

"Grace, Mercy and Peace"—2 Timothy 1:2

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

Grace . . . mercy . . . peace . . . words which one might expect displayed on a decorative wall piece much the same way as the words "faith," "love," "believe," "joy," and so forth can catch your eye. It's almost as if each word is a stand-alone reminder of a desired or commendable characteristic or ideal which you would do well to emulate in your life that day. Since one is offered no source for experiencing these characteristics or ideals, each person is required to understand them within his own mental, social and moral context.

Thus, "grace" is usually used in common parlance to describe a special divine favor (i.e. from God); an act of courtesy or kindness; a special privilege or period of time (i.e. a "grace period" before having to fulfill a responsibility or be penalized); ease of movement (i.e. "She walks with such grace."); a title of address (i.e. referring to a dignitary as "your grace"); and, of course, a short prayer at a meal (i.e. "Who wants to say grace?").

"Mercy" is usually used in common parlance to describe a blessing that is an act of divine favor or compassion (i.e. "Lord, have mercy.");

compassion by one who holds power over another (i.e. “Upon begging for mercy he was released.”); and works of human care which help those in distress or need.

“Peace” is usually used in common parlance to describe a lack of turmoil on social levels (i.e. lack of war; end of violence; reconciliation in the midst of arguments and discord) as well as on emotional and psychological levels (i.e. peace of mind; clear conscience; lack of disturbing memories and thoughts).

While such concepts are a part of our understanding of these words, we Christians hear them in a whole different way. Hopefully we do not hear them roll off our tongues so mechanically that their impact in our lives is overlooked, taken for granted or even ignored. As the apostle Paul wrote this salutation to Pastor Timothy in about 68 AD his context involved contemplating his impending death while sitting in prison for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Timothy 4:6). Instead of seeking the grace of the emperor, placing himself at the mercy of the court in order to have a more peaceful life, he looked to a different Source of *grace, mercy, and peace* at work in his life, reflected in the salutations of all his letters (cf. Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:12; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 3). He looked to the *grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The *grace, mercy, and peace* which flows from *God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* to you is experienced within the context of not only of recognizing sin in the world around you but acknowledging the sin in your own heart and life as well. It is easy to critically analyze the maladies of the world around you. Although the world would never attribute those maladies to sin, you can readily do so when you live in relationship with God as your loving Father and confess Christ Jesus as Lord. The Christian recognizes the Source of *grace, mercy, and peace* when, together with the psalmist, you confess to God: *Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You may be justified in Your words and blameless in Your judgment* (cf. Psalm 51:4).

Confession of sins is placing yourself at the mercy of the Judge Who is *justified . . . and blameless in His judgment* upon you because of your sin—it's the judgment of eternal suffering of hell. Confessing your sins is praying for mercy in the midst of a conscience tormented by the conviction of the Holy Spirit in the guilt of your sin, seeking peace with *God the Father*. It is standing before God in the shame of your sin, *not even able to lift up your eyes to heaven, but beating your breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"* (cf. Luke 18:13)

Wait! I thought this sermon was about the wonderful dynamics of grace and mercy and peace, not making me feel like a worthless human being in my sin. It is about grace and as much as the devil wants you to

think you are worthless in your sin you are not. Rather, you are worth it! That's right. You are so worth it (i.e. so valued by God) that *where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that . . . grace . . . might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord* (cf. Romans 5:20-21).

This *grace, mercy, and peace* is from God the Father **and** Christ Jesus our Lord because of **Christ's** righteousness. While God's Law produces guilt from disobedience in sinners such as you and me, Jesus lived rightly in perfect obedience to God's law for us. *For our sake* the Father *made Him to be sin Who knew no sin* (i.e. Jesus), *so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God* (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). Why did God lay on Jesus *the iniquity of us all* (cf. Isaiah 53:6)? Because *God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved*, (cf. Ephesians 2:4-5) so that *having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. Romans 5:1). Without this recognition of your utter sinfulness in God's sight there is no seeing God's grace, His undeserved love, in your life.

Such a concept is actually foreign to the sinful human nature because everyone knows you can't get something for nothing. If there's not a catch or an angle then I will live the rest of my life feeling like I owe

someone something. The difficulty of receiving graciously became a reality to me in 1981. While offering free car washes at a district youth gathering as a servant event, it was difficult to get people to take us up on our offer. Of the three vehicles which did receive a free car wash that whole afternoon, one woman insisted so intensely about paying us that I finally had to accept her money after twenty minutes of explanation of my refusal to do so. Grace was so overwhelming for her in connection with a car wash that it must have been unfathomable when thinking of her eternity. This week I visited with a man who was offered a lawnmower free of charge and he insisted so much on paying for it that he had to give twenty dollars to a little girl standing nearby. Interesting, our idolatrous, works-righteousness runs so deep in our sinful nature that we cannot receive graciously let alone give graciously.

This is exactly why every human being on this planet needs the *grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord*. When it comes to your relationship *God the Father*, forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven is based on His mercy expressed in the atoning work of Jesus for you. In others words, God's mercy in Christ reassures you that it's a really good thing that you don't get what you deserve—that judgment of eternal suffering of hell. At the same time, God's grace in Christ reassures you that it's a really good thing that you get what you don't deserve—forgiveness of sins, eternal life and peace

with Him.

As we confess our sins, including our frail efforts to receive and give grace, the Holy Spirit also puts the confession on our lips that we receive *grace, mercy, and peace **from** God the Father **and** Christ Jesus our Lord*. When you *acknowledged* your *sin* to the LORD, and do *not cover* your *iniquity*, you speak both confessions in the words of Psalm 32:5 → *I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.*

It is interesting that of the thirteen salutations which Paul uses in his letters only this one, which includes the word *mercy*, is directed to the pastors. Those directed to congregations basically say: *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:2). Maybe it was to remind pastors Timothy and Titus that they were to dispense the mercy which comes from God and Christ Jesus to the churches through His means of grace. Maybe Paul's salutation to the congregations recognized that they had already received God's mercy through the means of grace and have His peace. At any rate *the word of the Lord remains forever . . . the good news that was preached to you* (cf. 1 Peter 1:25) . . .

*Grace, mercy, and peace*

*from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord*

(cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

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