

How to Describe the Trinity

The Father who is at peace with us

The Son who gives us access

The Spirit who gives us hope

If you want to frustrate someone, ask him to describe a spiral staircase without using his hands. Even with your hands, it is hard to describe. And yet, when you see a spiral staircase, you know exactly what it is and what it's for. It is impossible to describe our Triune God in a way that makes sense to human logic. The Bible does not give us an exact dictionary description of the Trinity such as: "One God existing in three coequal, coeternal, consubstantial divine persons: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit." Instead, the Bible simply shows us what our Triune God does. In Romans 5, the Apostle Paul simply refers to the Father, Son and Spirit by what they do for us.

The Father who is at peace with us

Romans 5 begins with, "**therefore,**" which points back to all of chapters 1-4 of Romans where St. Paul carefully explained that every one of us is sinful but Jesus came to save every one of us from our sins. In chapter 4, he explained that salvation comes to us through faith, simple trust in the heart. Chapter 4 finishes with, "**Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.**" "Justification" was a legal term which means "to be declared innocent." The fact that Jesus rose from the dead is proof positive that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross paid for all of our sins. Even though you and I are sinful through and through, because of Jesus, God declares us to be innocent of all sin and guilt. You are justified.

Paul continues in chapter 5, "**Therefore, since we have been justified** [declared innocent of all sin] **through faith, we have peace with God.**" In order to understand this better, let's travel back to the Garden of Eden and look at Adam and Eve after they ate the forbidden fruit. For the first time in their lives, they felt shame. They were ashamed of how they looked and how they looked at each other. They were also terrified. God told them that if they ate from the forbidden tree, they "**would surely die.**" They felt like prisoners on death row and there was no way to escape. With trembling hands, they sewed some fig leaves together. The leaves covered a bit of their body, but could not cover up their sin. When God called out for them, they tried to hide from God like a 3-year-old who broke a lamp and tried to hide from mom behind his bedroom door. Adam and Eve were terrified to stand before God, just like we would be terrified if someone pointed a loaded gun at us. But God did not call them out in order to destroy them. He called them out from behind the bushes and led them to admit their sin

because he wanted to tell them that he was going to send a Savior to take away their sin. Jesus was finally born as that Savior and it's no surprise that the angels sang about peace when he was born.

The story of Adam and Eve is not just ancient history. It is also a view into our own condition with God. Just like Adam and Eve, we deserve to be exiled from God into eternal suffering in hell. Each and every one of our sins is just as deadly serious as what Adam and Eve did. The reason we do not run and hide like they did is because we've gotten so comfortable living with our sin and guilt. God does not blast us with a lightning bolt every time we sin, so it's easy for us to think that our sins are not such a big deal. God does not need to confront us personally like he did Adam and Eve or zap with a lightning bolt, because he already told us everything we need to know about sin and guilt and death in the Bible.

God took all of his righteous anger over sin and blasted Jesus as he hung on the cross. Since Jesus was punished for your sins, God is not going to punish you. Your sins are forgiven. Even though we are sinful through and through, God declares you to be innocent of all sin. Instead of going to hell, you get to go to heaven. Because of Jesus, God the Father is not angry with you. He smiles on you. He looks at you with love. You do not need to be afraid of God. You are at peace with God.

The peace that we have with God the Father is not a mere emotion, like feeling peaceful when you watch the sun rise over a calm Lake Michigan. Your peace with God the Father is an objective reality whether you feel peaceful or not. The Father is at peace with you even when you are sleeping and are not aware of anything. Things between you and God are just as peaceful as it was for Adam and Eve before they sinned. Your relationship with God is good. When you pray the Lord's Prayer and begin with, "Our Father," you can smile to know that even though you are far from perfect, God the Father is smiling on you and eager to bless you.

The Son who gives us access

Your peace with God is also marked by continual unhampered access to God. St. Paul explained in verse 2, "**through whom [Jesus] we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.**" We have access to the Father because Jesus took away the sin that was keeping us separate from God. Recently I stumbled upon a story about a boy with a friend named Dale. Dale's father ran the projectors in the local movie theater. When he wanted to see a movie, he went with Dale and Dale's dad got him in for free, as well as free popcorn. Through Dale, he had access to his father and all the same privileges of his son. In the same way, you have the same access to the Father as Jesus does. God will not turn you away. You have unlimited, free access – any time, for whatever

reason. Think of Jesus walking us into the Father's throne room and saying, "Dad, my brother – or sister – here wants to talk to you." And God will give you his undivided attention.

