

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Call for Completion

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:11-14

Code: 47-96

Well, this is a monumental day. We come to the last portion of Scripture in the epistle of 2 Corinthians. After four years going through this with a little bit of a break, we come to message number 96 in our study of 2 Corinthians and we say good-bye today to what has become a familiar and beloved friend, this great epistle.

Paul's divinely inspired writing ends with a straightforward appeal to the Christians at Corinth, it comes in the last four verses of chapter 13 of 2 Corinthians. He says this, "Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace and the God of love and peace shall 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."

Now you remember back in chapter 12 verse 19 we introduced this entire section under the title of "A Faithful Pastor's Concerns." That's been the theme from chapter 12 verse 19 on as Paul brought his epistle to an end. And it is still the theme in this last final farewell. He is still telling us what concerns him. In fact, in some ways this is a general summary of everything that a pastor is really concerned about. As he gives this last final word to the troubled church at Corinth, the troubled church that he loved so much, he summarizes the concerns of his heart for them.

As you remember, the Corinthian church had been under siege, they were under siege from the world, the flesh and the devil. That is to say from all the possible enemies. The world being the culture around them that was filled with immorality, to an almost epic proportion so that to Corinthianize meant to go to bed with a prostitute, they were so synonymous. Their culture had all kinds of sinful defects which had influenced their lives prior to coming to Christ, and which, of course, continue to be an influence as they were surrounded by them.

They were also influenced by the devil. The devil, having spent most of his time always in false religion, the devil had allowed to come into the church at Corinth some false apostles, false teachers who were teaching lies and who had many more lies to teach if they could destroy the people's confidence in Paul. They had come to attack the church and had been successful in so doing, as you remember.

And then, of course, there was the attack from the flesh. The people were falling victim to sins of the flesh which, of course, were a way of life before they had come to Christ. So this was a church under siege basically from every possible angle. We have learned about that as we've gone through the epistle. We've seen them battling the world, and battling the flesh, and battling the devil in 2 Corinthians as well as 1 Corinthians.

Now as Paul wraps everything up, as he comes to this just final finishing few statements, the very end, the final farewell, the final summation, he has three concerns for them. We can sum this up in three words. He desires for them perfection, affection and benediction. Those are the three things that sort of sum up the last four verses. And this is really a final farewell summation. In fact, he begins verse 11 by saying, "Finally, brethren," and obviously it is the very end. Brethren is a term he used in chapter 1 verse 8, chapter 8 verse 1 to refer to the believers at Corinth. And this is a summation then in finality, the last word, so of a recapitulation of all his concerns. He brings everything together under three words. And, you know, you could safely say that these three words sum up what any faithful pastor would want for his church. In fact, these become goals for the church, objectives so strive for in the life of the Christian and the church.

I feel compelled also to mention what Paul doesn't have in his list. What are his apparent non-concerns, like prosperity, and success, and physical health and comfort and freedom and honor and prestige and things like that that people often get caught up in pursuing, even in the church. Paul has little or no regard for them. They don't even show up on his list.

Three main things concern him: perfection, affection, and benediction. And by the way, they overlap a little bit, as you will see. They're not just distinct, although there is enough in each of those categories to identify the category, there's a spillover into the other categories. You'll see that as we go through. So after 13 chapters of relentless defense of his life, 13 chapters of relentless defense of his apostleship, of his ministry, of his integrity, including a confrontation of the church and a straightforward confrontation of the church, a straightforward confrontation of the false apostles who were lying to them, finally it's all come to an end and he gives his final desires, his last brief summary. He tells them what he really wants to happen in that church.

Let's look, first of all, at the first word, perfection. Verse 11, "Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you." The key to understanding this point is found in that statement, "Be made complete....be made complete." That's a comprehensive statement. That sort of sweeps over the whole verse, and we'll see how the rest fits in in a moment. "Be made complete," a very important Greek verb is the root of this, *katartizo*, very commonly used. It means to put in order, to put in order. It isn't to complete in the sense that something is incomplete and something needs to be added to it. It isn't complete in

the sense that something that has some imperfections need to be made perfect. It's complete in the sense that things that are out of sync, out of order need to be appropriately placed in order. It could be translated wholeness, or soundness. It is a word used to refer to restoring a broken bone, to reducing a fracture, or to...to locating a dislocated joint. It is used...the same word is used in Hebrews 10:5 and I think it's chapter 11 verse 3 and it's translated in the English by the word "prepare," that it has the idea that something is ill prepared, something is not ready, something is not right and it needs to be further prepared. There must be further preparation before this is to the place it needs to be.

