

GRACE AND PEACE

Galatians 1:2-3

INTRODUCTION:

What you need now is grace and peace. This was the conviction of Paul, the Apostle. According to the custom of the day, Paul usually included a statement of his highest wish in the introduction of his letters. Regularly the prayer would be that his friends might know the grace and peace of God. Sometimes he would include the mercy of God.

These two words were commonly used in the greetings of the day. When Greek men met each other, they used a form of the word "grace" in greeting. They would wish "Joy" to each other. Hebrew speaking men greeted each other with "shalom" or "peace". This is still the common greeting in the Middle East. Paul combines the two to express his personal desire for his friends in Galatia. If they can know the "grace and peace" which comes from God, their deepest needs will have been met.

It will be to our spiritual profit to spend some time looking at this prayerful greeting from the Apostle. The fact that circumstances have changes, but people are still the same, surely makes this doubly true.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GRACE AND PEACE

These two terms tell us so much about our experience of the Christian faith. Human language does not have two more precious words.

Charis, translated "grace", is a word that is peculiarly Christian. The Greeks used this word to describe something beautiful. They placed great value upon the charis or "grace" of something. One lexicon defines the word as "properly that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loneliness." But in the Christian vocabulary the word came to mean "good will, loving kindness, favor". Commonly we have defined it as "God's unmerited favor".

Grace, then is the merciful kindness by which a holy God bestows saving deliverance and forgiveness upon guilty, condemned, undeserving sinners. It is the Good Shepherd God seeking to rescue stubborn, wayward sheep from the consequences of their own folly. It is God the Father sending His Son into the world. It is God the Son giving His life to rescue sinful man. It is God granting free forgiveness and stature to those who deserve nothing more than condemnation. It is your receiving something beautiful, and wonderful when you deserve nothing. Who can really ever define grace?

Does the name Mephibosheth mean anything to you? Students of Old Testament history will probably remember the name. He was the son of Jonathan and the

grandson of King Saul. When David became the King of Israel, most of the family of Saul perished in his downfall. However this grandson of Saul's escaped. He had the misfortune of a severe disability because of -crippled feet, and since he was a direct descendant of Saul, David could have justly put him to death by the standards of the day. However he chose to bless the young man. He gave him a seat at the king's table. He put him under the protection of the crown. He gave him a house in the king's city. Not one need of Mephibosheth was left unmet. All of these kindnesses were an experience of grace --- they were surely much more than he ever deserved. He had done nothing to merit such favor.

According to this Galatian letter, this is the way God has treated us. He has granted to us a seat at his table. He has made us members of his family. He has canceled out all of the charges recorded against us. He has done all of this in spite of our attitudes and actions. It can be explained only by the love and mercy that we find in the heart of God. Surely such grace meets one of our deepest needs. What the world needs now is grace, yes, the amazing grace of our God.

What about peace? Peace means more than just the absence of hostility. While it does indicate that hostility has ended, it also reveals the reconciliation of the warring parties. In the Hebrew mind "peace" included many positive blessings --- such as health and prosperity. It really meant a fullness of life. Dr. Ray Summers connects the word to the conscience of man in the greeting of Paul. When grace has done its work of redeeming and restoring sinful man, peace follows. It is the quietness of heart known by the man who has seen his sins nailed to the Tree in the person of Christ. It is that inner consciousness of the divine favor that brings to life so much fulfillment. It is the tranquility of the man who knows himself to be near to the heart of God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Peace-Who could ever ask for more than grace and peace? Surely what the world needs now is grace and peace.

THE SEQUENCE OF GRACE AND PEACE

It is noteworthy that these two words always appear in this order in the greetings of Paul. It is always grace and then peace. Never does he pray for peace and then grace. This order is not accidental, but reminds us of some important things. This is the sequence they follow in the divine provision. God expressed his grace first in the sending of His only begotten Son into the world to redeem the world. The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. The grace had to appear before there could be any peace. In the old order the sin offering always preceded the peace offering.

Experience also follows this sequence. We experience the saving grace of God and then we know the peace of God. No man ever knows the beautiful peace of God in his experience, until he has first received the full grace of God in salvation. Foolish and sinful man is ever attempting to change that order. He

wants to know the inner tranquility before he receives the word of Christ on the cross on his behalf. But it never works.

The necessity for this particular sequence is obvious. Something must be done about the sin of man before he can ever experience inner peace. And it is only as Holy God acts in grace toward man that sin can be removed. If God does not act in grace, man is eternally without hope and is destined to know no peace, but rather to be like the troubled sea. Have you been looking for the peace with God? Then you must be ready for God to act toward your sin in grace. This involves an admission on your part that you are helpless to do anything about it, grace and then peace in the divinely established order.

THE SOURCE OF GRACE AND PEACE

The greeting of the Apostle makes clear the source of this which we so desperately need. "Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ." One interesting and helpful insight found in this greeting is the place that Paul gave to Jesus. He presents Him as being the equal of God the Father. In the construction of the Greek sentence, it is clear that Paul approaches them as being equal in every way, especially as being the source of grace and peace.

The God who provides grace and peace is "Father". In this letter he is presented as the gracious Father of the believing. He is the Father who sent His Son in the fullness of time. He is the Father to whom the Spirit draws men in trust and devotion. As such, He is the source of grace and peace.

The God who provides grace and peace is also the "Lord Jesus Christ". He is the one who gave Himself that we might be delivered from this present world. He is related to the Godhead as Son, but to us as "Lord". When men receive grace and peace from Him, they know Him as their Lord and God. He is the source of grace because of His willing sacrifice for us on the Tree.

About one thing we need to be clear --- there is no other source of grace and peace. These precious experiences are not found in the church, nor in religious activities, but in God alone. Your sins will be dealt with decisively only as you open your life to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in trust.

CONCLUSION:

What do you need today? What would it take to make your life really complete? If you are a discerning person, you will surely recognize that knowing your sins have been forgiven and knowing that you have a good relationship with God would be a big step in that direction. Grace and Peace is what you really need. Fortunately for all of us the God of this universe is a God of grace and a God of peace. He is full of grace and delighted to come to peace with warring men. All

you must do to know this grace and peace today is openly acknowledge your need of it. To step forward and say, "I need grace and peace," is the big step. God will respond to your confession of need and request of faith with abundant grace and a peace that passeth understanding.