

Love, Forgiveness, and Fellowship



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 19

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 16:20; John 3:16, 17; 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11; Romans 8:35.

MEMORY VERSE: “I pray that the Lord Jesus Christ will continue to be very kind to you all. I pray that God’s love will be with you. And I pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to serve each other as friends” (2 Corinthians 13:14, EASY).

PAUL ends his second letter to the Corinthians with five important commands (2 Corinthians 13:11). (Paul already wrote about these ideas in his letters to the Corinthians.)

1. “Be joyful” (NirV). Joy is an important part of Paul’s letters.

2. “Work to make things right with one another [each other]” (NirV). This verse comes from just one word in the Greek language: ‘katartizō.’ (Also read 1 Corinthians 1:10.)

3. “Help one another [each other]” (NirV). Paul wants church members to encourage each other (2 Corinthians 1:3–7). Paul starts and finishes his letter with this idea. God encourages us so that we will encourage other people (2 Corinthians 1:4, 6).

4. “Agree with each other” (ERV).

5. “Live in peace” (ERV). Paul’s 4th and 5th commands are about working together with one heart and mind. When we work together in peace and love, “the God of love and peace will be with you” (ERV).



Paul wants church members to encourage each other (2 Corinthians 1:3–7).

THE LOVE AND FORGIVENESS OF JESUS (Romans 16:20)

Paul starts and ends his second letter to the Corinthians with the same idea: the love and forgiveness of Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14). As we saw at the beginning of this quarter, Paul just can't stop thinking and talking about Jesus.

"You know how much love our Lord Jesus Christ had. He was rich, but he became poor for your sakes [for you]. Because he became poor, you can become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9, WE). Wow! Jesus left the riches in heaven to become poor. Jesus walked the dirty roads of ancient Galilee. "And when he lived as a man, he made himself even less important. He obeyed God completely, so that he died. He even died on a cross!" (Philippians 2:8, EASY). We live on a planet filled with sin, death, and suffering. So, we may have trouble understanding everything that Jesus left behind in heaven to come to save us.

Read Romans 16:20; Galatians 6:18; Philippians 4:23; and 1 Thessalonians 5:28. What important teaching do you learn in these verses?

Paul talks a lot about God's love and forgiveness in his letters: read Romans 5:15 and Romans 5:17. Paul also starts and ends other letters the same as 2 Corinthians: he talks about Jesus' love and forgiveness (Romans 1:7; Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 1 Corinthians 16:23; Galatians 1:3; Galatians 6:18; Philippians 1:2; Philippians 4:23). This topic filled Paul's heart and mind. He wanted it to fill the hearts and minds of the Corinthians, too.

Paul wants all the churches to show God's love and forgiveness all the time. Notice what Paul says to the Ephesians: "May God give loving-favor to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love that never gets weak" (Ephesians 6:24, NLV). Did Paul want people to love Jesus with less love than that? Of course not! Paul wanted the love and forgiveness to touch more and more people (2 Corinthians 4:15). God's love and forgiveness were enough for Paul (2 Corinthians 12:9). He wanted these things to be enough for the churches, too.

Think about all the mistakes you make. What reward do you think you should get for your wrong words and actions? But what does God offer you anyway?



Jesus walked the dirty roads of ancient Galilee.

HOW MUCH DOES GOD LOVE US? (John 3:16, 17)

“I pray that the Lord Jesus Christ [the Savior] will continue to be very kind to you all. I pray that God’s love will be with you. And I pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to serve each other as friends” (2 Corinthians 13:14, EASY). Paul ends his second letter to the Corinthians with this verse. Do you see that he talks about the Godhead? The Godhead is the Three-in-One God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When we understand the work that the Godhead does, we will better understand God and His love.

Read John 3:16, 17; Romans 8:37–39; and 1 John 4:8–11. What do these verses tell us about God’s love?

In 1 John 4:8, we read that “God is love” (ERV). Love is an important part of who God is. God gave His only Son to die for us to show us what is love (John 3:16). God sent Jesus to save us (John 3:17). That was part of God’s plan (Acts 3:20, 21; 1 John 4:10, 14). Many times, Jesus said that the Father sent Him (Matthew 10:40; Mark 9:37).

Paul says, “But God showed His love to us. While we were still [continued to be] sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, NLV). Marriage is a symbol of God’s love. The love between parents and children shows us God’s love, too. Nature also shows us God’s love. Ellen G. White wrote, “The budding flowers and the growing grass show us that ‘God is love’ [1 John 4:8, ERV]. The birdsong, the perfume of flowers, the green trees show us that our Father in heaven cares for us. He wishes to make us happy.”—*Steps to Christ*, page 10, adapted. But the most powerful proof of God’s love is Jesus. God gave Jesus as an offering for our sins. Jesus gave His life for us. When we understand this Bible truth, we also “should be willing to die for our brothers” and sisters (1 John 3:16, WE).

Paul wanted the Corinthians to live in peace. But without love, we can’t live in peace with each other. That’s why Paul wrote, “Love helps people to become strong” (1 Corinthians 8:1, EASY). Without love, everything is useless and empty (1 Corinthians 13:1–3). So, everything we do must be done in love (1 Corinthians 16:14).