I suppose it would be safe to say we could translate it "mend your ways." Paul is calling for restoration here. There are a lot of things in the church that are out of line, out of order, out of sync and out of harmony. And Paul is saying you've got to get everything back in its proper order, back into place. He encouraged them along that line, by the way, already at the end of verse 9 when he used the same root word in that phrase "that you be made complete." Get your life in line as a church. Get things in order. This is spiritual wholeness. Having everything consistently in conformity to the Word of God and the will of God, that's the idea. Whatever's broken, whatever's out of sync, whatever's out of whack, whatever's out of harmony needs to be brought into its appropriate place. That's really the same thing he was saying to the Ephesians when he wrote them in Ephesians chapter 4 and he talked about the fact that the necessity for the Apostles and the prophets and the teaching pastors and evangelists was the perfecting of the saints, to put everything in place, to bring everything into sync, to bring everything into perfect order. This is the equipping of the saints for the work of the service. This is the building up of the body of Christ till it becomes a mature man and reaches the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, as he says in verse 13. You need to get everything in the kind of harmony that was exhibited in the person of Jesus Christ, where his theology and his thoughts and his words and his life all were in perfect harmony, where everything he did, everything he was, everything he claimed, everything he believed was in perfect integrity.

We're talking here then about integrity, about spiritual wholeness. Paul is saying to them, "Look, you've got some things to fix, you've got some things to correct. You have some things that are out of order that need to be brought into order, some things that are out of line that need to be brought into line."

I don't know about you, but that's kind of a way of life for me, isn't it for you? I mean, you kind of go through your whole Christian life being restored, getting things back in line, getting the priorities back in appropriate places, correcting the sins, correcting the errors. And that is exactly what the church is involved in. Any church leader knows that who is faithful to the Word of God. We are given this tremendous responsibility of getting the church in order and it's a never-ending battle. We work all the time to bring the church into harmony with the Word of God and the will of God, that's what we do. I am much more concerned about the church than I am about the world outside. I can't fix the world outside. I can't put it in order. But I have the tools in the power of the Spirit and the truth of the Word of God and spiritual leadership to do what God's commissioned me to do and that's to get the church

in line, to put the church in order.

Where there are errors of theology, they need to be corrected. Where there are sins, they need to be eliminated. Where there are violated relationships, they need to be restored. Where there is laziness and indifference and apathy and lethargy, it needs to be turned into energy and commitment and devotion and service. That's what pastors do much of the time is work to put the church in order, and that's what the people need to do as well. That's why you're instructed in the Scripture. If you know someone who is sin, you go to that person, you confront that sin, you deal with it. You that are spiritual, Galatians 6:1 says, you're going to restore those who have fallen into sin.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 10 Paul said, "I want you to be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment." In 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 10 he said, "We want to complete what is lacking in your faith." This whole idea, same word is used, this whole idea of getting things in order, getting things in line in the church, that's the great task of church leadership. That was Paul's great passion. He knew that evangelism was a byproduct of that. He knew that changing the world around them was more likely to occur when they were what they needed to be. They needed to reject the false teachers, the false apostles, reject their lies, reject their heresies. They needed to turn their back on the sins of the flesh, the sins of the world. They needed to acknowledge Paul's apostleship to hear the truth of God, end all sinful practice, all ungodly thinking. And they needed to start with their own hearts. That's why in chapter 13 verse 5 he says, "Test yourselves to see if you're in the faith." Start with you. Make sure things are in order in your life.

That's a consuming thing, isn't it? Just keep your own life in order and then to be concerned about the lives around you. Lovingly to confront and encourage and strengthen and build and pray for those around you that their lives might be in order and that the whole church might be in perfect harmony with the will and the Word of God.

So, he's saying you need to make all the necessary changes to bring the church into perfect harmony with God's will. That's the great challenge. You know, you don't study the Word of God just simply so you can preach a sermon that people will like and think is insightful or profound or clever or moving. You study the Word of God so that you can preach a sermon that informs people about God's will so they can live by it. That's what you do. You're always trying to conform the church to the Word and the will of God because that's the desire of God. God's not...God's desire, obviously, comes through Paul because it is God who has inspired Paul to write this. This is the faithful pastor's concern that the church be adjusted, that it be brought in line, prepared, ordered rightly according to God's Word. That means sound doctrine, sound thinking, sound living.

Now doing this is an endless task. As I said, it's endless in your own life and it's endless in the circle of people around you. You're always trying to get them into adjustment to God's will. You try to do that in your family with your spouse and with your children, sometimes children with their parents. Always trying to bring them back into line with God's way and God's Word and God's will...and that's what we do in the church as well. And in order to do that there are some features that feed in and make that happen.

Go back to verse 11, there are four of them here. Number one, you see it in the word "rejoice," *chairote*[?]. Some translations translate that "farewell." And it could be translated farewell, it could also be translated "all hail," which was the greeting when you met someone. And the reason for that, although the word means "to rejoice," that is what the word means, it had become a greeting. It all started when Jesus came out of the grave. When Jesus came out of the grave and first greeted the disciples, He said to them, the Scripture says, "All hail." But the actual term is "rejoice." Rejoice then became the greeting. They heard Jesus the first time when He had come out of the grave and He said, "Rejoice," and that became the Christian greeting that was standard for both "hello" and "goodbye." Personally I prefer it. "Hello" has absolutely no meaning to me. I don't even know what the word means. I...I know it's a greeting but it has no meaning, it's meaningless, it's vapid, it's vague, it's nothing. Why do we say it? Well because that's the tradition, I guess. But the early Christians said something with meaning, they said, "Rejoice." And the implication was "rejoice" because Christ is alive.

