

Text: II Corinthians 13:11-14

Title: “The 3-D Life ... Connection”

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – At my favorite Starbucks shop they have a sign that hangs in the kitchen area. It’s just magic-marker writing on a simple piece of paper displayed prominently where all the workers can see it. Just five words: “Be excellent with each other.”

That got me thinking. If that is a value in Starbucks, how much more is it a value for the church, the people of God.

I think that may have been what Paul had in mind when he closed his final letter to the Corinthian church. Open your Bibles to II Corinthians 13:11-14. Remember from our studies in I Corinthians that one of the great problems with the church in Corinth was their fractured fellowship. So we’re not surprised that Paul returns with these final words of encouragement for a church that he truly loved.

Note: It’s common for Bible readers to skip over sections like this where it might appear that nothing of substance is included. This is never true about the Bible. All Scripture ... all Scripture ... is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. Every word, every phrase is important, so let’s look at it carefully.

2 Corinthians 13:11 - Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

“Good-by” – A word that explodes with joy. It’s more than just saying, “So long” or “See ya later.” It really means “rejoice.” When it comes to Christian relationships, there’s joy even in our farewells.

Now Paul peppers them with a series of imperatives or commands. Here’s the first one.

“Aim for perfection” – He’s not calling for sinless perfection, which is impossible for us as human beings. The word means “to be mended,” as you might mend a tear in a piece of cloth, or how a broken bone mends over time. He means to say, “Mend your relationships.”

(“Be excellent with each other.”)

“Listen to my appeal” – Maybe the NIV misses the real meaning here. The word means “be comforted” or “be encouraged.” O how we need to say that to others around us whose courage is sagging. Support each other.

“Be of one mind” – Settle your differences. Get your attitudes in sync with each other.

“Live in peace” – Peace and harmony in a home, in a church, doesn’t just happen. It doesn’t come naturally. That’s why there is a command here to live in peace. Work hard at it.

Romans 12:18 - If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

So Paul is talking here about a powerful connection and unity that exists in the church. But it's not something that is man-centered. It flows out of the presence of God in our midst as the people of God. That's why it says...

“And the God of love and peace will be with you.”

As we strive for this kind of unity, it opens the door for the God of love and peace to take our relationships to even higher levels.

“Be excellent with each other.”

Our God is the “God of love and peace.” Can the world around tell that from the way we connect with each other in love and peace in the church?

We've been talking about three dimension of our life together as the people of God ... INVITE, DISCOVER, CONNECT.

These are all important dimension to the life of the church because they are all important dimensions of who God is.

Invite – Because God is a reaching God

Discover – Because God is a revealing God

Connect – Because God is a relational God ... “the God of love and peace.”

Let's continue.

2 Corinthians 13:12 - Greet one another with a holy kiss.

The holy kiss was a common way of greeting in biblical times. You've seen how people greet each other in the Middle East with a kiss to either side of the face. It's much like our handshake today. But notice it is called a “holy” kiss. There was something spiritual about it. It was a “holy kiss,” sanctified because of their devotion to Jesus Christ. It symbolized love, forgiveness, and unity which should exist among Christians.

The church fathers of the 2nd century tell us that this came to be associated with the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the baptism of new believers.

How we greet each other is important. We see it again in the next verse.

2 Corinthians 13:13- All the saints send their greetings.

At the writing of II Corinthians, Paul is probably somewhere in Macedonia, perhaps Philippi. I think it's interesting that the brothers in Macedonia sent their greetings. Did they know of the severe problems in Corinth? If they did know, it is beautiful that they still loved the sister church in Corinth, and sent greetings. If they didn't know, it was because Paul had not bad-mouthed the Corinthians in the presence of those other believers. So they could send their greeting as brothers and sisters in Christ in a different land.

And now we come to what many believe is the greatest benediction in the Bible. It is a prayer for those struggling believers in Corinth.

2 Corinthians 13:14 - May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

“With you all” – I’m impressed that Paul had no problem asking this for even the most stubborn, divisive person in the church. He prayed it for those who struggled with moral issues. Paul wanted God’s very best for each of them.

He was doing something powerful when he prayed this prayer for them, because he was asking the Triune God to make His life real toward them and among them.

Now, one of the great mysteries of the Bible is the doctrine of the Trinity, which teaches that God is One in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

ILLUSTRATION – A little boy came home from VBS and told his mom that he learned that God was everywhere. “Is God in that hot oven?” “Yes.” “Is God in the cabinets?” “Yes.” He took the lid off the sugar jar and said, “Is God in there?” “Yes.” The little boy slammed the lid on the sugar jar and said, “Caught you!” Well that mom needed to do a little more explaining about God.

