

Grace, Love, and Fellowship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 16:20; 1 John 4:8–11; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 2:1, 2; Gal. 4:4–6.

Memory Text: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14, *ESV*).

Paul closes 2 Corinthians by re-emphasizing essential elements addressed in his letters. He does this through five imperatives (2 Cor. 13:11).

The first imperative, “Rejoice” (*ESV*), recalls earlier texts in the letters.

The second imperative, “Strive for full restoration” (*NIV*), translates a single word in Greek (*katartizō*), which appears here and in 1 Corinthians 1:10.

The third, “Encourage one another” (*NIV*), resumes 2 Corinthians 1:3–7. Paul begins and closes his second letter with encouragement. We receive God’s encouragement in order to encourage others (2 Cor. 1:4, 6).

The fourth and fifth imperatives, “Be of one mind, live in peace” (2 Cor. 13:11, *NKJV*), are a call to unity. This atmosphere of joy, restoration, encouragement, unity, and peace is the condition for the presence of God, “the God of love and peace” (2 Cor. 13:11, *ESV*). It results from our triune God’s work in the human heart (2 Cor. 13:14).

Grace, love, and fellowship result from the work of the triune God for us. These three Christian features promote an atmosphere characterized by God’s presence.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 26.

The Grace of Jesus

It is inspiring that at the end of 2 Corinthians, we see a reference to the grace of Jesus, just as in the opening (2 Cor. 1:2, 2 Cor. 13:14). Paul begins and closes this letter with a reference to His grace. As we saw at the beginning of this quarter, he couldn't stop thinking and speaking about Jesus.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9, *NKJV*).

How admirable and irresistible is the grace of Jesus! He left the riches of His eternal existence in heaven to become poor. He walked down the dusty roads of ancient Galilee. “He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (*Phil. 2:8, ESV*). He did so in order for us to become “rich,” namely, for us to have a chance to be with Him in heaven. It's hard for us, who have known only a world of sin, death, and suffering even to begin to grasp what it meant for Jesus to have left the courts of heaven in order to come here and offer His life for us.

Read Romans 16:20, Galatians 6:18, Philippians 4:23, and 1 Thessalonians 5:28. What important teaching do you see in these passages?

Paul refers to the grace of Jesus very often in his letters. Some pearls include, “The free gift by the grace of . . . Jesus Christ abounded for many” (*Rom. 5:15, ESV*). Those who receive this abundance of grace will “reign in life through . . . Jesus” (*Rom. 5:17, ESV*). As occurs with 2 Corinthians, Paul also begins and ends other letters mentioning the grace of Jesus (*Rom. 1:7, Rom. 16:20, 1 Cor. 1:3, 1 Cor. 16:23, Gal. 1:3, Gal. 6:18, Phil. 1:2, Phil. 4:23*). This topic occupied his thoughts, and he wanted it to fill the minds of the Corinthians, too.

This was his wish for all the churches. Notice what he says to the Ephesians: “Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love” (*Eph. 6:24, NIV*). Would he wish for us to love Jesus less than that, an undying love? Certainly not. After all, his wish was for the grace of Jesus to reach “more and more people” (2 Cor. 4:15, *NIV*) and become sufficient for them just as it was for him (2 Cor. 12:9).

Think about God's grace toward you like this. What do you deserve for the kind of things you have said and done? What, however, does God's grace offer you instead?

The Love of God

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor. 13:14, *NKJV*). With this verse, Paul ends his second letter. Notice that he mentions the three Persons of the Trinity in this order—Son, Father, and Holy Spirit. It is through the work of all three that we can better understand what God is like and what He has done for us.

Read John 3:16, 17; Romans 8:37–39; and 1 John 4:8–11. What do these passages tell us about the love of God?

First John 4:8 says that “God is love.” Love is an essential attribute of God. John emphasizes that we can know love in that God gave His only Son to die for us (*John 3:16*). God sent Jesus on a rescue mission (*John 3:17*), and this was part of the project of salvation (*Acts 3:20, 21; 1 John 4:10, 14*). Jesus referred to the Father several times in the Gospels as the One who sent Him (*Matt. 10:40, Mark 9:37*).

