

Fullness

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[0 : 00] Let's read now in God's Word in 2 Corinthians chapter 13. 2 Corinthians 13, this is on page number 912 of the Little Black Pew Bible in the seat in front of you.

2 Corinthians 13, page 912. This is the Word of God.

This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warn those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not spare them.

Since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me, He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God.

For we also are weak in Him, but in dealing with you we will live with Him by the power of God.

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

[1 : 25] Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you fail to meet the test. I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.

But we pray to God that you may do no wrong. Not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed.

For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for.

For this reason I write these things while I'm away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

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.

[2 : 30] Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen. May God bless His Word. It's those last few words, that last verse, which we'll consider this evening the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Two weeks tomorrow, Christmas Day, we'll be waking up, hopefully, to presents under the Christmas tree. For a short while this evening, I thought I'd remind us of the greatest gift of all, that which the Apostle Paul describes in another place as the inexpressible gift.

In this most famous benediction in the Bible, 2 Corinthians 3 verse 14, it's as if the Apostle Paul raises his hands over the Corinthian church and blesses them with these words, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship or communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

What better way to describe this gift than under the title fullness, fullness. There could be no gift more complete and no more gift as necessary than what we have as Christians.

[4 : 16] The greatest of all gifts, the fullness of God's blessings extended to all of us here through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, His grace, His love, and His communion.

I want to unwrap this gift here in this verse in three stages. First, the fullness of God. Second, the fullness of blessing.

And third, the fullness of the church. For all the presents that we'll receive this Christmas, this is by far the greatest. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

First of all then, we have the fullness of God. The fullness of God. It's there in seed form from the first chapter of the Bible where God creates the heavens and the earth, the Spirit hovers over the waters of the deep, and the Word brings all things into being.

But the doctrine of the Holy Trinity comes into its own in the New Testament. We worship and serve one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[5 : 42] We do not worship three gods, but one God. But the God we worship is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

One of the church fathers, I'm sure someone will tell me afterwards who it was, famously said, whenever I think of the one, I think of the three.

And whenever I think of the three, I think of the one. It's this very doctrine of the Trinity which explains how it can be that God is love.

Love is at the heart of God because each person of the Trinity is joined not just by the essence of divinity, but by an infinity of love expressed toward one another.

Love can only exist between persons because God is three in one. Here in 2 Corinthians 13-14, Paul presents us with the threefold blessing of God, the grace of Christ, the love of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

[7 : 00] He places each person beside the others as equals. Son, Father, and Holy Spirit. We find the Old Testament equivalent in Numbers 6.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you and give you peace.

Again, a threefold blessing. But here in this verse, the Lord of Numbers chapter 6 is named as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The fullness of God is His being expressed as the three in one. Now, this doctrine of the Trinity can sometimes be considered as somewhat of an embarrassment to us as Christians because we can't explain it.

It seems so deeply mysterious to us. There are no images we can use to perfectly explain it. Ice, water, and steam don't do it justice, nor do the three angles of an equilateral triangle.

[8 : 18] Both fall far short of doing justice to how God exists as three in one and both of them open the door to heresies.

We don't like mysteries. And the essence and being of God is a deep mystery. We must accept that God is beyond our understanding and the glory of His being and essence is greater than our minds can grasp.

Rather than embarrassment, the biblical doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that we are finite. We do not know everything. This humbles us and challenges us to bow before the immensity and holiness of God in worship and praise.

But the point of this blessing is that it is this God, the God whose glory is far beyond our comprehension and understanding, who offers Himself to us as the ultimate blessing.

You see, He doesn't bless us with things. He blesses us with Himself. He, the three in one, comes to us in an act of loving condescension and offers Himself to us in the fullness of His being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[9 : 53] The greatest gift we can have as human beings isn't what God gives us, but God Himself. Cheesy moment coming up.

The gift I'm looking forward to most under the Christmas tree is the presence of those I love most in the world with me.

