

Many of us have learned to associate the word holy with the idea of perfect. That's not wrong. If you look at an English dictionary the word is defined as sacred or consecrated to God. But the biblical word goes deeper than that. The fact that God is holy refers to him being unique and pure in the sense of superior moral qualities and possessing certain essential divine qualities in contrast with what is human.

It calls to mind his sinlessness and absolute purity. He has no fault. It is this holiness that can not allow sin to be in his presence. If he did not oppose sin he would cease to be holy. Therefore this holiness separates God from sinners.

But his uniqueness doesn't stop there. In his holiness God is also all-knowing, he's all-powerful, he's eternal, he's independent from all around, and he is perfectly just and perfectly loves. It also teaches us that he is triune.

Now, the teaching of the Trinity is beyond our powers of human comprehension. Human reason simply cannot understand how there can be only one God yet still be three distinct persons within that one Godhead. Trying to solve the problem with our human reason will always fall short and will lead down a path of error. However, the mind that is ruled by faith does not stumble over this fact. It is what the Holy Spirit has revealed to us.

1. What does holy mean?

2. Name some ways that God is unique.

3. How can we explain the Trinity as three persons and yet one God in a way that makes sense?

Prayer: O Triune God, we thank you for your great power, love and mercy which you daily reveal to us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

There is great comfort for us in the teaching that God is Triune. It is not a dry piece of theology. It is not a teaching to dismiss with a shrug of the shoulders. The triune God is the God of our salvation. Apart from the triune God one cannot be saved. He is the only true God.

So, a proper understanding of the Trinity is directly connected with a right knowledge of our salvation. God the Father gave us life and continues to preserve our life by providing for all our daily needs. God the Son died for our sins and saved our soul from hell and damnation. God the Holy Spirit has brought us to faith and keeps us in the faith through the Word and sacraments.

What a fitting way, then, to start a service. For the hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty” highlights the God we have come to worship. It instructs us in who he is. In calling to mind his holiness it sets the tone for the proper fear and respect we are to have as we enter his presence. He’s not this “buddy” to whom we offer a fist bump and pat on the back; he’s not some side-show who deserves only half of our attention; he’s not some entertainer from whom we demand a show. He’s the God of the universe; the God of creation; the God who hates sin; the God who loves the sinner.

And, in incredible fashion, this song unites us with the angels in heaven who sing: **“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!”** And again we hear, **“In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures (angels), and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back...Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come’”** (Revelation 4:6,8).

1. Are we unloving or intolerant when we proclaim that everyone who does not worship the triune God is actually worshipping a false god or a god who does not exist?

2. How is a proper understanding of the Trinity directly connected with a right knowledge of our salvation?

3. What is a good attitude to have as we come to worship our holy God?

Prayer: O Triune God, forgive us for our doubts and through your Spirit grant us faith to believe. Be with us with your almighty power and love. Amen.

Ephesians 2:8-10 Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them.

You hear it often within a worship service – the word grace. It can be heard in sermons, prayers, and sung in hymns. Some churches even have it as their name. But are you sure of its exact meaning? Grace is God's undeserved love. And let's take a moment to examine that meaning.

First, let us consider the fact that it is undeserved. Recall that earlier we were reminded that God is holy. That calls to mind his sinlessness and absolute purity. He has no fault. It is this holiness that can not allow sin to be in his presence. Therefore this holiness separates God from sinners.

That is not good news for us, because that's what we are – sinners. We are sinners the moment we enter this world. That sinfulness shows itself already in the selfishness we demonstrated as toddlers – demanding that everything be mine. Then, in adolescence it shows up in our rebellion against authority. As adults it would be nice to say we have grown out of such sinfulness, but the truth of the matter is, all we've really done is perfected the art of sinning.

So where does that leave us? It leaves us outside of God's kingdom. It leaves us separated from God. It leaves us staring down the dungeon of hell. For we have nothing to offer a holy God that would remove the guilt of our sin and allow us to be in his presence. That's the way it would end for us if not for God's grace.

1. What does grace mean?
2. Discuss/consider the “undeserved” aspect of grace.
3. What do you suppose the devotion is trying to say when we read, “As adults...all we've really done is perfected the art of sinning”?

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your unmerited love for us. We do not deserve it or earn it. Amen.

We can't earn forgiveness and we don't deserve salvation. And each day we need to be reminded of this truth because it's the opposite of the way the world works. The world operates on the basis of work and wages. Whatever we have in this world, generally speaking, we have earned. A faithful workers paycheck is something that justly comes to them because they have earned it. They merit their paycheck. They deserve the wages that they are being paid. But that's not true when it comes to forgiveness and salvation.

