

## THE APOSTOLIC BLESSING

The Grace of God the Son -- The Love of God the Father -- Our union with God the Holy Spirit.

**TEXT:** *May 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

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

There is the Aaronic blessing and the Apostolic blessing. The Aaronic blessing is found in Numbers 6, where the Bible says: *The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ""The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."" ' "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."* Obviously, we call this the "Aaronic Blessing because God told Moses to have his brother Aaron use this blessing to declare his gracious name and to put that name on the Israelites.

The Apostolic Blessing gets its name from being the blessing used by the apostles. So in the conclusion of Paul's second letter to the Corinthian congregation, he declares: *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* What's the difference between two blessings? While the words are different, the substance of both blessings is the same.

Both are "Trinitarian," that is, both are God's revelation of himself, The Lord, who is one God, yet three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Both bestow his richest blessings of grace and salvation upon those who are called by his name, in both the Old Testament days and in the New. The Grace of God, revealed through Jesus to the glory of the Father; The Love of God, revealed to the universe and understood by God's children; and, Our union with God, established by the power of the Holy Spirit and revealed by the fellowship we have through the Gospel.

On the night before Jesus died on the cross, he had a long prayer that consisted of three parts. First he prayed for himself, the Son of God. Then he prayed for his disciples who were there with him. Finally, he prayed for us, his future disciples. In praying for himself, the Bible says: *After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.* Jn 17 There are only a few who are able to see any glory in the cross of Christ. We see the glory of God in that God's promise to defeat Satan, and to pay for the sin of all mankind so that through the forgiveness of sins we might have eternal life. The glory is this undeserved love of God that we call "the grace of God."

But we often fail to see this glory, for when our Lord Jesus says to us, his disciples: *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me...* Mt 16 But we find no joy in being part of any sort of cross-carrying. There is the little story of a Christian upon whose shoulders the Lord placed a heavy cross. His life was miserable and regularly complained and asked the Lord to take it away. Then one day, God came to him and invited him to enter a room filled with crosses. God told him that he could exchange his cross for any one of the others in the room. There were many crosses from which to choose. Then his eyes spied a beautiful golden cross full of jewels. Excited, he exchanged his miserable cross for the one that offered great wealth. But within a few months, the burden of great wealth brought him heartaches for which he was not prepared. He saw that he was losing his family to the ways of the world. So he begged God for a different cross. Spying a small cross promising little weight and few problems, he quickly exchanged the heavy golden cross for the small one. But that cross was so light he didn't notice that he was becoming proud and arrogant. His friends and family couldn't stand to be around him. He began to lecture others and urged them to be more like him in their faith. So he asked the Lord for another cross exchange. Entering the room full of crosses, he spied another average-looking plain cross, rough-hewn and having splinters. When he told God that he would give that cross a try, the Lord told him, "that was the original cross I gave you to carry for me at the start." A cute story illustrating the truth that our Lord knows us perfectly and is able to give us his goodness in the cross he has chosen to place upon our shoulders. We should learn to trust him!

The cross given Jesus also was "tailor-made" for him. Paul says in an earlier chapter of this same epistle: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* 2 Co 5 And then, in Hebrews we are told: *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our*

*faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.* He 12 And so the inspired apostle Paul blesses us with these words: *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ... be with you all.* May your God-given, tailor-made crosses bless you by keeping your eyes of faith fixed on Jesus, the *author and perfecter of our faith!*

Next, we are to declare in this Apostolic Blessing: *May ... the love of God ... be with you all.* The Psalm-writer writes: *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.* Ps 19 God's goodness is revealed in nature and is seen by men. Even the ungodly are able to see this and often say things like "God is great; God is good," even though they do not know the true God through Jesus. Jesus also points this out when he declared: *(The Father) causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.* Mt 5 Much to the consternation of our own sinful nature we see this and sometimes join Jeremiah in his complaint: *Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?* Jer 12 Yet, as we have already said, we, God's people, are given crosses to bear throughout our lives here on this earth.

So what good does this Apostolic Blessing bestow upon us? What good is there in all the pain and suffering of this life? Two things. First, even the great apostle Paul was given a heavy cross to bear. His cross was some sort of very painful physical ailment. He was convinced that if he wasn't suffering so severely he would have the strength and energy to do more for the Lord. So Paul prayed. He writes in the previous chapter of this letter: *To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* 2 Co 12 This is God's greatest goodness! In addition to all that we need for body and life, he gives to us in proportion what he knows is best for our life here on earth. As Paul also writes about all of God's Elect: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* Ro 8

So how can I be certain that I am one of God's Elect upon whom all God's grace and mercy falls, from the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation to all that I need in perfect proportion to what will aid and assist me in living out my life here on earth until my work is done? It is the gracious power of the Holy Spirit who gives me that answer: *May ... the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

It is the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, Jesus, out into the world to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify men, women and children with the power of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, creating faith in hearts even of little children, and making us members of his Kingdom, the Communion of Saints, and of the family of God. Paul declares: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* Ga 3

This blessing, just as with the Aaronic blessing, is proclaimed before the people of God after our worship services because it is through the Gospel that is preached here that the Holy Spirit works to strengthen our faith so that we always remain in fellowship with God and with one another. Our union with God through faith in Jesus also unites us to all other believers in Jesus. The Creeds call this union, "The Holy Christian Church, The Communion of Saints."

Following this sermon, we will read portions of the creed known as "The Athanasian Creed." Due to heresies in the church at that time in history, the true disciples of God and his word wrote and confessed this creed in defense of the mystery of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Note that this truth will be confessed by us today, that if anyone does not believe in the Triune God who as revealed himself as one God yet three distinct persons, he cannot be saved.

The Feast of the Holy Trinity is a celebration of the Triune God who by the Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel to know Jesus our Savior and King to the glory of God the Father. So it is in the context of this faith that we declare: *the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.*