They even said it when they said "goodbye." Goodbye is a funny word, too, isn't it? I know, it makes a little more sense than hello...hello doesn't seem to make any sense, but goodbye means in your parting I hope things are good. But rejoice, it's kind of like the Hebrew word *Shalom*. *Shalom* means peace in Hebrew, but it's become a greeting. And when you see somebody you say *Shalom* and when you leave them you say *Shalom*. And *chairote* was the same thing. *Chairote* when you met, and *chairote* when you parted because joy was so essential in the life of the church. He says rejoice, you have nothing to be dour about, you have nothing to be defeated about, you have nothing to be morose about, you have nothing to be down-in-the-mouth about. You ought to be characterized by joy, rejoice always and again I say rejoice, Paul said in Philippians 4:4. Repeatedly in Philippians, at least three other times he told the Philippians to rejoice. Galatians 5:22 says joy is a fruit of the Spirit. First Thessalonians 5:16 says that we're to rejoice all the time without ceasing. First Peter 4:3 says...4:13 says essentially the same thing, it's to be a constant feature of the life of the church that we express joy. Rejoice, he says, Jesus is alive. Joy was a part of our Lord's legacy. In John 14 when Jesus was meeting with the disciples in the upper room, He said that they had reason to rejoice. In John 15:11 He repeated it, you have reason to rejoice. In John 16:22 He said, "You're going to have reason in the future to rejoice."

And if you follow joy through this New Testament, our joy is to be great, it is to be abundant, it is to be exceeding, animated, unspeakable, incessant and full of awe. We should be joyful all the time. Our sins are forgiven. Our past is dealt with. Our present is under the power and control of the Spirit of God. And our future is secure in God's promise, right? Rejoice. There's no vicissitude of life, there's no struggle of life, there's no issue of life, there's no problem of life that can overpower the purposes of God on your behalf. Rejoice...rejoice! Christian joy is not something superficial. Christian joy is the experience...it's the experience bubbling up from deep confidence that God is control of everything and all is well. Circumstances on the surface change. The surface may be rough. There may be a storm. But way down deep inside there is a confidence that God is in perfect control of everything in my life and He will bring it to good in time and His glory in eternity. And that takes all the anxiety out of life. I mean, why become flustered about anything? God is in control of everything. Every circumstance in life is under God's control. Every issue in life is under God's control for His children. And it's all for your good and His glory. All things are working in that direction, rejoice.

You say, "What about illness? What about death? What about struggles? What about economic difficulties? What about the loss of a job? What about disappointment in careers or disappointment in expressions of affection? What about broken friendships? What about anything?"

It can't tough the deep-down confidence that God is still in control. That's joy. Rejoicing is the bubbling up of that deep-down confidence. And what gives you that deep-down confidence, folks, is good theology. A good understanding of God's Word gives you the deep-down confidence and when it bubbles up it's rejoicing. That's an act of proper response to the character of God. When I understand the character of my great God, that causes me to rejoice. Rejoicing is an act of appreciation for the saving work of Jesus Christ. It's an act of gratitude for the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. It's an act of reasonable thanks for spiritual blessings, divine providence, the promise of future glory, answered prayer. It's an act of appreciation for the Scripture, of appreciation for Christian fellowship. It's commanded over and over in the Bible that we rejoice and that's something way deeper than some superficial emotion. And it's essential to spiritual wholeness. It's essential to well-being. It's essential to restoring the church to its completeness. One of the features of this perfection, one of the features of getting everything in order is pervasive joy.

There's a second one and it's in the phrase "be comforted," in verse 11, "be comforted." Actually the verb here is *parakaleo*, *paraklesisis* the form here, but it's the verb *parakaleo*, probably better to translate it exhorted...exhorted, or admonished. And the word here is submission. If a church is to get its act together, if we're to pull in the loose ends, if we're to get things in order and have integrity and demonstrate the fullness and the wholeness of spiritual life that is the measure of the stature of Christ, if we're to be what we ought to be we must have joy but we also must have submission. There

must be a character of submission in the church in that it submits itself willingly to the authority of God, to heed all the appeals based on truth, all the calls to righteousness. Paul is saying to the Corinthians, "Look, if you're going to be the kind of church you ought to be and enjoy the perfection that I desire for you, first of all there needs to be a pervasive joy and secondly, there needs to be a pervasive submission to that which is authoritative from the mind of God to you.

In 1 Corinthians he had certainly expressed that to them in 4:14. He says, "I do not write these things to shame you, but admonish you as my beloved children." Just like a father does a child. You have to learn...we could even say obedience, submission. Paul is calling the believers to obey, to submit to the authority of the truth. Paul in Colossians 1:28 said his ministry was all about admonishing every man. That admonish is the same word, to bring them under authority, a call to obedience. Titus preached with conviction because Paul told him you're to preach with conviction and you're to preach with all authority, Titus 2:15, and don't let anybody circumvent that.

