

2 CORINTHIANS 13:14

A PORTRAIT OF GOD

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”¹

You have undoubtedly heard the story of the little boy who was colouring at the kitchen table. When his mother asked him what he was drawing, he informed her that he was drawing a picture of God. “But no one knows what God looks like,” his mother remonstrated with him. “They will when I get through,” the lad responded.

Whenever we speak of God, we must be cautious that we don’t attempt to reduce God to a concept we can handle; we must avoid recreating Him in our own image. The Psalmist Asaph charges those who supposed they were worshipping God with a dreadful sin when he writes, “You thought I was exactly like you” [PSALM 50:19].² The professed worshippers of God attempted to make God after their own desires. Of course, such an attempt is foolish. God is not at all like us. In fact, it is fair to say that God can only be described as “Other.” However, there are aspects of His character to which we can relate.

The most distinctive facet of the divine nature is perhaps His Triune nature. God reveals Himself as the Triune God, a concept that is difficult for people to grasp. It is doubtful that any of us can say that we actually understand the concept, but as Christians we accept the revelation. Though we see the reality presented in the Word, we nevertheless grapple with the implications of this doctrine—attempting to find models or analogies, only to see each effort end in futility.

It is important to acknowledge that the triune nature of the Godhead is not a concept that man could envision—it is revealed by God Himself. Closing the Second Letter he wrote to the Christians in Corinth, the Apostle to the Gentiles referred to the Triune Godhead when penning a benediction. It seems apparent that this truth permeated the Apostle’s mind because it flows so freely from his pen as he pronounces a blessing on those first readers.

THE TRIUNITY PRESENTED — It is fascinating to discover that the Bible does not attempt to provide a definition of the Triune Godhead. One cult makes much of the fact that the word “Trinity” does not occur in the Bible. This should not be worrisome to any serious student of the Bible. The word “rapture” does not occur in the Bible, but we still look for the Blessed Hope. Likewise, the word “millennium” is not found in our English versions of the Word. Nevertheless, the Word makes it clear that we shall reign with the Master for a thousand years. The terms “natural depravity” and “eternal security,” though evident from what is revealed in the Word, are not found in our English versions. Doctrinal terms are used to identify biblical truth; they are not the biblical truth themselves.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)

The term that speaks of the Triune Nature of God which we commonly use is “Trinity”; this is likely the term that you will have heard used most often by pastors and theologians. I prefer to use the term “Triunity,” which though less familiar is somewhat more descriptive. Whether we use the term “Trinity” or “Triunity,” we need to know that we are speaking of the nature of God as revealed in His Word.

Let’s admit up front that the passage we are focused on in this hour does not conclusively teach the truth of the Triune Nature of God; however, it is evident that the Apostle assumes the Triunity to be an accurate representation of the Godhead. Today, we have the advantage of looking back to this verse with more understanding than the first readers could have had because we have received the entire revelation of the Word. Thus, it is obvious that our understanding is retrospective; we are privileged to have the full revelation of the Word to guide our understanding. Consequently, contemporary Christians are able to see the nature of God in the degree He has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind.

Throughout the Word of God, the Triunity is accepted as factual by the writers. Consequently, they expend no effort in defending this truth—one either accepts the doctrine as true, or one rejects it as fanciful imagination. Thus, the doctrine is revealed, and not assumed. Pause for a moment to weigh that thought—the nature of God could not be discovered through man’s effort, for if we were able to discover what God is like through our own ruminations and cogitations, we would be greater than God. God’s nature is known by revelation, and not through man’s search to know God. For us to know what God is like, it is necessary for God to reveal Himself. As God reveals Himself to us in the written Word, we are amazed to meet One God, but in three expressions. We do not meet three gods, for that is nothing short of paganism. We do, however, meet God in three Persons comprising the Godhead.

When God began revealing His will and His character, He did not immediately provide a complete revelation. The Spirit of God progressively revealed the nature of the Living God. Until the canon of Scripture was complete—over four thousand years after the first words of Genesis were written, it was impossible to have a full revelation of the character of God. Even then, our humble state compels us to confess that the revelation we have is complete only so far as God has chosen to reveal Himself to man. It is fair to say that we will not have a full revelation until we have been transformed into the image of Christ. When, at last, we are changed into His image we will stand complete in Him before the Father. At that time, as the Apostle has written, “I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” [**1 CORINTHIANS 13:12**].