In a remarkable statement, Paul says, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8, NIV*). We can glimpse God’s love in the sweet relationship between husband and wife, as well as parents and their children, in sincere friendships, and so forth. We can also see God’s love in nature. In that regard, Ellen G. White says, “ ‘God is love’ is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of springing grass. The lovely birds making the air vocal with their happy songs, the delicately tinted flowers in their perfection perfuming the air, the lofty trees of the forest with their rich foliage of living green—all testify to the tender, fatherly care of our God and to His desire to make His children happy.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 10.

However, nothing is more convincing than God’s giving Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins. When we understand that God loved us to the point of sending Jesus to lay down His life for us, our response is willingness “to lay down our lives for the brothers” (*1 John 3:16, ESV*).

Paul wanted the Corinthians to live in unity. However, without love, there is no unity. That is why he taught them that “love builds up” (*1 Cor. 8:1, ESV*) and that without love, everything is useless and empty (*1 Cor. 13:1–3*). So, all we do must be done in love (*1 Cor. 16:14*), a love that is an extension of God’s love.

What would we lose in the gospel if Jesus Himself were not fully and eternally God?

The God of Love

In the ancient pagan world, people did not believe that the gods loved humans. Instead, the gods were malevolent and furious, and were supposed to be appeased. The idea of a God of love, as we see in the Bible, was a novelty. As surprising as this statement was in his time, Paul characterizes our God as “the God of love and peace” (2 Cor. 13:11).

Read 2 Corinthians 13:11. How can you draw hope from what is said here? How can you better experience what this verse teaches?

The phrase “the God of love and peace” can be interpreted in two different ways. On one hand, God is seen as the source of love and peace. On the other hand, God is characterized by love and peace. It is not necessary, however, to decide between the two. Because love and peace are intrinsic characteristics of God, He gives us love and peace.

Elsewhere, Paul refers to God as “the God of endurance and encouragement” (Rom. 15:5, *ESV*); “of hope” (Rom. 15:13, *ESV*); “of peace” (Rom. 15:33, Rom. 16:20, 1 Cor. 14:33, Phil. 4:9, 1 Thess. 5:23), “the Father of mercies” (2 Cor. 1:3), and “the God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3). God is the source of all these blessings. He gives them to us all out of His unfailing love.

Also, although the phrase “God of peace” is somewhat common in the Bible, the phrase “God of love” occurs only here (2 Cor. 13:11), and, hence, it deserves our most profound reflection.

As many interpreters have noticed, Paul’s reference to the God of love a few verses before the trinitarian benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14 suggests that he thinks of God as three Persons. “Though he uses the word ‘God’ here as one of the three, his understanding of Jesus and the Spirit elsewhere in his letters . . . forces us to see the whole phrase as describing the one God whom the earliest church came to see in threefold form. It would be over a century before theologians . . . began to use words like ‘trinity’ as a shorthand way of expressing what Paul is already articulating.”—Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), p. 148.

We believe in one God, the unity of three Persons who live eternally in a relationship of love. This triune God loves us and summons us to love one another in a way that reflects the love among the Three Members of the Godhead.

The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

The grace of Jesus not only reveals the love of God for us but also brings the fellowship of the Spirit as a further effect of that love. At the same time, fellowship has its source in the love of God. And that is because without love, there is no fellowship. As Paul writes: “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (*Phil. 2:1, 2, NKJV*).

Some people say that the Holy Spirit is only a force or influence, but that cannot be true. After all, why would Paul mention two persons—the Father and the Son—along with a mere “force” in a trinitarian formula? That would make no sense. Just as the Father and the Son are presented in a personal relationship (*2 Cor. 1:3, 2 Cor. 11:31*), the relationship of the Spirit with persons leads us to the conclusion that He is also a person (*Rom. 8:15, 16; see also John 14:16, 17, 26; John 15:26*).

The phrase “fellowship of the Spirit” (*Phil. 2:1*) can be understood in two ways. It can mean fellowship with one another granted by the Spirit, or fellowship with the Spirit Himself. Several Bible interpreters argue that these senses are not mutually exclusive. After all, fellowship with one another is the consequence of fellowship with the Spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 12:11; and 2 Corinthians 3:6, 17. What did Paul teach the Corinthians about the Spirit?