Two key words then, joy and submission. Third key word, truth. Its found in the phrase, "be likeminded." Now normally when you read likeminded you think of the people who sort of learn to agree with each other because they make necessary adjustments. That's really not it. The key word here is truth. The first key word is joy. The second key word is submission. The third key word is truth. Literally this phrase says, "Be thinking the same thing...be thinking the same thing." Have the same thoughts. To put it another way, have the same convictions. To put it another way, believe the same things. This is a plea to conformity to the truth, get in line with what the Word of God teaches. Agree with each other, yes. But agree with each other because you all understand the truth of God. It's not superficial, this is not something on the surface, this isn't...well, we don't want to make doctrine an issue because its divisive. We don't want to have any convictions because they tend to fracture things and we want to have room for everybody's opinion so we can't let anybody's opinion reign over any other opinion...it's not that kind of thing. It's not trying to find some superficial truce. What we're talking about here is everybody thinking the same about God, everybody thinking the same about Christ, everybody thinking the same about the gospel, everybody thinking the same about sanctification, everybody thinking the same about God's revelation for the church. This is a unity of truth based on a unified understanding of God's Word. Philippians 1:27, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ," he says, "and I want to hear that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." I want you to be single minded in that you all understand the gospel the same way and you stand for that same gospel. This is what Paul called in Ephesians 4 "the unity of the faith...the unity of the faith."

If the church is to reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, Christ is not divided. Christ doesn't have five different theologies swirling around in His mind, He has one understanding of the truth of God. When he says "be like-minded," he is saying be thinking the same thing. It's all built

around truth.

In Romans 15:4 there's a good illustration of that. The Apostle Paul writing in Romans 15:4 says, "Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction," he's referring to Scripture there. Whatever was written in the Scripture in earlier times was written for our instruction. So that's where everything starts. Then through perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures we have hope. So we...we study the Scriptures, we find there our perseverance and our encouragement that secures our hope in the future. So he says now, "May the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind." And there is the point...the same mind about the Scripture. There is a standard of truth to be understood. There's a standard of truth to be adhered to. It's the Word of God.

Back in verse 8 of 2 Corinthians 13 Paul said, "We can do nothing against the truth but only for the truth." This is not mindless submission to some human authority. This is not mindless submission to some panel of authorities. This is not some arbitrary standard that is established whimsically by different people in different places. What he is saying is there is a standard of truth. The standard of truth is the Word of the living God. You need to understand that to the degree that you are united in the truth, the true oneness that comes from thinking the same thing about the Word of God, knowing the truth. That's why we teach the truth.

There's so much misunderstanding about this today that it's really amazing. If you have a church that's unified as ours is, and I thank God...I thank God for the joy of this church, I don't want to leave that point without commenting on that. And we were just talking about that this morning as we were listening to you sing. Your joy is exuberant in your singing. This is a church full of joy. I...I see it before and after services, and occasionally during as you fellowship and talk and enjoy each other and enjoy the joys of the Lord that are yours. It goes on all week in the expressions of love and fellowship that you share with other believers, and even alone with the Lord. This is a church that has joy, but it comes out in your singing and in the enthusiasm with which you give and serve. And this is a church characterized by submission. I can't imagine that there is a church any more submissive to the truth of God than this church. And certainly this is a church united around the truth. We agree on the truth. We agree on the gospel and the truths of the gospel. That is such a strange phenomenon in our day, even in the church, that we're often criticized by the undiscerning, criticized by the untaught, and criticized by the ignorant for being so united in our doctrine, as if somehow that's narrow and somehow that's extreme and somehow that's wrong. In fact, it's right. It is what God requires for the wholeness of His church. If you're going to get everything in order and if you're going to bring everything into harmony so that we have the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, then it has to be in line with the truth.

The church then, 1 Timothy 3:15, is the pillar and ground of the truth. Sound doctrine establishes the basis for all the functions of the church. Perfection then includes joy, submission and truth. The fourth word is unity, and that's bound up in the little phrase, "Live in peace...live in peace."

I'll tell you right now, the key to living in peace is having the same thoughts, isn't it? One of the reasons this church is so harmonious, one of the reasons this church doesn't split up and fracture all the time is because we believe the same things. And whenever...listen carefully...and it's only really occurred once in my tenure here, there has been a fracturing of this church, it is because some people believed something different was true and we didn't have that truth. Where you have a common grasp of the Word of God, you have the commonality that perpetuates itself in peace. But when you get some people who start teaching something different, then you create the fracture. So if you're going to live in peace, you have to be like-minded and submissive to the truth and expressing joy in that truth.

