

# The Foundation of Christian Strength

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*Ephesians*

By Don Green

**Bible Text:** Ephesians 1:1-2

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## **Truth Community Fellowship**

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I don't need to tell you that many professing Christians trudge through life with defeated hearts. They grind out what they think are the do's and don'ts of Christian living without any real sense of joy, or privilege, or opportunity. It's all about the externals. Were you in church at such and such a day? Did you read your Bible? Over time those things just accumulate and those lists of externals just accumulate and actually turn to be less than the blessing that God wants them to be and so it becomes a sense of drudgery. Well, we shouldn't have to think very long to realize that it couldn't possibly be that that's the way the Christian life should be, that we would resent the do's and the don'ts and not have any sense of joy when Nehemiah 8:10 says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." So something must be wrong with this. Thinking of life together over time here at Truth Community, I recognize that some of you are going through seasons of despair where it's hard to get out of bed, it's hard to just get out of bed to face another day with the weight that is on your heart and still others find yourselves with unexpected challenges, sudden disruptions in relationships and you just don't know what to do. Well, it's with sympathy and with hope and confidence in the word of God that I come to you this morning recognizing that it's easy to get overwhelmed with it all. It's easy to start to feel the weight on your shoulders and just slump under the weight of it because we lose sight of what true salvation is and this morning I recognize as we come together around God's word that we all need, every one of us needs true encouragement and that's the point of this message.

Martyn Lloyd Jones said and I quote, "Are you a miserable unhappy Christian, feeling that the fight is too much for you? Are you at the point of giving up and giving in? What you need is to know the power that is working mightily for you, the same power that brought Christ from the dead. If we but know that we are meant to be filled with all the fullness of God, we would no longer be weak and ailing and complaining. We would no longer present such a sorry picture of the Christian life to those who live around us. What we need primarily is not an experience, but to realize what we are, who we are, and what God has done in Christ and the way he has blessed us."

That's what I want to bring to you this morning, the way in which God has blessed us because when you understand these things you understand the foundation upon which

Christian strength in life is found. We must know what we are in Christ regardless of our circumstances if we would live well as Christians. To know who you are in Christ, to know the immeasurable blessings that God has poured out on his children, is to find the fountain, the source, the wellspring of good Christian living, of joyful Christian living, of confidence and courage and strength. We need to be reminded of these things time and again in today's passage it's going to help us do that. It's a passage that you read over quickly when you are reading through in your Bible reading plan but I invite you to turn to Ephesians 1, verses 1 and 2, for our text this morning. God through his word says this,

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is Paul's greeting to begin the entire letter, this is what he has to say as his opening invitation into what is going to follow in the word, that it says are sweet to the taste of every true Christian. It is the foundation for us to live well and he lays out three themes that he's going to go back to again and again in these opening two verses and we're going to see these three things, these three aspects of Christian living, these three dynamics of God's work in our salvation that give us what we need to not only get through life but to triumph through life as Christians, to live in a manner that is worthy of the Christ who shed his blood for the salvation of our souls. And if you've come today weighed down, I want you to drink deeply from this fountain which God entirely intends for your blessing and for your encouragement here this morning and I praise God that he brought us to this passage for just such a day as this.

What are those three themes? We're going to look first of all: your union with Christ; we're going to look at the grace of God; and we're going to look thirdly at your peace with God. That's the outline for this morning. Your union with Christ, the grace of God and your peace with God. That's what I want us to spend our time on here this morning. These are superlative truths for us to come to. It never ceases to amaze me how much God is able to put into a single verse of Scripture. It never ceases to amaze me how deep you can drill and find water everywhere to refresh a thirsty soul and this passage here is no different. It is one of the many marks of the inspiration of Scripture that just in a few short words you can find things that can open up eternity to you. That's what we have here in these first two verses.