Throughout the Creation account recorded in the first chapter of Genesis God is referred to by the Hebrew word “*elohim*.” *Elohim* is a plural noun, but it is used as though it were singular. In the early verses of the first chapter of the written Word, the pronouns are all singular. *Elohim* appears in conjunction with singular verbs, and the pronouns referring back to the word are also singular. We accept that this is a means by which God at once emphasises that there is but one God alone, though there is a plural dimension to His being. I acknowledge that this information is not sufficient to definitively declare the Triunity of God, but it does suggest this great doctrine from the first chapter.

Those who are knowledgeable of New Testament Scriptures know that **GENESIS 1:26, 27** is strongly suggestive of the triune Godhead. The truth would have been more difficult to comprehend at an earlier time in the history of the Faith. “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”

“So God created man in His own image,
in the image of God He created him;
male and female He created them.”

Scope in on the 26th verse: “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness.” This is one of the very few places where a singular pronoun does not occur. In **GENESIS 3:22** we again witness the use of the plural pronoun as God speaks following the rebellion of our first parents. “The LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like *one of us* in knowing good and evil.’” The LORD God—*Yahweh Elohim*—reasons that “the man has become like one of us.” Whom did the LORD God address when He reasoned as He did?

Some Bible teachers—but no Bible scholars—endeavour to teach that God spoke to angels in our text. However, such a view appears fatally flawed in light of **ISAIAH 40:14**.

“Whom did he consult,
and who made him understand?
Who taught him the path of justice,
and taught him knowledge,
or showed him the way of understanding?”

If Scripture teaches anything, it teaches that God need not invite the angels to enter into His grand work of creation. Moreover, the LORD God would have no need to ask the angels for advice about how to respond to the sin of mankind. Since the Living God presents His Son as “a lamb ... foreknown before the creation of the world” [**1 PETER 1:19, 20**] and as “the Lamb that was slain” [**REVELATION 13:8**], He would have no reason to invite mere creatures to share in either the glorious work of creation or to provide for the redemption of his fallen creature. We are informed that angels are ignorant of salvation since the angels long to look into matters concerning salvation [**1 PETER 1:12**]. Bear in mind that the angels are themselves created beings. Therefore, why would the Creator ask the very creatures He created to serve His redeemed people [see **HEBREWS 1:14**] to give Him advice concerning how He should respond to man’s sin?

There are liberal professors who consider the wording of **GENESIS 1:26** to be superfluous; they treat it as though it were meaningless. There are yet other Bible teachers who in their ignorance of the Word have taught that in that passage God is addressing wisdom personified. They base this thought upon the words of Solomon recorded in **PROVERBS 8:22-31**.

“The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of old;
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth,
before he had made the earth with its fields
or the first of the dust of the world.
When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned the sea its limit
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master workman,
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting the children of man.”

Perhaps you are wise, but it is doubtful that you address yourself and say you are speaking to wisdom. It is possible that you possess a measure of knowledge; however, you don't go about talking to yourself and say you are seeking advice. If you do, people will think you are eccentric, at the very least. At the worst, they will think you are losing it!

There are some who wish to push themselves forward as teachers who insist that God is employing the language of majesty in the earlier passage referred to in Genesis. However, there is no other instance in the whole of the Word where the Living God employs such pretentious language as they suggest—God is not ostentatious in His speech, nor does he speak magniloquently. Why, then, should we expect that in this one instance He would speak in a stilted, artificial manner? Others have speculated that this is simply the necessary agreement of number with the noun. This is not grammatically required when *elohim* appears elsewhere, either in this chapter or throughout the entire Old Testament.

How much simpler in light of the entirety of the Word to confess this as the initial teaching of the triune nature of the Living God! How much simpler to see that full revelation awaited the timing of God, but He has here graciously provided a glimpse of His very nature! Of course, if these words were all we possessed on the teaching we could not be certain it spoke of the Trinity. However, consider the teaching found in the whole of the Bible.

The Bible teaches that *Yahweh*—the LORD—is Creator. As evidence that this is Bible teaching I point to but two instances in Isaiah’s prophecy.

“Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer,
who formed you in the womb:
I am the LORD, who made all things,
who alone stretched out the heavens,
who spread out the earth by myself.”

