

The Trinity: Grace, Love, and Fellowship

2 Corinthians 13:14

Clément Tendo, pastoral intern

January 16, 2022

Introduction

Today we will be looking at the third question from the New City Catechism. It is about the Trinity, the doctrine that makes the Christian God unique compared to the gods of other religions. The one true God exists eternally in three persons. In them we see the fullness of life and existence itself. The whole universe is the fruit of the Trinity's work. In creation and redemption, the three persons of the Trinity have always worked together. Without these three persons, there can be no creation, no salvation, no hope for the future. When we think about God's grace, mercy, justice, love, and other doctrines, we should remember that the Trinity is the foundation of them all.

Now, I will read the Catechism question, and then let us read the answer together.

Question 3: How many persons are there in God?

Answer: There are three persons in the one true and living God: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

They are the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

When we talk about the Trinity, it is helpful to remember seven things that you can see in this diagram.

Pastor Kevin DeYoung reminds us that:

- (1) God is one: There is only One God.
- (2) The Father is God.
- (3) the Son is God.
- (4) the Holy Spirit is God.
- (5) The Father is not the Son.
- (6) the Son is not the Spirit.
- (7) the Spirit is not the Father.

All three persons are one and equal in substance. None of them is less important than the other. But they each interact with us and creation in different ways. The Father is the initiator, the planner. The Son executes and accomplishes the Father's plan. And the Holy Spirit applies and seals those plans. To us human beings these three might seem separate, but they are not. The three persons of the Trinity work in concert; they work together.

Let us think about three musicians playing together. In one song we hear Andrew playing keyboards, Clement playing acoustic guitar, and Daniel playing bass guitar. There is no competition. Each one of us has our own skills.

We work together to produce a harmonious sound for the glory of God. And in the Bible, from the beginning, the three persons of the Trinity have always worked together in harmony. It is true that we cannot find the word "Trinity" in the Bible. And yet, the concept is clearly taught in Scripture.

We see the Trinity in creation, especially in the creation of man in Genesis 1:26 when God says "let Us make man in Our image." We also see the Trinity in redemption. The Father planned our redemption, the Son executed the plan by dying on the cross, and the Holy Spirit applied Christ's work by magnifying Him in our lives.

The Trinity teaches us that God does not need anything to be God. God does not need any external relationship in order to be God. He does not crave external love. And this is why He can love generously and sacrificially.

We will look at different texts of Scripture today. But we will focus our attention on the doctrine of the Trinity as we see it in 2 Corinthians 13:14.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Let us pray together.

Father, Son, and Spirit, you are beyond our understanding. Thank you for bringing us into your love, a love that existed before the world in your three perfect persons. We ask that our hearts will be warmed and edified as we gaze at Your beauty. Help us acknowledge that we are creatures and that you alone are the Creator and unlimited. Give us a sense of wonder that draws us on our knees in worship. May You be glorified in our lives, now and forever more. Amen.

I grew up hearing 2 Corinthians 13:14 as a blessing at the end of worship every Sunday. This is the "richest benediction in the entire New Testament because of its trinitarian formula" as one author has said. Charles Hodge says that "it includes all the benefits of redemption." Some have compared it to the Old Testament benediction in Numbers chapter 6:22-27 that Pastor Chris pronounces here every Sunday:

24 "The Lord bless you and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."

Here are three points for today's message. They all come from today's scripture verse:

Point 1: The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

Point 2: The Love of God

Point 3: The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Point 1: The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

What is grace? It is favor shown to someone who is undeserving. Grace is mercy, love, and kindness given to someone who deserves punishment. This passage speaks of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Sinners like us can only receive grace through the life and death of Jesus Christ, who is full of grace.

You probably have heard John 3:16.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life."

God the Son had to be born as a human being, to undo the damage to our souls done by the first human being, Adam.

Romans 5:12,15

12 "When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.

15 But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ."

As human beings, we are born with a sin nature that we inherit from Adam. We are sinners from birth. God is holy. He cannot let guilty sinners go unpunished. But God loves His children. So, what can be done to save us? A human Savior had to take our place, to fix the problem started by Adam our human father.

A mediator is someone who can stand between two people in conflict. But who can stand between a holy God and sinful human beings? All ordinary people are disqualified because they are all sinners. To stand between God and human beings, the Mediator must be both God and man. Pastor Alistair Begg puts it well, *"If God would save, then the Savior must be God. If man must bear the punishment because man sinned, then the Savior must be a man. If the man who bears the punishment of sin must himself be sinless, then who other than Jesus meets these qualifications? Friends, Jesus is uniquely qualified to accomplish God's plan of salvation."* It is a salvation that we receive by grace alone.

Brothers and sisters, we receive the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ because He was willing to shed His blood in our place. In the cross, we see clearly the grace of God in Christ and also the love of God.

Point 2: The Love of God

Friends, God did not love us for anything that He could get from us. Because God is eternal and perfect, His love is eternal perfect love. We are limited human beings, limited by time and space. For instance, I cannot be in the USA and the Congo at the same time. I can only be in one place at a time. But God's love is as universal and eternal as God the Lover is.