Forgiveness and salvation come only from God's gracious love. In a most marvelous and undeserved way, our holy God restored harmony and peace between himself and the world. He did it at the greatest cost to himself. He sent his one and only Son into the world to take our place. Jesus carried all your sins together with all the sins of all the sinners in the world to the cross. There your sins were all counted against Jesus. There Jesus received the full justice of a holy God. There Jesus suffered the eternal flames of our hell. There God's perfect love for you was exercised. For our sins are not counted against us. Not one of them is counted against you.

And it's not a matter of trying to prove that we deserve this. We never could. It is ours for free. It is ours by faith. It is ours because Jesus earned it for us. It is ours because of God's grace. But let us never think that because it is free, that means it's cheap. While grace costs us nothing, it cost Jesus his very life to get it for us. Grace was purchased with the price of the Son of God himself.

Because this grace is free and undeserved; because it is independent of our behavior, it makes our forgiveness and salvation certain. There can be no doubt whether it has been accomplished. There can be no question if his sacrifice was sufficient. There can be no uncertainty if a holiness that God accepts has been given to us through Jesus. For it all received the boldest stamp of approval when Jesus rose from the dead. It is ours, it is true, it is done. Period.

But don't think that because this grace is free and undeserved; because it is independent of our behavior, it gives us the license to do whatever we want. No, now this grace motivates our behavior – **“For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.”**

1. This portion of the devotion mentions two things that constantly try distort the reality that our salvation is all by grace. Can you find the two things?
2. Earlier we said that God's holiness also means he is perfectly just and perfectly loving. How can this be?
3. Why does grace make our salvation and forgiveness certain?

Prayer: Dear God, your unmerited love is given freely to all who believe your promise. Help us to grow in faith as we sing hymns of certainty to your glorious name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

What fears and sorrows are on the map of your life right now? If we are honest, we have to admit they are there. Oh, maybe not always, but they come and go. Some are stronger than others. Some last longer than others. Some never seem to go away. To be sure, though, they are there.

A man by the name of John Franklin, a believing scientist, at one time was correcting an old map. This map of the east coast of North America and some of the adjoining waters, drawn in 1525, had some frightful comments on it. It said, “Here there are fiery scorpions. Here there are dangerous giants. Here there are dragons.” Franklin crossed out all those words and wrote across the entire map, “Here is God.”

Sounds like Franklin knew the words of Psalm 46:10: **“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted on the earth.”** So also did the writer of the hymn *Be Still My Soul*. It’s as if she saw the fiery scorpions of failing health and the physical decline of loved ones. It’s as if she saw the dangerous giants of financial difficulties, flailing economies, and unexpected bills. It’s as if she saw the dragons of political and social unrest, natural disasters, and broken relationships. Yet over and above and around it all she still saw and heard and sensed the even greater truth that God is always with us: **“Be still, and know that I am God.”**

1. Sometimes there is great value in talking about our fears and sorrows. If you are with others (and feel comfortable) do just that. Then let others share words of comfort. If you are alone, take time right now to take those fears and sorrows to God in prayer.
2. What specific truth about God does this portion of the devotion stress as comfort for us in the midst of our sorrows and fears?

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, we thank you for being with us in all situations in life. Forgive us when our faith becomes weak, and we begin to doubt your care. Amen.

On the answer page in the back of this devotion, you will find the words for the hymn this devotion is based upon. Read through it before reading this devotion. If you and your family are musically inclined, sing the hymn together.

And we shake our head in agreement with what the author writes. We nod in consent. We are of the same mind. And why? Because the love and grace of our triune God is free and unconditional. Because he who stilled the wind and waves is still our God. Because he who made the sun stand still is always with you. Because God loves you so much that he stretched out his arms on a cross to pay the penalty of your sin so that through faith in Jesus the doors of heaven could be flung wide open for you.

And he is not going to go through all that only to desert you when you need him most. He is not going to pay that price only to go back on his promises. He is not going to suffer those agonies and then not provide for his believers safe arrival to the mansions of heaven he prepared for them. So when you face difficulty, disappointment, fear, pain, or trying situations, don't try to face it alone. In fact, know that you aren't facing it alone. Run to God's word, know that God is always with you, and know his promises are true.

Did you know that when building their huge nests, after the supporting base is built, eagles place thorns, rocks, and sharp branches in the nest? Next, they overlay the sharp objects with moss, grass, seaweed, sod, and wool, making the nest soft and comfortable. But when the time comes for the offspring to fly, the eagle parents will stir up the nest. Now sharp objects make the nest uncomfortable; the chicks are encouraged to leave the nest, to fly, to learn to soar.

Making the nest uncomfortable seems unloving and uncaring, but the action is actually loving. We might not always understand why the Lord allows our "nest" to become uncomfortable. But what we know is we have a loving God who spared nothing to save us. We know that we have a God who cannot go back on his promises. We know that we have a God whose unwavering and unyielding goal is to safely bring us to heaven. What we know is that we have a God who has always promised to be with us. Knowing this, our soul can be still as we wait for the day faith becomes sight. Amen.