You can turn to God in every need.

- When you are depressed, you have access to God who reminds you how much he has done for you and how much he cares about you.
- When you are confused, you have access to God who promises that he has a plan to bless you and not to harm you.
- When you are overwhelmed, you have access to God who lets you know that he has everything under control.
- When you are frustrated, you have access to God who says that he will work out all things for your eventual and eternal good.
- When you are betrayed by friends and family, you have access to God who calls you his own dear son or daughter and promises that he will never leave you or forsake you.
- When you are a bit apprehensive of death, you have access to God who says that he has a place prepared for you by his side.

Notice, also, how Paul says, "**this grace in which we now stand.**" That is an unusual phrase. Think of standing in a room called grace. The walls, ceiling and floor are all grace. You are surrounded by God's undeserved love and no guilt can get to you. Every sin is neutralized by God's grace. God's grace is not something he gives you a little at a time. It is his attitude toward you all the time. Through faith you are constantly surrounded by God's grace. Forgiveness is not like taking a bath once a week. It is like standing in the rain all of the time. It's easy to think that we pile up sins until we come to church and are forgiven. But that's not how God's grace works. You are forgiven all the time. Tragically, those who reject Jesus as their Savior and push him away by purposefully living a sinful lifestyle will be stuck with their sins for all of eternity. Through faith, you are standing in God's grace cleansed of all your sins. To stand in God's grace means to know you are justified and are going to live forever in the presence of God's glory.

The Spirit who gives us hope

Paul also said that we (:3-4), "**glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.**" Being a Christian will not get you a fun-filled and fluffy life. Not only does Paul say that Christians will suffer, he even says that we will be happy, or glory, or rejoice in our sufferings. No one enjoys suffering, but follow Paul's logic here. An athlete gets stronger by exercising. "No pain, no gain," they say. In the same way, trials and temptations strengthen the muscles of our faith as they are stretched and tested through earthly trouble. God permits the devil to afflict you with some suffering because he knows that he is going to use it to get

you to hang on to him even tighter. We rejoice in sufferings because they drive us back to God's Word which strengthens our faith. Suffering does not mean that God is angry with you. Instead, it is a compliment. He is saying that your faith is ready to move up to the next grade level.

The patient endurance built up in us by trials in turn builds a genuine Christian character in us – that is, character which is more spiritual and less worldly. When the devil afflicts you with some type of suffering you can laugh at him. You can laugh at the devil like when you are playing checkers with someone and the other person moves his piece to attack you without realizing that he just set himself up to get triple-jumped and your checker gets crowned. The devil wants you to suffer hoping that you will give up on God who is supposed to make you happy. But in the end, you are hanging on to God even tighter. Ha! The genuine Christian character built in us by patient endurance in turn builds in us a focus on our glorious future

Paul said in verse 2, "**we boast in the hope of the glory of God.**" And in verse 5, "**Hope does not put us to shame.**" If I hope there will be a brand-new Rolls-Royce car in my driveway after church, I could boast to you. "I'm going to get a brand-new Rolls-Royce." But when you leave church and see that there is no brand-new Rolls Royce in my driveway, then I would feel like a fool for boasting. Hope makes you ashamed when it does not come true. But the hope that you have in Christ is never going to make you ashamed.

If you put your hope in having good health, you will be disappointed. If you put your hope in having a smooth life, a lot of friends, the perfect family, the greatest job, you will be disappointed. But when your hope is in Lamb of God, Paul says that you do not just have reason to be content, you have reason to boast, to rejoice and be glad because you cannot be dropped by the one who already carried this whole world's burdens. You cannot be rejected by the one who already forgave your sins. You cannot be misled by the one who already showed you the way. And you cannot be let down by the only one who already faced every pressure you do, and overcame. Just as someone waters the plants in his garden, the Holy Spirit is pouring out God's love onto you so that you grow in grace and knowledge and faith.

It is impossible to describe our Triune God in a way that makes sense to human logic. So what? An infant does not need to be able to describe what a mommy is in order for him to feel safe and secure in her arms. If you want to describe the Trinity, the best you can do is to say that you feel safe and secure because the Father is at peace with you, the Son gives you access and the Spirit gives you hope that will not disappoint you. Your Triune God loves you. You are saved. Amen.