

Today is Trinity Sunday, the day Christians focus on what it means for our Lord to be one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Like us, Jews and Muslims affirm that there is one God; but unlike us, they do not believe that God was fully present in Jesus. As Christians, we share their devotion to one God, but we have come to know God in three distinct persons. Creator, Christ, and Comforter. Jehovah, Jesus, and Wisdom. The Great I AM, the Good Shepherd, and the Advocate. The Ancient of Days, the Promised Messiah, and the Spirit of Adoption. Whatever moniker you use to describe the persons of the Trinity, these names help us to understand the purpose and mission of the Triune God.

The Trinity was a hot topic in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when the heresy of Arianism was spreading through the early church. Arianism denied Christ's divinity, claiming that he was a creation of God, subordinate to God, and thus, not God but a lesser, distinct being. Arianism defended this position with the phrase: "There was a time when the Son (Jesus) was not," meaning Jesus did not exist forever like the Father did. This runs counter to Scriptures like John 1:1-3, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" and Colossians 1:16: "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things were created through him and for him."

Church leaders sought to combat this false belief by emphasizing and celebrating the unity of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The church commemorated the Trinity through the recitation of prayers and hymns, along with a number of creeds, most notably the Athanasian Creed (6<sup>th</sup> century) which proclaims: We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity... the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God: and yet they are not three Gods but one God.

Wanting to set the record straight, the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great convened a Council in Nicaea (325 AD) to resolve the Arian controversy. The council used the term *homoousios* (hoh-mo-oo-see-oss) to affirm that Jesus (the Word, the *Logos* of John 1:1) is of the "same essence" as God the Father and thus divine as the Father is divine. The Arians contested this, preferring the term *homoiousios* (hoh-moy-oo-see-oss) meaning "of similar substance." Because the Greek words differ only by a single letter, the "iota" (i) in the middle of the word, the debate gave rise to the phrase "not one iota of difference." (Here endeth the history lesson!)

But that iota makes a HUGE difference to us. If Jesus is of the *same essence* as God, then his assertion that he can forgive our sins is valid, for only God can forgive sin. If Jesus is simply of *similar* essence to God, then sins remain forgiven. The Council wrote the

Nicene Creed, the oldest of our Christian affirmations of faith to firmly state that Jesus is one with God the Father. When we recite the creed today, we affirm, "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." That's one God in the person of the Father-Creator.

We also affirm, "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father." That's one Lord, in the person of Jesus, the One who is both "true God" and "truly human." Finally, we affirm, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified." That's one God in the person of the Holy Spirit, a divine power that "proceeds from the Father and the Son."

One God, three persons: The Trinity. A Creative Parent, a Redeeming Son, and a Spirit of Truth: These are the true masters of the universe. To fully know the Triune God, we need to embrace the gifts that the Trinity gives us – grace, love, and fellowship (sometimes "communion") – and the benefits that come with them. Paul gives us these words in his blessing to the Corinthians church: "May the *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ, the *love* of God, and the *fellowship* of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:13, emphasis added). These gifts come to us by the power of the Triune God, not "the power of Grayskull."

**Grace.** Paul talks about grace repeatedly in this letter to the Corinthians, using the word eight different times. At one point, Jesus says to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). But what *is* grace? When asked to give a definition of grace, Christian writer Philip Yancey told a story. He once got stuck in Los Angeles traffic and arrived 58 minutes late to return his car at the Hertz rental desk. He walked up in a bad mood, put the keys down and said, "How much do I owe?"

The woman said, "Nothing. You're all clear." Yancey admitted that he was late, and she said, "Yes, but there's a one-hour grace period." So, Yancy asked, "Oh really, what is grace?" And she said, "I don't know...I guess what it means is that even though you're supposed to pay, you don't have to." That's a pretty good definition of grace, isn't it? Paul was supposed to pay for his sins, but he didn't have to. Instead, the grace of Christ was sufficient for him, offering him forgiveness and new life. The same is true for us when we receive the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Love.** When Paul speaks to the Corinthians about the love of God, he is using the Greek word *agape*. This is not the kind of love that we see on television or in magazines, where

love is more like the Greek word *eros*, a word better translated as “desire.” *Agape* is the self-giving love that God offers us, the love seen most clearly in the life of Jesus. *Agape* is selfless love; it is unconditional love; it is an action, not a feeling. *Agape*, says Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, “is patient...kind...not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). The *agape* of God is a strong and sacrificial love, and it is experienced in communities which put their love into action as followers Jesus guided by the Spirit of Truth and Justice.