[ISAIAH 44:24]

“To whom then will you compare me,
that I should be like him? says the Holy One.
Lift your eyes on high and see:
who created these?
He who brings out their hosts by number,
calling them all by name.
by the greatness of his might
and because he is strong in power
not one of them is missing.”

[ISAIAH 40:25, 26]

Unarguably, the LORD God is Creator; but the Son of God is also presented as Creator. The opening verses of John’s Gospel provide powerful witness to Christ’s creative work. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” [JOHN 1:1-5].

In a similar fashion, the Apostle Paul presents Jesus as Creator in COLOSSIANS 1:16, 17. “By [Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

The Word of God presents the LORD God and the Son as God, and it also presents the Spirit of God as Creator. The Psalmist speaks of the Spirit’s creative work in PSALM 104:30.

“When you send forth Your Spirit, [the animals] are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.”

In GENESIS 1:2 we witnessed the Spirit of God brooding over the nascent earth much as a mother eagle watches over her fledglings on the first flight. The evidence is overwhelming that Father, Son and Spirit alike are presented as Creator—and that the Creator is God. The Word of God either presents three Gods or a Triunity. Since God is one [see DEUTERONOMY 6:4], the evidence points to an unfolding revelation of the Triune God.

No one doubts that God is presented as the Father. The Master's words, recorded in John's Gospel, clearly reveal this truth. "Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal" [JOHN 6:27]. Therefore, the testimony of the Word is that our heavenly Father is God. We know this, and we look up to Him for mercy and grace.

Jesus, likewise, is revealed to be very God in the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul testified, "To [the Jews] belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen" [ROMANS 9:5]. Amen, indeed. Did you notice that statement and how strongly the Apostle presents it? It is "Christ who is God over all."

The Holy Spirit is also revealed to be God. Listen to an extended account from the early days of the apostolic church when a couple thought to lie to God. "A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.' When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it" [ACTS 5:1-5].

The full revelation of the doctrine of God's triune nature awaited God's timing. Rather than building a doctrine upon one isolated verse, sound interpretation requires consideration of the whole sweep of the Bible. We encounter the Triune God throughout the pages of the New Testament, and looking back to the Old Testament we understand what was written.

When Jesus was baptised, we read of the affirmation of heaven, an affirmation in which all three members of the Godhead were present. "The heavens were opened to [Jesus], and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" [MATTHEW 3:16, 17]. This teaching of the triune nature of God explains the baptismal formula given in [MATTHEW 28:19]. We are taught to baptise all who come in faith seeking to identify with the Son of God, baptising in the Name (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus was preparing to depart this earth, He prepared His disciples. An extended dissertation designed to assist the disciples during this transition period is presented in John's Gospel. Listen to a portion of that discourse, noting in particular the presence of all three members of the triune Godhead and taking careful note of the comparison between all three. "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?' Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me'" [JOHN 14:16-24].

Then, here in the text chosen for this day, we witness Paul, closing his second letter to the Corinthian church appended this apostolic benediction. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” [2 CORINTHIANS 13:14]. Clearly, he assumes co-equality between each member of the Godhead.

When we think of salvation as revealed in the Word we see the Father planning for the salvation of His fallen creature, the Son providing for salvation through giving His own life, and the Spirit of God applying salvation through calling individuals to faith and opening their hearts to belief in the Risen Son. This is the heart of Paul’s benediction.

THE TRIUNITY WORKING IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER — “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” In the moments remaining for our study this day, I want to think briefly of the Triune God at work in our lives. Paul certainly hints at the work of each Person within the Godhead in this benediction that occupies our attention this day.

First, because it occurs first in the text, think of “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Clearly, Christ’s grace is important to the Apostle Paul, if citations concerning Christ and His grace in the letters he wrote are any indication. However, this focus on Christ and His grace are abundantly evident with each of the writers of Scripture. As an example of the importance of the grace of Christ the Lord, consider John’s words as he opens the Gospel that bears his name. “The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” [JOHN 1:17]. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Certainly, we can read of the grace of God, but it is the Son of God that exemplifies and embodies the divine grace that we have received.

When the congregation in Jerusalem was asked to respond to the concerns of the congregation at Antioch concerning the insinuation of legalism by the Judaisers, Peter brought the assembly back to earth with a brief reminder of what God had accomplished. He said, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” [ACTS 15:7-11].