The three persons of the Trinity have always loved each other perfectly, from before time began. That is why God has never been desperate for love. God does not need any creature to feel loved because He is already satisfied in the love relationship in the Trinity. That's why God can love without using or manipulating anyone. God loves us with no hidden agendas.

Who of us would accept love from someone who only wants to use us? True love is genuine. Someone who loves us truly won't manipulate us for their own ends.

The God of love did not send Jesus Christ because we had something to give. We had nothing, except for our sins. God sent Jesus to take our punishment, and to give us grace. God does not save us to get anything from us, but in order to give grace to us. As we read in John 15:13, *"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."*

The Father sacrificed His own Son for you and I even when we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). That is the definition of true love. Unless we experience this sacrificial love from God, we cannot love anyone well. We must first receive

love from the Trinity.

That is what frees me to love myself without being selfish. And I can also love others without being manipulative or naïve. True love does not wait for love in order to love. God did not wait for us to love Him. He just moved toward us. What an amazing love! Parents, why do you love your little children? Because you expect them to do something for you? Of course not. You love them unconditionally because they are your children. When we believe in Christ, we are loved as sons and daughters. And no one can take that away from us, not even ourselves.

We find the power to love through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and our fellowship with the Holy Spirit. So that is our final point.

Point 3: The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Saint Augustine from North Africa provides an analogy to help us understand the love relationship within the Trinity. He said that the Father is the Lover, the Son is the Beloved, and the Holy Spirit is love itself. This analogy cannot fully explain the persons of the Trinity. But it helps us to see what Paul meant about "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit." The Spirit is the glue of the relationships in the Trinity. For example, when King Saul broke God's law, he broke relationship with God. As a result, God removed His Spirit from Saul. The Spirit seals and maintains our fellowship with God.

All of us crave a relationship with love at the center. We look for it in people, in nature, even in pets. But nothing on earth can provide such a relationship to us. We need the Spirit to bring us into a right relationship with God through a new birth.

John 3:5-8 says:

5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The Spirit of God brings us into fellowship with God the Father through faith in Jesus the Son. In Jesus we share in fellowship with "Abba Father" as sons and daughters. (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). God the Father loves us with the same love He has for Jesus. And through the Holy Spirit we also learn to love other people, especially fellow believers.

As believers, we encourage each other to grow in this fellowship with each other and with God. And the Trinity helps us with this, too! The Spirit applies grace to us through our fellowship in worship, prayer, and the sacraments. Our church is called One Voice fellowship, because as believers we share in One fellowship through the Spirit. In these things, together, we see Jesus more clearly. And Jesus reveals to us the glory of His loving Father, as He promised the night before He died.

I have a personal question to ask: Have you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ? Have you experienced His grace, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit? Without that faith, I am sad to say that the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14 does not apply to you. But for all who trust in Jesus, this wonderful blessing applies to you.

I have a few final thoughts in conclusion. First, all three persons of the Trinity were involved in Creation, and also in

our re-creation. All three members of the Trinity were involved in our salvation, from beginning to end. The Father planned our salvation in His love. The Son executed the plan to give His grace to us. And the Holy Spirit applies the finished plan to us, sealing our fellowship with God as His children. That is why Paul mentions all three persons in this prayer. Because they are equally important for the entire process of salvation.

Second, we have learned that love is beyond us. It is eternal just as God is eternal. For us to love, we need to rely on God's love in Christ who assures us of eternal life. Of course, we cannot love God as He loves us. That's why we pray every day. We need to draw from His love if we want to love God and others.

Third, the Trinity is a great mystery, like love itself. God must teach us about love and model it for us. He reminds us that we are limited and must seek His help for all human relationships.

Fourth, remember that God knows everything about you as a sinner, but loves you anyway in Christ. We can accept the love of human beings who know us only a little. So why would we not accept love from the perfect loving God who knows who we truly are, in life and in death? Therefore, we can love God without fear, and be willing to make sacrifices for this person who loves us so deeply.

Finally, two words of invitation to you. First, for those who do not yet trust in Jesus as your Lord. God's love is the perfect love that your heart is longing for. In fact, the Holy Spirit inspired these words, "God is love," in 1 John 4:16. This means that "the fullness of love exists in God." The grace of God is offered to you today, my friend. If you will receive Jesus, then the Holy Spirit will seal you into an eternal relationship with the Father. You will discover fellowship with all three members of the Trinity, and you will rest in God's love in both life and in death. What a wonderful gift!

Second, a word for those of us who believe in Jesus Christ. We are to love one another, my brothers and sisters. Not for selfish reasons, to get something in return. Instead, we love in the way we were loved.

John writes in 1 John 4:10-11, 19,

10 "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.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

19 We love because he first loved us."

God's love is the basis of our love. Friends, God's love is reason enough for us to put our faith in Jesus Christ, who is full of grace. Let us give thanks in the name of Jesus, through the Spirit, because in Him we experience the joy of eternal fellowship with our heavenly eternal Father.

Let us pray

Dear LORD, thank you for revealing Yourself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in creation and redemption. Thank you that while we were far from you, by grace through faith, your love came to us in Christ Jesus. We praise you for the Holy Spirit who continues to glorify your Son in our lives and bringing us in fellowship with Himself. Help us to commune with you every moment. Help us to humbly worship you and to call others to do the same. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now, and forever more. Amen.