

Dear friends in Christ,

During the school year, I don't even like glancing across the table at my son Danny's U of A engineering homework. He's obviously many years past the point of asking me for help. Now he just shows it to me to mock me. You see, I'm one of those people who still staunchly holds the position that we ought to only use numbers for math! Letters and symbols in mathematical equations don't make any sense to me; I simply don't understand them. And frankly, I don't want to! Fortunately, my job doesn't require a lot of complicated math. But it does require some.

The math I'm talking about only requires numbers (so I like that), but it is confusing. All of the smallest kids here today can tell me what  $1+1$  equals—2. But in God's math,  $1+1=1$ ! You say, "*Pastor, where do you get that?*" Well, Jesus says, ***a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one (Matthew 19:5-6).***  $1+1=1$ . That's God's marriage math.

Here's another one: Kids, help me out.  $1+1+1$  equals.....3, right? Normally, yes that's true. But there is a case where God says that  $1+1+1=1$ ! Listen to this: when Jesus tells us to go and baptize in the name of God, he says, ***Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).*** Baptize in the name of God: the Father—1, the Son—1, and the Holy Spirit—1.  $1+1+1$ . But God also says: ***...The LORD our God, the LORD is one (Deuteronomy 6:4).*** So God's math says  $1+1+1=1$ ! It's enough to make a logical person's brain melt down!

That's why a tremendous believer, an early church father from way back around 400 AD, named Augustine, said this about trying to understand God as Three in One: "*We must always discuss this subject with the greatest and most outstanding humility and fear and listen with the most attentive and devoted ears, when we are in the search of the unity of the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; because at no other point does one err with greater danger or seek with greater labor or find with greater benefit.*"

Trinity Sunday is the one time a year we set aside the whole worship service to consider the amazing Three-in-One God we have—to praise him and to realize the blessings we have through him. As we do that today, considering the blessing that Paul wrote to finish off his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians, I invite you to

### **RECEIVE THE BLESSING OF OUR TRIUNE GOD**

#### **1. THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST**

#### **2. THE LOVE OF GOD**

#### **3. THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

When Paul wrote to his friends in Corinth, they and their church desperately needed the blessings of grace, love and fellowship—the very things we need in our lives! What was true for them is true for you: If you RECEIVE THE BLESSING OF OUR TRIUNE GOD, you *live* this blessing—and you are a blessing to others!

You realize, don't you, who God had write these beautiful and peaceful words? The man formerly known as Saul. He was a man who HATED Jesus and anyone who followed him. He hunted them down and had them killed. Do you think anyone understood the GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST more than Saul, who became the Apostle Paul?!

The Lord told Saul to stop terrorizing Christians. He told him to pay attention to him and then Jesus personally instructed Saul, telling him that the One he had been persecuting was true God from all eternity, that he had come into the world to save it, and that he did when he offered his sinless life as a ransom on the cross. With that death and his resurrection from the dead, Jesus told Saul, he secured forgiveness and eternal life for all people. A world full of sinful people did not deserve it. Saul certainly could see that *he* didn't deserve that kind of love! How could Jesus even die for someone who hated him and inflicted death upon those who trusted in Jesus? That is *undeserved* love—and that's what GRACE is!

Isn't our story a lot like Paul's? We didn't deserve the GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST either, did we? Those of you who have grown up in the church—you know better. What I mean is, you have always known who God is and what he has done and what he wants to see in the lives of his people. But what do you do? Exactly the opposite!

God says don't hate, but you do!

God says recognize your body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, but you don't—you drink too much, you eat too much, you play around with drugs, you have sex outside of marriage!

God says remember the Sabbath Day—worship week after week, but you come to his house when you feel like it!

God says love one another, but you don't—you gossip and lie and use people and get jealous and angry!

How much more could we mention?! You do not deserve God's love. You do not deserve the continuing GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!

And those of us who were not born into the church—and that includes me—we're no better. Think back to when you didn't know Jesus. How was your life? The only rules were the ones you decided on. We did what we wanted because we were only accountable to ourselves. Did you commit any of those sins I just mentioned? Even if you were basically a nice person or a good person, you weren't perfect, were you? In fact, by never even giving God the time of day, you showed how you felt about him! It doesn't matter that you didn't know—he was still there and his expectations remained—your and my ignorance of him was no excuse. We were not deserving of the GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST and we're not now either, because now we know better and we still can't pull ourselves together and live perfect, godly lives!

But you see, that is EXACTLY what grace is about! We were and we are sinners who don't deserve the love of Jesus. But he gives it to us anyway! How long would you put up with a friend who treats you terribly? How long would you put up with a cheating spouse? Do you understand that we are like the terrible friend? We are the cheating spouse. And yet, Jesus continues to forgive us and to take us back and to keep us as his! He lived a tough, sinless life for us and paid a tremendous price on the cross for us. He did it because he loves us. And by the GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST you and I stand forgiven of all sins. We sit here today knowing that by his grace, we will have eternal life in heaven!

And just one more thing about grace. Since we have received the blessing of grace—undeserved love—from Jesus, can't we exercise that same love for others? Can't we forgive the sins of others? Can't we forgive and move on as brothers and sisters in Christ? Isn't that what we even pray in the Lord's Prayer? The answer is 'Yes!' We can exercise the blessing of grace because we have RECEIVED THE BLESSING OF THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!

