
Gracious Words in Ministry Calls

2 Corinthians 13:11-13¹⁷

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Think about the opening of the letter...

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Kent Hughes wrote:

The good, the bad, and the ugly were there side-by-side: business, sport, tourism, sex, religious pluralism. Nevertheless, Paul and his cohorts had planted a remarkable church in Corinth. And all went quite well until the arrival of those whom Paul called "super-apostles," men who preached a strange amalgam of Christianity and old-covenant strictures and triumphalist theology that imported the values of Corinthian culture right into the church. From the super-apostles' perspective, Paul suffered too much, his ministry lacked luster, his preaching was dull, he had no ecstatic stories to tell, he had no letters of commendation, and he was a poor laborer who worked with his hands. Tragically, the great apostle found himself rejected by many in the very church he had founded!

Thus, in the brilliant and stormy second letter to the Corinthians he defends his apostleship and defines authentic ministry. (Hughes, p. 231)

Remember what has happened...

The church was in deep trouble with division, sin, compromise, leadership and external influence...

Paul had confronted the church in person, through letters and via other servants...

Initially, most of the church rejected Paul's admonition and then, increasingly rejected Paul's authority...

Then there came the group of church leaders from Jerusalem, claiming to be super apostles and hyper-ministers who denied Paul's authority and drew the church aside to follow them...

Eventually, most of the church repented and eagerly sought reconciliation and restoration with Paul...

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Yet there is still a small, rebellious, unrepentant group who are in concert with the "super apostles" from Jerusalem...

Think about how that frames his closing...

He has accepted the general repentance and looks forward to the joy of restored fellowship with them...

He has confronted the unrepentant and has challenged them as to whether they are believers or not...

If they repent, then restoration, reconciliation, joy and fellowship can be the outflow of this benediction.

So, unless there is repentance on the part of the rebellious and unrepentant, then they will have to be removed in order for this benediction to have any, real, practical meaning. And remember, Paul is telling them that they need to deal with the group *from the church at Jerusalem!*

What is the trajectory?

The trajectory through the whole book is to land on each of these phrases. With all the chaos, carnality and confusion in the church, here is great desire of all godly leaders and Biblical confrontation: peace among God's people.

The Call to Community Peace (v. 11-13)

¹¹ Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All the saints greet you.

Its Pointed Commands

The five brief admonitions listed in verse 11 show a distinct change in tone as Paul introduces them with "Finally, brothers, rejoice." Paul had earlier used the term "brothers" when he opened each of the first two major sections of the letter (cf. 1:8; 8:1). But "brothers" is noticeably absent in the final section (chapters 10-13), in which he assails the unrepentant in the Corinthian church.

Now, however, he addresses everyone in the Corinthian church as "brothers" in hopes that all will be considered brothers (and sisters) due to their repentance. Optimism brightens Paul's final words. (Hughes, p.232)

Let there be joy

...We are commanded to rejoice, to have a joyful heart, spirit, attitude and engagement with one another.

Let there be restoration

...We are commanded to mend our ways and mend our relationships. You are to forgive and to be restored. This will be a constant requirement and responsibility. Is there anyone that you need to mend your relationship with?

Let there be care

...We are commanded to encourage and comfort one another. But underlying that practical movement of words and deeds will be love and genuine care. If you don't care, you won't.

Let there be harmony

...We are commanded to agree with one another. This does not mean that we set aside genuine differences and act like they don't matter. But we are to pursue harmony. Not everyone will be on the same notes, singing the same melody. But all of us are to seek harmony and unity.

Let there be peace

...We are commanded to live at peace with one another. This means with other Christians here in the church. It also means in the family. It means in ministries. It means between shepherds and sheep. It means in flocks. It means in every relationship we have at all levels in all dimensions, live in peace.

Its Promised Consequence

The Character of God

True peace and harmony in the church is mediated by :

The love of God in Himself and for us...

The peace of God in Himself and which He gives to us...

The Presence of God

Consider Philippians 4:2-9

² I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

God is always near and with us in His omnipresence. That is a fact of existence.

What does it mean that if we meet certain conditions, God's presence will be with us? It means that God will be with us as observing, evaluating, approving and affirming those who experience and express His love and peace. S

Then it is right to promise and pray for this. When we say, "May God be with you..." we are encouraging the person that God is pleased with them. When we pray, "God. Be with us..." we are seeking His approval and affirmation.

Finally, this is also one of the titles or names of Jesus in the incarnation. He is, "God with us..." Let us then savor and seek the presence and the pleasure of God in our relationships with one another.

Its Practical Expression

Within the congregation people were to greet one another in the familiar, cultural way. For them it was a kiss. For us it is a varied but sweet acknowledgment of another person in the flow of life, ministry and gathering. We are to welcome, receive, and rejoice in one another. There are no exceptions.

Among the congregations there were to be greetings and salutations. Churches were to recognize and rejoice in one another. Today that is harder because of doctrinal and practical fragmentation. But as I do from every trip abroad, we greet one another from the variety of places and persons we are connected to.

The Blessing from Trinitarian Unity (v. 14)

¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The Son's Grace

Jesus' grace is first brought to us in the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19). It is through Jesus' grace that we are truly rich; that is, rich in spiritual treasures and heavenly rewards (2 Corinthians 8:9). So Jesus' grace is needed to not only make God's people, but to mend their brokenness and mature their childishness.

The Father's Love

The grace of Jesus comes to us out of the Father's love. He is the God of love (v. 11). Who God is blesses us. That He is love and that He loves is our greatest good and benediction.

The Spirit's Fellowship

Here is that word, *koinonia*. It means to have things in common in such a way that we engage one another in them.

So, the Spirit fellowships with us. He imparts the life of Jesus to us, stamps the image of Jesus on our hearts, transforms us into that image and causes us to walk in His righteousness. This is just a part of the way the Spirit fellowships, communes with us. It really is what the spirit communicates and thus commutes to us.

We fellowship with one another by the Spirit. He is the common bond that holds us together. Yes, we may fellowship in our common interests in life, sport, family, ministry, vocation. But those are superseded and sanctified by the presence, power and perfection of the Spirit.

One writer says, "By this prayer Paul is reminding the Corinthians that their 'mending' does not lie within themselves but with the grace of Christ, the love of God and the Spirit's fellowship. The grace of Christ removes aggressiveness, the love of God dispels jealousy, while the fellowship created by the Spirit destroys bitterness. As God answers that prayer, the problems so manifest in Corinth and in every troubled church will be overcome." (Barnett, p.188).

Reflect and Respond

Where is the conflict, concerns, confusions here at the Chapel?

How do you handle our doctrinal differences?

How do you respond to each other's sin against you?

Do you prefer one another and put each other's interests and needs first? Or are your expectations and experiences first and foremost?

Is your life marked by:

God's love

God's peace

Are you at peace and reconciled to everyone in the church? Is there anyone you cannot greet with a holy kiss... or at least our version of it? Is every smile, every hand shake, every hug, genuine?

Let us hear and heed these exhortations:

- Let there be joy, here. Be happy with one another.
- Let there be restoration, here. Mend your relationships with one another.
- Let there be care, here. Comfort and encourage one another.
- Let there be harmony. Agree with one another.
- Let there be peace. Live peaceably with one another.

Read together:

May the
 grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
 the love of God,
 and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.