

2 Cor. 13:11-14

Trinity, June 12, 2022
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Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, 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 greet you. ¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The mystery genre has been the one of the best-selling genres in American literature for a long time. Many consider the very first American mystery novel to be Edgar Allen Poe's, *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, which was published almost 180 years ago. After Poe opened up the door, I wonder how many mysteries have been published and sold in America in those 180 years; I imagine the number is astronomical—people just love a good mystery. I'm sure you do as well. I think the reason mysteries are so popular is that they don't stay mysteries for very long. You get hooked at the beginning of the story, but soon enough you've come to the end of the novel, and you've discovered the satisfying answer. You can move on with your life; you don't have to keep asking those questions and searching for those answers.

That is not the case with every mystery though. Today we'll be discussing two different mysteries that many people around the world are still searching for the answers to. I wonder if sometimes we might find ourselves looking for the same answers as well. Thankfully, the answers to these mysteries are indeed revealed to us. The theme we'll be exploring today is:

The Mystery of Unity

- I. "How can I have peace with the Triune God?"
- II. "How can I have peace with *anyone else*?"

Speaking of mysteries, our Triune God is, in a lot of ways, rather mysterious to us. The true **Mystery of Unity** is the Unity of our Three-in-One God. In one of the earliest confessions about God, we proclaim "**The Lord our God, the Lord is one!**" (Deuteronomy 6:4) And yet this one God Himself said at Creation, "**Let US make man in OUR Image.**" (Genesis 1:26) Those statements seem to be in conflict. The same Word of God that says "**You shall have no other Gods,**" (Exodus 20:3) also describes God as being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—all worthy of our praise and worship. We have quotes from Jesus in which He, the Son of God is praying to God the Father, and yet we also have a quote from Jesus that says, "**I and my Father are one!**" (John 10:30)

It all remains a big mystery to us, because it's just impossible for us to wrap our brains around all the nuances of the Triune God. And I think that's because there is nothing in nature that really resembles the Trinity. There's not one illustration that I could use this morning to try and explain our Triune God that would really capture the full picture of this Three-in-One Union. It's been tried many times.

Way back in the 400's there was a missionary to Ireland whom we now call St. Patrick, who held up a three-leaf clover as his illustration of God. Three leaves, but one clover. Three persons, one God. And yet that picture falls short of our Triune God because each of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is distinct from one another. And they're not just part of God but all fully God; whereas each of the three parts of the leaf are indistinguishable from one another and only a part of the whole. Then there is the popular explanation you hear today, that God is like an apple; you have the peel and the fruit and the seeds, all

three different parts that make up the one whole apple. And while each of the three persons of God are all distinct, yet they are of the same substance: all fully perfect, fully just, fully holy, fully God. The peel and fruit and seeds of an apple are all obviously different substances entirely.

And I could go on and on and on looking at every picture that anyone could come up with, and we could discuss how it falls short of picturing the uniqueness of our God—instead of doing that, let's just stick to what we know from Scripture. The Triune God is three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and yet one God—and all three are equal in power, equal in majesty, equal in glory, all eternal, all holy, all worthy of our praise. But even knowing all of that, there are still a number of questions we might wonder about our Triune God, because God's full nature and the relationship of those three persons remains a mystery.

But the mystery that often confounds me even more is why that perfect, holy, unsearchable Triune God would concern himself with me and my salvation? And you and yours? Related to that is the greatest mystery on most people's minds when it comes to God. The mystery on most people's minds isn't His Triune Nature, it's the question, ***How can I have peace with God?*** And that remains an unsolved mystery for many.

Sometimes, being a parent of toddlers makes you feel like a broken record. "Your shoes on the wrong feet, your underwear's on backwards, go back and wash your hands, how do we ask for that nicely?"—just again and again and again the same things over and over and over. I imagine at some point my boys will start to pick up on some of these things, but after what feels like the 500th day straight of saying the same refrains, it makes you start to have doubts whether they'll ever learn. Some things, you would think would be done correctly some of the time. Like with the shoes, there's a 50% chance of getting them on the correct feet by my reckoning, but every single time they're on opposite feet. Or with the underwear! Only two ways to put those on, but every time one of our boys goes to the bathroom, he will inevitably walk back into the room with his underwear facing the wrong direction. It would be funny if it didn't happen every single time, but right now it does happen every day.

