

Refresh on God's Triple Blessing

△ **Grace**

△ **Love**

△ **Fellowship**

In the Name of our Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – dearly created, redeemed, sanctified:

If you wanted to describe our culture today with one word, what would that be? *Materialistic, greedy, confused* – all these could be used for any generation back to the children of Adam and Eve after the Fall into sin. But if Hollywood is any indication, if you can stand to listen, it's clear their vocabulary has suffered in recent years. Many actors and actresses seem to be stuck on one letter of the alphabet and can't get much further into the vast treasure of English words they could be using. Writers complain that everything is off-limits – humor, sarcasm, joking – that not so long ago would have swelled their audiences. But it's just more of the same old blame game which can't excuse the character of our culture. If anything, our music and movies suggest one word. It's all about *cursing*. This is the *cursing culture*.

Do we fall into the trap? Maybe letting some curse words slip every once in a while? Maybe excuse our substitute cursing which doesn't quite say bad words, but it's obvious what's meant. And if the cursing doesn't always come out of our mouth, can any of us deny that obscenities sometimes shout in hearts? We can't help reflecting the times in which we live, any more than you could keep your boots and jeans spotless while cleaning out a dairy barn. Let's face it. By nature our sins stink too.

Summertime in the country if the wind is blowing the wrong direction, will assault your senses in the humidity and heat. Vacation travels in the Midwest with the windows down can help you appreciate heaven's gift. It's so much sweeter here where we can **Refresh on God's Triple Blessing**, first with...

△ **Grace**

God's **Grace** is like a fragrant flower garden no barnyard can beat. Especially when you think of all the grief the Lord's Apostle Paul suffered with this Corinthian congregation in two of his longest letters. He knows the problems he will face in writing, yet begins both his letters with the same warm greeting: ***"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!"*** (1_1:3; 2_1:2 EHV) You know how I've often said that if there were a store where you could buy congregational problems, the labels would not read, "Made in China," or "Made in America," but "Made in Corinth." And yet Paul closes this second letter with pure **Grace**: ***"Finally, brothers, rejoice. Set things in order. Be encouraged. Agree with one another. Be at peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."***

Finally suggests there's no more to say. No hidden agenda. Plain honesty is pure **Grace** too, isn't it? And ***brothers*** – such **Grace** in that. Jesus first called His disciples, ***"My brothers..."*** on Easter morning first appearing to Mary Magdalene. (Mark 16:9; John 20:14-17) After Peter denied knowing Jesus, Judas betrayed Him, and all the rest ran away, Jesus begins to call them ***"my brothers"***? That one word could comfort them with pure **Grace** for all eternity because it means they're still included in God's family. So if you feel you've disappointed God and your family and yourself, here's some real refreshing **Grace** from the Triune God. And He means to treat the boys and girls with equal love by calling us all ***"brothers."*** Instead of the divisions of our confused cursing culture, **God's Triple Blessing** calls us all to ***rejoice***. This summer as we study Paul's Captivity Letters in Adult/Teen Bible Class on Wednesdays, we'll see again and again this miracle of rejoicing even when Paul is in prison.

Set things in order is actually a Greek word Jesus' disciples would understand. You can still see fishermen on the shores of Galilee casting their nets which get torn and need mending to prepare for the next day. The more we keep casting the net of the Gospel to draw in the souls **Grace** wants to catch in God's love, the more we need to be setting things in order. As sainted Pastor Richard Lauersdorf put it, this "describes someone who fits into his proper place and performs his proper function."¹

When a congregation keeps refreshing on **God's Triple Blessing**, it comes as naturally as love for newlyweds: "*Be encouraged. Agree with one another. Be at peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.*" God Himself brings the **Grace** that refreshes weary souls, helping us refresh each other too.

△ Love

In such a cursing culture, **God's Triple Blessing** which includes **Love** needs extra explanation. And frankly, this is one that most any other culture seems to understand better than northern Europeans. Unless you come from a hugging family, and even if you do in this "Me-Too" time, Paul's words here may raise a few eyebrows: "*Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.*"

This is obviously not talking about Hollywood affection and physical abuse. Paul explained this to Pastor Titus who was serving on the island of Crete. The Cretans by their own admission were "*always liars, vicious beasts, and lazy gluttons.*" (Titus 1:12) So it helped Titus to hear Paul set the record straight on **Love**: "*To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.*" (Titus 1:15 NIV84)

Practicing pure **Love** and affection in warm greetings is one reason we don't make this mandatory. Years ago the sister of one of our members described her visit to a church where the pastor always called for "the holy kiss" at the end of each service. What was she to think when an older man about her age kept coming over to her from the far side of the sanctuary? Not much of a "holy kiss" for her! More and more our cursing culture wants to blame the women for their feelings. The God of **Love** demonstrated His **Love** for us by sending His Son Jesus to be our Savior. He respects our feelings with refreshment for men and women. It comes from God through His family made holy in Christ: "*All the saints greet you.*"

△ Fellowship

Fellowship with God can be so surprising with comfort and peace. One dark and lonely night I was caught off guard by this, as if someone were whispering to me, "*God sends his love and his faithfulness.*" (Psalm 57:3) "*God sends his love*"? That's really awesome! And "*his faithfulness*" too!

One old man liked to say that if the only thing he got out of a worship service was the Benediction or Blessing at the end, that would make it worthwhile for him to go. The Creation account in our First Reading from Genesis (1:1 – 2:3) helps us see why this is so true. Every time the Creator spoke, "*It came to be.*" Human words don't have that power, but God's words do, even when we humans repeat them. That's why when Balaam was hired to curse the Israelites, he had to admit: "*Whoever blesses you is blessed, whoever curses you is cursed.*" (Numbers 24:9 TPA) Can you give God's refreshing **Blessing** to friends and neighbors or travelers you meet along the way? "God bless you," means, "May God find you with His pure **Grace, Love, and Fellowship**, bringing you into His family by Word and sacrament."

God never fails to help in every need. This Apostolic Blessing gives **Triple** from the Triune God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all take part as the great Three-in-One God of the Bible restores your soul. "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ*" – He personally paid with His own blood to give you God's undeserved kindness and mercy. *And the love of God* – because "*God is love,*" it's the true essence of the Father for you too. "*And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*" We are united with God and each other by the Holy Spirit's Word and sacraments. Flowers from heaven – so refreshing! Amen.

¹ Lauersdorf, Richard, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 86, No. 4, p. 276.