Paul opens by identifying himself and his audience. Look at verse 1, he says, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus," there he's identifying himself. In this time period, they did the exact opposite of what we do with our letters: we put our names at the end, they put their name at the start which, when you think about it, makes a whole lot more sense. "Who is this from?" Oh, it's from Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. I get this. I don't have to read all the way through it to get to who is sending me this letter. Paul opens and identifies himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. So he is writing with divine authority. He was sent on a mission. He was commissioned by Christ to be a unique representative of his to the Gentile world and that's who he's writing to here as he opens up. We've studied Paul in the past; we won't review all of that here today. We simply

want to note that he's writing with the authority of Christ himself. He's writing by the will of God. He holds his office as an apostle by the will of God. He is uniquely sanctioned by God to write the words that we are reading here now today. And so what we have here is not someone's opinion, this is not an old wives tale from 2,000 years ago, this is the living word of God delivered by his chosen instrument to the church for all time. We have here before us, we are looking at the living word of the living God and we should expect him to speak to us as we hear it expounded to us here this morning. God has a message for us this morning and he has sent it to us through the Apostle Paul.

Now, very important in light of the way we frame the introduction in terms of the difficulties of life, it's very important for you to understand that Paul wrote this letter from prison. Look at chapter 3 verse 1. Two places where Paul makes reference to this. In Ephesians 3, verse 1, he says, "I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles," and he is speaking of literal imprisonment. Again, in chapter 4, verse 1, he says, "Therefore I, prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." Paul in this imprisonment in Rome had freedom to receive guests, yes but overall his mobility was restricted and God had confined him to a place where his desires were not able to be fully expressed. Surely, he would have preferred to have been left to his own choice, to be out proclaiming the gospel, but instead he is stuck in a Roman prison with a Roman guard chained to him, guarding his every movement. This is so important for us to receive this word rightly here today. Paul is writing under less than ideal circumstances. He is writing in the midst of adversity and yet, beloved, as you read the book of Ephesians, you realize that the Apostle Paul is writing triumphantly. He is not a defeated man in his imprisonment: he is more free than the guards who are watching him because he is redeemed in Christ; his soul is at liberty. He is the apostle who has been set free and it's from that great position of spiritual liberty, of spiritual power, of spiritual confidence that Paul writes the words that we're going to be studying over the next several months together in which we're looking at here today.

In his imprisonment, what's on his mind are the saints. It's the church of God. Look at verse 1 with me again, it says in our English text here that we're reading from, it says that he's writing "to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus." We need to take just a moment to understand what's going on here. It says in our English text "to the saints at Ephesus," but the earliest manuscripts omit the geographic reference; some of you will see that in your marginal notations. And the way that most textual scholars look at this is that they think the original was simply read, "to the saints who are in Christ Jesus, to the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus." In one sense, it doesn't make a whole lot of difference for the way that we understand the letter but here's what you need to see: if Paul wrote this not to one particular location but wrote this as a circular letter intended to be shared and distributed across many different churches in the region which is what the opening blank would seem to indicate, he's writing not to address a particular situation in a particular church but, watch this because this means something to us today, it means the he is stating universal truths that have the same application for believers across all time. It means that they have the same application for us today as they did in the first century in Ephesus and the other cities that would have

received this letter. So this is something that is for all of us, is the point. This is something that we don't have to wonder what's the application then and now. This is an application that applies to all of us. These are transcendent truths that are meant to encourage and instruct and edify and exhort and command believers for all time. So we can receive this as written for us in our situation and realize that when we come to the word of God with a receptive heart as believers in Christ, he will bless us. He will edify us. He will strengthen us. So, to those of you that came in heavy hearted today, you are in exactly the right place for exactly the right time to hear what God has to say for us today. You should view this as a divine appointment from God. God brought you here today to hear this very message to apply directly to your circumstances today.

Now, look again at verse one. He says, "to the saints who are at Ephesus." It's a shame that this word has been stolen by the Catholic Church and twisted and perverted to mean something that it's not. Saints are not Christians who are somehow holier than other Christians and get a title bestowed on them after they die as recently was done by the current pope for two prior popes, It has nothing to do with the kingdom of God. Every Christian is a saint. Every Christian is entitled to that term. It is not reserved for a so-called elite within the body of Christ. This is a term supplied and meant for every true Christian. To be a saint means to be set apart by God to serve his purposes. To be a saint means that God has sanctified you, he has removed you from the world and set you apart to serve him, to belong to him.