You know, we can all be like toddlers in a lot of different ways. God teaches us in Scripture how he expects us to act and how we as Christians should live; the overarching principal is that God wants us to dwell in unity and peace and love with one another. Like a parent He tells and again and again throughout Scripture. Think of the second half of the Ten Commandments: "Honor your father and mother, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness." It's all focused on loving your neighbor in a way that results in peace and unity.

And again, He's repeating those same instructions for us here in our text. Because we act like toddlers, God repeats Himself often. Here He describes how He would like us to live by saying, ***"Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace."*** But like toddlers, even hearing these instructions again and again, we almost always get it wrong.

Paul says, ***"Aim for restoration."*** And how much better does it feel, when someone has wronged you, to let those wrongs simmer on your heart. How often would we rather just not bring these things up and give them an opportunity to say sorry, because we don't want to have to forgive them. ***"Comfort one another,"*** Paul says. Maybe that's something we do with our words, but inside don't we sometimes

rejoice when things go poorly for others? It makes us feel better about ourselves. **“Agree with one another, live in peace!”** How many days of my life can I honestly say I wasn’t feeling animosity towards someone? There’s always someone or something rubbing me the wrong way, causing me to lose sleep, promoting stress and headaches; just general resentment probably every single day of my life.

God desires us to live in unity with one another, and achieving that unity seems to remain a mystery to us all. And after acknowledging this, we have to ask about an even greater mystery: **How can I have peace with the Triune God?** Me, with all the hateful thoughts that run through my head. How can you have peace with the Triune God, you, who are often unwilling to understand all of your neighbors’ words and actions in the best possible way and with a heart of forgiveness? How could we have ever find peace with God, when this is what we offer? For many people, the pursuit of this peace remains a mystery. Yet God indicates in our text that we already have that very peace we desire.

In our last verse, Paul declares God’s good will towards you: **“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”** You’ve probably heard that many times before, I’ll often end meetings at church by using that as a prayer. One thing I realize that I often do is that when I pray it, I will say **“May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...”** and so on. If not that, I say, **“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit will be with you all.”** In both cases, it’s more like I’m expressing a wish of what I hope God might do for us.

In the Greek, there’s not a verb in that statement at all, and there’s no idea of mere possibility or a mere wish. It’s a simple declaration of fact. **“Jesus’ grace, God’s love, the Holy Spirit’s fellowship of peace—YOURS.”** This is something that has already been given. And notice how one-sided this is: God isn’t leaving room for your participation at all, because if we were involved, we’d have the shoes on the wrong feet every time. He doesn’t say, **“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and your cooperation...”** Instead God makes it clear, that when it comes to peace between you and Him, He does all the work.

That’s why the first phrase is **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** How often do we feel, **“Sure, I’m saved because Jesus died for me, but there has to be something that I can do!”** We try to do things that make us feel like we could deserve God’s love, but every time we fail, we start to lose hope. Desiring to “earn” God’s love, we fail, and we start wondering if God will give up on us instead and withdraw it from us. Well, if it was something that you could earn, it wouldn’t be grace. Grace is God’s undeserved love. When God tells you that the **“Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”** is extended to us, He’s saying that He loves people that don’t deserve His love. He’s talking about sinners like you and me. This is grace, that **“While we were still sinners, (while we were enemies of God) Christ died for us.”** (Romans 5:8)

God does all the work to achieve our peace because it is based on the **“love of God.”** The love of a Father for humanity that led him to sacrificing His own Son that we might live. The love of a Father that continues to suffer long with our faithlessness and doesn’t respond to every single evil, but instead bears with us and forgives us through His Son. God does all the work to achieve our peace, because it is based on the **“fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”** The third person of the Trinity that is always working behind the scenes of our heart: convicting us of our sin, causing us to turn to the Lord for forgiveness, and thereby creating that peace we so desire. The Holy Spirit has brought you close to God, when—left

to yourself—you would have run far away. **How can I have peace with God?** That's no longer a mystery. We have peace with God! Signed, sealed, and delivered by His loving hand.

