

"Grace Be Unto You, And Peace"

**"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all
spiritual blessings in heavenly places."**

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is perhaps the highest expression of the joys that constitute the spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

It was written many years before the Spirit had occasion through John to remind this ecclesia of its lost first love. Those among them who were moved by John's warning words from Patmos would doubtless read again this earlier epistle of Paul. They would remember those purer and happier days. They would remember Paul's tearful parting words of warning when he saw them for the last time at Miletus, words which at the time perhaps seemed unnecessarily ominous—

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves...for I KNOW this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." (Acts 20:29).

And they would remember too, that Jesus himself had said, shortly before he left them,

"The love of the many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:12, RV).

Time would take its toll. Other things would claim the attention. The original enthusiasm would slowly disappear, and the lightstand, no longer zealously tended, would gradually flicker out. How slowly! But how surely and how deadly!

"Thou hast left thy first love" (Rev. 2:4).

A watchman slumbering at his post with a cold, empty lamp in his hand!

But none of this had begun when this epistle was written. All is light and joy and Paul writes freely and warmly of the things nearest to his heart—of the things he desired to share with the Corinthians, but could not because they were yet carnal and had to be carefully fed with milk as babes.

He writes of the deep things of the glorious, predestinating purpose of God in Christ. He writes of the fellowship of the mystery, of the multitudinous unity of the Spirit, of the love of Christ which passeth all knowledge and which constrained Paul to super-human effort and endurance on behalf of his brethren.

He writes of the fullness of God with which they were filled and by which they were gloriously strengthened with might in the inner man, and of the wonderful time in the future to which all creation was painfully travailing when God would gather together in one all things in Christ.

Contemplating their love and faith and unalloyed zeal, he ceases not to give thanks unto God continually, and he prays that they may fully know within themselves the inexpressible joys of the working of His mighty power.

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints..."

—the separated ones, the holy people—"Be ye holy even as I am holy, saith the Lord."

". . . to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:1).

Paul broadens his salutation to include not only the holy ones in Ephesus, but also that select and blessed few who in all ages come under the category of "the faithful in Christ Jesus." Does this include us, too? Are we among the "faithful in Christ Jesus"?

Faithful means many things. First, it means "firm in belief," having the full assurance of faith, unquestioning and undoubting, single-minded adherence to God's Word.

"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that cometh to God MUST BELIEVE" (Heb. 11:6).

Secondly, it means "true to one's word"—faithfully fulfilling one's promises and obligations.

"Faithful is He that calleth you, Who also will do it" (1 Th. 5:24).

"The Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God which keepeth covenant and mercy" (Deut. 7:9).

Third, faithful means "steadfast in the face of temptation," holding firm and unmoved come what may.

"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life"

Then faithful means "trustworthy in guarding what has been entrusted," and diligent in its use.

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust in much."

"It is required in a steward that a man be found faithful"

Let us remind ourselves of that—the little things are just as important as the big things for all is a matter of principle. Often, indeed, the little things are more important than the large things, and little sins worse than big ones. Why? Because while big transgressions may be the result of human weakness under great pressure, the little ones are often a sign of just plain heedlessness and lost love and enthusiasm for God.

It is the little sins and little services that paint the true picture of the heart; the daily acts of faith or faithlessness, unaffected by either momentary stress or momentary enthusiasm.

Many of God's faithful committed grievous transgressions—they fell low, but when they came to themselves He received them again with joy, for He knew that their hearts were set upon Him and their life was bound up in His, though they were overcome for a while.

Again, faithful means "trusting and dependent"—unwavering confidence and reliance.

"If God so clothe the grass of the field ... how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

"Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" (Matt. 8:26).

And, finally, faithful means "true and constant in affection," having the entire heart and mind firmly fixed upon an object of devotion. It means steadfastness in love. This perhaps is the foundation of all its other meanings—the basis or motive power of all, for "Faith," says Paul (Gal. 5:6), "worketh by love."

Such then are the faithful in Christ Jesus; the ones to whom Paul is speaking throughout this epistle; the ones for whom these blessings are reserved:

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

By this we can measure ourselves.

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Verse 2: "Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

What is grace? What mental pictures does the word create? It is difficult to define. It carries the atmosphere of harmony, and loveliness, and courtesy, and kindness, and gentleness. It is, in brief, godliness of deportment.

From grace we derive two related words—graceful and gracious. Graceful is defined as "displaying beauty in form or action," that is, grace of body; while gracious means displaying beauty of the mind and character.

"Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father."

"Be clothed with humility," counsels Peter (I Pet. 5:5), "for God giveth grace to the humble." And John records with an awe that is ever-new:

"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

That is the ideal combination. Grace and Truth. It is easy to stress one to the exclusion of the other, and some tend to err one way and some the other, but neither Grace nor Truth is complete alone. Christendom at large makes much of Grace, but cares little for Truth. But Grace alone, though pleasant, has no eternal value. It must cling to the sturdy stock of Truth to give it vitality and purpose.

