

The Church's Grace and Peace

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Ready (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)

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“Lord, I give up all my own plans and purposes, all my own desires and hopes, and accept Thy will for my life. I give myself, my life, my all utterly to Thee, to be Thine forever. Fill me and seal me with Thy Holy Spirit. Use me as Thou wilt. Send me where Thou wilt, and work out Thy whole will in my life at any cost, now and forever.” - **Missionary Betty Stam**

Introduction: Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 1. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “The Church's Grace & Peace.”

Growing and Ready for Christ's Coming

Isn't God so wonderful and kind that He would save us? Can you recall when you were saved? We come to an early letter of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians, dated around AD 51. This letter has the sweet drippings of the eternal Gospel. How does one enter the Kingdom of God? How ought we to pray for people to enter God's Kingdom?

The books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians will be our study for the next several months. They are letters that tell us to GROW in the Lord and to be READY for His coming.

How the Thessalonian Church was Birthed

Paul was a church planter. He went to the capital city of Macedonia, which was a northern province, a Roman province. It was in Greece. In AD 49 he planted a church. He began to minister and speak and teach and communicate. A number of people became Christians, and he organized them into a church. But almost immediately, when the church was still very, very new and all of the Christians were very young, there was so much opposition in Thessalonica that Paul was forced to flee for his life.

Yet he was very worried about leaving such a new group of people so quickly, so he sent Timothy, one of his coworkers, up to Thessalonica to see how they were doing. Timothy comes back. This is less than a year later, from what we can tell. Timothy meets him and gives a report. He tells him the group is doing pretty well but also tells him about some issues and problems. So in response to that report, Paul writes this letter.

The first few verses, the ones we just read today (you can understand now), are a recap of how they became Christians. These folks he's writing to are brand new Christians, very, very new in the faith, so he gives a recap of what they went through, *how* they became Christians, *why* they became Christians.¹

¹ Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

1 Thessalonians 1, Reading of Holy Scripture

“To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. ²We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

I. What is the Gospel?

The Gospel

The word *gospel* shows up right away. In verse 5, right away, it talks about *our* gospel. “Our gospel came to you.” If you go through the book of 1 Thessalonians you’ll see in 2:2, Paul calls it *his* gospel. In 2:8 and 9 (it comes up twice), it’s called the gospel of God. In 3 it’s called the gospel of Christ. The *gospel*.

What *is* the gospel? There’s a synonym for it. The gospel is down a little ways. He says, “You received our message.” The gospel, therefore, is a message. It’s a series of words. It’s a series of sentences, ideas, some affirmations and assertions. The gospel has content. It’s a message. It’s an essential core message. Paul is saying you don’t become a Christian through the preaching or the hearing about love in general, or morality in general, but the gospel.²

1 Cor. 15:1-4 expresses the Gospel clearly, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”

II. What is the Church?

What is the church? Verse 1, “To the **church** of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Christ gave us the promise, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). What is Jesus talking about when He speaks of His church?

Church Universal and Church Local

Theologically, we can define the church in two ways: the church universal and the church local. The church universal is that Body of believers from all times that will be gathered when

² Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

Jesus comes again at the marriage supper of the Lamb – when people of every tribe, tongue, people and nation will be gathered as one Body in Christ. That's the church universal. We call it the family of God, or the elect of all the ages. But most of the commands in the New Testament are for a local church context.

Christ's church is not only universal, it is local. In at least 35 places the Bible gives us the one another commands –

- exhort one another,
- encourage one another,
- edify one another,
- love one another,
- submit to one another,
- tolerate one another,
- outdo one another in good works,
- be kind one to another,
- bear one another's burdens,
- be hospitable toward one another
- etc.

III. What is Grace?

The Gracious *Hesed* (Grace) of God

Paul often uses the greeting “grace and peace” in his epistles. What is he communicating. Obviously it is more than just mere empty words of a greeting. He could have said “greetings” as James does.

First we need to know that Paul is carrying over the same understanding revealed in the Old Testament – specifically **Exodus 34:6-7**, “The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.’”

The word *hesed* in the Old Testament is often translated “mercy” or “grace” in the Greek translation of the OT that Jesus used (called the Septuagint). So it is not surprising that when Paul speaks of God being “gracious” he's talking about God's covenant of grace to undeserving sinners, just as was revealed to Moses in Exodus 34.³

IV. What is God's Peace?

The Reconciling *Shalom* (Peace) of God

So what does Paul mean when he says “peace”? It's far more than the ceasing of conflict or the lack of war. “In the OT the equivalent word *shalom* meant wholeness, soundness, hence health, well-being, prosperity.”⁴ The *shalom* that Paul is talking about is really connected to the new creation. When you understand the Gospel scope of God's power, it is in Christ, a

³ See Will Kynes article “God's Grace in the Old Testament: Considering the *Hesed* of the Lord.” Accessed 08, 2015. http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/430.

⁴ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

redemption of the entire creation including us (as the NIV says in **Ephesians 1:7-10**): “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”

Conclusion

What is revival but to live in God’s grace and peace? We are his special people. We are called to know God through Christ by His Holy Spirit. This is what it is to walk in God’s grace and peace. Are you walking with Him? How is your prayer life? Are you reading the Word till God meets you? Are you hearing from God when you pray?