

Doxology

II Corinthian 13:14 (11/18/2018)

On this Sunday before Thanksgiving, when we probably should be confessing in advance our sins of gluttony (right?; although, I really don't think that's how confession is supposed to work); but instead, we're going to talk today about DOXOLOGY.

Doxology simply means "words of glory, or expressions of praise." To give thanks to God is a... doxology. It's an offering of praise to God for His love for us and His gracious provision for our needs.

To help us express our gratitude, we're also going to look at a benediction—likely the best known benediction of all. Benedictions are prayers that one person makes on behalf of another, and the prayer says something to the effect of "God bless you."

Doxologies happen when we come to understand how truly blessed we are. Benedictions remind us of where our blessings come from—we acknowledge God as their source.

Which brings us to this: when we hear the word "Doxology," what do we think of? Sure, it's that thing we sing most Sundays—that some people don't want to sing, and others might shoot you if you don't! Who knew praising God could be so dangerous?!?

Around here, we sometimes sing "The Gloria Patri" instead—but we have no idea what that is! "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost..." Remember, it's that other doxology.

This morning, though, we'll stick with the doxology we know best. A man named Thomas Ken was born in England in the year 1637. He was educated at Oxford, and ordained to the ministry in 1662.

I'm telling you about Thomas Ken because of a hymn he wrote. The hymn is called "Awake My Soul, and with the Sun." I think he wrote it right after time change Sunday—only in the Spring, when the sun was rising about an hour earlier than the week before!

Actually, hymns were controversial back then. Most people believed that only Scripture should be sung in worship; but Thomas Ken wrote hymns anyway; and one stanza of this particular hymn

became the most frequently used piece of music in public worship. Listen to how the hymn begins (this won't be as familiar):

**Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run;
Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise,
To pay thy morning sacrifice.**

**Thy precious time misspent, redeem,
Each present day thy last esteem,
Improve thy talent with due care;
For the great day thyself prepare.**

**By influence of the Light divine
Let thy own light to others shine.
Reflect all Heaven's propitious ways
In ardent love, and cheerful praise.**

Now, there are seven other verses to this hymn, but in the interest of time, we'll skip ahead now to the last stanza:

**Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

With Thanksgiving fast approaching, let's spend a few moments reflecting on God's blessings in our lives. This is, after all, what moves us to Doxology—to offer up these "expressions of praise!"

Now, whether we express our praise by singing the *Doxology* or the *Gloria Patri*, we include in these expressions God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit.

Our text today is the best known benediction in the Bible. It's found in **II Corinthians 13:14**, and says "**May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.** (say it with me)

Paul closes his second letter to the church at Corinth with these words of blessing. Paul wrote several blessings, but this one is most familiar. It's called the Apostolic Benediction, since it came to us by way of the Apostle Paul. It's also known as the Trinitarian Benediction because of its reference to Father, Son, and Spirit.

It's short and simple; yet it beautifully expresses the "fullness" of the Christian experience: the grace, love, and fellowship of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. How good for one Christian to pray for these blessings to be present in the life of a fellow believer.

This is what Paul is doing. And it's worth noting that he reserves this unrivaled statement of Christian benediction for the church at Corinth--it's a great testimony to Paul's Christian spirit!

It's difficult to imagine that any church gave Paul more grief than Corinth. He speaks of writing to them "out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears..." This group broke Paul's heart in many ways, questioning his apostleship, accusing him of dishonesty, and insisting that he couldn't preach!

Still, Paul closes this letter by praying for them to receive grace, love, and fellowship. Not many people could respond in such loving ways to those who had been so "hateful" to them.

But Paul did. In this way, Paul demonstrated that he had personally experienced what he was offering to them: 'the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.'

Now, I want you to see what Paul does here. He gives us the essence of the doctrine of the Trinity. Paul never used the word, "Trinity," or mentioned a "Triune God" or "Trinitarian Doctrine."

It was nearly 400 years later, in fact, when St. Augustine described the Doctrine of the Trinity for the first time after the early church fathers had tried for years to explain "God in Three Persons."

We take this for granted now. We sing "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost..." or "Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost" or "God in three Persons, blessed Trinity." We baptize "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

We speak the words without considering the mystery. The early church fathers took time to ponder the mystery, and tried to put into words what they already believed in their hearts.

What they believed was this. First, they believed in one God. There could be no compromise. One ultimate reality stands behind all creation, and He alone is holy. He alone is God. One God.

The classic Jewish confession of faith is the "Shema." That's a Hebrew word meaning "Listen! Now hear this!" The faithful recited it twice each day, morning and evening. It goes like this: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."

This conviction that there is only one God is just as important for the New Testament Church. Jesus made this clear. A teacher of the Law came to Jesus with this question: "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:29)

We have a clear word from Jesus: "There is only one God." Yet we also have the New Testament which gives divine authority to Jesus Christ. Our confession of faith is "Christ is Lord."

See the problem? How can both Yahweh, the Lord God, and Jesus the Christ... be "Lord?" By definition, there's only one Lord. Then there's the Holy Spirit who is also God! It's confusing.