It reminds me again of what we studied in Titus chapter 2 that Christ purchased us and he redeemed us so that we might be his own people. In fact, turn over to Titus 2. I want you to see this first in this context with me. It is so important for our state of understanding that there is not us ordinary Christians and then there's this group called saints that are over and above us whose merits spill out to bless us. What an absolute blasphemous approach to the people of God. Look at Titus 2:14, "Christ gave Himself for us to redeem us," all of us, "from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." That's what it means to be a saint is what is given to you there. We're redeemed from our prior lawless deeds. We are purified for Christ and now we belong to him with the specific intention that we would be zealous for the good deeds that he appoints for us in life, those good deeds that he has revealed in Scripture that we are to follow and to live out in the life that he has given to us.

That's what it is. If you are a Christian today, you're a saint. You are set apart for God. You must view the world in which you live, you must view the life which you are trying to do your best in, you must view it from the perspective that God has given you this life with all of its joys and sorrows and difficulties and uncertainties. God has given you this life that you now have in order to live it set apart for him and to accomplish his purposes, to live for his glory, to love Jesus Christ in the midst of what he's given to you. That is your purpose in life. That is what you have been set apart to do. And just as Christ glorified God through his sufferings, so also you, so also I, can glorify Christ and achieve his purposes through our sorrows and sufferings. That's what it means to be a saint.

To be a saint, look at it at the end of verse 1 with me again, to be a saint is to be in Christ. Paul says to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful "in Christ Jesus." In Christ.

Commentator William Hendrickson said this and I quote, he says, "This phrase 'in Christ' may without exaggeration be called the most important one in all the Pauline epistles." This is of massive importance to understanding what it means to be a Christian and as we go through the book of Ephesians, we'll see that that phrase occurs around 30 times in this letter alone. Thirty times in six chapters. Five times per chapter Paul is using this phrase "in Christ" and when you look at what he says in connection with that phrase, you start to realize that this truly is the most important phrase that we could understand as we are here this morning. For example, Paul says in chapter 1, verse 3, look at it with me, that God, "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." It is in Christ that we find the realm of blessing. It is in Christ where everything necessary for life and godliness has been given to you. That should focus your attention like a laser on the person of Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 4 where Paul says, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." God chose us in Christ before time began. There was never a time where God thought about you separate from the Lord Jesus Christ. He saw you in connection with Christ before the foundation of the world. He goes on and says in verse 7, he says, "in Him," that is, in Christ, "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." We are locked into, we are limited to, we are gloriously liberated in the redemption which is found in Christ alone. In Christ is your redemption. In Christ alone is the forgiveness of your sins. Look nowhere else. Don't look to yourself. Don't look to Mary. Don't look to the Mormon Church. Don't look to anyone. Don't look for political deliverance. Look to Christ alone for your redemption. Look to Christ alone for your purchase because it is in Christ where the forgiveness of trespasses alone is found and it is given to us according to the riches of his grace which he lavished on us. Why would you look anywhere else when there are rich graces to be found, rich grace in Christ, why would you look anywhere else? Why would you look for a change of circumstances when you can go directly to Christ and find everything you need for life and godliness? Your redemption is in Christ. Look at verse 12 where Paul says that, "we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory." Or your hope is in Christ, your trust is in Christ, everything that your soul depends on is found in him alone in Christ and we look to no one else because we need no one else. We need nothing else. All that is related to our hope is found in Christ.

Look at chapter 2, verse 7. I'm not going to take you through all thirty although that would have been a good message on its own. Ephesians 2:7, look at this, the unfolding of the ages to come in verse 7, throughout all of eternity just unfolding one beautiful door after another opening into another realm of glory to another realm of glory. Verse 7, "So that in the ages to come He might show," meaning God the Father, "he might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Finally, one last one, skip over to Ephesians 6. In Christ. In Christ. In Christ. In Christ. In Christ. Ephesians 6:10, Paul says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." Your strength, your stamina, your motivation to continue on and glorify Christ for another day is found in him. And so we are in Christ, it is in the realm of Christ in union with him that we find every spiritual blessing that belongs to us and we find that God has lavished grace upon us in him. The blessings are immeasurable, they cannot be counted, they are infinite and they have all been given to us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so, what does that mean? What is the significance of that for us today? We could go in one million different directions but I'm just going to stick to one: Jesus Christ lived in perfect obedience to his Father. We're going to consider that more fully tonight at communion. I invite you strongly to be back to celebrate the Lord's table at 6:30 here in Legacy Hall and we're going to consider this in greater detail. The obedience of Christ. But Christ lived in perfect obedience to the Father. He never faltered. He glorified God in every detail of his life. His obedience to the law was perfect. His Spirit never failed. He resisted sin perfectly all the way to death on the cross and beyond.