**Fellowship.** When Paul prays the fellowship of the Holy Spirit will be with the people of Corinth, he uses the Greek word *koinonia*, literally “communion.” This word might seem ancient to us, but it pops up in surprising places. In fact, it was the final word in the 2018 Scripps National Spelling Bee. There, a 14-year-old from Texas named Karthik Nemmani spelled the word correctly and won the contest. *Koinonia* means sharing, fellowship, and being part of an intimate, loving community of mutual support and shared values.

The letter to the Hebrews says, “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Hebrews 13:16). That sharing is *koinonia*. In the book of Acts, the first followers of Christ “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). That fellowship was *koinonia*. And in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, “The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16). That communion is *koinonia*.

Although Paul and the Corinthians had a history of conflict, Paul wants nothing but the best for them. Pointing them to the true masters of the universe, Paul offers them the power of God’s grace, love, and fellowship. Paul knows that these gifts will enable the followers of Jesus to “be restored,” to “agree with one another,” and to “live in peace” (2 Corinthians 13:11). In our own times of conflict, the same gifts of grace, love and fellowship can bring unity and peace. We have these gifts not by the power of Grayskull, but by the power of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: the true Masters of the Universe.

Prayer: God of holiness and light, in the mystery of dying and rising with Christ you have established a new covenant of reconciliation; cleanse our hearts and give a new spirit to all your people, that your saving grace may be proclaimed to the whole world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Sources:**

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## The Real Masters of the Universe

Trinity Sunday, May 31, 2026

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

He-Man, Skeletor, Teela, Man-at-Arms, Stratos, Zodac, Beast Man, and Mer-Man. If you know these names, you grew up watching cartoons in the 1980s. If not, the time has come for you to meet the “Masters of the Universe.” They started as small action figures with bulging muscles that could be used in imaginary battles. Then they featured in a popular Saturday morning cartoon series, comic books, video games, magazines, and eventually several feature films. Novelist Brian Cave writes that they had “everything a kid could ask for as part of their weekend plans: a hero they can look up to, a collection of characters with varied powers, colorful villains they can throw around, and a world full of adventure.”

As of Friday, June 5, 2026, there is a new movie called *Masters of the Universe*, featuring He-Man, “the most powerful man in the universe.” He began life as Prince Adam, the hybrid of an Earthling and an Eternian. Then, at the age of 18, Prince Adam visited Castle Grayskull, an ancient fortress where he received his superpowers. Fans of the series know that Prince Adam becomes He-Man when he holds high his Power Sword and says, “By the power of Grayskull...I have the power!” In most of his adventures, He-Man battles the villainous Skeletor and tries to preserve the good of the planet Eternia.

Looking at the world today, we might wonder: Where have all the action heroes gone? Who will battle the Skeletors of our day? Are there any *real* masters of the universe? The apostle Paul says yes, and he knows exactly who they are. Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians after being estranged from this community. Paul wanted to visit again, but he feared that another visit would be painful as his leadership was being questioned and his ministry disrupted by false apostles and deceitful workers (Corinthians 11:13). If Paul visited, he feared that there would be “quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder” (2 Corinthians 12:20). Battles would be fought, not with Power Swords, but with “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17).

Paul had great affection for the people of Corinth. He did not want to fight with them; he wanted to build them up (2 Corinthians 12:19). So, Paul offered them a blessing: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” (2 Corinthians 13:13). For Paul, the only real masters of the universe are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Triune God is collectively the greatest of powers and the source of all grace, love, compassion, justice, and fellowship. What was true for the Corinthians is true for us: to thrive as Christians, we need these gifts of God.