After the mind is set on truth inwardly, that's the foundation. The church outwardly has the basis for unity and lives in peace. I thank God through all these years, and I'm coming in on thirty years here, this has been a thirty-year pilgrimage in a peaceful environment. And that's all built on the truth of the Word of God which is central to the core of this church which we all believe. It's the end of all factions. It's the end of all divisions. It's the end of all disagreements which were so common in the Corinthian church.

So, Paul says I want your perfection. I want you to get the things that are out of sync in sync, out of harmony in harmony. I want you to get the things that are out of order. And that means I'm calling you to the truth, sufficient to the truth, unity in the truth and overall joy that comes from that.

And it has a rich promise at the end of verse 11. "If you do this the God of love and peace shall be with you." You say, "Well, does he mean that the Lord...the Lord isn't here if we don't do that?" Well, obviously God is omnipresent, He's everywhere at the same time. What he means by that is you will know the fullness of blessing from the God of love and peace. God will shower you with His love and shower you with His peace. That's what he means. As the church pursues spiritual wholeness, as the church expresses joy, submission, truth and unity, the powerful presence of God flourishes.

I can explain it to you by going at it negatively. There are times when God does abandon His churches. It's true. Just like God wrote Ichabod, the glory has departed from Israel, there/ are times when God abandons churches. The best illustration of that is Revelation chapter 2, the Lord of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ writes a letter to the church at Ephesus and in verse 5 He says to them, "Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen..." In other words, lots of things were out of order,

lots of things were out of sync, lots of things weren't right. "You better repent and you better get them right or else I'm coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent." What I'm going to do if you don't change is come and blow the light of your church out. I'll end your witness. That's the judgment of the Lord of the church on the church. That's the opposite of having the God of love and peace with you. That's the obvious...obvious opposite. In chapter 2 of Revelation verse 16, He's writing to the church at Pergamum and He says, "Repent, therefore or else I'm coming to you quickly and I'll make war against them with the sword of My mouth."

First He says I'll come and blow your light out to the church at Ephesus. Then to the church at Pergamos says, "If you don't get things together, if you don't move toward perfection, if you don't mend your ways, if things don't change immediately, I'm going to come with a sword against you and I'm going to make war. In verses 22 and 23 He's writing to the church at Thyatira and He says, "When there's no repentance, I'll cast her on a bed of sickness, those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation." This was in the church. "Unless they repent of their deeds I'll kill her children with pestilence. All the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts and I give to each one of you according to your deeds." I'll come to that church and if that church is in sin and adultery and idolatry, if need be I'll kill the church with pestilence. I'll come and blow the light out. I'll come with a sword and fight against you. I'll come with a pestilence like a disease. And I know your mind and I know your hearts and I'll judge you accordingly.

In chapter 3 verse 3, the Lord of the church writes to the church at Sardis. This is a church at the city of Sardis, a real church as all these are. He said in the middle of verse 3, "If you don't wake up I'll come like a thief and you know a thief comes to plunder and to steal and to destroy. I'll come like a thief and you're not going to know what hour I'm going to come. I'll come to a church and I'll blow the light out, I'll come to a church and fight with a sword, I'll come to a church and bring the pestilence and I'll come to the church...He says...if need be like a thief in the night to plunder you." Verse 16 He says to the Laodicean church, "Because you're lukewarm and neither hot or cold, I'll spit you out of My mouth." Boy, some serious language. That's the opposite of "And the God of love and peace shall be with you."

Paul is saying...Look, you want the continued blessing of God? You want the powerful presence of God in your congregation? Then you better head toward perfection. You better get what's not in order in order or you're going to forfeit God's blessing and the Lord's going to come and bring judgment on the church."

By the way, the God of love is the true and living God. Only here is He called the God of love in Scripture. Nowhere else is He called the God of love, although in 1 John 4:7 to 21 there's a whole long section about how He is love. God is love. But only here is He called specifically the God of

love.

On the other hand, He's called the God of peace many places...Romans 15; Romans 16; Philippians 4; 1 Thessalonians 5; Hebrews 13. Simply to say this, God is love by nature, God is peace by nature. Love comes from Him, peace comes from Him, He's both love and peace by nature and the source of love and peace for us. Paul is saying...Look, I want to tell you to get your church in line and in order so that you can enjoy all the fullness of love and peace that God will bring, or He'll withdraw the manifestation of His love and you'll have chastening and judgment. He'll withdraw the manifestation of His peace and you'll have conflict and chaos.

Paul really sought the perfection of the church.

The second thing he sought was the affection of the church...the affection of the church. Verses 12 and 13, "Greet one another with a holy kiss, all the saints greet you." This is a wonderful brief section. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

What was a holy kiss? Well it was very common in the ancient east to greet one another with a kiss. And that kind of kiss that typically occurred was a man-to-man, woman-to-woman embrace cheek to cheek. And you see that even today in some cultures of the world, although it's not as common as it used to be in the west. But that was a way to demonstrate affection. It was a way to endear oneself. We all know the power of a touch and the power of an embrace. Brotherly love shared among believers was to be shared on every level. If you've studied the New Testament, and I don't have time to get into it, the world knows we're Christians by our love, John 13:34 and 35 says. We show that love by willingness to give up our lives for each other, to meet each other's needs, not to close our compassion to someone who's in need. Brotherly love is an expression of affection given to someone through a ministry to them that meets a need they have. We love sacrificially. We love by meeting needs. We love humbly, not considering ourselves but others more important than ourselves. We love when we give ourselves away for someone else.