Suppose there are no presents under the tree on Christmas morning and don't really listen to what I'm saying, kids or wife. As long as they're with me, it'll be all I want or all I need.

Suppose there are 10,000 presents under the tree. If they are not with me, it will be a most unhappy day. In this Pauline benediction here in 2 Corinthians 13, God is blessing us with Himself first and foremost.

with Him we have everything even if we have nothing else. Without Him we have nothing even if we have everything else.

[11 : 06] Let me say that again just in case we're confused. With Him we have everything even if we have nothing else. Without Him we have nothing even if we have everything else.

At the end of the service when we are blessed with the words of this benediction. Remember God the mysterious three-in-one whose essence is beyond our comprehension and understanding He offers us Himself in the fullness of His glorious mysterious being.

He is offering to be with us in the ups and downs of the week ahead. The high points and the low points of the week ahead.

The hours of loneliness and those hours of feeling crowded. The challenges of work and the clamor of arguments. The dangers of this week.

The delights of this week. He in the fullness of His Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God will be with us in the valleys and on the mountaintops. He'll be with us in the aching void of grief and in the joyful fullness of love.

[12 : 22] The consistent promise of each person of the Trinity is their unconditional presence with us. The God of glory offers Himself to us in this benediction and says to us, let my presence in your life fill you with joy, with meaning, and with strength.

So, we have the fullness of God. In the second instance, we have the fullness of blessing, the fullness of blessing.

The God who offers Himself to us now specifies what it is He brings to us, grace, love, and fellowship.

Grace from the Lord Jesus Christ, love from God the Father, and fellowship from the Holy Spirit.

More correctly, these divine virtues are not coming from them, they are of them.

They are. He is the fountain of grace, the spring of love, and of fellowship. I may give you a gift, and it's from me, but someone else may give you the same gift.

[13 : 52] But properly speaking, one can only receive love from God the Father because all love comes from Him, and He is love. One can only receive grace from Christ because all grace springs from Christ, and He is grace, and one can only receive fellowship from the Holy Spirit because all true communion between human beings and God originates in Him.

Likewise, each of these virtues may be attributed to all the persons of the Trinity. Grace is of Christ, but it's also of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

Love is of God the Father, but it's also of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Fellowship is of the Holy Spirit, but it's also of Christ and of the Father.

The Holy Trinity is the fountain of all grace, love, and fellowship. And this is what He brings to us and offers us through this benediction, the fullness of God in the fullness of the glory of His gospel. But for His own reasons, in this instance, Paul attributes grace to Christ, love to the Father, and fellowship to the Holy Spirit.

[15 : 21] grace is unmerited favor, unmerited favor. The smile of Christ we do not deserve.

By nature, we are sinful men and women. We do not deserve the favor of God. We deserve the anger of God. We do not deserve the acceptance of God, but the refusal of God.

But this message concerns that which we do not deserve. The Christmas message tells us that the Son of God became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, that He who was infinitely and forever blessed became a man who experienced hunger and thirst, grief and pain, and then finally the Christ who knew no sin became a sin offering for us.

That Christ Jesus came to bring salvation not to the great and the good, but to the weak and the sinful. The Christian life from beginning to end is all of the unmerited favor of God in Christ.

It's all of grace. Now, we always talk of the love of Jesus, and it's right that we should owe the deep, deep love of Jesus.

[16 : 48] But the greatest of all loves is that of God the Father. It was God the Father who so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever should believe in Him should have everlasting life.

It was God the Father who demonstrated His love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. It is God the Father who bestows and showers His infinite love upon us.

How great the Father's love for us. How vast beyond all measure. How infinite, how intense, how inventive.

It is the Holy Spirit who brings to us the presence of both Father and Son. The Holy Spirit who comes alongside us, and through whom we enjoy fellowship with God, and fellowship with each other as Christians.