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Another promised blessing in these words is THE LOVE OF GOD. That LOVE OF GOD the Father includes a number of things. Consider for instance, what LOVE God the Father had for you to create you in the first place! Just as God had a plan for the earth, for the universe, and all that fills them, God had and has a plan for you! Now, some of you might be thinking, “*Oh, God doesn’t REALLY think of me individually! There are so many people and I’m just not that special.*” Well, you are to God. The same God who is the Creator of all things, who took his time in specifically and creatively making Adam, then Eve, also specifically and creatively made you. Yes, he knew what he was doing and he knew you as an individual. How do I know? What God told Jeremiah, he also means for you: ***Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart (Jeremiah 1:5).***

That’s a mind-boggling thought, isn’t it? God knew what he was doing with you when he made you specifically, individually. This is the Almighty and Righteous God we’re talking about. It’s humbling, isn’t it? I cannot grasp the kind of LOVE God the Father has as he takes care and time to individually craft each person and to know them inside and out.

In addition to creating us, he also preserves us. He is the one who makes our planet tilt just the right way and contain the right combination of elements so that his living creation can exist...so that day and night come and go according to his plan...so that the seasons roll...so that food grows. As our Preserver, God the Father is sure to send the food to your table and puts clothes on your body. He sends the right people and opportunities into your life so that you are sustained. You don’t really think all that happens by accident, do you? You don’t really believe that you are the one that makes all that happen, do you? Without God—it all goes away!

So let me ask you this: How good are you at remembering your Maker and Provider? How good are you at recognizing each day that if God didn’t have your back, you and all you have would be gone? I am ashamed to say that I remember those things too infrequently. As sinful people, we take things for granted and tend to think that we make so much happen in our lives, our homes, our jobs, our churches. The truth is, God the Father cares for all things, creating and providing according to his LOVE.

And it was the Father’s LOVE that prompted him to look at his creation, ruined by sin, and come up with a plan to save it. It was the LOVE OF GOD the Father that sent Jesus to be our Savior. Let me read you something that John, Jesus’ best friend, wrote for us so that we could at least begin to understand the LOVE OF GOD: ***This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us (1 John 4:9-12).*** How much did God love us? So much so that he sent his only Son to be a sacrifice that made up for our sins! It is difficult to imagine a love like that—that would single me out and save me. Amazing love. Incomprehensible love.

Since God loved us that much—with self-sacrificing love—we are to show that same kind of love to each other. THE LOVE OF GOD is not just a BLESSING we RECEIVE, but another blessing that we live! Imagine all of God’s people here showing a self-sacrificing love. That would mean that each of us gives something up for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ and for those who don’t know their Savior. We would gladly give up a healthy percentage of God’s blessings to us so that through our offerings God’s people are served and mission work is carried out. We would gladly serve on ministry teams or teach Sunday School or help with work around the church. If we love one another, we gladly give of ourselves for the good of others. John said that if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. That happens whenever we who have received the BLESSING of THE LOVE OF GOD live THE LOVE OF GOD!

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The third promised blessing of this Apostolic Blessing is THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. When you hear that phrase, you might think of the fellowship or partnership that we have with the Holy Spirit because we have faith. Or you might think of the fellowship or partnership that we have with other Christians because we share a faith in God. And you would be right to think of both!

Here's another mind-boggling thing about our God: We are sinful people—what do we share with the Holy God?! We have as much in common as a bum and a businessman! We get along as well as Wildcats and Sun Devils! What do sinners have in common with the perfect God?! Nothing really, and yet the HOLY SPIRIT has given us faith to believe that God in love sent his Son, who in love saved us from sin and death and hell! Because we have that faith—the most extraordinary gift we could ever receive—we are accepted by our Triune God!

We were brought into fellowship with God as we heard the words of Holy Scripture and believed or as we were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Those are the Means of Grace—the means by which the Holy Spirit brings people into FELLOWSHIP with the Triune God. That means that we have been washed up with the blood of Christ and dressed up in the robe of righteousness! We belong to the family of God.

And we belong to the family of God TOGETHER. We share something the rest of the world does not know and cannot comprehend. We are NOT like everybody else. Church is NOT just like any other organization or club or team. We have a fellowship with each other that transcends all worldly things. We are bound together by the Holy Spirit who lives in each of our hearts! There is an underlying comfort and peace and security that is always there beneath everything we do or say together. Because we share the FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, we can trust each other and be honest with each other and serve each other and love each other. Just think—you have something with your friends in Christ that no other friends can even begin to comprehend! How thankful we can be to RECEIVE THE BLESSING of the FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT who makes us one with our Triune God and one with each other!

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It is an incredible, amazing God that we have! We have just looked at each person of the Trinity in a little detail as the Apostle Paul gave us the 'keywords' of each to consider—THE **GRACE** OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE **LOVE** OF GOD, and THE **FELLOWSHIP** OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. How can each person of the Trinity be distinct, but not separate from each other? How can the Three Persons be One God? How can each share in all the divine qualities of God equally? I wish I could explain it. I wish I could fully comprehend it. But to be honest, I can't do God's math. No human being can fully understand the Triune God and all that he is and does. But I do know this: every time we hear the words of the blessing, we can be reminded that every one of us who believes in him RECEIVES THE BLESSINGS OF THE TRIUNE GOD! For that we praise our Triune God and thank Him by living those things! Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.