Many people are like that little boy. They want to put God in a jar ... or in a box. And you can’t do that. You can’t contain the infinite in the finite.

But one of the amazing mysteries of the Bible is that the great God of the universe who exists in three-persons (an even more amazing mystery) has actually revealed Himself and manifests Himself in His church.

Why is this doctrine important? There are many reasons, but for our purposes this morning, it’s important because the relational, connecting aspect to God’s character is seen in the doctrine of the Trinity.

The powerful connection that exists within the Trinity makes possible the relationships we enjoy the Body of Christ.

1. ENABLING GRACE COMES THROUGH THE SON.

II Corinthians 13:14 – “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ ... be with you all.”

Grace is enabling, in the best sense of that word. Grace is what makes us sufficient for every need, every challenge we face.

Here in II Corinthians Paul tells about a severe struggle he had in his own personal life. He calls it his “thorn in the flesh.” We don’t know what that was. All we know is that Paul prayed a lot about it, and that God came to him in the midst of that personal struggle and said this:

2 Corinthians 12:9 - But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

Listen, there is more grace in God’s heart than there is sin in your life. There’s more grace in God’s heart than there are problems in your life.

How does that grace come to us? Obviously through Christ. But in a very practical way, that grace flows through relationships as we show grace to each other.

ILLUSTRATION – I recently heard the story of a CEO of a Fortune 500 company who pulled into a service station to get gas. He went inside to pay, and when he came out he noticed his wife engaged in a deep discussion with the service station attendant. It turned out that she knew him. In fact back in high school before she met her eventual husband, she used to date this man.

The CEO got in the car, and the two drove in silence. He was feeling pretty good about himself when he finally spoke: "I bet I know what you were thinking. I bet you were thinking you're glad you married me, a Fortune 500 CEO, and not him, a service station attendant."

"No, I was thinking if I'd married him, he'd be a Fortune 500 CEO and you'd be a service station attendant."

That’s how grace works. Being around people of grace enables us to rise to the challenges we face as the grace of Christ flows through the encouragement of others.

Enabling grace flows from Christ through us into the lives of others.

2. EXTRAVAGANT LOVE COMES THROUGH THE FATHER.

II Corinthians 13:14 – “May the ... love of God ... be with you all.”

This is amazing love ... extravagant love, lavished upon us by the Father. It’s a love that moves to meet a need without counting the cost, seeing the object of that love worthy of the sacrifice.

1 John 3:1 - How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

ILLUSTRATION - In his book, *Searching for God Knows What*, Donald Miller tells the story of a friend who experienced a dramatic deliverance from alcoholism. The turning point came as a result of a single incident that gave him the strength to overcome his addiction. The man’s father had flown in to attend a recovery meeting with him, and in the meeting the alcoholic had to stand and confess all his weaknesses. When he finished, his father stood up to address the group of addicts. He looked at his son and said, "I have never loved my son as much as I do at this moment. I love him. I want all of you to know I love him." The son said for the first time in his life, he was able to believe God loved him, too.

That’s the way it works so often. The love of the Father is experienced through the love of believers around us.

Extravagant love flows from the Father.

3. EXTRAORDINARY SHARING COMES THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

II Corinthians 13:14 – “May the ... fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

ILLUSTRATION – Those of us of the older generations know the name Sam Rayburn, a powerful politician from Texas. Years ago, when Rayborn was Speaker of the House discovered he had terminal cancer, he shocked everyone when he announced he was going back to his small hometown in Bonham, Texas. People said to him: "They have got the finest facilities in Washington, D. C. Why go back to that little town?"

Rayburn's response speaks to the priceless importance of community. He said, "Because in Bonham, Texas, they know if you're sick, and they care when you die."

You see, there's a powerful connection that exists within us. Just as there is an energy that pulsates in the Godhead, there is an energy that pulsates among believers. This fellowship or sharing is a very practical thing. We share together in the things of God. We have them in common. The Spirit that lives in me, lives in you. How can we look at one another like that was just another human being in front of us? I sometimes am moved to tears when I sit across from someone and there wells up in my heart an extraordinary love that cannot be explained. I realize in that moment the connection that exists between two believers.

CONCLUSION

Let me close with two questions, each with a challenge.

Question #1: Is there anything in your life that cannot be overcome by the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit? Answer: Absolutely not. So, my challenge is to trust God with your life.

Question #2: Is there anything in the life of anyone you know that can't be overcome by the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit? Answer: Absolutely not. And the challenge is for you to begin to let that grace, that love, that sharing flow through your life.