Paul has much to say about the work of the Spirit. In 1 and 2 Corinthians, there are more than forty references to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit promotes the edification of the church (*1 Cor. 14:12*), enables people for mission (*1 Cor. 2:4, 5*), reveals the deep things of God to us (*1 Cor. 2:10, 11*), and teaches them to us (*1 Cor. 2:13*), dwells in us (*1 Cor. 3:16, 1 Cor. 6:19*), works with Christ for our justification (*1 Cor. 6:11*), bestows spiritual gifts to the church (*1 Corinthians 12–14*), seals us for salvation (*2 Cor. 1:22*), imprints the law in human hearts (*2 Cor. 3:3*), and gives new life in Christ (*2 Cor. 3:6*), and freedom from sin (*2 Cor. 3:17*). For sure, we cannot live without the Holy Spirit.

Why, too, is an understanding of the divinity of the Holy Spirit important for fully grasping God’s love for us?

Our Triune God

When reading 2 Corinthians 13:14, one may think that Christ is the only source of grace, God is the only source of love, and the Holy Spirit is the only source of fellowship, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:3, 4, 9; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 2 Corinthians 1:2, 12; Romans 8:35; Romans 15:30; Galatians 2:20; and Ephesians 3:19. What do these passages say about grace, love, and fellowship in connection with the members of the Trinity?

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit work together for our salvation. Grace, love, and fellowship come not from only one but the Three Members of the Godhead. Yet, each One has specific functions in the history of salvation. Paul is aware of that and emphasizes this teaching in his letters. For instance, the plan of salvation is told with an incredible economy of words in Galatians 4:4–6, with the respective participation of the Three Members of the Godhead. God the Father sent Jesus, which suggests that the Father is the Source of that plan (*Gal. 4:4*). The Son was born of a woman (*Gal. 4:4*), which is a reference to the Incarnation and points to the fulfillment of an ancient promise (*Gen. 3:15*). The Son redeemed us and brought us back to the correct relationship with the Father, whom Satan had lied about (*Gen. 3:5*). And the Holy Spirit legitimizes our identity as children of God (*Gal. 4:6*).

There are several other references to the Trinity in the Pauline letters. The three act together, enabling the church for mission (*1 Cor. 12:4–6*), giving us spiritual strength (*Eph. 3:14–19*), and promoting a profound unity among church members, one that replicates the unity that marks the very relationship of the members of the Godhead (*Eph. 4:4–6*). In Paul's understanding, not only is God triune, but also the three Persons of the Godhead work together for our salvation (*Eph. 1:3, 13, 14*). In Ephesians, Paul goes so far as to mention that we must be filled with the fullness of the Father (*Eph. 3:19*), the Son (*Eph. 4:13*), and the Holy Spirit (*Eph. 5:18*).

In bringing the correspondence with the Corinthians to a close (*2 Cor. 13:14*), Paul could not finish with a better ending—a promise that the three Dignitaries of the universe, the heavenly Trio, would be with us now and in the age to come.

How should fellowship among church members reflect the lovely relationship of the Godhead?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,’ ” pp. 662–680, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The grace of Jesus Christ alone can change the heart of stone to a heart of flesh, and make it alive unto God. . . . Men have no power to justify the soul, to sanctify the heart. Moral disease cannot be healed save through the power of the great Physician. The highest gift of heaven, even the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, is alone able to redeem the lost.”—Ellen G. White, in *The Signs of the Times*, May 2, 1892.

“ ‘God is love.’ 1 John 4:16. His nature, His law, is love. It ever has been; it ever will be. ‘The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity,’ whose ‘ways are everlasting,’ changeth not. With Him ‘is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning.’ Isaiah 57:15; Habakkuk 3:6; James 1:17. Every manifestation of creative power is an expression of infinite love. The sovereignty of God involves fullness of blessing to all created beings. . . . The history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God’s unchanging love.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 33.

“We need to realize that the Holy Spirit . . . is as much a person as God is a person. . . . The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 52.

“There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will cooperate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 615.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 A well-known Christian song is entitled “Amazing Grace.” What is amazing about the grace of Jesus?
- 2 A beautiful portrayal of God’s love can be found in the parable of the prodigal son. How do we know the father in this parable is a loving father?
- 3 How can local churches demonstrate that the “fellowship of the Spirit” is a reality there?

Begun in a Bar

By RICK KAJIURA

People in the village scoffed. “These Christians must be deluded to think we would worship God in a building with such a wicked past,” they declared.