1. What is God's goal for us?

2. How does knowing that goal help us in the midst of trial and sorrow?

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, lead us as you have promised into the future with the full assurance that you are always with us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

ANSWER PAGES

PAGE 1

1. In what ways can worship turn into entertainment, be disorderly, or focus on ourselves? As you answer this question, it is important to understand that a person's motive and attitude for doing things will play a large role in whether something is viewed as entertainment or a focus on self. Many things can be fitting. But things done with a wrong motive are no longer proper. If my goal in a children's sermon is to make people laugh and provide a moment of levity in the worship service so that people aren't "bored," my motive is wrong and I'm seeking to entertain rather than edify. This can happen with music as well. Is the music, and the way it is done, done to assist the worshiper in singing praises to a God who loved them so much that he died for them; or is the music meant to entertain them. We always want to have confidence and trust in the gospel to do the work of creating and strengthening faith. The gospel does not need to be "jazzed" up and it doesn't need gimmicks. This doesn't mean we don't want to do things well. It doesn't mean that a pastor can't have a "joke" in a sermon. It doesn't mean that we can't have multiple musical instruments. But we always want to ask – why? Why are we doing this? Let our reasons flow from the desire to instruct and strengthen faith, and to focus on God.
2. What is meant by the "liturgy"? What is the value of the liturgy? The liturgy is the part of the service that serves as the "form" the worship service is built around. It is the parts of the service like confession and absolution, the reading of Bible lessons, the pastor and congregational responses, the sermon, the prayers, and the songs. Through these the gospel dominates, people participate, faith is nurtured, and God is praised.
3. What is the value of solid, Christian hymns? They proclaim the law and gospel and direct people to God. They also give the Christian the opportunity to offer prayer and praise to God.

PAGE 2

1. What does holy mean? Yes, holy means perfect. But as the devotion states, it is more than that. It is speaking about a uniqueness in God. A uniqueness in his purity when compared to the moral qualities in a human being. It is also uniqueness in qualities that he has that transcend those that human beings have.
2. Name some ways that God is unique. The devotion lists a number, things like: sinlessness and absolute purity. He cannot allow sin to be in his presence. His holiness separates God from sinners. He is all-knowing, all-powerful, eternal, independent from all around, perfectly just, perfectly loving. He is triune. There are many other qualities and attributes that are unique to God. You will come up with more, no doubt.
3. How can we explain the Trinity as three persons and yet one God in a way that makes sense? God is absolutely unique. We can make no perfect comparison between him and anything we have seen or experienced in this world. Nothing created can adequately illustrate the uncreated triune God to the satisfaction of the human mind. In fact, all who insist upon making sense of the Trinity either end up with three gods or reduce Christ and the Holy Spirit to things less than God (such as in the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses).

God has revealed to us a wondrous glimpse of who he is, not to satisfy our curiosity so that we can make sense of him but to save us. Should it really surprise us that there are truths about our infinite God that go beyond our human understanding? For example, the difference between God and us is infinitely greater than the difference between a parent and a young child. The best response is to simply marvel at the wonder of God's essence and nature like a small child. A small child does not understand a parent but, in the best situation, simply trusts in the care and protection of that parent. We confess with the Psalmist, "My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother" (Psalm 131:1,2).

PAGE 3

1. Are we unloving or intolerant when we proclaim that everyone who does not worship the triune God is actually worshipping a false god or a god who does not exist? James tells us, "Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (5:20). We do not label a parent as unloving who points out danger to children. To point out an error in

belief that could eventually condemn someone to an eternity apart from God is neither unloving nor intolerant. In fact, it can save someone from eternal death.

On the Last Day, every person who has ever lived or is living is going to bow before Jesus of Nazareth and confess him to be the true God and Lord (Philippians 2:10,11). Those who have believed in him will do this with joy and delight. Those who have not known him or have rejected him will do this with terror and sadness. How important it is that we share the simple truth that Jesus spoke in John 17: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (3). On that Last Day, no one will label as unloving or intolerant the truth that there is no other God than the triune God. It will simply be clear to everyone as the truth that gives eternal life.

2. How is a proper understanding of the Trinity directly connected with a right knowledge of our salvation? Each person of our triune God is intimately connected with the work of our salvation. Remove one person of the Trinity and you lose salvation. The Father sent his Son. The Son lived, died and rose for us. The Spirit works through the message of Christ to bring us to saving faith. Each is essential. Each has their work they do. Apart from all three, there is no salvation.
3. What is a good attitude to have as we come to worship our holy God? Fear and respect, awe and reverence. We want to treat our coming to worship with a respect that is due the Creator of the universe and the Author of our salvation. Please understand, there is not a “cookie-cutter” way that this happens. It doesn’t mean that we can determine if someone has a lack of respect by their dress or hair or outward things. It is just a good reminder that we want to treat God as God.