What would we lose from the Good News if Jesus were not fully God?



God gave His only Son to die for us to show us what is love (John 3:16).

THE GOD OF LOVE (2 Corinthians 13:11)

In ancient times, people didn't believe that the gods loved humans. They believed the gods were mean and nasty. So, people needed to bring the gods offerings and gifts to make peace with them. The idea of a God of love was a new and strange idea in Paul's day. Paul says that our God is "the God of love and peace" (2 Corinthians 13:11, ERV).

Read 2 Corinthians 13:11. What hope does this verse give you? How can you live what this verse teaches?

The words "the God of love and peace" can be understood two ways. First, God gives us love and peace. Second, God always feels love and peace. You don't need to choose one meaning over the other. Both meanings are correct. Love and peace are part of God. So, He gives us love and peace.

Paul talks about the other ways God blesses us. God encourages us (Romans 15:5). God gives us hope (Romans 15:13). As we just saw, God gives us peace (Romans 15:33; Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 14:33; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). God gives us mercy, love, and forgiveness (2 Corinthians 1:3). God helps us feel better (2 Corinthians 1:3). God gives us all these gifts because He loves us.

The words "God of peace" are used many times in the Bible. But the words "God of love" are used only in 2 Corinthians 13:11. So, we should give this special verse our careful attention and study.

As 2 Corinthians 13:14 shows us, Paul believes in one God in Three Persons. We believe in one God as Three Persons, too. As we saw already, the Three-in-One God is named the Godhead. The Godhead includes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Together, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit live in an everlasting relationship of love. The Three-in-One God loves us. The Three-Person God commands us to love each other. We must love each other in a way that shows the love that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have for each other. This love shows everyone God's love.



We must love each other in a way that shows the love that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have for each other.

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (1 Corinthians 2:10, 11)

Paul says, “You belong to Christ [Jesus]. . . . You are able to [can] help one another because his Spirit is in you” (Philippians 2:1, EASY; also read verse 2).

Some people say that the Holy Spirit is not really a Person. But that is not correct. Why would Paul include the Holy Spirit in the Godhead if He is not a Person? As we saw already, the Godhead is the Three-in-One God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father and Son have a personal relationship with each other (2 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 11:31). In the same way, the Holy Spirit has a personal relationship with us. This relationship helps us understand that Spirit also is a Person (Romans 8:15, 16; read also John 14:16, 17, 26; John 15:26).

The words “his Spirit is in you” (EASY) also can be written as “Do we share together in the Spirit?” (ICB). We can understand these words two ways. First, they can mean the fellowship we have with each other. The Spirit gives us this fellowship. Second, these words can mean our personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. Both ideas are correct.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 12:11; and 2 Corinthians 3:6, 17. What did Paul teach the Corinthians about the Holy Spirit?

Paul has much to say about the work of the Spirit. The Spirit makes the church grow strong (1 Corinthians 14:12). The Spirit gets people ready to do God’s work (1 Corinthians 2:4, 5). The Spirit explains God’s deep secrets (1 Corinthians 2:10, 11) and teaches them to us (1 Corinthians 2:13). The Spirit lives in us (1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19). The Spirit works with Jesus to make us clean and holy (1 Corinthians 6:11). The Spirit gives spiritual gifts to the church (1 Corinthians 12–14). God puts His mark on us to show us we belong to Him. The Spirit lives in our hearts as proof that we are God’s (2 Corinthians 1:22). The Spirit writes God’s law in human hearts (2 Corinthians 3:3). The Spirit gives us new life in Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:6). He helps us win the fight against sin (2 Corinthians 3:17). For sure, we can’t live without the Holy Spirit.

Why must we believe that the Holy Spirit is God? How does this Bible truth help us understand God’s love for us?



The Spirit lives in our hearts as proof that we are God’s (2 Corinthians 1:22).

OUR THREE-IN-ONE GOD (1 Corinthians 1:3, 4, 9)

Some people do not understand 2 Corinthians 13:14. They think this verse says that only Jesus gives us love and forgiveness. Love comes only from God. And only the Holy Spirit gives us fellowship. But these ideas are false.

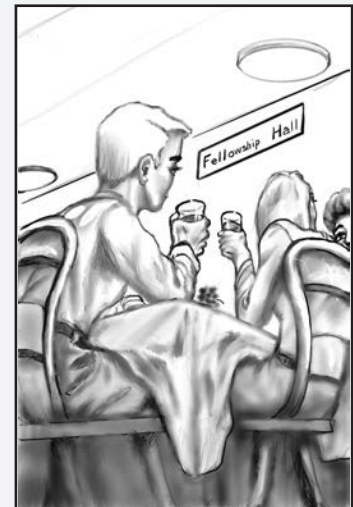
Read 1 Corinthians 1:3, 4, 9; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 2 Corinthians 1:2, 12; Romans 8:35; Romans 15:30; Galatians 2:20; and Ephesians 3:19. What do these verses say about love, forgiveness, mercy, and fellowship? Which members of the Godhead give us these things? As we saw already, the Godhead is the Three-in-One God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit work together to save us. Mercy, love, and fellowship come from all three of Them, and not just one of Them. At the same time, each member of the Godhead has certain jobs and tasks in saving us. In Galatians 4:4–6, Paul tells us that the Father sent Jesus to save us. This information tells us that the Father made the plan (Galatians 4:4). The Son was born from a woman (Galatians 4:4). This verse tells us how Jesus came to earth. Jesus kept the ancient promise God made in Eden (Genesis 3:15). The Son saved us. His death helped the Father to accept us. His death made a relationship between us and the Father happen again. The Holy Spirit helps us to become God’s children (Galatians 4:6).

