

PLAIN TRUTH®

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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

God = Grace, Love and Fellowship

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May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14).

God is love. That's the most concise biblical definition given to us. God IS love... which is infinitely beyond love being one of many of his attributes. Love is his essence, his totality and center of his being. It seems that God as Triune is embedded within this passage in Corinthians. However, while I believe the best biblically-based explanation about God is a Trinitarian definition, I also believe it is "the best possible *human* explanation."

Let's not get too focused on or proud of a doctrine. The doctrine of the Trinity is a *human* attempt to get a handle on eternity, based on a study of all biblical references to God, but *because it is human, it is an interpretation at best, and subject to being imperfect and flawed.*

That said, I believe *all other perspectives and beliefs about God are even more flawed—so the Trinity doctrine is the best human attempt to perceive the fullness and mystery of God.* We do not worship a humanly created creed, but rather the God the creed attempts (inadequately given human involvement) to describe.

The Bible says and teaches God is one, yet he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit—perfectly united without any division, existing eternally and in perfect harmony as one God in **Three Divine Persons.**

One might respond (maybe "one" is "you"), "I know how to count. How can one plus one plus one equal one while at the same time being three?" Good. You (or "one") can count. But the fullness of God, who he is and how is not accountable to our limited abilities to count.

God never subjected himself to our arithmetic ("maths" for the British). God is greater than our abilities to compute, add, subtract and calculate. The sum total, to use an expression of numerical

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addition, is greater than what we can humanly perceive—spiritual reality is not all that it may seem to be on the physical level.

I do not believe it is necessary and required of a Christ-follower that they memorize a formulaic definition about God. I believe it is entirely possible that Christ followers can follow Jesus Christ and not fully (or even partially) grasp, understand and believe that God is one essence eternally existing in perfect, united harmony as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Extending this discussion to the hyperbolic extreme, I certainly do not believe that Saint Peter will stand at the Golden Gates of Heaven insisting everyone who enters must sign a document accepting the creed and dogma of the Trinity. How foolish we become when we pretend to subject and limit God to our physical attempts to comprehend him.

Grace, Love and Fellowship

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14).

This verse is not a definitive explanation of all that God is... it is a benediction (an expression of good wishes, a blessing, often offered at the end of a sermon). This benediction is not a doctrinal statement or a creed that we must memorize in order to properly understand God.

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Grace, love and fellowship is not the Trinity, but rather the best hopes Paul has for his readers. While the words are a summary of Christian faith, they are not a knock-down argument that proves the Trinity doctrine beyond a shadow of a doubt. For that we must study many passages, which is not my purpose in this short article.

Let us however consider the three constituent parts of 2 Corinthians 13:14: *grace, love and fellowship*.

1) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

Grace separates the gospel of Jesus Christ from Christless religion, whether that religion calls itself Christian or not. Grace elevates the gospel from Christless religion to Christ-centered faith.

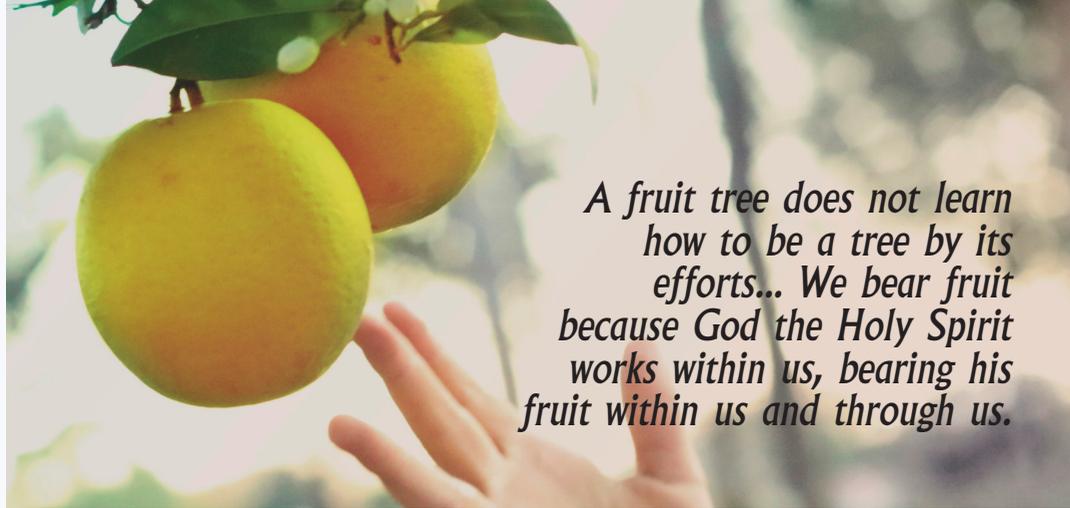
Religion is based on performance. Polytheistic religion insists the gods will not rain hail and brimstone down on you if you please and appease them by your meritorious deeds and obedience.