But it's more than just an ethical thing, it's more than just a moral thing, there's an affectionate physical component, and that's what he's driving after here. He knew there was conflict in that church. He knew there were all kinds of conflict there. There were all these factions against each other. Then there were the people who had sinned and needed to be restored. Then there were the people who hadn't fallen victim to the false apostles who might feel superior to the others. And he knew that the fragmentation and division in that church could be really disconcerting, not only to the church and its future but the Lord Himself. And so he calls for an act of affection here. He's not really talking about introducing the morality of love, or the ethic of love, that will flow out of getting everything in line in verse 11. But what he wants them to do is begin to demonstrate it, to

demonstrate it.

And they used to do it with a holy kiss, cheek-to-cheek embrace, and there may have been a slight touching of the lips on the cheek, men to men and women to women, and occasionally perhaps between the sexes in a very discreet manner that was done. Most notably this was done at the Lord's table...at the Lord's table because it was at the Lord's table that sin was brought out. That's why we do our church disciplining at the Lord's table, that was the way the early church did it. And it was at the Lord's table when...when people who were in sin were confronted and the church was told about it, but it was also at the Lord's table when sinners who repented were restored. This was the appropriate place then for the embrace of love, the touch that meant so much, the great embrace that brought the person back into endearment into the church who had felt estranged by their sin. Once they had repented, once they had confessed, once they had come back, they were restored with this kind of embrace. It was...it must have been a lovely thing to see the church hugging and embracing that individual. I've watched them do that in the eastern European countries, even when a sinner comes to Christ the person sometimes working his way through the crowd, and as they go through the crowd they're embraced all the way along the path by believers who are embracing that restored sinner in very evident signs of affection. Of course in Russia the men kiss mouth on mouth which is a whole different deal. And it's a little bit of an adjustment, I confess, especially when there's like six of them in line and...but it is an endearing thing, it's an endearing...it's a way to transcend pettiness. It's a way to endear yourself to someone and it's a lovely gesture. I'm glad for the places in the world where it's still done. It's largely been lost in western civilization and it sort of faded out in the thirteenth century because they had institutionalized it and made it a ceremony to be carried on on behalf of priests who were embraced and kissed, as if they were especially holy people and it passed out of existence.

Interestingly enough, even in the church it seems to have seen a revival in my lifetime. When I was growing up as a kid, I didn't see people do that. I didn't ever see men embrace and I see that now...and occasionally do that as well because I think that's a wonderfully simple thing to do in obedience to the Word of God, to express our affection, to break down those barriers. I think that's a very endearing way to conduct ourselves, and that's what he's really asking for here. Make visible, demonstrable that sign of restoration, that sign of acceptance, embrace those people. We...we tend to do a handshake, but that's not a distinctly Christian thing at all, it's just something that everybody does everywhere as sort of an official, I guess it's an official way to give somebody something like a cold or...you know, I don't know. But its become the cultural thing to do, anyway, but as Christians maybe we ought to go one better and in a discreet and in a holy way, separated from any kind of worldly kiss, holy meaning separate, a special way to endear ourselves to those in the faith who feel dispossessed, who feel on the outside, who need to be restored, who need to have affection shown to them who are coming to us newly in Christ, I think that's a very endearing thing. And Paul wanted to see that kind of thing happen in the church because he knew how it could break down barriers.

In verse 13 he says, "All the saints greet you." They obviously were the saints who were with him. He was probably in Philippi at the time he wrote 2 Corinthians, in Macedonia. There were some saints with him. They would all love to have given a holy kiss to the Corinthians, but obviously distance prevented that, so he communicates there affection in sort of a verbal embrace. "All the saints greet you." Obviously we're to love each other with sacrificial service. Obviously we're to love each other by giving away ourselves for the sake of another. Obviously we're to meet needs. That's...that's ethical, that's moral, that's spiritual. But this is physical, heartfelt affection important to the well-being of the congregation. Sometimes when I meet someone who feels...who has, for some reason or another, become an enemy of mine or been critical of me, or something like that, I will purposely embrace them because I think it has an amazing way of sort of breaking down walls that really don't need to be there.

Well, perfection and affection should be in the life of the church. Thirdly, benediction...benediction. I got out my official Oxford English Dictionary of the English language, the consummate dictionary of English, huge volumes and the print in them, even though they're massive volumes, is so small I have to have a big magnifying glass even to read. And I got all down in my magnifying glass on the floor and I looked up benediction and benediction says, "Solemn invocation of blessing on someone." And that's exactly what Paul concludes with, verse 14, this is a benediction, a...a solemn invocation of blessing on someone. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." That, my friends, is a benediction. To pronounce a benediction, that comes from the Latin word *benedictus*, it means literally to pronounce a blessing on someone, to invoke blessing.