He is the spirit of peace through whom God dwells with us and makes His home in us. He is the spirit of fellowship who breaks down the barriers between us as human beings, empowering forgiveness, reconciliation, and intimacy between us as Christian believers.

[18 : 09] God in the fullness of His being offers us Himself the grace, the love, and the fellowship of His wholeness.

This is the greatest gift this Christmas, not a thing, but the God who comes to us in the beauty of His divine character and says to us, all the treasures of my love and my grace and my fellowship, they are all yours.

This is the fullness of His goodness, a greater than which cannot be imagined, a grander of which cannot be dreamed, a more extravagant than which cannot be conceived.

And this is what God offers us every time He blesses us with this benediction. The fullness of the blessing of the God of all fullness.

And then lastly from here we have the fullness of God, the fullness of His blessing, and the fullness of the church. The fullness of the church. The benediction concludes with the words, be with you all. [19 : 32] Be with you all. Now many Christians today wish that they could get back to the state of the early primitive church. But when we think about it, that wouldn't really be a very good idea, would it?

The church in Corinth was a very messy place indeed. There were power games, there was sexual immorality, there was false teaching, and there was chaos among the leadership.

We should be very thankful indeed that we don't live in the early church times. And yet it was to them, this messy, disorganized church, so filled with sin and false teaching, it was to them God offers Himself and the fullness of His blessing.

After all, if a church ever needed the grace, grace, the love and the fellowship of God, it was the church in Corinth. The reference here isn't so much to the whole church, but to every believer within that church.

Be with you all, be with each one of you. The blessing of God is for each and every Christian in whatever state he or she is. It is for elderly Christians, it is for youthful Christians, it is for Christian masters, it is for Christian slaves, it is for Roman Christians, for Greek Christians, for Barbarian Christians, and for Jewish Christians, no one is excluded from the fullness of the blessings of God. [21 : 10] The blessing of God is for Christians who have been faithful and for Christians who have been unfaithful. Let me say that again.

the blessings of God are for Christians who have been faithful and for Christians who have been unfaithful, for those who have been backsliding. The point is this, the fullness of God offers the fullness of His goodness to the fullness of His church in this heavenly benediction.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in His love, His grace, and fellowship blesses all of us, every single Christian. The fullness of God offers the fullness of His goodness to the fullness of His church.

That surely is the greatest gift, the fullest expression of the gospel, in which the crucified Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, reconciles us to God the Father.

Father, in Christmas morning, before we begin to open up those presents under the Christmas tree, pause for a moment, and give God thanks for the greatest of all gifts, the fullness of God, offering the fullness of His goodness to the fullness of His church.

[22 : 42] And may God bless us and all our families this Christmas. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we saw this morning from the story of the birth of Jesus in Luke chapter 2, words which we have read hundreds of times can assume new meanings when You speak to us through them with special power.

And this benediction we have heard hundreds of times as well, and perhaps we haven't thought about it any more than it marks the conclusion of a service.

But we pray, Lord, that You would help it to assume a new meaning for us, that You, in the fullness of who You are, come in the fullness of Your goodness to the fullness of the church, and You offer Yourself to us and say, I'll be with you.

in the high points and the low points of this week, in all the sorrows and in all the joys. And work, home, wherever You are, I'll be with You.

And I'll give You my grace and my love and my fellowship. Lord, we pray for any this evening who as yet have not accepted Christ as Lord and Savior.

[24 : 03] Savior. And we pray that something that was said either by Anne or in one of the readings or one of the hymns or psalms or something I've said this evening would be used powerfully to bring them to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Christ. We pray for those who perhaps have been backsliding, losing a grip on the reality of the truth as it is in Jesus, and have cast aside Your goodness in favor of the baubles and tinsel of this world's pleasures.

Lord, we pray tonight again that You would revive their interest in You and bring them back to that place of repentance and first love. And so we ask all these things now in Jesus' name.
Amen.