Leenus, a Global Mission (GM) pioneer in Kenya, had an unlikely setting for growing a thriving congregation—a small room that used to be a bar. His ministry as a GM pioneer also had an unlikely start. He was a pastor of a different faith, but was raising a new group of Seventh-day Adventist believers.

Leenus became an Adventist after attending evangelistic meetings and studying the Voice of Prophecy (VOP) Bible lessons. “I found there was truth in them,” he said. He set out to share that truth with his former members as soon as he was baptized.

Leenus registered 360 people in the VOP Bible study course. He went from home to home, answering questions until every one of them had completed the course. To his delight, 15 of them requested baptism.

The conference leaders conducted the baptisms and told Leenus he would lead the new flock. But they changed their minds. They were so impressed by Leenus’s ability to reach others they made him a GM pioneer. “They told me to go into the interior and fetch more people,” Leenus said.

When Leenus arrived in the new town, there was no Adventist presence. He went door to door, sharing the Adventist faith. After much effort, one person accepted the message. “I told this man, ‘Hold my hand, and together we will reach others.’”

Leenus held a series of evangelistic meetings, and several community members attended. When they asked, “Where is your church” Leenus had to tell them that they were meeting in a shop.

“No, no!” they said, learning that the shop was once a bar. “We can’t worship God there. That’s impossible.”

Leenus was tempted to feel discouraged, but he soon realized God had a plan. “God wanted us to start in a bar so He could use His power and people to support us.”

Leenus prayed about having a church and, eventually, God helped him acquire land and people to help build the structure. Now, 10 members meet every week on Sabbath in the brand-new church. Some come from as far as 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) away. Leenus plans to hold evangelistic meetings in the community. He believes having a new church has helped people feel God is with the church plant. “They can see that God is doing something for us. He is expanding us and helping us grow.”

Please pray for Global Mission pioneers who, like Leenus, have accepted the challenge of planting churches among unreached people groups around the world. Learn more about Global Mission pioneers: bit.ly/GMPioneers.

Sin shattered Adam and Eve's communion with God, but He did not leave the fallen pair to self-destruct. He first sought them out (*Gen. 3:9, NKJV*) and went on to prophesy about the birth of One who would save the world from sin (*Gen. 3:15*). Right there in Eden after the Fall, prophecy uplifted Jesus and pointed sinners to Him, their only hope.

This quarter's study, entitled *The Gift of Prophecy* by the Ellen G. White Estate, examines God's ingenious innovation for communicating His will and way to fallen human beings who can no longer commune with Him face-to-face.

We will learn how God calls prophets and how we can test their authenticity. We will see the similarities and differences between Old and New Testament prophets, as well as gain a working understanding of how revelation and inspiration functioned in their lives. While some prophets spoke, others wrote; some did both. We will examine these and other modes of divine discourse, their implications, and the blessings of obeying the messages these prophets gave.

Lesson 1—The Creator Speaks

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Communication in Eden** (*Gen. 2:15–17*)

MONDAY: **Hiding From God** (*Gen. 3:1–8*)

TUESDAY: **God Seeks Humanity** (*Gen. 3:9*)

WEDNESDAY: **Expelled From the Garden** (*Gen. 3:14–24*)

THURSDAY: **God's Spokespeople** (*Heb. 1:1, 2; Rom. 1:19, 20*)

Memory Text—*Hebrews 1:1, 2, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Sin destroyed the face-to-face relationship that we were intended to have with God. To restore communication with us, He has carefully chosen spokespersons, known as prophets, who reveal His messages to us, often through writings in the Bible but not always.

Lesson 2—The Call of a Prophet

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Abraham, Defender of the Covenant** (*Gal. 3:6–9*)

MONDAY: **The Elijah Message** (*1 Kings 18:19–39*)

TUESDAY: **Isaiah, the Gospel Prophet** (*Isa. 6:1–8*)

WEDNESDAY: **Daniel, the Faithful Seer** (*Dan. 15:13, 14*)

THURSDAY: **John the Baptist, Preparing a People** (*Mark 1:2–5*)

Memory Text—*Isaiah 6:8, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Today, the prophetic voice is often rejected or simply ignored. We are called to heed the voice of God's prophets, and to be messengers of the hope given to us through the prophets.

Lessons for People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision:

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