

# 2 Corinthians 13:14

## *Trinity Sunday*

27 May 2018

### **1 Introduction**

Part of ‘the rule of faith’ — the basic principles of the faith, or the standard of faith—is the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>1</sup>

#### **1.1 Historic Christianity**

Notwithstanding the claims of Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, the testimony of the church catholic through history is thoroughly Trinitarian.

- The Trinity is inherent in the structure of the creeds: I believe in: a) God the Father, b) Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, and, c) the Holy Spirit.
- The church fathers believed in and defended this doctrine. Gregory Nazianzen wrote ~381: *No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish the Three than I am carried back to the One ... When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Colin Gunton (1941–2003), *Father, Son & Holy Spirit*, xiv. (theopedia.com/Trinity).

<sup>2</sup>Gregory Nazianzen (... the Theologian), *Oration XL, The Oration on Holy Baptism*. Section XLI. [ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf207.iii.xxiii.html](http://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf207.iii.xxiii.html).

- The Trinity is part of our public worship: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.*
- The use of the sign of the cross is based on the Trinity, evoking for me personally words from the hymn known as St. Patrick's Shield, which we sang this morning. *I bind unto myself today, the strong Name of the Trinity.*

## 1.2 Biblically Revealed

What is more important is that the doctrine of the Trinity is a God-revealed truth. I can declare with certainty that it IS God's revealed truth to us.

The doctrine of the Trinity is unmistakably part of Jesus' teaching: *Go ... and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit ...*<sup>3</sup>

This morning, we consider another verse that is familiar to all of us. *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.* I want to look at each of the phrases in turn and then make observations regarding the whole.

## 2 The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

### 2.1 Gift/Benefit Bestowed On Us

Grace can mean the gift or benefit bestowed. Paul says to the Corinthians:

God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.2 Gift/Benefit We Bestow On Others

This grace is also something we give to other. Paul wrote *of the churches of Macedonia ... who were begging us earnestly for the favor — the grace — of*

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<sup>3</sup>Matthew 28:18–20.

<sup>4</sup>2 Corinthians 9:8–9.

*taking part in the relief of the saints.*<sup>5</sup>

## 2.3 Response To Grace

And finally, grace can mean one's response to the gift or benefit — often translated into English as the giving of thanks.

For example, Paul commends the Corinthians for their generosity to starving Christians under persecution and says that those who have been recipients of their generosity, in turn, *by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks (literally GRACE) be to God for His indescribable gift!*<sup>6</sup>

## 2.4 Grace All-Encompassing

Here's the key point. The *grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* is that which encompasses the entire faith: his desire to grant us eternity, the gift of eternity, *and* our response to the gift of eternity.

Think of that great old hymn "Amazing Grace".

- *'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear.* It's a fearsome grace that evokes fear as well as thankfulness!
- It's such a grace that it *demands my soul, my life, my all.*
- It's also *grace my fears reliev'd.* That same fearsome grace is that which makes the demand bearable in the work of Christ.
- *How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believ'd!* The grace that John Newton, the slave trader, initially rejected as a cause of fear became to him, by faith, the better thing above any wealth, respect, or comfort he may have gained before faith.
- *Thro' many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far.* The grace that was so valuable to him at the start of his journey with Jesus, he recognizes was the same grace that

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<sup>5</sup>2 Corinthians 8:1–5.

<sup>6</sup>2 Corinthians 9:14–15.

was granted him by a gracious God, even and perhaps especially when he didn't recognize it as grace.

- *And grace will lead me home.* The same grace that was granted him before faith, that drew him into faith, will also finish what it has begun — it will lead him home.

Grace is the cause of our salvation, and the means of salvation, and our response to salvation.

### 3 The Love Of God

The phrase *the love of God (the Father)*, like *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*, is a multi-faceted idea. It is his commitment of love to us, or our commitment to Him in love. Additionally, it can be used to describe the transmission (so to speak) of the Father's love through us, as we love others.

#### 3.1 The Father's Love Toward Us

It can denote the Father's commitment to us in love. Think of that perhaps most famous of all the verses in the entire Bible.

God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.<sup>7</sup>

And:

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.<sup>8</sup>

The love of God for us is unilateral. It's initiated by God and maintained by God, all without our reaching out to Him.

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<sup>7</sup>John 3:16 ff.

<sup>8</sup>Romans 5:8.

## 3.2 Our Love Towards Others

The phrase *the love of God* also encompasses our response to his love.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus told his disciples,

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.<sup>10</sup>

Paul tells the Corinthians in his first letter that of all the Christian virtues, it is biblical love that surpasses them all, encompasses them all, and expresses them all.<sup>11</sup> Jesus makes it clear that this word *love* is so big and so competent that it can encompass even love for our enemies and, indeed, the entirety of the law itself.

Brothers and sisters, you don't have to like me, trust me, or respect me. No, it's worse than that: you have to love me! Perhaps we see here part of the reason that the gospel is not being heard and the church has lost its saltiness?

## 4 The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

1. The grace of Jesus Christ in giving his life for our lives,

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<sup>9</sup>1 John 4:7-12, see also 19-21.

<sup>10</sup>John 13:34-35.

<sup>11</sup>See 1 Corinthians 13:13.

2. is grounded in the love of God for us, and third,
3. we have *the fellowship of the Holy Spirit* as the application of that salvation.

This word *fellowship* — κοινωνία — means a mutual participation toward a common goal, a meaningful engagement together to a common end. It can mean a community, an association, sharing, even intimacy, such as when fellowship was used as a word for marriage. And, as with *love* and *grace*, so also *fellowship* is multi-faceted.

## 4.1 God's Fellowship with Us

Having fellowship with God: how can this be? The means of this fellowship with God is the Spirit, who bears witness to the Father's love and the Son's grace, bringing these things to mind.

The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.<sup>12</sup>

The certainty of God's love is reinforced by the fellowship the Holy Spirit has with us. He applies the effect of God's love to us.

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.<sup>13</sup>

We are kept in our relationship with the Father by the Holy Spirit.

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>John 14:26.

<sup>13</sup>Romans 5:5.

<sup>14</sup>Ephesians 1:13–14.

## 4.2 Our Fellowship With Each Other

John speaks of this in his first letter.

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life ... we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.<sup>15</sup>

Notice that the fellowship — the mutual participation — with the disciples exists, *because they belong to God*. Having fellowship with God is the basis of our fellowship with each other.

A great example of this is when Paul commends the Corinthians for their contribution to persecuted Christians in Jerusalem — the word *contribution* being the word *κοινωνία*.

In the symbol of the Lord's Supper, we understand that our fellowship with God — and his with us — and ours with each other — is sealed in the elements of bread and wine.

Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.<sup>16</sup>

## 5 Application

God's all demands our all. Each of the properties of the godhead in verse 14 have their analogy in us.

- How do I get to know the love of God? In part by exercising my love for the brethren.
- How do I get to know the fellowship of the Holy Spirit? By depending on him for my fellowship with the other saints.

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<sup>15</sup>1 John 1:1–3.

<sup>16</sup>1 Corinthians 10:16–17.

- How do I get to know the grace of Christ? By extending that same grace to my fellow believers and giving thanks – giving grace, as it were – for Jesus' grace.

God bends himself entirely, even in his nature as three and one, one and three, for our sake and salvation!

The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately relational. The persons of the godhead, in relationship with each other, work together to bring us into relationship with God. Grace demonstrates love and love is expressed in fellowship.