Paul also tells us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit work together to help the church do its work (1 Corinthians 12:4–6). The Godhead gives us spiritual strength (Ephesians 3:14–19). The Godhead helps us to work together in peace and love in the church. Our fellowship with church members shows other people the love between the members of the Godhead (Ephesians 4:4–6). The Three Persons of the Godhead also work together to save us (Ephesians 1:3, 13, 14). In Ephesians, Paul says that we must be filled with the Father (Ephesians 3:19), the Son (Ephesians 4:13), and the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

Paul ends his letter with a beautiful promise in 2 Corinthians 13:14. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will be with us now and in the future.

How should our fellowship with each other show the beautiful relationship of the Godhead?



Our fellowship with church members shows other people the love between the members of the Godhead (Ephesians 4:4–6).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “‘Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,’” pages 662–680, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Only Jesus’ love and forgiveness can change our hearts. His love and forgiveness make our hearts new and give us new life. Then we can live for God. . . . Men can’t make their hearts clean or holy. Only Jesus can heal us from sin. Sin is the same as a disease. Jesus is the Mighty Doctor. Jesus is heaven’s best gift. He is filled with love, forgiveness, and Bible truth. Only Jesus can save sinners.”—Ellen G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, May 2, 1892, adapted.

“We must understand that the Holy Spirit is a Person. He is as much a Person as God is a Person. The Holy Spirit has a personality. If He didn’t, He couldn’t communicate with our own hearts and minds and tell us we are God’s children. The Holy Spirit is God. If He weren’t, He couldn’t share with us the secrets that are hidden in God’s mind.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, page 52, adapted.

“Three living Persons belong to the Godhead. [As we already saw, the Godhead is the Three-in-One God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.] When we accept Jesus and get baptized, we are baptized in the name of these three mighty powers: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These powers will work with the obedient servants of heaven to help them live a new life in Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, page 615, adapted.



“When we accept Jesus and get baptized, we are baptized in the name of these three mighty powers: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Most of us know the hymn “Amazing Grace.” Grace is God’s love, forgiveness, and power over sin. What is so amazing about the grace of Jesus?
- ② The picture-story about the two sons is a powerful example of God’s love (Luke 15:11–32). How do we know that the father in this picture-story is a loving father? What does he do to show his love?
- ③ How can local churches show that they have God’s Spirit in their hearts? How can church members show love for each other?

THE CHURCH THAT STARTED IN A BAR

The people in the village laughed at the Christians. The people told each other, “These Christians must be crazy to think we would worship God in a building that has an evil past!”

Leenus was one of those Christians who talked in that way. Then he started a church in the most unexpected place: a small room that used to be a bar. Leenus was a Seventh-day Adventist Church pioneer in Kenya. Before Leenus became a church pioneer, he was the pastor for a church of a different faith. Now, he was starting a church filled with a new group of Seventh-day Adventist Christians.

Leenus became a Seventh-day Adventist after he went to meetings and studied some Bible lessons. Then Leenus started to share that Bible truth with the members from his old church after he got baptized.

Leenus signed up 360 people for Bible studies. He went from home to home and answered people’s questions until every person finished the lessons. Leenus was very happy when 15 people asked to be baptized.

Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders came to baptize the people. Then they told Leenus he would be their new pastor. But soon they wanted Leenus to do something else. The leaders made Leenus a church pioneer because of his skills in sharing the Good News. Leenus smiled and said, “They told me to travel in Kenya and teach more people about Jesus.”

Leenus arrived in a new town where no one was Seventh-day Adventist. Leenus went from door-to-door. He shared Bible truth with the families he met. Leenus worked hard. Then one person accepted the message. Leenus said, “I told this man, ‘Work with me. Together we will help people accept Jesus.’ ”

Leenus held Bible meetings. Many people in the community came. They asked Leenus, “Where is your church?” Leenus told them that his church was in an old shop.

The people said, “No, no! That old shop used to be a bar.” The people told Leenus, “We can’t worship God there!”

Leenus prayed about getting a new church. God helped him to get some land. Then God sent Leenus some people to help build the church. Now, 10 members meet every week on Sabbath in the brand-new church.

Leenus plans to hold more Bible meetings in the community. He says, “That way, people can see and know we are here.” Leenus believes that having a new church helped the people know that God is with them. Leenus explains, “They can see that God is doing something for us. He is helping us grow.”

INSIDE
Story
by RICK KAJIURA



The people said, “No, no! That old shop used to be a bar.” The people told Leenus, “We can’t worship God there!”