

The Triune God Gives Us Perfect Peace

2 Corinthians 13:11-14 • 2023-06-04 • Holy Trinity Sunday



Did you notice it? (Putting out of place candle back into symmetrical positioning.)

Maybe the screen was hiding it until now, but I put it out of position before the service

to make a point. I'm guessing many of you did notice something was off. We usually like things to be uniform, don't we? There is something about agreement and balance that pleases the artistic eye in most of us. What about unity and agreement among people? I'm not just talking about appearance. I'm talking about the real unity of spirit and mind. Is it in any way possible? Where do we find true unity? It is found only in our Triune God. And with him we find a oneness that includes oneness in spirit and mind. Today we look at the closing words of one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians, and we see how true unity and peace comes alone through our One, Triune God.

Sometimes when reading the Bible, you could get the impression that the early Christian church had something which you don't see in today's churches. You might get the impression that they were less divided. When the believers gathered at Jerusalem at Pentecost, they spoke in many voices, but with one and the same message. When you hear about how they lived it says they shared everything. They prayed together and ate together. It seems so unified, perfect, and right. Isn't that the way it should be with believers? Why the divisions today? Why the division within congregations? Why not the same expression of unity and fellowship that these early believers enjoyed?

But when we dig a little beyond that surface, we see that the early church did indeed face the same challenges we face. They weren't always perfectly united and in agreement. A few months before this letter was written, Paul wrote against division at Corinth. The believers were anything but the example of a peaceful and united Christian congregation. They were breaking into groups and factions. Some claimed to follow one person and some another. Still others refused to follow any leader or shepherd and considered themselves superior. On top of these divisions they had disorderly worship, abuse of the Lord's Supper, and disagreement in doctrine. They were not united on the use of Christian freedom. They were divided on the role of men and women. The apostle Paul rightly admonished them for their disagreement in thought and doctrine.

But, as you can well imagine, the divisions didn't disappear overnight. A few months later Paul was still a little concerned they might not be perfectly united. You see this as he wrote the final remarks in 2 Corinthians: *Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace.*

Perhaps we can all relate in some way or another. Maybe you've been at a congregation where there was not entire agreement on some matters. One committee member might find he or she doesn't get along with another. One board member may decide he'd rather support one position over the position of all others. No, I'm not pointing fingers at anyone in particular. Yet I am pointing out that we all have felt this division. "Look, there goes the brown carpet group. I'm with the green carpet group." "I'll never agree with those purple hymnal people, I like my blue song book!" "I must be done this way, or its not done right!" Yes, the division can even be more serious than building adornments or worship format. But even those small things can create a huge disunity and rift in a congregation. Oneness of mind can be replaced with a singleness of mind. "If they do that then I'm out of here!" Disunity brings discord, disconnection, and causes a body to dissolve into disorder and decay. And whether over big or small the disease of disunity affects all. No congregation today is free of division just as no congregation is perfectly united in belief and practice.

But should this surprise us when we look at the rest of our lives and the world we live in? Do brothers and sisters in a family always get along? Do mom and dad never have major disagreements? The workers gripe as they mock their boss. And just think about sports! People can't even get along in sports as they ought -even when they are on the same team! Teammates no longer function as a team but in anger and competition against each other! These are the groups that are supposed to be united. Should we be so surprised if this happens within the visible church? Walking through a church door or having your name on a membership role won't filter out the things that divide.

Christians can sit together. They can worship together. They can carry out God's work together. But God wants more than that from us! *"Be at peace...be of one mind."* And God doesn't just want us to feel at peace with each other. He wants us to show it. Paul told the Corinthians to let the peace display itself in action: *"Greet one another."* Have you maintained peace? Good. But have you done everything to display full peace?

All such division is part of the lack of peace between us and God. How can we expect to find unity and peace among hearts that have spurned and broken away from their God? The real problem is not that we can't have perfect peace with each other. The real problem is how impossible it is for us to establish perfect peace with our God. And that lack of peace flows from our hearts and minds into all we do. Until at last we will all die. And the heart that lives in disunity with God, dies apart from God. All will face the judge who will have no part with divisive sinners -not in the least.