Think about this now: to be in Christ, to be joined together with him, to be in spiritual union with him means something profoundly significant to you today. It means that you have his power to obey, you have his power to persevere, you have his power to glorify God in the midst of these adverse circumstances which you find yourself in. As you yield yourself to the influence of the Holy Spirit, the grace of Christ, the power of Christ, the certainty of the influence of Christ is manifestly operating in your inner man and you have the ability because you are in Christ, you have the ability to glorify God, to persevere, to have joy and peace and assurance as you go through life even in the midst of the circumstances that you find yourself in today. To be in Christ, to be in union with Christ, means that you are joined together with him in an inner union that gives you access to his spiritual resources. You draw upon Christ just as a mental exercise. There is spiritual grace conveyed to your heart because of your union with Christ. That grace, that union is rooted in your election before time began. It became real at your conversion and it lasts forever into all of eternity. And it is that eternal reality that is not tangible but is revealed to us in the pages of Scripture; it is that eternal reality that gives you the strength for your Christian life today. We are joined together with him in his righteousness, we are joined together with him in his power, we are joined together with him in his grace.

That means something. That means something for you today. It means that you must look beyond the adversity of your present circumstances and view things not by what you see but by what is revealed in Scripture. Because you are in union with Christ today, beloved, you are not too feeble to do God's will. The amount of adversity is not too high to climb. You have the strength not only to make it through, not just to squeak by, but to triumph joyously and mightily through the power of Christ. That is why we have the strength to persevere. That is why martyrs could be burned at the stake and pray for those who were executing them. That's why martyrs could look up and say, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," as Stephen did in Acts chapter 7. It's why Paul could persevere through all of the adversity that he outlines in the Corinthian letters. It's why Paul could persevere in 2 Corinthians through ministerial heart ache by those who had rejected him and opposed him and disappointed him. That is where the strength lies. It is in Christ and if we are

going to thoroughly appropriate, be faithful to our Savior in the midst of these difficulties, these disappointments, we must look to Christ alone. We must abandon any trust in human psychology or human counselors that do not give us the word of God, that are giving us human wisdom. We have to look past that. We have to say, "I'm sorry, I've got something better to rely on, to put my hope in," and come to the Scripture and come to Christ and trust him to communicate his strength to us day by day and with each passing moment so that we would find strength to meet our trials here.

Beloved, beloved in Christ, you have the strength to prevail. You have the strength without anything else being given to you. You have the spiritual strength to persevere. You have what it takes within your heart because of the riches of the grace that God has lavished upon you. You have everything that you need to rise to the occasion and to glorify God in the midst of the circumstances he has given you. And let me say this, we grasp this now, we grasp it in life and we live this way and when the day of death comes when we are lying on our deathbed and we are drawing our final breaths, we have the strength even then to persevere and to glorify Christ in that final moment, in that final hour. We have the strength to rise up and spiritually worship Christ and trust him as he picks us up, as it were, and ushers us from earth into glory. I say stuff like that now because you need to know it now and settle that in your heart so that when the moment comes you can rise to the occasion. This is adequate for everything. To be in Christ is to have our spiritual all.

And so, beloved, I invite you right now to just take a moment and by faith thank God that you are in Christ, that you're joined together with him and to thank him for the rich lavishing grace that he has poured out to bring you into union with, to place you in the realm of our most holy Savior Jesus Christ. You see, the reality of being a Christian is so much greater than trying to comply with a list of external do's and don'ts. It's so much more than being in church on Sunday or trying to conform to the expectations of people who have a religious significance somewhere in your life. This is so much more than that. This is totally transcending that realm. To be a Christian is to think in spiritual ways about Christ and to realize that there are unseen realities that God has given that make everything in this world pale in comparison. To be in Christ is to have everything even if you lose everything else. You believe that don't you? You love Christ that way, don't you? You trust him that way, don't you? Because that's the essence of being a Christian.

