

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

¹² *Greet one another with a holy kiss.* ¹³ *All God's people here send their greetings.*

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.* (2 Corinthians 13:11-14 NIV2011)

The Triune God of Love and Peace Is with You

“I’d like to buy the world a home and furnish it with love... I’d like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony... I’d like to buy the world a coke and keep it company.” Standing on a hilltop in Italy, youth from 20 different countries holding bottles of Coke sang this song. Airing in 1971 this commercial stands as one of Coca-Cola’s most successful advertisements. Of course they didn’t think buying everyone a Coke would solve all the world’s problems. But the message of a desire for peace and unity is clear. (Wikipedia: “I’d like to buy the world a coke”)

It would be nice to have a little more peace and unity these days. Even when facing a common threat there’s division and discord of how to address the issue at hand. You will hear things like, “We need to put our differences aside...” or, “We just need to talk this through more,” or, “If only people will better listen, be more informed...” or, “We need to make a change!”, all in the name of striving for peace and unity. Even saying, “We can agree to disagree,” is an attempt at both parties feeling like they can be right while also maintaining a resemblance of unity and peace. We feel the divide in our nation and communities. We see it in our families and closest relationships. We want unity and peace. There is so much working and driving a wedge between people.

The church in the city of Corinth is dealing with similar things. When Paul writes his first letter to them we see problems with jealousy, fighting over who to follow, struggles with roles of men and women and marriage, abuse of the Lord’s Supper causing division instead of communion, how to handle a willful sinner amongst them, just to name a few. And while it seems things had been getting better since that first letter, there were still issues. And so, before Paul is going to come visit, he strongly encourages them to get their act together. He’s afraid that when he comes, **“I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder”** (2 Corinthians 12:20-21). In other words, there was a lot of room for improvement.

While it seems he is being harsh with these Corinthians he Paul still addresses them as brothers and sisters in faith as he closes his letter: **“Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace”** (v.11).

Talk about easier said than done. No one would argue against these things. But how do you get there? Strive for restoration. Paul is saying, “Set things in order. Mend your ways.” Okay, we will, once they admit what they are doing wrong. Once they apologize and make up for it. People need to be less offended; it’s just my personality.

Encourage one another, be encouraged. But nothing seems to be working the way we want. People aren’t listening. They say they know what they are doing is wrong, but then keep doing it. It seems like every year we are asking the same questions and still have no answers.

Be of one mind? How can we when there’s so much we do not see eye-to-eye on? You may feel like they don’t see you as a person with a valid opinion or suggestion. So if they don’t listen to me, why should I listen to them? They don’t want to hear a different suggestion. They refuse to see my point of view.

Be at peace? How can I when they’ve hurt me? It was something said to you; and it hurt. They promised to be there, and then they weren’t. They made you feel left out. You feel underappreciated and taken for granted. Be at peace. How can I when I know what they have done in the past?

There is so much that is working against unity. There’s so much that causes division. How much of that comes from your own personal doing? You might keep score—I’ve done this so they should do that—simply because you don’t want them to take advantage of you. You hold onto those grudges because you wholeheartedly believe you have every right to feel this way. You hold sins over someone’s head because you have convinced yourself that it’s for their good you. You want to make sure they learn their lesson. You are looking out for others. Are you more interested in winning the discussion, being right, making sure your opinion is heard so that you are unable or unwilling to listen? You may be holding onto a sin because you think it’s not hurting anyone else. So often we either don’t notice or prefer to not recognize the divisions that we cause in our lives and in the lives of others.

Whether it’s at work with your coworkers, it’s out in society, at home with your family—your children and your spouse—or it’s here with your church family, the devil loves the discord and disunity. It’s fertile soil for the devil’s seeds of doubt that question God’s love and the validity of the peace God gives to us. It sets up roadblocks from living and sharing Jesus’ forgiving love with others. It puts barriers in the way so some feel they cannot come to God’s house to be fed with God’s Word and Sacraments. And the sad truth is, if someone is not finding true peace and love from the God, they are going to find it in something else.

So how do we mend the divisions and be at peace with each other? We have something better than buying someone a Coke. Paul writes: “**The God of love and peace will be**

with you.” You aren’t in this on your own. God doesn’t leave you to wade through the mess of this world alone. The same God who spoke and the world came to be, that’s who is with you.

But who is this God? He reveals himself to us as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the three-in-one Triune God, co-equal, co-eternal Lord. How this is possible truly is a mystery. But this is your God. What might more mysterious is why would he want any relationship with us who cause so much division? Why does want anything to do with us who so often take for granted his good gifts of brothers and sisters in Christ? Why would he want to be with us who are so self-centered, personal-agenda driven and focused?

It sounds too easy. But it’s love. When his perfect creation is plunged into sin and death, the Father’s love springs into motion. The Father says, “I should really scrap it all and start over. But I love them. And I’m going to show them what real love is. Jesus, my Son, you are going to save them. Yes, they are still sinners in open rebellion against us. Yes, by nature they are born our enemies. No, there is nothing that they can do to pay for it or repay us. But I love them. So I’m going to save them.”

And God the Son, Jesus says, “Yes. It’s the perfect plan. No force necessary; your will, Father, is my will. Your love for the lost is my love for them. I will take on flesh and blood and live for them. I will go to the cross and I will claim all that causes disunity as my own fault. You will punish me so that you do not punish them. I will shed my blood to pay their entire debt. And I expect nothing in return. I want nothing in return. I’m giving it for free with no strings attached.”

And God the Holy Spirit says, “This is a fantastic plan. And you know what, send me, and I will work to make this their own. I will bring them into our fellowship so they have a close intimate relationship with us. They will be us and we with them. I will make them my temple where I will dwell. I will work in them this love and peace so they are a new creation. And then I will work through them the good works we already have prepared for them to do.”

That’s the God who is with you. This isn’t just a sentimental, nice thought. The Triune God comes down to us gathered in Jesus’ name in church. He reaches out his hand and washes you in the waters of baptism where he places the name of the Triune God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on you. Right there the Triune God rips you from the devil’s grip and sets his claim on you. Through his Word He reaches out touches your heart and speaks into your ears. He provides food for your starving soul with the Son’s body and blood in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper.

It’s this God who Paul blesses the Corinthians, “**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.**” You

maybe recognize those words. This is the “Apostolic Blessing” which we sometimes use at the end of church. This blessing isn’t a churchy goodbye to let you know it’s time to start getting your things together because church is almost done. This isn’t a wishful thought that might happen. You don’t know what dangers, what temptations, what sin you have been protected from because God blesses you. Understand correctly: this isn’t a lucky talisman to protect us from bad luck or the evil eye. But this is God’s promise to you. As you go about your Sunday Jesus’ grace is still with you when you fall back into that sin you are struggling with. He will not abandon you. The Father’s love continues to pour out on you every morning even when you struggle to get going during the week. As we struggle with divisions in our life, disagreements and disunity, you are still united with the Triune God with fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

There is so much lack of peace and so much division in our world today. You have the one thing that brings true peace and real unity—the Father’s love, Jesus’ forgiving grace, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Share it. Live it. You are not in this on your own, “All God’s people here send their greetings.” All God’s holy ones, God’s people who have been made clean with the blood of Lamb, stand shoulder-to-shoulder bearing each other’s burdens. Rejoice; you are united with the Triune God. Rejoice; you have a family of believers who are here supporting you. Encourage each other. Let go of that grudge. Forgive as Jesus forgives you. Be at peace. You have the Triune God of love and peace with you. Amen.