

## 2 Corinthians 13:11-14 (EHV)

**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. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.**

In the name of the Triune God: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit dear brothers and sisters in Christ;

The Christian missionary we know as St. Patrick brought the teachings of Christ to Ireland. It is said Saint Patrick used the three leaved Shamrock to explain the concept of the Holy Trinity, (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit), to the pagan Irish during the 5th Century.

As this illustration shows the shamrock leaf has three parts but its only one leaf. The holy Trinity consists of three persons but only one divine being.

In his letters to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul addressed numerous troubles and problems. In his first letter to them he mentioned gifts of the Holy Spirit which would enable them to overcome the troubles which were found in their congregation. Our sermon text is Paul's closing prayer and encouragement from his second letter to the Corinthians. His words are a reminder to us that

**Theme:** We Are Blessed By the Trinity

1. With the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
2. With the Love of God
3. With the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.** These words are familiar to us all. They are used frequently in our worship services. I use them to close many of our meetings and classes. They are known as the Apostolic Benediction or the Trinitarian blessing.

The *grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* was an important blessing for the Corinthians. Paul had taken the members of this congregation to task for their lack of spirituality. They had tolerated immorality in their midst. They were slow to keep their promises of providing assistance for the Christian brothers in Jerusalem. Although they were highly blessed by the Lord they often failed to use their blessings properly. They were especially lacking in love as evidenced by the fact that the congregation was divided in factions and cliques. Members of the congregation were even taking fellow members to court to settle disputes.

The Corinthian congregation like all congregations was comprised of sinful human beings – human beings who first and foremost need the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to set them free from the control of sin. Through Jesus' redeeming work you and I have been set free from the control of sin. Jesus paid a price for us – he sacrificed his holy perfect life as a payment for our sins. By being punished for our sins he has taken away our guilt. In Romans 8:1 we are reminded: **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** (EHV) That's one way of speaking of the grace or the generous love of God.

Because God's grace rests upon us we belong to him. Jesus is our Lord. He rules over all things for our good. He directs our lives. Our sins have been forgiven. In response to this it will be our desire to acknowledge this grace with a sincere struggle to set aside our sinful ways and actions and to do what the Lord our God desires.

In his letters Paul had explained what it the Lord was displeased with in their congregation. He had reminded them of what was right. He summarizes some of his thoughts in this closing section. He told them **Set things in order. Be encouraged. Agree with one another. Be at peace.** The grace of God had forgiven them for their disorderly behavior, for their failure to listen, for their lack of unity and for their hostilities toward one another in the past. Let these types of activities remain in the past is Paul's plea. Live as children of grace – being gracious to each other for Christ's sake.

The change of attitude that Paul speaks about in this text is one which is appropriate in our self centered world too. We have a need for the grace of Christ – a grace which assures us of forgiveness for our previous sins and which encourages us to set things in order by setting our sights on living holy lives: seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. We need the grace of God which will motivate us to be concerned less about ourselves and more about the needs of others. We need the grace of God which will motivate us to be gracious to one another for Christ's sake.

The Triune God blesses us with the gift of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we respond to that grace as we struggle to mend our sinful ways and as we set things in order in our lives. We can do that confident of the Love of God.

In his love for us the Holy Trinity blesses us with wonderful gifts. We've already spoken about the gift of his Son and the grace our Lord Jesus Christ. Now let's consider other aspects of the Father's love for those who have been rescued from sin by his Son.

We generally think of our creation, our preservation and our protection when we think of the Father's love. Luther summarizes the gifts of the Fathers love in his explanation to the First Article in this way: *I believe that God created me and all that exists, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities.*

*And I believe that God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life. God also preserves me by defending me against all danger, guarding and protecting me from all evil. All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it. For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him.*

*This is most certainly true.*

God didn't just create the universe as we heard in our OT Lesson and then leave it to run all by itself. God continues to watch over his creation and to provide for the needs of his creatures. Our heavenly Father shows his goodness by providing all that we need for our bodies and our lives. God generously provides for our needs on a daily basis. Even though there are billions of people in the world, God knows each one and cares for each person personally. God graciously provides for everyone in the world, believers and unbelievers alike.

