

PLAIN TRUTH®

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inside

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

God = Grace, Love and Fellowship

Greg Albrecht

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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The Comfort of Christ

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28.)

“The most important thing that ever happens is letting ourselves be loved and comforted by God. ‘Be still, and know that I am God’ (Psalm 46:10).”
—Brennan Manning, *The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus*

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:7)

One of Jesus’ most precious gifts to those who follow him would have to be **comfort**. In using the term, **comfort**, I am not writing of a material comfort, as if Jesus promises his followers great wealth, perfect health, or an easy life. No, far from it.

The Comfort of Christ of which I write is a spiritual gift. This spiritual gift is firmly rooted in faith, in trust and in an intimate relationship we share with Christ Jesus himself.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus invites *all who are weary and burdened* to come to him. Jesus extends the ultimate invitation to experience him; to step towards him and to receive his rest, comfort, love, and grace.

How can we put a price on the **comfort of Christ**? When we are in need, alone, suffering loss, or fighting battles with anxious care, fear, doubt and worry, Jesus waits for us to *come to him*. His invitation is priceless.

As he waits for us, Jesus does so with a tender care. As Brennan Manning writes, *the most important thing...is letting ourselves be loved*

and comforted by God. Life can be more than dark at times. It certainly was for Brennan Manning. Brennan suffered from years of repeated bouts with loneliness, depression, anxiety and the long-term effects of alcoholism. He often felt his life left him on the outside of Christ’s love and care. He believed there could be **no comfort** for him. Perhaps, we can feel the same way too.

How can we put a price on the comfort of Christ? When we are in need, alone, suffering loss... Jesus waits for us to come to him.

At such low points, the tough stuff of life can be easier to believe. **How can Jesus love me and care for me when I fall down so easily? Why would Jesus want to invite me to come and receive his comfort when I feel so worthless?**

Brennan Manning knew well these depths of despair. Whether due to our own weaknesses and limitations, or due to life as it simply unfolds, we can know these depths, as well. It is central to the human experience.

Jesus knew all about the tough stuff of life. Jesus had been thrown out of his own hometown. He had been held at arm’s length by people he loved, tested, tried, taunted and rejected by the religious leaders of his day.

Jesus was misunderstood by his own followers, betrayed, denied, left alone, beaten and ultimately put to death. He knew intimately the worst of human experience. He

knew better than anyone what it was to **need comfort**.

Jesus calls to us with a voice of relentless tenderness. Jesus’ voice calls us to be still and to trust that he has us, no matter what. In the moment of our greatest need, letting ourselves be loved and comforted by him can feel unnatural.

Believing in his tender care can seem too good to be true. But, the gift of his faith within us leads us to trust. The intimate relationship we share with him, by him, leads us to believe. Jesus helps us to hear his voice.

Every time we hear his voice which calls us the Beloved, we discover a desire to hear that voice longer and more deeply, writes Henri Nouwen in his book, *The Life of the Beloved*. The comfort of Christ comes from hearing his voice.

This comfort is firmly rooted in faith, in trust and in our relationship with him. Like the Good Shepherd calling to his sheep, Jesus calls to us in our darkest moments. Jesus calls with a voice we know well; his voice of tender care.

As Christ-followers, our risen Lord leads us to share **the comfort of Christ** with the world around us. If anything, our world today is a world of endless cares; a world of anxieties, fears, and worries. Ours is a world of those who are weary and burdened.

Through Christ in us, we bring **comfort** to the world. We bring his precious gift of grace in the darkest of times. His love and grace are that comfort. His relentless tenderness is that priceless gift. □

—Ed Dunn

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.

