

Basic Christianity

by Alistair Begg

A genuine Christian experience involves grace, love, and sanctification, and is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ that transforms us from the inside out.

Duration: 30:22

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:12

Topics: "Basics"

Description

In this sermon transcript, the preacher emphasizes the importance of three foundational elements of genuine Christian experience: grace, love, and peace. He highlights that these elements are essential for individuals to come to terms with a living God, have genuine relationships with others, and find inner peace. The preacher also emphasizes that grace is not something earned or achieved, but a gift from God that should be humbly received. Throughout the letter, Peter consistently points to the true grace of God as the source of salvation and encourages his readers to embrace the good news of the gospel.

Transcript

I'd like now to invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 5, where we come to our final study in this letter, and what we have in verses 12 to 14 is essentially a postscript. The substance of the letter, as you would note from the conclusion of verse 11, has really been dealt with up until the eleventh verse, hence Peter's triumphant final statement, To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

And then, in these concluding verses, we have a PS. Since the substance of the letter essentially concluded at verse 11, it was very tempting for me in our last study simply to skate over verses 12, 13, and 14 in coming to the end of these studies in 1 Peter. However, as is obvious, I chose not to do that, which is why we're here this morning with our Bibles open once again at 1 Peter 5. After all, a PS at a letter's end--where else would you put a PS?--but a PS can be very important.

Like the fellow who wrote to his girlfriend, Dear Jennifer, I love you so much, I would climb the highest mountain, swim the widest ocean, cross the burning desert just to be with you. I will see you on Saturday. PS, if it's not raining.

The PS made all the difference to what went before. Or how about this one? Dear Fred, seldom have we had such an employee of quality and consistency as you. For productivity, you're hard to beat.

As a team player, you're an example to all. As the year ends, we want to acknowledge the fine job you've done. Sincerely, the district manager.

PS, you're fired. So you've got to be careful with the PSs. And here in 12, 13, and 14, not only do we have an apt summary of what Peter has written in this whole letter, but they are also emphasizing for us three foundational elements of genuine Christian experience.

And these I have outlined for us in the bulletin this morning. If you care to take notes and follow along, you will find it there in the central part of your bulletin. And I discovered also in studying these verses this week that most of what has been written concerning them largely focuses upon history and geography.

The theology of these concluding verses is largely overtaken by addressing matters of place and personnel--not that the matters of place and personnel are irrelevant, but that they are subservient to the important doctrine which is actually interwoven in these concluding statements made by Peter. I want to say, then, just a word about place and personnel in passing, and then go on to focus on the three words in our outline. First of all, concerning Silas, or Silvanus, the variant reading of his name.

This individual was Paul's companion on his second missionary journey. He was, like Paul, born a Jew, and he was also a Roman citizen. He's the individual of whom we read in Acts 16 in jail in the evening, joining in the hymns along with the apostle Paul and sharing in the wonder of what then subsequently took place in the conversion of the Philippian jailer.

You can read about him all through Acts chapter 15 also. And from what Peter tells us here, it would appear that Silas was either his scribe--his secretary, if you like--as Peter voiced the words, Silas wrote the words, or perhaps he was the messenger conveying the letter, or perhaps he was actually both. But that is this character Silas who's described in such a lovely phrase as a faithful brother.

In terms of geography, in verse 13, Babylon is the city of Rome. If you read Revelation 17 and 18, you will discover there that Babylon is used as descriptive of Rome. Some have suggested that it was Babylon in Mesopotamia or Babylon in Egypt, but that is a fairly recent notion, and historic Christianity has linked Babylon with Rome all the way through.

And what Peter then is saying in verse 13 is this, that the church, she who is in Babylon in Rome, who shares in the same electing grace of God that they enjoy, since he has written to them in chapter 1, as God's elect strangers in the world, he says, the church in Rome and the church of the diaspora, the church dispersed throughout the then-known world, shares in God's saving grace. And it seems more than likely, therefore, that Peter was writing this letter from Rome. Mark, who is also mentioned here at the end of verse 13 as his son, is his spiritual son, if you like, his younger in the Lord.

