form, it is pointless to consider man as the divine image-bearer without first understanding that he is the divine *son*. Sonship lies at the heart of the communion that exists between God and man, and this concept itself provides important insight into the nature and extent of this communion.

- a. First of all, sonship speaks of **filial** relationship. The underlying meaning of communion is “common union,” which speaks to a relationship between two or more parties characterized by commonality. This commonality can take numerous forms and exist to various extents. Organizations, clubs, and societies are expressive of the myriad of ways people can be related to each other.

But the greatest commonality – the most intimate form of natural relationship – is that which exists among family members, and not simply (or even primarily) because of shared bloodline. Family “common union” has genetic commonality only as one possible starting point, and in many of those instances it goes no further than that. In other cases (such as husbands and wives), familial communion exists outside the bounds of common bloodline.

The fundamental issue with family relationships is *intimacy*, not genetics. This is evident in the dynamics of the nuclear family in which the points of commonality between members extend to virtually every aspect of life. Their intimacy is physical in that they share the same time, space, activities, etc., but it extends also into the non-physical realm of thoughts, attitudes, emotions, and convictions. This is true of family relationships in general, but familial intimacy arguably finds its greatest expression in the relationship between a parent and child. The reason is that children largely determine their own identity and even their perception of reality in relation to their parents. Life is what their parents communicate it is (in attitude and action as much as in word), and even a child’s sense of himself is framed by what he sees in his parents and the way they relate to him, his siblings, one another, and the world around them. More than merely the meeting of temporal needs, children are dependent upon their parents for their worldview and self-identity. This is all the more true of human “sons” and their divine Father.

- b. As sonship implies physical, intellectual, emotional and psychological intimacy, so it equally implies **sameness**. It is here that the idea of genetic relation comes to the forefront. A son’s intimacy with his father is material as well as immaterial; he is “of his father” in the sense that his father lives on in him. Sons participate in the nature and attributes of their fathers, and so it is with human beings and God.

This is seen most clearly in the way the Bible treats the concept of sonship. The expression, “son of...,” implies shared essence, substance, and/or quality between “father” and “son.” Thus one who is a “son of worthlessness” is a worthless individual, and one who is a “son of man” is attested to be fully human.

“Son of...” indicates that the progenitor is manifested in the offspring; to see the son is to see the one who begat him. The implication is that man is not the “son of God” simply in the sense that God has determined to interact intimately with him (although this is certainly true). Man is God’s “son” first of all in the sense that he shares in certain of his Creator’s essential (“communicable”) attributes. Sonship speaks first to *ontological* (essential) relationship and only then to personal relationship: It is precisely because man shares in the divine likeness that he is capable of fulfilling the relational purpose for which he was created. Sonship language and “image” language, therefore, are mutually interpreting.

- c. Finally, sonship implies **devoted submission**. A son is *of* his father, but for that very reason he is not the *same* as his father. The father has primacy of both place and position, so that a father-son relationship ordered according to truth will find the son relating to his father from a position of devotion, honor, and submission.

The creation account emphasizes man’s unique nature as divine image-bearer, and his nature finds its purpose in divine-human communion. Man was created to commune with his Creator, but in a way that is unique among creatures. Man’s communion with God was intended to take the form of the intimacy that exists between a father and son.

2. **Dominion**

Understanding the nature of man’s communion with God provides insight into the nature of his rule over the earth. Man was created to exercise dominion, but in the context of communion: Adam was charged with subduing the earth, but as God’s image-son; he was to manifest his Creator-Father’s supreme lordship by ruling in His name and authority and for His sake. This sort of arrangement was commonplace in the ancient world, and so perfectly comprehensible to the Bible’s original audience. Kings exercised absolute authority over the domains under their control, but they often administered their rule through their son(s). This was especially the case as kings grew older and were less capable of the sort of military activity required to direct, preserve and expand their holdings. The daily work of ruling fell to their sons who acted in their name. In that way a son was effectively an extension of his father’s presence and authority in his kingdom.

So it is that man, the image-son, was appointed by the King-Father to act as His vice-regent, and this framework brings definition to the creational mandate God gave to Adam to “*be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it*” (Genesis 1:28).

- a. The creation mandate contained three related components, the first of which is **multiplication**. God had created the earth, not to be “formless and void,” but to be fully inhabited (Isaiah 45:18), and this is the reason His command to multiply extended beyond man (Genesis 1:21-22).
- b. So Adam and Eve were also to be fruitful, but their multiplication carried a broader significance: Their fruitfulness, too, would spread their own kind across the earth, but their “filling” would **fill the earth with God’s manifest presence**.

Because of man's identity as image-bearer, his presence represents the tangible expression of God's presence. God's determination was that man would be the interface between Himself and His creation and administer His rule over it. Like the royal son who is an extension of his father and his lordship, so man was to carry God's presence and dominion to the ends of the earth. Thus the charge to "fill the earth" was effectively the charge to extend sacred space until the whole earth became God's sanctuary. This is proven out by the way this charge is reiterated and developed as a core theme in the movement of salvation history:

- 1) It was reissued to *Noah* as a "second Adam" in the context of the postdiluvian "new" creation (Genesis 9:1-7).
- 2) It later became the basis of God's covenant promise to *Abraham* to make him into a great, multitudinous, and regal nation through whom the divine blessing would fill the earth (cf. Genesis 12:1-3, 17:1-8, 15-19, 22:17-18). That same promise was carried forward to Abraham's covenant "seed": first to *Isaac* (Genesis 26:1-4, 23-24; cf. 24:59-60), then to *Jacob* (Genesis 28:1-14, 35:1-12; cf. 48:1-4, 15-16), and finally to the nation of *Israel* (cf. Genesis 47:27 with Exodus 1:1-12, 20; also Exodus 6:1-8, 32:11-13; Leviticus 26:1-12; Deuteronomy 6:1-3, 7:12-14; Isaiah 51:1-2; etc.).

In fulfillment of His promise to Abraham, God had taken Israel to be His "son," and, like Adam at the outset of creation, Israel was to be fruitful and multiply. Most importantly, being the image-son who reflected his covenant Father and dwelt with Him in intimate communion, Israel's multiplication was to bring God's presence – and so also His blessing – to the ends of the earth. *In realizing the Abrahamic promise of dominion and global blessing Israel would also fulfill the Adamic mandate.*

- c. Man's fruitfulness was to result in the filling of the earth, but also its **subjugation**. It's here that the principle of dominion is first made explicit. God is the Lord of all the earth, but man in His image-son; therefore, God's call to Adam to subdue the earth was His affirmation that His own lordship was to be administered through man. The entire creation would discern and acknowledge the presence and rule of its Creator by subjecting itself to His image-bearer. Stated another way, the creation's continuance in and full enjoyment of its initial shalomic perfection under its Creator-Lord presupposed its eager subjection to the Creator's image-son. David understood this truth, and marveled at its glory:

"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens... When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than God and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8)