Likewise Truth without Grace is like light without warmth. It is frigid and unmoving. It is easy to be convinced without being aroused, and if we convinced someone without arousing them, we only add to their condemnation without showing them the power to rise out of it.

The multiplication table is truth, but it is without grace. It is possible, out of a desire to avoid the errors of Christendom, to present the Gospel of God in the same sterile fashion as a mathematical equation—to declare its truth with the implied attitude that: "There it is, take it or leave it." This error must be carefully avoided, too.

"Let your speech be always with grace" (Col. 4:6).

"Speak that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).

That must be the purpose of all that we say—"To administer grace unto the hearers."

Truth itself is indeed a worthy object of search and attention, but it is the grace we find woven throughout all the Truth of God that kindles our love and affection. Let us, then, as Peter counsels (2 Pet. 3:18), "Grow in grace, and in knowledge." Let the two grow side by side, each helping the other.

"Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

Peace—tranquillity, freedom from disturbance or agitation, calm, harmony, concord, exemption from fear. Not, as some picture it, an emotional vacuum, but a calm inner serenity that no external factor can touch. A serenity unshakably rooted in a perfect oneness with the Eternal Author of Peace. Jesus calmly said, in the dark night of agony and desertion that led to the cross:

"Peace I leave with you: MY peace I give you . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid!"

Present conditions around us, both within the Household and without, emphasize the preciousness and blessing of peace. Not, of course, peace at any price—that is a fool's paradise—but true, well-grounded, God-given peace.

There are, of course, always those to whom the thought of peace does not appeal, those to whom excitement and pleasure have a much more tantalizing ring. But this is a limited and pitiable mentality. The thoughtful student soon realizes that God has so constituted us that our deepest and fullest happiness demands quiet peace of both mind and body and that, in this present life, it is the greatest blessing that God can give.

Now the Scriptures define certain elementary principles concerning peace, and the first is that, like every other good, it doesn't just happen, but has definite causes. Peace is not the toy of time and chance. It does not come to us as the caprice of the cycle of fortune. It is determined by law—fixed, divine law.

And furthermore, it is something that requires working and planning and earnest effort. It is, in a sense, a matter of learning and practice, just like any other worthwhile accomplishment. We must learn how, and then, by practice, develop our skill. We must be prepared to make a great, all-consuming effort, if we truly value the prize. The first relevant statement of Scripture is this:

"I make peace ... I the Lord do these things" (Isa. 45:7).

This is lesson one. True peace begins in God. And lesson 2 is:

"There is NO PEACE, saith the Lord, to the wicked" (Isa. 48:22)

Peace is divinely bestowed in proportion to righteousness:

"GREAT PEACE have they which love Thy Law."

Loving the Law does not, of course, mean abstract admiration, for:

"THIS is the love of God, that we keep His commandments."

Solomon declares,

"My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments; for length of days, and long life, AND PEACE, shall they add unto thee" (Prov. 3:1-2).

And Isaiah says,

"The work of righteousness shall be peace" (Isa. 32:17).

Obedience, then, is the first key to peace. We must accept this primary fact at the outset, before we even begin to take the course. It is inescapable, and the wise man will not kick against the pricks. The delicate balance of our minds and moods, that control which determines between tranquility and turmoil, is reserved within the almighty power of God.

We may ignore God's counsel and we may so arrange our outward circumstances by worldly provisions and guarantees that we seem assured against all the vagaries of chance, and peace appears to be inevitable, and men may envy us mightily, but still the divine verdict is, "Thou fool."

An obedient heart—a heart that yearns to obey and to conform itself to the holiness of the object of its affection—is an essential prerequisite to peace. Paul says of them that obey not God,

"The WAY of peace have they not known" (Romans 3:17).

They want it but it is hid from them. Paul says further we must:

"Follow after the things that make for peace."

Peace is made, and we must learn how to make it. If we would have peace, we must take the steps that lead to peace. It is not enough just to hope for it, and to pray for it. We must consciously set our course toward it, and we must keep moving along that course. Paul gets a step closer to telling us how when he says in this same epistle to the Romans (8:6),

"To be SPIRITUALLY-MINDED is peace" (Romans 8:6).

Peace is a state of the mind. It does not depend upon the things that happen to us. They can't give us peace or take it from us. Peace depends upon how we receive them, and react to them. It is godliness with contentment—doing right and being satisfied.

Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, said of Christ's birth:

"The dayspring from on high hath visited us ... to guide our feet in the way of peace."

Here again is the same thought—"The way of peace." The dayspring to whom Zacharias refers reveals this way in Matt. 11:28—

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me."

That is, Copy me, Follow my example—

“. . . for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29).

"Rest unto your souls" is a very good synonym for peace, and the way to it is, "Be meek and lowly." Take it easy. Be content with little. Leave the worrying to God. Settle back into the everlasting arms. Cast your care upon Him. Turn it all over to your Father. Give up the frantic struggle to keep up with the mad and endless treadmill.

Relax your grip upon the things that are vanishing, and let the world rush by. Don't look after it longingly, because it isn't going anywhere—but of course it doesn't know that.