Now, as you think about the Christian life, you should also remember a second thing that Paul alludes to here in this passage. Look at the opening of verse 2, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The grace of God. The grace of God. Grace is God's unmerited favor operating in the lives of unworthy sinners. It means that he has extended goodness where condemnation could have prevailed. He exchanged judgment for you for his favor, for his goodness, for sharing his blessings in your life when he had every prerogative and every right and every reason to judge us instead. We had forfeited any claim on God's goodness through our sin and yet here we are in Christ with our sins forgiven, all of that as a result of the unmerited favor, the grace of God.

It is on the principle of grace that he extends salvation to us. You've got to stop thinking that God's more pleased with you when you read your Bible and he's not as pleased with you when you don't. He doesn't deal with us on that external basis. He deals with us according to his principle of grace. His favor is established in grace, it does not rise and fall upon your performance. And God's grace runs throughout the book of Ephesians. Let me read a couple of passages to you. When I say a couple, I mean five. Look at Ephesians chapter 1, verse 7, again, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us." Look at chapter 2, verse 5. We'll actually start in verse 4. After explaining how dead we were in sin, it says that, "God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ," here it is, "by grace you have been saved, and he raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His," what? "His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

We are going to be in a place of spectacular splendor throughout all of the eternal ages and we're going to be there not because of a single thing that we did but because God in his grace brought us to Christ and showered all of this on us in his lavish love and mercy. That is grace. Do you understand that there is not possibly anything that you could have done to contribute to a salvation that gives you something that great and vastly eternal? There is nothing that you could have done. There is no good work that you could have done. There is no prayer that you could have prayed that somehow would have obligated God from your sinful state to unfold the riches of his mercy in heaven throughout all of the ages to come. Nothing. That totally crushes our human pride. It makes us love Christ immensely and it helps us realize that the certainty of blessing is secured not by what we do but by what God has done in his grace in Christ for us. We were dead. You were dead. You were dead in false religion. Dead in your sin. Dead in your indifference. And in that state, when you weren't looking, God drew you to himself and poured out his immeasurable favor upon you that not only did you not deserve, you actually deserve the exact opposite. God gave you the opposite of what you deserved if you are in Christ. And it's only going to unfold in infinitely exponentially more wonderful ways throughout the unfolding of the halls of eternity. That's grace. That's undeserved favor. Don't think, don't allow yourself to sin against grace by thinking that somehow you did something that prompted God to unleash all of that marvelous favor upon your soul. You didn't. You couldn't. To think that we could go to heaven with the ticket that was stained with the dirt of our sin and say, "Here, let me in. Here, give me every blessing in Christ." Please. Please, just perish the thought. Put it out of your mind and just humbly come before God and say, "Oh God, I thank you for undeserved favor like that."

Verse 8 of Ephesians 2, and it's so emphatic I can't wait to get to this passage and show you how vastly emphatic this is. Verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." By grace, the gift of God, not from you, and not a result of works. You may never boast about it. Ever! And if you're a Christian, you don't even want to. One of the marks of a true Christian is that it's a foreign thought, it's a foreign object in his soul



to think that somehow he would boast in his own righteousness. No, no, our boast is in Christ alone. I will repose in grace and we gladly say, "I did nothing to contribute to my salvation." We gladly say that. We glory in that. We glory in saying, "It's not from anything I do. I have nothing. My only boast is in Christ and in his marvelous grace of God poured out upon my soul when I was so undeserving." You know, some of us can remember with shame in our hearts when the name of Christ was our curse word and now here we are in the realm of his favor, the realm of his love, the realm of his acceptance. When he should have cursed back by human measure, he gave grace instead. I feel about that big right now. That's okay because when we talk this way we're making Christ great. We're proclaiming him for who he is. We're proclaiming the majesty of grace and it's not about us. I don't want to be that big. We just want Christ to be glorified as the sole love of our hearts.