Well what about peace with one another? How can we achieve that sort of peace and unity? How can we learn to love one another rather than be filled with hatred? Those have been the big subjects on the minds of Americans this past week and a half. Again, for many the solution for how to achieve these things remains an open mystery. How many interviews have you heard that went, *"I don't have any solutions, but I know something has to be done. Something has to change."* **How can I have peace with anyone else?** The answer is before us. The only viable way to create peace is through that which is the only solution for any sin—the blood of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness which He freely offers through it.

We see that Christ-motivated attitude in effect here in our letter, and it's important for you to know Paul's background with the Corinthian church so you can see it. The Apostle Paul had started the church in Corinth on one of his missionary journeys. He'd met some fellow Christians there and stayed with them and was preaching and teaching for some time, and a church formed. Soon after he continued his missionary journeys, and then he received some concerning reports about the young Corinthian congregation. There was a certain sin in the congregation that many of its members were holding up as a matter of pride. And so, he wrote a letter condemning some of those things, (1 Corinthians) and some of the people listened and repented and acted on Paul's words.

But many within the congregation turned away from Paul and were using the opportunity of his absence to slander him and cast his ministry into doubt. It caused real turmoil within the church and caused extreme turmoil within Paul's heart also. In 2 Corinthians 2 then, Paul says that he's writing out of the anguish of his heart and with tears in his eyes. It's difficult to write to these people who had forsaken him and treated him with so much contempt.

The people had turned on Paul because they determined he was unimpressive. He was poor, scraping by on a meager income, often persecuted, often homeless—how could he be a preacher of God? But Paul points out that he was not there to proclaim himself, his job was not to be impressive himself but to point the people to the one who is impressive—Jesus Christ! It was just as He said in his first letter, ***"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."*** (1 Corinthians 2:2) That was the one important idea that needed to remain at the forefront of everything.

Another bone of contention was that the last time Paul had written to this Corinthian congregation, he had written about the Christians in Jerusalem who were being afflicted and persecuted and could really use the Corinthians financial support. Well, the time had come for their offerings to be sent, and these Corinthians had decided not to collect anything—which was extremely troubling, as their selfishness and lack of empathy revealed a lack of faith. Again, Paul answers them by pointing them in the proper direction. ***"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."*** (2 Corinthians 8:9) Jesus had given up His glorious honor and wealth, and He lowered Himself to die so that other people who are impoverished through sin and death can be exalted to eternal life with God.

Paul is declaring in these responses that to be a Christian means to keep Christ at the forefront of everything! It means that the magnitude of what Christ has done has sunk deep into your mind and heart as you realize that without him you have nothing, but through Him you have the wealth of eternal life and true and lasting peace with God. This was what Paul kept as his motivation, that God had answered His faithlessness with grace and love. For he had persecuted the church of God! But as Paul said, ***“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”*** (1Timothy 1:15)

Keeping that on his heart and mind, Paul could write to these people—even those that had conspired against him—and speak to them as he does in our text. He addresses them by saying, ***“Finally, Brothers.”*** He calls them brothers despite all their sins and the difficulties he had with them, because he knew that if Christ extended His grace to Him, Paul could exercise love and patience with them too.

If we are ever to ***“Aim for restoration, or comfort one another, or agree with one another, or live in peace”***—if we are ever to have unity with one another—it will be because of the love of Jesus. ***How can I achieve peace with anyone else?*** How can I be at peace with people of a different background, or a different race, or a different social status, or a different gender, or a different political opinion? That can only come when we remember the One with whom we had nothing in common at all. When we remember the One with whom we had nothing but differences. But He came down, He walked in our shoes, He endured our temptation, He faced our pains; He did this so that he could empathize with our humanity and then save humanity. And you were included in that.

Left to yourself, you would have no peace. Not with God, not with anyone else. But our Triune God, He has delivered peace to you in full. There’s no more reason to doubt. God now lifts up his face to look upon us and speaks to us, “Peace.” And that was grace, love that we never deserved, yet that He gave abundantly. If we are to receive these blessings from God with open hands, how can we also not share that same patient love with everyone else? How can we not in love, open our ears to listen and understand? How can we not in Christian love, strive to explain one another’s words and actions in the best possible way? How can we be forgiven so much by God and not be willing to forgive one another?

The Mysteries of Unity—How can I have peace with God? How can I have peace with anyone else?—You have the answer to both. It’s solely on the basis of the love that our Triune God has for you. May God grant that we now take that love and share it. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (Philippians 4:7)