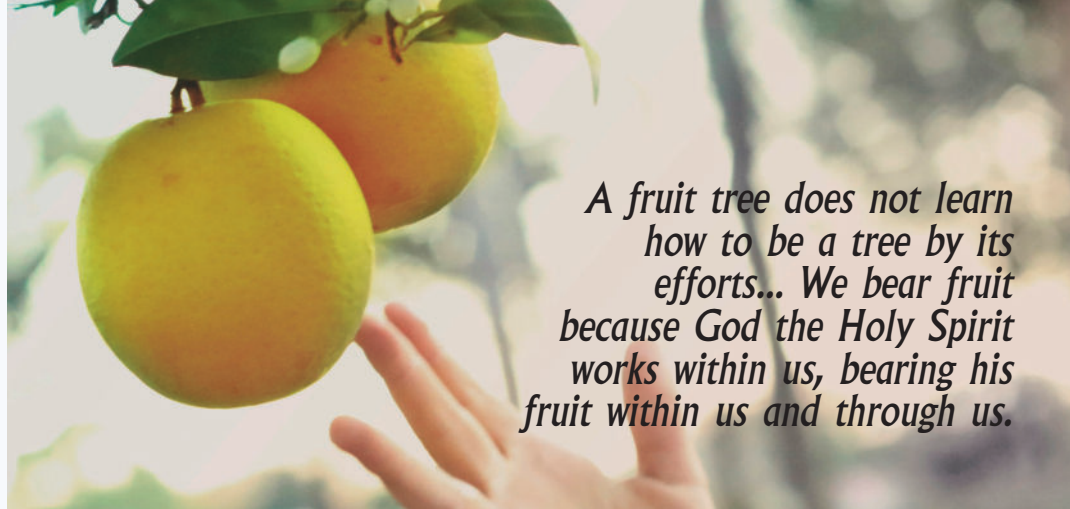
Religion is based on performance. Polytheistic religion insists the gods will not rain hail and brimstone down on you if you please and appease them by your meritorious deeds and obedience.

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*. □

*“Thanks
for shining
Jesus’ light in
the darkness!”*



Letters from readers like you!

Here are a few letters of thanks we have received at CWR/PTM, from those who are blessed because of the work God is graciously allowing us to do, together, through this ongoing ministry. Thank you for your participation. If you haven’t contributed to CWR/PTM lately, please consider making a donation today to help us help so many others around the world!

Thanks for shining Jesus’ light in the darkness of this world. We all need the bigger picture your work shows us. The teaching you provide makes all the difference in our daily lives. This world is indeed very dark but with Jesus in us, the picture is eternally hopeful and bright.—Washington

Thank you so much for telling it like it is. I thank God that you are bold enough to tell people the truth about God’s amazing grace.—Alabama

Your ministry of grace, kindness and compassion in the face of turmoil, chaos and disaster is needed now as much as ever, and more so!—Canada

Thank you for your loving kindness by feeding us each month with God’s word and encouraging us to know Jesus. I enjoy all the letters, magazines and other resources and I’m very thankful for all you send our way. God bless all of you at PTM.—Louisiana

Thank you for being servants of Jesus and getting the truth about Jesus out to the world. Thank you for all your service to others in Jesus’ love.—New York

Thank you for never giving up on me, even when I gave up on you. I thank you so much for all the monthly pick-me-ups.—Kentucky

Thank you for your ministry. I appreciate and look forward to the monthly letters and magazines. I pray God’s blessings on everyone involved with CWR/PTM.—Indiana

I am so thankful for everyone at CWR/PTM! Without you I would be so lost but because of your ministry I have hope and love, and I feel free in this world. I am so very grateful.—Delaware

I am thankful God has poured out the riches of his amazing grace upon me. My donation is an acknowledgement and appreciation, with many thanks to CWR/PTM for proclaiming God’s grace.—Illinois

The CWR/PTM gets meatier every month, with so much food for thought. I look forward to receiving my magazine and letter every month, and I pray daily for all of you and the work you are doing.—Alabama

I thank our creator Father God for the peace and joy he has blessed me with through the inspired writings of PTM. Thank you for all you do—we love and appreciate you.—Oklahoma

Thanks for your commitment to the gospel. We appreciate the letters and magazines you continue to provide. Keep up God’s good work!—Michigan

Thank you, thank you, thank you for all you are doing for God’s work in teaching the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.—North Carolina

I pray for God's blessing on everyone at CWR/PTM that you will be able to continue this helpful, encouraging and hopeful ministry. —Puerto Rico

Thank you so much for serving those wounded by Christless and legalistic religion.—California

Thank you for the honor and privilege to be a part of PTM. It is my daily prayer that God will continue to bless this ministry and keep it going!—Texas

Thanks for all the great resources available on the web.—Philippines

Thank you for all the friends and partner letters—they are always so encouraging and helpful just when a good word is needed.—Kentucky

Thank you for encouraging us to keep our focus on Jesus. Your message is so needed.—California

I thank God for this ministry! CWR/PTM provides me with insight, hope and encouragement just when I need it most.—England

Thank you very much for the many ways you uplift and encourage so many of us around the world. We greatly appreciate and pray for this work.—Washington