Monotheistic religion, which believes that God is one (three of the monotheistic world religions are Christianity, Judaism and Islam) also believes that humans earn their way into God's favor.

Christless religion can be monotheistic and still insist that salvation is achieved and earned. It teaches salvation is qualified for when one racks up enough points so that one deserves eternal bliss. Grace on the other hand is the COMPLETE opposite of religion!

Grace, as explained in the New Testament, insists that *people are not capable of earning God's love because God's love is not for sale*. God does not promise we will have the privilege and insight to see exactly how grace is working in our lives. God's grace is somewhat like the wind—we cannot see where it comes from nor can we predict it, but we can experience it at work.

Grace tells us that **God's love is a gift to be received, not a product to be achieved**. The first phrase in 2 Corinthians 13:14 is *the grace of*



A fruit tree does not learn how to be a tree by its efforts... We bear fruit because God the Holy Spirit works within us, bearing his fruit within us and through us.

our Lord Jesus Christ and now the second is...

2) The love of God

The love of God, as mentioned earlier, is who he is, in his fullness—his essence. *The foundational essence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is love.*

God's love is not just any kind of love. When we humans use the word "love" it is often loaded with human imperfections, expectations and limitations. God's love is beyond physical comprehension, beyond human boundaries. God's love is *no-matter-what love* because God loves us no matter what.

God's love means that God loves you and me right now just as much as he ever has or ever will. God's love means that nothing we can do positively or negatively changes his love... God cannot be manipulated by what we do or promise to do.

The first phrase in 2 Corinthians 13:14 is *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* and the second is *the love of God* and finally, the third is.....

3) The fellowship of the Holy Spirit

God the Holy Spirit is the third divine Person in the Godhead who works in our lives empowering us so that God's works are produced in us, as a means to us becoming *the handiwork [workmanship] of God* (Ephesians 2:10).

God the Holy Spirit molds us, as we yield to God, so that the fruit of the Holy Spirit grows in us, namely *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* (Galatians 5:6).

Christless religion says that the

fruit of the Holy Spirit must be produced by the effort of the individual—that we must work harder, run faster, give more, drive ourselves further with the goal of becoming what God wants us to be and producing by our efforts fruit in our lives that will please him.

A tree bears fruit because only God can make a tree. A fruit tree does not learn how to be a tree by its efforts. A fruit tree doesn't discover the secret of bearing fruit by sitting in a building listening to a fruit tree expert. A fruit tree doesn't have to be a "member" of an orchard so it can bear fruit. *We bear fruit because God the Holy Spirit works within us, bearing his fruit within us and through us*. This is part of what this verse means by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Some say *fellowship* means attending a building and having coffee, tea and cookies with people who believe most of the same things you do—and God will be happy if you do, and not so happy if you don't.

The *fellowship of the Holy Spirit* may include being around people who believe similar things as you do, but please, let us not limit God. The *fellowship of the Holy Spirit* means that we are not alone—we are in a community with God and all who are part of the universal body of Jesus here on earth.

The *fellowship of the Holy Spirit* assures us that God our Father is always our father, and that no matter what happens to us, he is always near... always and forever imparting to us, his dear children, his *grace, love and fellowship*. □