PAGE 4

1. What does grace mean? Grace is God’s undeserved love.
2. Discuss/consider the “undeserved” aspect of grace. This might seem like a confusing exercise, or maybe you think it is too simplistic. But there is a point to it. The point of it is to get us to discuss/consider our true unworthiness. It is so easy to look at others and compare ourselves to others and think that in some small way, God would certainly have to accept us over others. It is so easy to soften the reality of the law, and adjust the perfect nature of God’s law, and coast through life thinking we are pretty good, that’s good enough. This question is meant to let the reality sink in that we don’t deserve even an ounce of God’s grace, not even a gram of grace. This is essential for us to understand for us to truly grasp grace.
3. What do you suppose the devotion is trying to say when we read, “As adults...all we’ve really done is perfected the art of sinning”? Sometimes we like to think that as adults, we’ve grown out of adolescent sins. The prayer, of course, is that as we mature in our faith, we do grow in our Christian living. But the truth of the matter is, we never grow out of those sins. All we usually are able to do as adults is hide them better. Where we threw temper tantrums against those in authority as teens, now we in casual conversation speak poorly of those in governmental positions. Where we wore our emotions on our sleeve and sometimes said whatever came to our mind as kids, now we just think them and hold on to them and seethe over them. We really haven’t changed, we just hide them.

PAGE 5

1. This portion of the devotion mentions two things that constantly try to distort the reality that our salvation is all by grace. Can you find the two things? The first one is the way the world works. The world operates on the basis of work and wages. So, it would seem only natural to our sinful nature that this would be the way forgiveness, salvation and justification works. The second might be a little more challenging to find. But it is found in the words, “And it’s not a matter of trying to prove that we deserve this.” Our sinful nature is so sneaky and so deceptive that it tries to get us to take some credit through the back door. And so, it tries to get us to think that God is wanting us to prove ourselves worthy of what he has given to us. It tries to mix grace and works together.
2. Earlier we said that God’s holiness also means he is perfectly just and perfectly loving. How can this be? The cross of Jesus. At the cross his justness was perfectly meted out as he punished all sin and charged all guilt to his Son. Yet, his love was perfectly on display because Jesus did not commit a sin, but instead carried the sin of all people and paid the penalty for all.
3. Why does grace make our salvation and forgiveness certain? Because it depends on the declaration of God. God cannot lie. God does not go back on promises. God proved all has been done when Jesus was raised from

the dead. It leaves no question unanswered, no guilt unpaid. However, if it were works; if it was up to us, we would always wonder if what we did was enough, and if what we did was good enough. Grace removes all that and makes it certain.

PAGE 6

1. Sometimes there is great value in talking about our fears and sorrows. If you are with others (and feel comfortable) do just that. Then let others share words of comfort. If you are alone, take time right now to take those fears and sorrows to God in prayer.
2. What specific truth about God does this portion of the devotion stress as comfort for us in the midst of our sorrows and fears? **God is always with us.**

PAGE 7

1 Be still, my soul; the Lord is on your side; Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;

Leave to your God to order and provide; In ev'ry change he faithful will remain.

Be still, my soul; your best, your heav'nly friend Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

2 Be still, my soul; your God will undertake To guide the future as he has the past.

Your hope, your confidence, let nothing shake; All now mysterious shall be bright at last. Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know His voice who ruled them while he lived below.

3 Be still, my soul, though dearest friends depart And all is darkened in the vale of tears; Then you will better know his love, his heart, Who comes to soothe your sorrows and your fears. Be still, my soul; your Jesus can repay From his own fullness all he takes away.

4 Be still, my soul; the hour is hast'ning on When we shall be forever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone, Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored. Be still, my soul; when change and tears are past, All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

1. What is God's goal for us? It is always so important for us to remember God's goal for us is that we remain in the faith and that he brings us safely through this world to our real home in heaven. His goal is not for us to be happy – it is for us to be saved. Because when we know we are saved we can be joyful now and will be eternally happy in heaven. His goal for us is not earthly riches and an easy and carefree life. For the riches of heaven are far greater than any riches that can be offered here on earth.
2. How does knowing that goal help us in the midst of trial and sorrow? **Knowing this goal helps us remember that this means the sorrows and trials he allows in life have this goal in mind. Since they have his goal in mind, it completely changes the way we view them, the way we deal with them, and our attitude about them. It gives us patient endurance to handle them and confidence that he will indeed work them for our eternal good and our safe arrival in heaven.**