

Benediction: 2 Corinthians 13:14 R. C. H. Lenski Commentary

[Edward D. Seely Note: The Benediction is a very important part of Christian worship services. In the following excerpt from his commentary on the Apostle Paul's letters, First and Second Corinthians, the outstanding Bible commentator, R. C. H. Lenski, explains why the Benediction is such a vital part of Christian worship, as he interprets the meaning of one of the Bible's most often-used verses in the Benediction. In so doing, Lenski identifies key and monumental blessings the Triune God provides for his believers in worship, and Lenski also indicates some reasons pertaining to the vital need for church attendance and membership. For more on the Benediction and other aspects of Biblical worship, see my curriculum manual, *Worship: A Course on Christian Worship in the Christian Church* (Second Edition), on the [Christian Worship](#) page of my [Website](#).]

Paul closes [Second Corinthians] with what has come to be called and with what is used as the New Testament trinitarian benediction, the counterpart to the Old Testament trinitarian benediction found in [Num. 6:22-27](#). **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit (be) with you all!** The order of the persons as well as the order of their gifts are significant. We have "the Lord Jesus Christ" first, then "God"; we have "the love of God" second and not first. This benediction is pronounced upon people who are already Christians.

The love of God referred to is the love with which God embraces his own and not the love which reaches out to make men his own. God's love is able to bestow thousands of gifts upon believers which he could not possibly bestow upon people who are not yet believers or who are unbelievers. "The love of God" properly occupies the second place in this benediction.

"The grace—the love—the communion" are not conceived in the abstract but as including all gifts and blessings that emanate from them. Nor are grace, love, communion conceived as being separate from each other. We see that grace is only a form of love, love toward the undeserving. In [1:2](#) grace emanates from both God and Christ. So both grace and love toward believers also involve communion with them, and communion involves grace and love toward them. In fact, communion is the crowning form of grace and love. We should guard against intellectual distinctions. The rationalism which finds "communion" incongruous and not a true third in this trio gives evidence of the fact that it does not rightly understand what any of the three are.

Yet each concept is distinct in the union of the three, and each is in its proper place. It is pure, unmerited grace on which every believer depends until he draws his last breath. He is and remains a sinner until his end. The blood of Christ's grace must cleanse him daily. By grace alone he enters heaven at last. "Grace" keeps its full connotation of guilt and sin, of unmerited pardon in [1:2](#) and here at the end. It is always "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." To think that this dissociates it from the Father and from the Spirit is to think that it is dissociated from the love and the communion, neither of which is true or could be true. The Triune God is the fount of grace for us in Christ Jesus. Read the exegesis of [John 1:16](#).

"The Lord" = he who has purchased and won us and to whom we belong; "Jesus" = the name he bore here on earth when he came to save us with his grace; "Christ" = this person in his saving office. Each part of his name glows with grace, and this form of his name has become infinitely precious to the church from the days of the apostles onward.

We have already shown how "the love of God" follows. It is again the love of full comprehension and corresponding purpose which in this benediction enfolds those who have been won by Christ's grace. Since it is here ascribed to "God," the infinitude of this love is emphasized. And this includes the infinitude of its blessedness for us. If the sinner bows his head at the pierced feet of the Lord because he is overwhelmed by the grace, shall he not be utterly lost in this ocean of the love which is as great and as blessed as God himself? Our little understanding staggers and falls, and only worship and adoration are left.

The third place in this trio belongs to the heavenly word κοινωνία [*koinonia*], "union with," "communion" or fellowship. The Holy Spirit stoops down to us and enfolds us in his communion in which are found all the grace and the love. Not from afar are these extended to us but in a union which is beyond our comprehension. Yet we must not drift into what is called *Schwaermerei*, the false mysticism in which some revel. This communion is mediate, its means are Word and sacrament. In these the Spirit becomes one with us, and we with him. Apart from the means we are far from the Spirit.

The personality of the Spirit is often denied by rationalism. Only a person can establish communion. The Holy Spirit is here named beside the other two persons. So much for this passage. The full answer to unitarianism is compiled from the whole domain of Scripture revelation in any good dogmatics.

"With or in company with you all" is itself communion and fellowship. With the picture of the great apostle spreading his hands over the Corinthians with this profound New Testament benediction his voice sinks into silence. But the benediction remains upon our hearts.

Soli Deo Gloria

R. C. H. Lenski, *Lenski New Testament Commentary – The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, WORDsearch 10, pp. 1339-1341.

Tags: Benediction; Christian Worship; Church Attendance; Church Membership; Daily Blessings; Grace; God the Father; God the Holy Spirit; God the Son; Jesus Christ; Biblical Worship; Love; Trinity

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