Paul wanted for his church that they would get everything in order, perfection. He wanted that they would have deep and expressive love, affection. And he wanted that they would have blessing coming from heaven in a flood, benediction. And he knew that if they were obedient, and if they were faithful they would know the benediction of God, they would know the blessing of God. This is a full benediction, by the way. This is a magnificent benediction. It's worthy of a...of a lot more attention than I'm able to give it in the next five or ten minutes, as we close, but you need to grasp this benediction because of its importance. It is the most complete benediction Paul gave to end any letter. And typically he gave benedictions in his letters. He gave one at the end of Romans. He gave a couple at the end of Romans, he gave one at the beginning of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians. And here at the end of 2 Corinthians, though, he gives a comprehensive benediction and I want to point out two things about this benediction, though there are many things we could talk about, two main things.

First of all, it is a Trinitarian benediction and as such it strikes at the very heart of the...of the Christian faith. It is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that is the love of God. It is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Each member of the trinity is there. This is a Trinitarian benediction. It is not a formerly constructed doctrine of the trinity. It is not a systematic structure of the doctrine of the trinity. It is almost un-self-consciousness. It's almost as if Paul isn't planning to teach the trinity but it just sort of flows out of him because when you talk about redemption, these are the three you talk about. And you know when you've read that, nobody's been left out and there's nobody else to conclude...to include. Nobody's been slighted, the Lord Jesus is there, God is there, the Holy Spirit's there, that's it. It's an almost self-consciousness simplicity that's so beautiful about this. And there's also an obvious equality here. There is...there's no...there's no difference laid out. There's no subordination laid out here. This is clearly a Trinitarian statement. The Lord Jesus Christ, God and the Holy Spirit are the essential persons that make up the one true God. This is the doctrine of the trinity.

Now listen carefully to what I'm going to say. Any denial of the doctrine of the trinity creates a non-existent false god and is a form of idolatry. If you deny that the Holy Spirit is God, then you have a false god. If you deny that Jesus is God, you have a false god. That is idolatry. If you deny that the Father is God, you have a false god. Anything less than the doctrine of the trinity is creating a non-existent false god and that is as much idolatry as if you carved out a totem-pole and worshiped it. God is God when God is understood as trinity.

Just as an illustration. The Mormon theology has a very skewed view of the Godhead. I just read a new book, a new Mormon theology that was sent to me by the Mormons themselves to read. I appreciated their kindness in doing it and it's important for me to know what they teach. Here's what it says, I'm quoting: "Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit are subordinate beings to the Father." That's not true. That's not what the Bible teaches and therefore they worship a non-existent false god who is nothing but an idol that they've created. Further, quote: "Latter Day Saints believe that God the Father is an exalted man, a corporeal being," that is he's flesh and bones, "a personage with flesh and bones." They do not believe God is a spirit, even though the Bible says, Jesus own words, "God is a spirit," John 4. They do not believe God is a spirit. "Our God was once mortal, lived on earth, died and was resurrected and glorified and grew over time to become the almighty that He now is."

So the God that we call God the Almighty was once a man. Now that poses a few questions. Who made Him? And what earth was He on since He created this one? Hopelessly confusing. "But He was once mortal, He lived on earth, He died, He was resurrected, glorified and He grew and developed over time to become the Almighty that He now is." This is the God who is the end of evolution, this is the evolution of God.

Further quoting, "God was once as we are now and is an exalted man who became God and then created the Son and the Holy Spirit." Not true. So when the Mormons say they believe in the God of

the Old Testament, they don't. When they say believe in Jesus Christ, they don't. When they say they believe in the Holy Spirit, they don't. They have created idols with the same names but they are not the true God. That devilish and bizarre lie may have seemed like a reasonable idea to Joseph Smith and certainly his informing demon wanted him to think that, but it's not true. God is three in one, anything other than that is a damnable lie, creates a false god and eliminates the possibility of salvation for anyone who believes it. It's either you believe in the true and living God and in the true Christ, or you can't be saved.

There are many places in the Bible where the trinity is demonstrated to us. You can go to the baptism of Jesus, Jesus being baptized, the Spirit descending like a dove, the Father saying, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." They're all there. You could look at creation. You can go back in Genesis, you'll find God is creating, the Spirit is moving on the waters. John 1 says Christ is the creator. The trinity are all at work in the resurrection. There are passages in the epistles that say Jesus raised Himself from the dead, that say the Spirit raised Him from the dead, that say the Father raised Him from the dead. Any clear simple reading of Scripture yields the fact that there are three personages in the Godhead who are all equal.