Thank you for teaching us about Jesus and that it's ALL about him! —Tennessee

I am so thankful for you and all the resources you provide.—West Virginia

Thank you for all the gifts I've received from you, but most of all for the gift of introducing me to God's amazing grace! I pray God will increase the growth of CWR/PTM in the coming years. —South Carolina

I thank my God for everyone at CWR/PTM.—Virginia □

**In need of mending
from Christless
religion?**



**Jesus brings hope, comfort,
encouragement & healing.**



PTM/CWR — All Jesus, all the time

We Don't Need *Perfect* Mothers

Rachel Ramer

When my sisters and I face relationship challenges, we occasionally say to each other, "What would Mom have done? Let's *not* do *that*." This may seem disrespectful, casting our mother as a horrible role model, but the truth is, we sympathize with the struggles she faced and how she dealt with them. She grew up in a world where females were openly taught to acquiesce to the will of the men in their lives. The church, the workplace and the home all reinforced this. Society taught her not to stand up for her own needs, and she passed this tendency on to her daughters. We struggled to dismantle this message for ourselves.

On the other hand, she read to us when the house needed attention. She prioritized our education. She worked hard raising five children and she contributed to paying the bills, sometimes taking on two jobs. During that time, she encouraged us to be in choir and orchestra, to take singing, piano and art lessons. She let us find our own paths and supported our dreams. Still, Mom did not have the skills to help us with some of the crises we faced. The gaps in her understanding left holes in our lives. At times, she left us vulnerable. And yet...we knew she loved us.

"Good Enough" Mothers

British psychoanalyst and pediatrician Donald Winnicott would have called her a "good enough mother." To be clear, his understanding of "good enough" was a mom who had insight about when it was wise to back away from meeting every need. This was a mom who allowed her children to fail because rescuing them could stunt their growth. While people may disagree when the timing is best for a mother bird to push babies from a nest, the "good enough" mom had an intuitive sense of that critical moment.

Whether or not the "good enough" mom is insightful regarding the growth of her children, carefully calculating her child's independence and self-sufficiency, or the mom who makes mistakes and who doesn't fully understand this dynamic, the outcome can be nearly the same.

The key is love. Not the kind of "love" of Marie Barone from *Everybody Loves Raymond*, who made the lives of

her family miserable. And yet, when she embarrassed her oldest son, Robert, by attempting to keep him from joining the FBI, he recognized that his overbearing mother feared for his safety, and that she loved him. Imperfectly. Obnoxiously. ["Lucky Suit" 2002].

This is not to give abusive, neglectful mothers a pass. At first, I recoiled from the term "good enough" as with someone unwilling to do the job well. Yet, a lesson I learned in parenting is that when we strive for perfection, we create anxiety and sadness in our children. "Good enough" means alleviating pressure not only from our children but from ourselves.

Willing to Embrace Change

I found out recently my mother held views later in life I didn't know she held. A family friend who had been with Mom when she was diagnosed with cancer, who watched over her for Mom's two remaining years, talked with her about multiple issues while I was several states away raising young children. Mom had changed her mind about issues that surprised me.

One of my sons told me the most important thing I taught him was that it's okay to change our minds when we have more information/insight. I had no idea this was the message that would stand out to him, or that I had, up to a point, previously taught him the opposite. He had to grow up with an earlier version of me—one less experienced about relationships, one less perceptive, one clumsily striving for perfection.

Recently, when he was traveling by plane across several states, I asked him to keep me posted on his journey. A year earlier he had taken a trip to Colorado without my knowledge. So, he thought he would be funny by texting me details about switching flights, exactly when he landed, and where he was at different moments. I loved it. I didn't want to be an annoying, hovering mom, but I loved knowing *I could indulge in the imperfection of the mom who needed reassurances*.

We don't need perfect mothers—we *need good enough mothers*—those who love us, those prone to mistakes who are willing to embrace change. □

Rachel Ramer is host of "Lost the Legalism, Kept the Love" on Facebook.



Mother Jones

Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).

My folks were New Deal Democrats. They were convinced that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was doing all he could to help small farmers who were struggling financially even as my folks were. They listened faithfully to his fireside chats that carried the sense of his being a friend who cared about them personally. But his concern was not only for farmers; he supported workers' rights to unionize, a more controversial platform, and one that created large numbers of political enemies.

From the time I was little I heard stories about Aunt Jennie who stayed with us for extended periods of time, and how she adamantly refused to listen with my folks to the fireside chats. But as soon as he was finished, she would open the door and rage against everything FDR had said (for an old lady she had good hearing). She despised Roosevelt, accusing him of being a socialist or worse.