Look at Ephesians 4, verse 7, "to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." Chapter 4, verse 29, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment so that it will give grace to those who hear." Chapter 6, verse 24, just showing you that the theme runs from beginning to end in Ephesians, that's all we were doing at this point. "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love." Look, Paul was writing to Christians when he wrote that final verse and what he's saying when he says "grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love," apparently somehow as we were going through this life, there's more grace to be received. There is a continual outpouring of enabling sanctifying grace in our lives. It didn't stop at the moment of our conversion and then we tried to trudge through and work it out all by ourselves. No, there's grace being poured out day by day by day. How good has God been to us? How wonderful is his love? How good is his mercy that would call us to devotion and faithfulness to him no matter the cost.

So when we consider grace, we realize, we remember that God intervened at the price of Christ's blood for our redemption. He forgave our sins. He continually cleanses you even when you don't deserve it. Grace means because, watch this, this is really critical for those of you that really struggle with an assurance of salvation, you'll need to pay special attention right now because salvation is predicated upon God's grace, not on your merit, not on your performance but on the sheer favor of God because it pleased him to do so, because it's predicated on grace that means that your standing with God is stable. It is secure because it is about his attitude toward you, not your faithfulness toward him. Christ fulfilled everything necessary for God to accept you. In Christ, in grace, our standing is complete. It is perfect because it is based on something outside of us. It is based on the merit of Christ, not on the merit of the recipient and the merit of Christ is perfect, it cannot change, it will not change. That's what's been given to us. That's the righteousness that has been imputed to us. That's what we stand on, not on our shifting allegiance, our shifting loyalty, our failing in very imperfect obedience. That's grace! That's why he gets all the glory and because it's by grace, not by works, once you're in Christ, you are secure and now the dynamic of grace influences you toward holiness and grace equips you for life.

Christian, you should never despair in an absolute sense because God never withdraws grace from his children. It is a continual fountain. Sometimes it manifests itself by helping us persevere through adversity. Sometimes it manifests itself in joy and wonder. Sometimes it's just the routine of daily life. But don't miss the fact that through all of that, the unifying principle of all of that is the sustaining, sanctifying grace of God that is at work in your heart. Continuing what he began at your conversion and he's going to carry it all the way through until you're safe and in glory where Satan and the enemies of your soul have no access, imperfect glory. He will be perfectly secured, never to be troubled by the sorrows of this world again, never to face the fluctuating fortunes of finance or politics or whatever. That's our ultimate internal security. We live in light of that now and that's what gives us confidence, joy, strength, serenity, peace, joy, love, all of that stuff and I trust that you see, I trust that you understand, that what we're seeing from God's word today is of infinite value. It is of greater price than anything that goes good or bad in this life. Nothing is more valuable than the grace of God and therefore everything that we experience falls under the realm of that enabling, saving, sanctifying grace and that's why we can be strong and be at peace and persevere because we have an unending stream of grace coursing through our spiritual veins.

There's a third source for joy, for strength, that's given in the passage. Look at verse 2 with me again. Chapter 1, verse 2, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Notice the source. From God our Father, from the Lord Jesus Christ. They are put on equal planes. It is a statement that testifies to the deity of Christ that God is a source of grace and peace, the Lord Jesus is a source of grace and peace. We have a statement here of the deity of Christ because he gives the gifts that God himself gives and only God can give his gifts.

Now peace has the idea of spiritual wholeness. Before Christ, you were separated from God by your sin but now in Christ, now that you have received salvation, you have been brought to full harmony, you have been reconciled to God. There is no longer a barrier to intimacy with him. There is no longer a threat of judgment from him because you have been reconciled to God objectively as a matter of external reality, not based on your emotion. You are no longer God's enemy as you once were, your sins are forgiven. He has adopted you into his family. He has fully received you and he will never disown you or cast you away. Stated differently: God is not hostile to you when you are in Christ. He is favorable to you. He designs your blessing and when you come out of a works based environment, those of you that come out the Catholic Church and those other works based systems and things that would more remotely claim the name of evangelical even, when it's geared toward your performance, you're always wondering when God is going to slap you when you fail. That's a total misunderstanding of what it means to be a Christian, of the grace and peace that belongs to us. The Scripture says that he "has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west." He will not hold them against us anymore. He does not deal with us according to our iniquities but according to his grace and favor and goodness. The reason that he does that is because we are at peace with him. There is a peace treaty that has been instituted between you and God in Christ and there is no longer war between us.