This is the Mark who wrote the second Gospel, and you'll find him referred to in Acts chapter 12 and in Acts chapter 15, as well as in the Pauline epistles in Colossians 4 and in 2 Timothy 4 and in Philemon 24. He's all over the place. And we read of him being left behind at one point on Paul's journeys, hence the dispute that arose.

And he, nevertheless, was important to Peter, and that's why he's mentioned here. Now, I don't dwell on that this morning, but I don't want to miss the tremendous import of it either in recognizing the benefit that comes to us from meaningful relationships and the importance, obviously, of each of these individuals in the life of Peter. And it would be a fine thing--I would regard it at least as a fine thing--to end my days

being described at least by someone as a faithful brother.

I would be happy to have that as an epitaph. A faithful brother. Somebody who, in the life of another, encouraged and helped along the spiritual pathway.

And indeed, this morning, if you're taking notes, as you think about the phrase a faithful brother or a faithful sister, you may even want to write down underneath the phrase the names of those who immediately come to mind who, down through the years, have been just that to you--those who have encouraged you. And you may even want to go further, and if they're still alive, if they haven't gone on to glory, to write them a note and say, amongst all the things I'm thankful for at Christmastime, I'm thankful for you. You are, to me, a faithful brother or a faithful sister.

We couldn't live life without them. We couldn't stay the race without them. And maybe we should write some of us to those who are our sons or our daughters in the faith, those in whose lives we've had the privilege of ministering and whom we've seen come to Jesus.

And we may want to make a note of their names, lest we forget and sin by ceasing to pray for them. So, with that by way of a backdrop, let us then concentrate on these three foundational elements of genuine Christian experience. And in doing so, answer the question which may be in the minds of some, What is genuine Christian experience? This is not all that it is, but this is certainly essential to what it is.

It involves, first of all, grace. With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, he says--and he's already by this time written a hundred and two verses, but it is fairly brief--I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace to thee of God. Notice the source of grace is God.

Not a god, but God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot think of God, but we think of grace, and we cannot understand grace without realizing the one who originates it and who, therefore, is its source. Throughout the five chapters of this superlittle letter, Peter has not been introducing his readers to philosophical concepts.

Nor has he been obligating them to simply impersonal moral codes. But rather, he has been introducing them to the good news of the gospel. Turn back to the first chapter, and let me just underscore this for us this morning.

From the minute his letter begins, he's talking about grace. At the end of verse 2, he says, Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Question, how can grace and peace be ours in abundance? He then goes on from verse 3 to outline the discovery of God's grace, as he makes known the wonder of what God has done for them in Christ.

And this, loved ones, is the essence of grace. This is what it is. It is not that we look around and commend ourselves on the basis of what we may assume we have done for God, but rather, it is the total reverse of that--that we bow humbly before him and recognize how much he has done for us.

The true grace of God, which he underscores, and he is unequivocal about it--there's no mealy-mouth notion on the part of Peter, there is no suggestion that what he has been sharing with them is an option on the smorgasbord of religious experience. None of that nonsense for Peter. No, no.

Unashamedly, he says, This is the true grace of God. He is in no doubt concerning it, and he wants his readers to be in no doubt concerning it either. And I, as the pastor of this church, want you, the flock, to be in no doubt concerning it either.

I don't want you to walk out into another Monday believing that your Christian experience fights for its place on the vast array of religious opportunity. I want you to walk out on another Monday realizing that you, by God's goodness, have been introduced to the true grace of God. And until that becomes the conviction of our hearts, we will never be able to communicate it to a world that is in need of that message.