Long before FDR, however, there was Mother Jones. She was known best as a union organizer—a woman Aunt Jennie would have regarded even more odious than Roosevelt. Jones was alleged to be a hard-hitting woman especially by mine owners and industrialists. But her mission was to fight for men who were not being paid enough to feed and house their families. Too often women and children were forced to work in factories to make ends meet. The role for mothers, Mary Jones insisted, was in the home caring for children and seeing them off to school.

She had not had that opportunity herself. She was a widow living in Memphis with four little ones. Heavy rains in the spring of 1867 filled drainage ditches with stagnant water rife with mosquitoes.

Wealthy residents fled to their summer homes up north; others left to live with relatives out of town. Before spring was over all four of her children had died, while she remained to nurse the sick.

From Memphis, Jones moved to Chicago where she worked as a seamstress and set up her own dress shop. But everything she had was destroyed in the raging Chicago fire of 1871. Now she was determined to become a union organizer as her husband had been. Without any training, she effectively organized mine workers and was called “the most dangerous woman in America.”

Mother Jones was an unusual union organizer who rallied thousands of workers' wives to picket alongside their husbands and sons during strikes,

...called “the most dangerous woman in America,” Mother Jones was an angel of mercy, crowned with *tender mercies*.

sometimes also when the men were working inside the mines and factories. Indeed, she made the demand for higher wages and better working conditions a family affair, recruiting wives and children to “man” the picket lines. A man's pay profoundly affected the whole family. If a woman had to work, so did the children since childcare was nonexistent or impossibly expensive. Thus, child labor was commonplace. And that is where her outrage was aimed most fiercely.

In 1903, Mother Jones organized a children's march to Theodore Roosevelt's luxurious home on Oyster Bay Long Island to demand laws against children working in factories and mines. There were no immediate results but within a decade TR, as a Progressive leader, was strongly opposing child labor.

I could wish that Aunt Jennie would have admired Mother Jones, but unfortunately too often minds are closed and virtually nothing can pry them open. Mary Jones refused to allow devastating setbacks interfere with her commitment to children. They needed fathers who earned enough money to support a mother to care for them. Mother Jones was an angel of mercy, crowned with *tender mercies*. □

—Ruth Tucker



Quotes & Connections



"Stop trying to protect, to rescue, to judge, to manage the lives around you—your children's lives, the lives of your husband, your wife, your friends—because that is just what you are powerless to do. Remember that the lives of other people are not your business. They are their business. They are God's business because they all have God whether they use the word God or not. Even your own life is not your business. It also is God's business. Leave it to God. It is an astonishing thought. It can become a life-transforming thought."—Frederick Buechner

"Mother is the name for God in the lips and hearts of little children."—William Makepeace Thackeray

"If at first you don't succeed, try doing it the way Mom told you to in the beginning."—Unknown

"Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards."—Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

"Jesus did not start his 'professional life' (ministering, teaching and healing) by posting a sign outside of a 'holy' building announcing healing services and prophecy seminars. Jesus didn't wait for people to find him. Instead, he found people in the midst of their daily problems, dilemmas, challenges and struggles... Jesus didn't wear a religious uniform and he didn't talk funny. Instead of quoting dead theologians, Jesus told colorful and memorable stories."—Greg Albrecht

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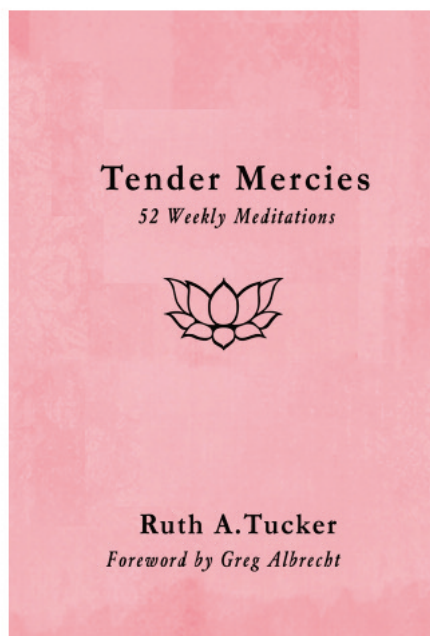
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CWR Press is pleased to publish this tribute edition of Tender Mercies!



The lotus, a flower that rises from the mud without blemish, is a universal symbol of rebirth. It crosses cultures and transcends religions to proclaim the tender mercies of our God.

Ruth Tucker is truly a lotus of divine grace.

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