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding . . . Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3:13, 17).

"To be spiritually-minded is peace."

"He that is spiritual discerneth all things" (1 Cor. 2:15). This is the basis of his peace, and it is a real and genuine foundation. His peace is founded upon knowledge—the knowledge that—

"ALL things work together for good to them that love God."

It is only necessary to know the truth, and be really convinced of it, and to live in harmony with it, to achieve peace. It doesn't require self-deception. We don't have to pretend, or run away from the facts. We only need to stand well back and get a good clear picture of everything in its true proportion, and peace is the inevitable result.

Everything in God's universe is progressing according to schedule. There is nothing out of hand. God is in full control. The plan is rolling forward gloriously; and the present puppets, which loom so large and self-important, are but passing shadows.

And we've got to hold on to that picture! We must not let it fade away and be replaced by the sordid, distorted, fractional view that is apparent to our immediate senses.

Such, then, are the ingredients of peace. Supply these ingredients, and the desired result must follow. Let us list them.

First, love, for that is the root and mainspring of all virtue. Meaning, of course, true scriptural love—pure, zealous and intense, "hating even the garment spotted by the flesh"—love that is bigger and stronger than fear.

Then obedience: that naturally follows. That is the fruit that identifies the tree of love, and a tree is known by its fruits.

Third, lowliness—for there is no peace in struggling endlessly up toward barren and elusive pinnacles of empty glory. A relaxed sense of nothingness and powerlessness. A contentment to be of small account, knowing that man's puny accomplishments and vain honors are worthless in God's sight. The world cannot give us peace. Peace is in the hand of God, kept for His children alone.

"The Lord will bless His people with peace" (Psa. 29:11).

Fourth, meekness—mildness of temper, forbearance, humility, patience. True strength of character and power of mind. Self-control. Being big enough not to be petty and resentful.

"The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord" (Psa. 29:19).

"He will beautify the meek with salvation" (Psa. 149:4).

"The hidden man of the heart . . . the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" (1 Pet. 3:4).

Then graciousness—for if we are to have real peace our outward contacts must leave us with no inward regrets. We must learn to give of our best to everyone—to treat everyone with studied courtesy and kindness—never too big or too busy to be kind and considerate.

And this, to mean anything, must be without regard to persons. If angels ever deign to visit us unawares, they are not likely to come disguised as pompous bank directors or corporation presidents, but as very simple, common people.

Sixth, wisdom—vision and discernment, for peace requires a keen perception that pierces through the disquieting and deceptive outward appearance of things. We must live by the things that are not seen, for these are the real things. We must, with Moses, "see Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27).

Finally, spiritual mindedness—for peace is essentially a spiritual quality. The carnal mind never knows peace for it ever burns with an insatiable flame of bitterness and envy, lust and desire. Only God can calm the raging of the storm, and say to our troubled mind, "Peace, be still."

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee."

Such, then, are the seven pillars of the temple of peace, the seven keys to the garden of spiritual rest.

"Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places."

It is these 'spiritual blessings' in heavenly places that should fire our zeal to transform ourselves for God. Not so much for what God has done for us. Let us go deeper than that. It is for the love that caused Him to do it. Paul exclaims elsewhere, with an overflowing heart,

"Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

"We love Him," says John, "because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). His love is so intense and so electrifying that when it meets a receptive heart, even this common clay cannot but be charged and transformed.

But it must be kept in the direct focus of that influence. Our light, like that of the moon, is only reflected glory, and fades quickly when the source is obscured. So again we perceive that all is of Him, even our love for Him.

What are these "spiritual blessings in the heavenlies" of which Paul speaks? They are summarized in John's words,

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God!" (1 John 3:1).

FULL adoption into the divine family, with all its privileges! He throws the door to Himself wide open. Sonship implies fellowship and communion, confidence and dependence. He could offer us no more than to offer us Himself. No higher honor. No greater blessing. And He gives it to us freely, merely upon our promise to be faithful, and to give Him in loving return the pitiful little we have to give.

"All things are yours . . . the world, life, death, things present, things to come; ALL ARE YOURS!" (1 Cor. 3:22-23).

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling . . . what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!"

Holiness, the divine eternal beauty of holiness, is the purpose of all this manifestation of love toward us. If it fails to move us to ceaseless and wholehearted efforts in that direction, it has missed its object and failed in its purpose. This is the end to which all is directed, as Paul continues here in v. 4,

"According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, THAT WE SHOULD BE HOLY and without blame before Him in love."

That is the glorious secret of His purpose—a people perfected in holiness by love. Not by force or fear, but by love. Holiness is the watchword of the future. Even the bells of the horses are to be inscribed, "Holiness to the Lord." (Zech. 14:20).

"And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it."

And they shall sing with triumphant ecstasy—

"Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, GLORIOUS IN HOLINESS? . . . Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed; Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitations" (Exod. 15:11-13).

Such was the Song of Moses, upon the deliverance of Israel, and such will be the Song of Moses and the Lamb.

"Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure . . . Blessed are the pure in heart."

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