Consider several instances when Paul spoke of the grace that is ours in Christ the Lord. “The free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many” [ROMANS 5:15]. The Apostle states that the Master provided the free gift of salvation that blesses all who believe. To the Corinthian Christians, the Apostle wrote, “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]. Christ impoverishing Himself, emptying Himself of His glory, reveals His grace toward us. This was an iteration of his opening words in a previous missive to that selfsame congregation: “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:4].

As was true of Paul, Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, also understood that grace is ours in Christ Jesus, and moreover, that grace will be fully revealed at a date that is yet future. “Preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” [1 PETER 1:13]. The revelation of the Master is a mark of grace in which we will share.

Focus on one final portion of the Word that points us to the grace of Christ the Lord. Paul urges Timothy, and consequently each individual who receives the gift of life in Christ the Lord, “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” [2 TIMOTHY 1:8-14].

Paul also focused on “the love of God,” or the love of the Father, with this benediction. Whenever a Christian speaks of the love of God, it is natural that the mind turn to JOHN 3:16: “God so loved the world that He gave His Only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Writing the Roman Christians, Paul identifies them as those “who are loved by God and called to be saints” [ROMANS 1:7]. Indeed, each one who is a Christian knows that “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” [ROMANS 5:5]. Shortly, in this same passage, the Apostle will speak of God’s love demonstrated toward us: “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” [ROMANS 5:8-10].

I direct your attention to but a few additional statements concerning the love of the Father. In his second letter to Thessalonian Christians, Paul pronounced a benediction, writing “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:16, 17].

Undoubtedly, grace is extended by the Father, but the Apostle focuses on the grace we have received in Christ the Lord. In a similar manner, though we recognise the love of God extended to each one of us, we know the love of Christ the Lord. What is being presented is the fact that grace is not under the purview of one member of the Godhead, but is extended from each Person within the Triunity, just as love is not the sole prerogative of one member of the Godhead because each Person extends divine love toward us.

John speaks of the impact that the love of the Father has on Christians, when he writes, “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.

“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” [1 JOHN 4:7-16].

Permit me to speak pointedly and concisely of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Writing the Philippian Christians, Paul urged, “If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or mercy, complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose” [PHILIPPIANS 2:1, 2].³ Fellowship in the Spirit is seen through unity in the Body. Have you ever noticed the emphasis on unity or harmony in the Letters Paul wrote? Here are a few examples. “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” [EPHESIANS 4:1-3].

To the Roman Christians, the Apostle urged, “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight” [ROMANS 12:16]. Later, in the same letter, he would encourage the Romans with a prayer for unity as he wrote, “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” [ROMANS 15:5, 6].

The Corinthian Christians were combative, so it should be no great surprise that Paul would plead with them from the earliest words he penned to them, “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgement” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:10].

Unity within the Community of Faith reveals the fellowship of the Spirit. When the people of God seek the fellowship of the Spirit, it means that they have the Spirit of Christ, and that they refuse to be ruled by their own passions. It means that they recognise the Body of Christ, refusing to permit the congregation to be viewed as a mere political entity to be manipulated according to our own fallen desires. It means that the people of God see the congregation to which they belong as the Bride of Christ, rather than a tawdry trollop sullied by and surrendered to the attitudes of this fallen world.

³ The NET Bible First Edition (Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2006)

What is God like? How would you describe God? Perhaps the question is too great, for who among us can describe Him who is infinite. What we can say is that God has revealed Himself as the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I tell you that whenever an individual goes wrong on this cardinal doctrine, it is evident that such a one does not know God. For had that one known God, she would have accepted the revelation of Himself that God has given.

Do you know God? More importantly, is your name known by the Triune God? Christ Jesus died because of your inability to make yourself acceptable to Him. Had He only died, perhaps one could ignore Him. However, He conquered death and rose to life. Therefore, the Word of God calls each one to believe this message so that they may receive the life He offers. “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ believing with your whole being that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. It is with the heart that one believes and is declared right with God, and with the mouth that one confesses and is set free from condemnation and guilt.” That passage concludes by citing the Prophet Joel in calling you to life, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].⁴

I pray you are saved. I pray that if you have yet to believe this message, that this will be the day you believe and that you discover the life that is offered by the Triune God. Amen.

⁴ Author’s Free Translation