The Church struggled with this. Its leaders had long meetings called councils to pray and discuss these issues. Finally, they arrived at this. First, "God is one." And second, "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God."

That's it—the Doctrine of the Trinity. It's as simple as that. At the same time, it's as mysterious and profound as that. The best theological minds came together, and soon realized they were at a loss to explain God. All they could do was to preserve the mystery.

They affirmed their experience of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—GOD, in THREE PERSONS—the TRINITY. They formed a doctrine, but it was founded upon their own personal experience.

This is important: "Doctrine has little meaning outside of experience." We only come to grips with a doctrine's meaning when it becomes part of our own experience.

Here's an example. I've heard the word "Father" all my life. For a long time, I've had the ability to define "Father." But it was not

until I went through the birth of our first child that I could speak of fatherhood from personal experience. (Soon... grand fatherhood!)

I could define "Father;" but then I became a father. That made all the difference in the world in my understanding. The definition took on new meaning once it became personal experience. And the longer I experience life as a father, the richer and more precious my understanding of fatherhood becomes.

We come to understand the Trinity in much the same way. First, we have the doctrine--the definition. But understanding what this means comes as we personally experience "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit."

Paul just reversed the process. He had the experience first. The Doctrine—the attempt to explain what it means--came later.

I. So with that, let's take a look at Paul's experience of God. It begins with **THE GRACE OF CHRIST**. This is what Paul first offered the Corinthians: "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...be with you all."

This may seem strange at first. We might expect Paul to begin with the love of God. But Paul's experience was rooted in the grace of Christ Jesus.

Grace had sought and found and forgiven Paul on the Damascus road. And grace remained the source of all that Paul was and all he did. He wrote, "by grace are you saved." But underlying that message was Paul's firm conviction, "By grace...I am saved."

By the grace of Christ, Paul's burden was lifted. He was forgiven. He became a new man in Christ. And he was forever thankful.

Our experience of God is rooted in the grace of Christ. We've received something that we don't deserve; something that we cannot earn; something that comes to us only as a gift.

We've received forgiveness, reconciliation, new life through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Doxology—"Praise God from whom all blessings flow!"

II. Now we're ready to talk about **THE LOVE OF GOD**. Once we experience the grace of Christ, our hearts are open to God's love.

It was the grace of Jesus Christ that made "the love of God" real for Paul. God was no longer just a Lawgiver and Judge. Now He had become for Paul the Father-God who loves us.

D.M. Baillie, in writing about the cross of Jesus, said: "The most remarkable fact in the whole history of religious thought is this: that when the early Christians looked back and pondered the dreadful thing that had happened, it made them think of the redeeming love of God."

That's powerful. It's been this way for Christians down through the ages, and it is now. We view Christ's life and His death, and we affirm by faith that it happened because "God so loved the world."

Folks get confused. Like Saul, the Pharisee, they see God primarily as the great giver of laws and judgments. In their minds, God's will is summarized by the phrase, "Thou shalt not."

Even Christians, in an effort to gain God's favor, may organize their entire lives around a system of rules and regulations. They may become negative and judgmental. They carry around a heavy burden, always trying to work their way to God.

Paul encountered people like this in church. When he did, he sought to help them understand the true nature of the Gospel: 1) that God is love; 2) and that they were wasting their time trying to work their way up to God because, in His infinite love, He had already reached down to them.

As Paul said in his letter to the Romans: "...God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Which is to say that the grace we know in Christ is consistent with the very nature of the Father. He... loves us.

Knowing this makes us more loving. Earlier, Paul had told the Corinthians that we can perform all kinds of good works; but if we don't have love, those deeds count for nothing. Paul experienced the grace of Christ, and that's when he discovered the love of God. Doxology—"Praise God from whom all blessings flow!"

III. Then Paul tells us about one more aspect of his experience of God: **THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**. Paul knew that God's Spirit was a living, active presence in his life.

The Holy Spirit gave Paul the power to sing while his body was bound in chains. The Spirit gave him the courage to preach the Gospel even to those who threatened his life for doing so. The Holy Spirit made his relationship with God deep and personal.

At the same time, Paul experienced an exciting new relationship with those who had the same Spirit of God in their lives. That's the fellowship of the Holy Spirit—this common bond we share in the Body of Christ. The church is not just another organization. We are bound together by the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit is the source of our strength and comfort. He fills us with love and concern for one another. His Presence among us shapes and forms us together into the church of Jesus Christ.

Paul experienced the grace, love and fellowship of God. He was grateful, and he wanted everyone to share in these blessings:

- 1) The blessing of **GRACE**—underserved gifts of forgiveness, reconciliation, and new life in Christ.
- 2) All of these being gifts of **LOVE**—because "God is love."
- 3) Which brings us to **FELLOWSHIP**. God's Spirit in us makes for a rich and meaningful fellowship—a powerful bond of love and concern for one another.

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

This, friends, is our greatest blessing! So, because we know and understand this... **Doxology!**

**Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**