The Psalmist David recognized this blessing of God and prayed: **The eyes of all look eagerly to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand, and you satisfy the desire of every living thing.** (Psalm 145:15,16 EHV)

God is our Father, and we are his children through faith in Christ. One of the great benefits of being his children is that God always looks after us and protects us. He may protect us by keeping us from evil and suffering. We may enjoy many days when we are healthy and don't get into accidents and such. Another way

that God protects us is by sending his holy angels to look after us. If he allows suffering and hardship into our lives, he protects us by making evil serve for our good. Such hardships are designed to strengthen our faith and bring us closer to God. As God's children, nothing happens to us that is not part of God's good plan for us. **We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.** (Romans 8:28 EHV)

All of this is an evidence of God's love. Like the Corinthians we need to be reminded of God's love so that we will live together with each other in love. God is a God of love and peace – therefore as his children through faith in Christ we will strive to deal with one another in a spirit of love and peace. The factions and the lawsuits in Corinth robbed the congregation of the love and peace which God wanted for them. That's why Paul urged them to set these sinful attitudes aside. Congregations today are not immune to sinful, selfish pride that ruins the peace and the love which are to be on display in our congregations. Paul's encouragement still applies in those situations.

Many of the problems in Christian congregations are caused by selfish insecurity. Members are afraid of change for fear that they will lose something which is precious to them. Individuals may be unwilling to make a stronger commitment to the church and its activities because they already feel stressed out by their routines. When we remember that the Father will shower his love upon us we won't have to cling to the past or our old ways for security and self-satisfaction. The Holy Trinity blesses us with His gifts. The grace of Lord Jesus forgives such sins. The love of God makes them unnecessary and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit keeps us connected with the Lord and with each other.

Let's conclude our meditation today by focusing our attention on the Work of the Holy Spirit. First of all the Holy Spirit enables us to be Christians by calling us to faith through the Gospel. The Holy Spirit connects us to God. Through the Holy Spirit we enjoy a fellowship with God – he enables us to see and to enjoy the blessings of God's love and the grace of the Son. He empowers us to respond in a positive way to these blessings. What the Holy Spirit has done for you as an individual he has also done for others. Again Luther's catechism explanation is helpful to enable us to appreciate the blessing of the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

With Luther we confess: *the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers.*

As we think about our text for today: Paul wants us to realize that the Holy Spirit will enable us to follow the directions he has given to us in this text. He has reminded us to be of one mind and to live in peace. Our thoughts are to be guided and directed by Christ – it is his will not ours which we seek. It is his church not ours. Since he has forgiven us we forgive each other. We seek what is pleasing to him not what pleases us. When believers are working together to serve the Lord there will be a unity of mind and lives of peace as we use the Word of God to guide us and to empower us for our ministries.

Paul encouraged the Christians in Corinth to greet one another with holy kiss. Those words almost make us shudder when we hear them today! We can't even greet one another with a hand shake – a holy kiss would be out of the question. Honestly "holy kisses" have never been a part of our customs – they were a common way of expressing unity at the time of Paul. He realized that the problems in that congregation had disrupted the harmony and fellowship that the Spirit had given to them. They should give evidence of a renewed spiritual unity and accord by making use of this custom which was an expression of the special relationship they shared in the Lord. Paul would encourage us also to find ways to remind ourselves of the special relationship we have in the Lord. One of the ways we do that is by thinking of each other as brothers

and sisters in Christ. When we think of ourselves as a family of believers we have a reminder to set aside our differences and to emphasize what we have in common.

There is one more aspect to the fellowship that we enjoy through the Holy Spirit. Christians provide a support network for each other. One of the failures of the Corinthian congregation was the failure to complete the support offering they were participating in for the Jews in Jerusalem. It's often hard for congregations to show their support for each other because we don't always have a close connection with them. Because of that we don't always appreciate the unity that the Lord has provided to our Christian congregations. However as members of the WELS we have some special opportunities to support joint ministries with our prayers and with our offerings. The WELS connection for today highlights an example: The WELS Christian Aid and Relief.

And as we go about our individual ministries in our separate congregations we can do so with the assurance that our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are praying for us and working with us in the Lord's kingdom. We are not alone – the Holy Spirit has gathered the family of believers from all nations – let us be encouraged by this as we enjoy The blessings of the Holy Trinity: the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Amen.