And there would have been a lot of ways that...that Paul wanted to give a doctrine of the trinity. He could have appealed to creation. He could have showed the various places where each of the members of the trinity is seen to be the Creator God. He could have gone to the resurrection and shown where each of the members of the trinity is said to be the one who raised Christ from the dead. But he chose the best way to demonstrate the trinity and the best way to comprehend the trinity and that's the second point I want to make, this...this benediction is, first of all, Trinitarian; secondly, it is redemptive...it is redemptive. And I would just put it this way, trying to conceive of the trinity essentially is not possible. If you try to conceive of three in one essentially, to try and grasp the essence of that, it's impossible. Your mind can't handle it. You should be glad for that, that means God is greater than you. If you're not glad for it, I am. We don't want a God who is a man. We're not like the Mormons.

But you essentially...I can't resolve that impossibility of three being one. And there are no illustrations. People say, "Oh, there's an illustration of that, H₂O, it can be water, ice, or steam. That doesn't help cause it can't be water, ice or steam at the same time. You say, "I heard a guy say, 'Well it's easy to understand, it's like an egg. It's a shell, and it's a yoke and it's a white.'" That doesn't help me either because the shell is the shell and the egg is...and the yoke is the yoke and the white is the white. There are no illustrations that help me with this. But that's okay. I don't have to understand everything I believe. There are lots of things I believe and don't understand because my mind can't grasp them.

But where the trinity comes most clear to me is where it came most clear to Paul, that's in redemption. Paul said, "When I look at my redemption, it's all very clear. It was the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that saved me and He came as a result of the love of God. And as the result of God's love and Christ's grace I entered into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit." That's the consummate statement of the trinity built on the redemptive picture. The scheme of salvation makes the trinity very clear. God the Father loves. God the Father sends His Son into the world. His Son graciously provides salvation, the forgiveness of sin and by faith in Jesus Christ we are recipients of the Holy Spirit who ushers us into the fellowship of the body of Christ. The truth of the trinity is the foundation of the nature of God. It is the foundation of the knowledge of the true and living God. It is the only way to conceive of the true God. Jewish people who believe in the God of the Old Testament and deny that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh have an idol, even though they call Him Jehovah. It's not the true God.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all involved in salvation. First salvation touches us this way, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's where redemption comes to us in the gracious favor of Christ who has made salvation and all its joys and benefits a reality to believers through His death. He graciously was willing to die in our place. And then He did that because of the love of God. It was really the plan of God. "God so loved the world that He...what?...gave His only begotten Son." Even when we were enemies God gave His Son and He died for us. God is the source of salvation. It was His love that set it in motion. It was the grace of Christ that brought it to us. And then comes the communion of the Holy Spirit. In salvation the Holy Spirit comes to live in us and He ushers us into the fellowship of the church, the part...and we become part of the body of Christ. And that's...that's the way you understand the trinity.

And it can't be any less or any more, can it? It can't be any less or any more. It's that simple. And so his benediction is this, "I want the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, I want the love of God, I want the fellowship of the Holy Spirit," that is to say, "I want all the riches of Trinitarian redemption. I want all the riches of all that God can do through salvation to be with you all."

What is he saying? Put yourself in a position to receive and enjoy all the riches of your salvation. If you will follow perfection and affection, you'll enjoy benediction. It's really a repeat of what he said at the end of verse 11, isn't it? "And the God of love and peace shall be with you." It's the same idea. I just want all of God's best for you. I just want God to pour out all His best for you. I want you to recognize all that is yours in the fundamental great Christian doctrine of the trinity and its redemptive power. I want you to know it all and experience it all.

This is what I pray for you. I pray for you your perfection. I pray continually that everything in this church would be in order with the Word of God and the will of God. I pray for your affection that there would never be divisions and fights and strifes but that we would all love each other and we would express that love in a very demonstrable way. I pray for reconciliation of all relationships that are broken and I pray for you benediction. I pray that all of you in this whole church collectively would know the fullness of the riches of all the best that God can give through His redemption. That's a consummate concluding prayer, isn't it? That's what any faithful pastor would want for his people. Pray with me.

We're struck again by the greatness of the Scriptures, Father. The majesty that comes to us in the economy of words, the choice of expressions, these incredible summations that are so deep and far-reaching, O God, how I pray for this church what Paul prayed. I pray for their perfection. I pray that everything would be put in order in their lives individually and collectively. I pray for their affection, that their love would be manifest on every front. I pray for their benediction that they would know all the best of all the blessings that come through salvation. And I pray all of that, Lord, that they might be blessed and in that being blessed they might give you the glory and the praise that is due Your great name. We thank You, Father, for this great letter, for all these many years of studying it. We thank You for how it has shaped us. We thank You that You've...You've built a church here that is concerned about perfection, affection and benediction, that is committed to the pursuit of joy and submission and truth and unity. We're blessed, we're grateful We give You the honor. We pray for any dear ones who are with us today who do not know our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who have not received the forgiveness of sin, eternal life, who have not been renewed, born again, regenerated, who have not been given the promise of heaven forever and all its joys. May this be the day of their salvation. May they come to know the triune God. May they come to know Him through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. And may all of us know the fullness of all the riches of our salvation. We thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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