

Perichor...what?

A discussion with C. Baxter Kruger, founder of Perichoresis, Inc.

Christian Odyssey: Most of us can't even pronounce *perichoresis*, much less spell it. What does it mean?

Baxter Kruger: Some years ago a woman walked into my office around Christmastime with a stack of newsletters in her hand. She was crying, and she slammed the newsletters down on my desk and said, "I just feel like a pile of junk!"

I said, "What is wrong?"

She said, "I've been reading these newsletters from these people from all over the world, and they and their children are all doing all these great things for God, and it just hit me what a worthless life I have. For Pete's sake, I'm married and I've got three kids. When I'm not grocery shopping, I'm cooking the groceries, and when I'm not cooking the groceries I'm cleaning up, and when I'm not doing that I'm trying to find clothes for my children and keep this mess of a house presentable. And sometime in there I'm trying to find time for my husband. I don't even have time to read my Bible. What do I have that I can do for God?"

I stopped her, and I said, "Wait a minute, hang on here a minute. Yesterday you spent two hours driving

about all his sheep? He put his concern for this sheep (your daughter) in your heart. You see, you are participating in nothing less than Jesus' life and burden. He was tending to his sheep through you. What is greater than that?"

In the light of the fact that Jesus Christ has laid hold of the whole human race, cleansed us in his death, lifted us up in his resurrection and has given us a place in his relationship with his Father and Spirit in his Ascension, we've got to rethink everything we thought we knew about ourselves and others and our *ordinary* human life.

The simple truth is there is nothing at all ordinary about us and the life we live. Caring for others, from orphans to our friends and the poor, our love for our husbands and wives and children, our passion for music and beauty, for coaching, gardening and fishing; these things do not have their origin in us.

They are not something that we invented. It is all coming from the Father, Son and Spirit. When this dreadful secular/sacred divide is exploded, we can see and honor life as it truly is—the gift of participating in the life and relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit.

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CO: So we're really talking about God meeting us in our day-to-day lives?

BK: Exactly. Through the work of Jesus, we have been *adopted* into the Trinitarian life. The concept of *perichoresis* helps us understand what our adop-

tion means for us. We could define *perichoresis* as "mutual indwelling without loss of personal identity." In other words, we exist in union with the Triune God, but we do not lose our distinct personhood in the process. We matter. We are real to the Triune God.

around Jackson searching for a coat for your daughter. A winter coat, and not just any winter coat but one she would like, one that would be large enough to put away for next year but not look like it was bought this year. And one that was on sale. And you did it, you found it, and she's thrilled."

The woman said, "What's that got to do with this?"

I said, "Where did that concern for your daughter come from? Did you wake up yesterday morning and decide you were going to be a good momma?"

She said she had been thinking about the coat for a week.

I said, "Isn't Jesus the good Shepherd who cares

only the Trinity could have union *without loss* of personal distinction. If you have union without distinction, you tumble into pantheism, and we would be united to God in such a way as to be completely absorbed into him. There would no longer be a distinct "us" to feel and taste and experience the Trinitarian life.

If you have distinction without union, you end up with deism, where God is just up there watching us

from a distance, and we never see our humanity as included in the Trinitarian life. Motherhood and fatherhood, work and play and music then appear to be merely secular, non-divine aspects of our human experience. Deism leaves us with a Christ-less humanity, and forces us to search beyond our humanity for connection with God.

In Trinitarian theology we say “no” to both pantheism and deism. We have union but no loss of personal distinction, which means that we matter and that our humanity, our motherhood and fatherhood, our work and play and music form the arena for our participation in the Trinitarian life of God. The Triune God meets us not in the sky or in our self-generated religions, but in our “ordinary” human existence.

CO: So the gospel is about God knowing us and us knowing God.

BK: Exactly. Let me give you a quick story. I like stories better than long and convoluted theological explanations. Many years ago when my son was six (he’s 18 now), I was sitting on the couch in the den sorting through junk mail on a Saturday afternoon. He and his buddy came in and they were decked out in their camouflage, face paint, plastic guns and knives, the whole nine yards. My son peers around the corner of the door and looks at me, and the next thing I know, he comes flying through the air and jump on me. We start wrestling and horsing around and we end up on the floor. Then his buddy flies into us and all three of us are just like a wad of laughter.

And right in the middle of that event the Lord spoke to me and said to pay attention. I’m thinking, it’s Saturday afternoon, your son comes in and you’re horsing around on the floor, it happens every day all over the world, so what’s the big deal? Then it started to dawn on me that I didn’t know who this other kid was. I had never met him. He had never met me. So I re-wound the story and thought about what would have happened if this little boy would have walked into my den alone. Remember, he didn’t know me and I didn’t know him, and he didn’t know my name and I didn’t know his name. So he looks over and sees me, a complete stranger, sitting on the couch. Would he fly through the air and engage me in play? Would we end up in a pile of laughter on the floor? Of course not. That is the last thing that would have happened.

Within himself, that little boy had no freedom to have a relationship with me. We were strangers. He had no right to that kind of familiarity and fellowship. But my son knows me. My son knows that I love him and that I accept him and that he’s the apple of my eye. So in the knowledge of my love and affection, he did the most natural thing in the world. He dove into my lap. The miracle that happened was that my son’s knowledge of my acceptance and delight, and my son’s freedom for fellow-

ship with me, rubbed off on that other little boy. He got to experience it. That other little boy got to taste and feel and know my son’s relationship with me. He participated in my son’s life and communion with me.

Then it dawned on me that that’s what *perichoresis* and our adoption in Christ mean. Jesus is the one who knows the Father. He knows the Father’s love and acceptance. He sees the Father’s face. Jesus has freedom for fellowship with his Father. And Jesus shares his heart with us. He puts his own freedom for relationship with his Father in us through the Spirit, and like that little boy we get to taste and feel and experience the relationship Jesus has with his Father. He shares it all with us. He unites himself with us, and we get to experience his divine life with him. He shares with us his own knowledge of his Father’s heart, his own knowledge of the Father’s acceptance, his

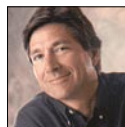
“We are now free to let go of our racial and personal prejudices, and to love and accept one another.”

own assurance of his Father’s love, his own freedom in knowing the Father’s passionate heart. He reaches into his own soul, as it were, and pulls out his own emotions, and then puts them inside of the whole human race. We’re all included in the Son’s relationship with the Father in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

CO: Then we never have to worry about whether God accepts us and loves us?

BK: Never. What does the understanding that we are accepted into the mutual indwelling and communion with God remove from our hearts? Fear and hiding. So because of Jesus’ knowledge of the Father’s acceptance, which he shares with us, we now are free to let go of our racial and personal prejudices, and to love and accept one another, which leads to the freedom to know and be known, which leads to fellowship and mutual indwelling.

This is what the kingdom of the Triune God is all about. The kingdom is simply the life and love, the communion, the fellowship, the camaraderie and joy of the Father, Son and Spirit, being shared with us and coming to full and abiding and personal expression in us, in our relationships with one another and in our relationships with the whole creation, so that the whole earth is full of the Son’s knowledge of his Father in the Spirit. As to why we don’t experience our life in Christ more fully, that is a question for another day. ●



C. Baxter Kruger is Director of *Perichoresis, Inc.*—*A Trinitarian Ministry*. Dr. Kruger’s resources can be accessed at www.perichoresis.org.