

2 Corinthians 13:14

Dear Friends in Christ,

Today we are celebrating the fact that God reveals himself to us as one God, yet three distinct persons. He had to reveal this to us because there is no way we would have ever figured it out on our own. In fact, we struggle to try to find an example anywhere that helps us understand the idea of a Trinity. Some suggest ice, water and steam, but that doesn't really work because they are just different forms of the same thing and the same water can't be ice and steam at the same time. The persons of the trinity are not just God appearing in different forms, but they are separate and distinct, yet only one God. The best we can do is diagram what God tells us about himself in the Bible as is depicted on the banner and on the bulletin cover. This diagram does not explain how it is possible for God to be three persons and yet one divine being, but it makes it clear that each person of the trinity is equally God, the same God, and yet the Father is not the same person as the Son, or the Holy Spirit.

God's revelation of himself as the triune God begins in the first verses of Scripture—the Father creating by the power of the word as the spirit is hovering over the face of the deep. It is hinted at in the creation of man, "**Let us make man in our image.**" It is there in the blessing that God gave Aaron as "the Lord" is mentioned three times. It is seen most clearly at Jesus' baptism as the Father says "this is my beloved Son", and the spirit descends in the form of a dove. It is spoken in plain words by Jesus who commands that Baptism be administered in the **name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

Here, in the last verse of his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul assumes the truth that God is triune and focuses our attention on the tremendous blessings our triune God gives us.

Paul starts with Jesus, the Son. He reminds us of the grace that is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, a few chapters earlier in this letter Paul says, **you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.**

He reminds us of what Jesus did for us. It's hard for us to imagine. He had all the riches of heaven that are themselves beyond our imagination and he gave them all up, set them all aside, for us.

You don't even have to be a Donald Trump or a Warren Buffet to be in awe of what Jesus did. Just imagine yourself giving up everything you have—giving up your house, your cars, your electronics, your toys, everything—leaving it all behind to go and live in a mud hut in Africa without a penny to your name. Maybe you can imagine hiring someone to go for you, but to go yourself? Yet Jesus gave up more than Trump and Buffet and Gates and every other billionaire there is, just so that he could become fully human and live like us on this earth.

If someone were going to do such a thing you would think that there would be a pretty good reason. Maybe to save the life of your child or your spouse. But the Bible makes it clear that there was no good reason for Jesus to make himself poor. The Bible reminds us that Jesus did this while we were still sinners. We were his enemies. He should have come to do battle with us, to destroy us and wipe us off the face of the earth. But Paul points us to the **grace** of Jesus. He didn't come to give us the punishment we deserve. **He did not come to condemn the world but to save the world.** He came to give us what we don't deserve, forgiveness and eternal life. That's grace.

He didn't win our forgiveness by waving a magic wand. As he carried out his public ministry most of the people rejected him. He was betrayed, arrested, mocked, beaten and crucified. He was despised and rejected. He was even forsaken by the Father as he hung on the cross. He did all these things, he endured all these things **so that we might become rich**; so that we might be heirs with him of a fortune greater than Gates and Buffet and Trump and all the other Billionaires put together; that we might be heirs of eternal life in heaven.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Lord, one with the Father from eternity. The angels told Mary and Joseph to name him Jesus, Savior, because he would save us from our sins. He is the Christ, the promised Messiah, the anointed one who fulfilled the offices of prophet, priest and king, and who continues to serve us in his offices of prophet, giving us the word, priest interceding for us, and king ruling all things for our good, all in grace because we do not deserve any of it nor could we ever pay him for what he has done and continues to do for us.

**The love of God.** As you might guess, this is the special word for love, agape love. It is love that only God has perfectly. It is love that is unselfish and self-sacrificing. It is love that is shown not just in words, but in actions.

The love of God is hard to imagine. It's hard to imagine loving people who hate you. When Jesus tells us to love our enemies we think, "Why should I? Why would I want to?" And then, if we try to love them because he tells us to and they don't respond, they remain our enemies and continue to hate us and try to hurt us, we give up pretty easily.

But God loves the world, all those evil people out there who curse him and refuse to even believe that he exists. God loves you and me, people who claim to love him, but who hurt him every day by not living up to his expectations for us.

And more than anyone else, God loves Jesus, his only perfect son. But he had a strange way of showing his love to Jesus. He let him be mocked and beaten. When he was nailed to the cross he didn't rescue him, he punished him for the sins of the world, for your sins and for my sins. That doesn't sound very loving, does it?

If your parents said they loved you and they saw someone beating you up and just let them, would you call that love? If your parents knew you were innocent but they chose to punish you for everything your brothers and sisters had done wrong, would you call that love? But we know it was love. In fact, Jesus says it's proof of how much God loves us. He says that God **SO loved the world**, he loved us so much that he gave his one and only perfect son, he let Jesus be beaten and although he knew he was innocent, he punished him for our sins so that we would see how much he loves us, believe in him, and have eternal life.

In addition to this, he lovingly provides for our bodily needs and sends his angels to watch over us and keep us in all our ways.

Finally, Paul points us to the blessing of the **fellowship of the Holy Spirit**. It is the Holy Spirit who has caused the Scriptures to be written and preserved for us. Without what God has revealed to us about himself in his word we would not know him. We would not have fellowship with him. He would be a complete stranger to us. But the Holy Spirit inspired the prophets and the Apostles to record the truth about God for us; to tell us that God is Triune, to tell us about the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to tell us about the love of God, to tell us how Adam and Eve's sin broke the fellowship that had existed between God and man, to tell us how

our sins had separated us from God, to tell us how God's plan of salvation was carried out so that the fellowship we had lost is now restored.

Then, through the word and the sacraments, the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to move us to believe the unbelievable, that God is Triune, that Jesus is God and man, that Jesus rose from the dead, that he does love us his enemies, that our sins really are forgiven, that there really is a heaven and that through faith in what God has done for us in Jesus we will enjoy the fellowship that God had with Adam and Eve in the garden—we will be able to walk and talk with him without fear.

But there's even more to the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Once he brings us to faith so that we have fellowship with God he brings us together with others who have also been brought to faith in Jesus through the word and sacraments. He enables us to study the Scriptures and agree on what is taught there so that we can worship together, encourage each other and pray with and for each other. He enables us to see that we are joined together in fellowship with believers of all time, with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David, as well as believers from every nation under heaven. What governments and wars will never accomplish, the Holy Spirit does accomplish every day as he works through the word and sacraments to create faith that brings people into fellowship with God and each other.

The fellowship of the Holy Spirit- Fellowship with God now and forever through the faith he creates in our hearts, and fellowship with all others who also believe in Jesus as their Savior.

We may not comprehend how God can be three distinct persons but only one divine being, but we can rejoice each day in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.