

The Triune God Blesses Us

I'm going to teach you some Latin to start off with this morning. Repeat after me: "*Teologia habitus practicus est.*" Well done. Those are words we learned at Seminary on the first day of dogmatics class. Dogmatics – it's like Catechism class on steroids. You study every doctrine of the bible and look at all of the bible verses that teach it. On the first day of class, you know what was waiting on each of our desks? A stack of notes about this high. 1600 pages of doctrine, doctrine, doctrine.

But on the very first page, those Latin words: "*Teologia habitus practicus est.*" Know what it means? Basically, this: All doctrine is practical. See the professor teaching the class knew what we'd think when we saw 1600 pages of doctrine we'd be studying. Not particularly excited. Wondering just how useful all this information would be. So he reminded us right away: "All doctrine is practical." What God tells us about himself in his Word – it's not useless information. All of it has a day by day, moment by moment impact on our lives.

I mention it because today, Trinity Sunday, the focal point is doctrine. One doctrine in particular: The truth that God is three in one. The Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God, but they are not three Gods, only One. And we might get the same thoughts as seminary students. Yes, it's important, but useful? What's this got to do with my everyday life?

This morning, the Apostle Paul answers that question for us. He closes his 2nd letter to the believers in Corinth by reminding them that God is three in one. But he also shares with you the wonderful news of what that means for you, what this triune God is doing in your life. Moment by moment, day by day, blessing you with just what you need for life now and life forever. The triune God blesses us... with his grace, his love, and his fellowship.

2 Corinthians 13:11-14

¹¹ Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All the saints send their greetings.

¹⁴ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Maybe you recognize those last words. We call it the apostolic blessing – and I give it to you at the beginning of most services and at the end of some bible studies. And they truly are amazing words. But maybe the most amazing part of God's blessing here is who Paul is giving it to.

The Corinthians were a mess. There's a reason Paul gives them a list of exhortations here after his good-bye – they had a track record of *not* doing these things. Instead of always **aiming for perfection**, they had for a time tolerated sexual immorality in their church. Instead of **listening to Paul**, they questioned his authority. Instead of **being of one mind**, they had been

divided into cliques based on which preacher they personally preferred. Instead of **living in peace**, they quarreled – members were even taking each other to court. Instead of **greeting one another** in love, they looked down on people who weren't as rich or as well-educated as they were. *This* is the group Paul says the triune God blesses?

But I guess we should ask the same about ourselves. After all, if we think we're any less of a spiritual mess...any more deserving of God's blessing...well, we're kidding ourselves. But that's also one sure way to miss out on God's blessing – thinking we deserve it. Are we really any different? Living in peace? No, how often don't we find quarreling working its way into our home, our work, even our church? And we're just as good at looking down on people who are different from us as they were. Instead of aiming for perfection, like them we're often all too tolerant of sin in our own lives. Even when we do aim for perfection, we never make it – not even in our best works. And *this* is the mess of people that the triune God blesses? We deserve his curse, not his blessing!

But that's the thing. The Triune God is all about giving people what they don't deserve. The first word of Paul's blessing reminds us of that: **Grace**. Grace is that which we don't deserve. There's a good reason why Paul connects this grace to God the Son – **our Lord Jesus Christ** - because what we don't deserve is what Jesus earned for us. A good definition of grace that helps us remember that uses the letters of the word as an acronym: God's Riches at Christ's Expense. We deserve God's curse – both now and forever – because of our sins. But God didn't want to give us what our sins deserve. So God the Son became one of us and suffered what our sins deserve on the cross. At a cost all to himself, he bought us blessings that he now gives at no cost. Earlier in his letter, Paul described this amazing grace like this: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich" – rich with the forgiveness of all of your sins, rich with a life lived under God's blessing, now and in eternity.

Is there anything more practical than this? Is there anything that we need more than grace on a daily basis? Not just for the bad things we do, but for the "good" things we do that still don't meet God's standards...we need grace even more than we need breathing.

And God the Son says, "It's yours." The translation here might make it sound iffy – **may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...be with you**. But there's no "may" in the Greek. It's simply **the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ...with you all**. The grace you need is yours. The triune God blesses you... with grace.

And if that weren't enough, Paul says, he also blesses you with **love**. This is one of the most basic needs we have as human beings, isn't it? To be loved. There was an interesting report on NPR a few years ago that followed research done in orphanages in Romania. Know what researchers discovered? When kids don't receive parental love from ages 0-4, their brains don't develop properly and they often develop mental illness as a result. Scientists can't explain why.

But we know why. It's how God created us – with a desire, a need, to be loved. It's not just a kid thing. We all want to be loved, we all fear not being loved. And here's the thing: Human love can never perfectly fill our need. Because human love, even at its best, is flawed. It's conditional – given with strings attached. It finds its cause in its object – there has to be something good and lovely about someone in order to love them. So ultimately, human love can fail. I think that we all know that by experience, whether it's happened to us – or whether we're the ones who stopped loving.

But the Triune God blesses us with just the love we crave. It's not conditional, comes with no strings attached. There's nothing that you can do to make God love you more. There's nothing you can do to make God love you less. He doesn't love only those who are lovely and good – no one is! No, he loves the unlovable and makes us lovely, holy, through Jesus. And unlike human love, God's love never changes. It doesn't go up and down from one day to the next. It will never fail – “I have loved you with an everlasting love,” God says to his people in Jeremiah.

Father's Day is an appropriate day to talk about this love, because Paul attributes this love to God the Father. The greatest display of it is how, when we were still sinners, he “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all” to save us. Maybe no story in the bible better illustrates how wonderful this love is than that of the Prodigal Son. The son practically tells his dad he wishes he were dead, runs away from home with his inheritance, squanders it in wild living. In spite of it all, his father still loved him...longed for him to return...and ran and embraced him as his son when he did.

That's the perfect love that your Heavenly Father has for you. The Triune God blesses you... with his love.

Grace is that which we don't deserve; God's love is what drives it; and it's result in our lives? Fellowship. Maybe the first thing you think of when you hear that word is what goes on in the fellowship hall right next door – we share food and coffee and conversation together. The word literally means sharing together, having in common, being bound together as one.

The fellowship God the Holy Spirit blesses us with is so much greater than sharing coffee together. When he brought us to faith, he bound us to God – made us one with him. God became our God, and we became his people. He made us sharers in all of the blessings that Jesus won for us. Although before we had nothing in common with God, now we are forgiven – have been made holy, like he is. And we don't just have that in common with God – we have it in common with all other believers, too. We're bound to them, too – we share the same Lord, the same faith, the same forgiveness, the same heaven.

It can be easy to forget that, though – and live as if it weren't the case. It was happening in Corinth, remember? Instead of living as one body, they were divided. Instead of living in peace, they were quarreling and bickering. Do you see the same in your life? In your marriage, is peace giving way to constant arguing? In your home life, is conflict par for the course? Here in church, are you holding something against someone who's wronged you in some way?

Do you see how much we need fellowship? And the triune God blesses us with just what we need. Through the word and the sacrament, the Holy Spirit ties us ever more tightly to our God. Keeps us united to him, at one with him. But in doing so he also draws us ever closer to each other. Empowers us to love and forgive. Gives us peace and unity.

All doctrine is practical. You've heard God's blessing a thousand times, and you'll hear it even more – as we gather here. But don't let that lead you to stop listening to it and taking it to heart. When you hear it, marvel at the nature of our God – that he's three in one. Marvel even more at how he blesses you every moment of every day with just what you need: Grace...love...fellowship. Amen.