Yet peace and unity still come, even to sinners just like us. Look at the closing of Paul's letter to the Corinthian Christians: *"Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace."*

How is this possible? Paul wasn't just spouting idealistic thinking. He wanted them to live in the peace God had given. He called them "brothers." He was speaking to those who are together in faith in Christ Jesus. Though sin had divided and destroyed their relationship, the Triune God was not a God of division and lovelessness. "The God of love and peace" would be with them. And this changes everything! They would not be alone in this. Nor are we. The promise to all believers: "*The God of love and peace will be with you.*" Their peace was worked by the God of love and peace. "*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*"

Unity and peace start with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything centers on Jesus. This is a grace, an undeserved unearned love that led Jesus to give his life for the Corinthians. This is the grace that God says was Christ dying for us, the ungodly. This is the grace that is seen as God's Son Jesus takes on human flesh, and though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor. He did this so that we might become rich. The grace of Jesus showers us with blessing upon blessing. With that grace from Christ how can we not feel secure and at one with our God? The Son of God makes us at peace with God. He came to a world filled with disunity and discord to bring perfect harmony.

The love of God the Father is now ours. Because of the grace of our Lord Jesus, we now enjoy the full confidence that God the Father looks on us as his own dear children. God treasures us as much as the blood of his own Son. His care for us will never be taken away. The division between God and sinners has been replaced with the love of God. With such a love from God how can we not enjoy oneness with him? God the Father is now at peace with all of us.

With the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the love of God is the crowning jewel of our peace: fellowship. The Holy Spirit has brought us into fellowship with God. We now enjoy a unity that goes beyond all comprehension. When you cry out, the Holy Spirit cries out. When we sin, we grieve our new self and the Holy Spirit who lives in us. When we praise God together and in private, God accepts that praise and works it in us by his Spirit. All division between us and our God has altogether disappeared. We enjoy fellowship with him. With that fellowship how can we not be full of peace with our God? God the Holy Spirit brings us into communion with himself. He does this by Word and Sacrament. It is the Triune God --Father, Son, and Holy Spirit-- who gives us his perfect peace.

And along with peace with God is peace with his people: "*Aim for perfection*". Rather than just settling for division we mend it. God has completely made us at peace with himself. How could we not desire and work to be completely at peace with those we call brothers and sisters in Christ at this congregation and within our fellowship united in teaching? The complete peace that God has won for us and brought us is a peace now to be enjoyed among each other. And it will be enjoyed with all believers forever.

"*Listen to my appeal.*" Paul asks them to heed his encouragement in his letter. When we find that someone at Church is seeking to bring us to peace and unity --how could we ever disagree and seek to continue disunity? Just as God has worked in us the trust and acceptance of his peace, he works that we trust and find peace with each other. That will only come by listening to the Word --not our own divisive thoughts.

"*Be of one mind*". We only find true unity as we are united in our thoughts. This unity cannot come by ignoring God's Word. It can only come by a deep love and concern that our thoughts be based on what is God's Word. It means we look together to the Word. It also means that our doctrine is united. The Corinthians disagreed over doctrine of the Lord's Supper, the Roles of Men and Women, and over stewardship principles. We will only find unity in these matters, be truly of one mind, if we share in the same doctrine of the same Word of God.

"*Live in peace.*" Then with working for perfection, listening to the Word, being united in thought as we learn and teach doctrines of the Word, only then we can live in true peace with each other. Then we can carry out the ministry of Rock of Ages Lutheran and our synod by getting the news of our Triune Savior-God to this world of division and strife. Then we can peacefully share the peace God has given us.

Greet one another. We show that peace by welcoming each other. In Paul's culture it was shown by a kiss. We shake hands. But we show it by more than that. Everything that a friendly handshake has behind it follows that greeting. "*All the saints send their greetings.*" We are part of the Holy Christian Church united in Christ, and part of a united visible congregation. We send greetings and support to our missionaries who share with us a unique unity of mind and live in peace with us. We share the peace God has given us with the whole world.

We weren't just like an out of place candle. We were out of place, upside down in the dirt, and unlit. But God did it all to bring us back into the place he wants us to be. The words are passive. Paul says, "be mended" "Be made complete" not perfect yourselves, but don't toss aside what God has given for your unity. Paul says not just "listen to my appeal" but literally "Be encouraged." Peace and unity come as we are brought peace and unity from the Triune God. In those three persons alone is true unity for us and all believers.

We worship the same God as the early Christian Church. We worship the same God who has been from eternity and will ever be three in one. Though we at times have division, he brings us the same unity and fellowship with himself and with others. That true unity will someday be perfectly enjoyed. When we are with him in glory everlasting, there will be no division of practice, of doctrine, of mind. We will fully know the God of love and peace, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Triune God gives us perfect peace with himself and with each other.