There is also a subjective dimension that flows from that. We have an inner sense of well-being that flows from that restored relationship. I remember to this day the blessed thing that dawned on me in the newness of my conversion when God saved me. I didn't know too much about being a Christian. I just knew that I needed a Savior and what happened in those early days actually set the course and the foundation for the rest of my life. There wasn't anyone else involved in my life: me and God and my Bible. I remember without going into it, what an angry young man I was, what I used to be, and I remember in the days after my conversion I started to realize, "I'm not angry anymore." There is joy and there is peace and I had no idea when I so-called "gave my life to Christ," I had no idea that that was part of the bargain. I didn't realize that those blessings were going to come, I just knew that I needed a Savior and figured, "Okay, now I'm going to have to read my Bible." I had no idea the flowing permanent peace that would come as a believer in Christ. Paul is conveying that since reminding us of our objective peace with God and reminding us that there is a subjective peace that goes with this: we have an inner sense, a permanent well-being that flows from the fact that we have a restored relationship with God. The fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace.

This theme of peace is important in Ephesians. Look at chapter 2, verse 14. Let's start in verse 13. Just as you listen to me preach over the course of time, whenever I say, "Turn to this verse," just subtract one and go to the one before it because that's what I almost always do so that will just be a shortcut for you. "Okay, he said 14, I know he's going to 13." Verse 13, "But now in Christ Jesus," here's the sense of objective peace of reconciliation, "Now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." We were separated and Christ brought us near. Verse 14, "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups," talking about Jews and Gentiles here. We'll go into that in a lot of detail when we get to it. He made, "both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God," Jews and Gentiles, "through the cross, by having put to death the enmity." Verse 17, "and He came and preached to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near."

Chapter 4, verse 3, "Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Chapter 6, verse 23, "Peace be to the brethren, in love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Do you see how he starts and ends at the same place? Grace to you and peace from God our Father in the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 23, Peace from God the Father in the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ. Peace and grace. It's the beginning and the end. The book of Ephesians starts with grace and peace and it ends with grace and peace. Our Christian life starts with grace, it gives us peace and it's going to end in even greater grace and peace when we are before the throne of Christ in heaven. From beginning to end, our spiritual lives, our lives are now dominated by the grace of God in the peace of God. What a position of privilege we are in.

So perhaps my discouraged brother in Christ, perhaps my despairing sister in the Lord, let me say this to encourage you not to scold you, to help you to aspire after better things than before: you don't have to be dejected; your shoulders don't have to sag in Christ. God has brought you into union with him, that God has shown his grace to you. God has brought you into peace with him. You're at peace with God in Christ. Let that not only encourage you but give you the inspiration to live. Jesus said, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden." Don't you love the tenderness of that appeal? Don't you love the fact that Christ doesn't scold us in our weakness but he says come to me? Come to me just as you are, come just in that weary condition and I will give you rest. Beloved, know who you are in Christ, know what God has done for you in Christ. Let that reality which is more certain than what you see around you, let that reality shape your response to life. You can react to life in quiet strength that's built on that sure foundation in Christ. Praise God.

Let's pray together.

I would fail in my responsibilities as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ if I didn't at least ask this question for some of you: are the realities of grace and peace unknown to your heart? Well, let me just invite you, Christ laid down his life for sinners just like you, he rose from the grave for sinners just like you and he says, "Come to me and I will give you rest." It's not just a promise for us that are Christians, it's a promise to you who do not know Christ to come and he will receive you and give you the blessings that we've discussed here this morning. So for you who are convicted and you know that you're not a Christian, I invite you to the risen Christ this morning. He will receive you. He promised and his promise cannot fail. He will reconcile you to a holy God forever. Come to him today for salvation. Let him be a fountain of blessing to you just as he has been to me and so many others in this room. He's a good Christ. He's a good Savior. Please don't turn away again.

*For the rest of us, our Father, we thank you for our great salvation in Christ. We pray that you would help us to live in strength and hope as is fitting for those who have received grace and peace in Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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