Until we become convinced that what we are dealing with in Christ is true and it is grace, then we'll never, ever be able to share it in a way that will be life-changing and transforming. And so, he is telling them of the wonder of the gospel. Verse 3 and following of 1 Peter 1, this amazing wonder that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, that he has died for our sins, that he has risen again for our justification.

1 Peter chapter 2, verse 24, speaking of Jesus, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. I think when I preached that verse--I can't remember--that's the morning that I read part of the story of the ragman.

And never did I have so many requests for anything as I had for that. And I hope the gentleman's book sold well subsequently. Maybe he'll send me a royalty or two, and then I'll have to pass them on to the person who introduced the book to me, who's in this church as well.

But anyway, you may recall that morning, as we read that story together, we marveled at the wonder of it. And this is grace, that we who are dirty and stained by sin, that we who are infirm and sick as a result of sin, may be made brand new, instantaneously transformed, not as a result of our ability to commend ourselves to God but as a result of what God has done for us in the person of his Son upon the cross of Calvary. 1 Peter chapter 3, 18, underscores it yet again, For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God.

When Paul writes concerning this in Ephesians 2, he underscores it in those well-known words, For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Simply the direct intervention of God. Let me give you one or two references this morning that you could soak in.

You know, sometimes you come home at the end of a day, and you say, I'd just like to soak in a bath for a wee while. I'd just like to sit there, just get everybody out. I just want to sit and just soak it in.

I don't know what I'm gonna think about, I just want to sit and soak. Let me suggest to you that we take times to soak in the Scriptures. And in relationship to the whole question of grace, let me give you, as it were, the bath salts that will be helpful for you.

Titus 2, verse 11. Romans 5, verse 2. 1 Corinthians 1, verse 4. Colossians 1, verse 6. And Colossians 1, verse 21. That's just a little selection to be going on with.

An early Christmas present, if you like. Bath salts. Do you remember when you used to get bath salts for your Christmas from your ancient aunt? Ancient bath salts from your ancient aunt.

Well, anyway, let me turn you, just in summarizing this, Colossians 1, verse 21. This I was reading this morning, with Phil Webb singing in the background, You Paid Much Too High a Price for Me. And God

blessed this to my heart.

Maybe he'll bless it to yours. Colossians 1, verse 21. Put your name in here, you see.

Once you, Alistair, beg, were alienated from God and were an enemy in your mind because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death, to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. To live life without blemish and free from accusation is possible only one way in the whole world, and that is as a result of God's grace.

The source of it, then, is God--the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The strength of this grace is so profound that he says, I've been writing the whole of my letter in order to exhort you and in order to encourage you to take your stand in this truth. Notice, it's an imperative.

It's not an indicative, as it appears in some of our versions. Stand fast in it. In what? In the true grace of God.

Well, you can't stand fast in it until you know it. And you can't stand fast in it until you believe it. And you can't stand fast in it until the conviction is in your heart that, Here is where my identity lies.

Here is the answer to my questions about life. Here is the answer to the dilemma of who I am. Now I'm going to take my stand in this.

It's a tremendously powerful thing, and it's unique to Christianity. There is none of this in Buddhism. There is none of this in Islam.

There is none of this in Krishna. There is none of this in the cults. They all, without exception, are a works righteousness approach to God.

How may I be accepted by God? Do as many good things as I can to tip the balance in my favor, so men and women live their days tyrannized by the question, Have I ever done enough? Only the Christian can say, I could never do enough. Therefore, because of what Jesus did, I am instantaneously without blemish and stain in his sight. Do you understand that? That's the doctrine of justification by faith.

You cannot be in Christ with blemish and stain. We are then, by status, made immediately right in God's sight. That's the doctrine of justification.

That's the strength of it. When the devil comes and says, Alistair, you were very unkind to that person. Surely you can't be a Christian.

The answer is, go back to hell where you belong. Yes, I am! Why? Because Jesus bore my sin in his body on the tree, and today I am accepted in him. I will never be more accepted than I am today because I am placed in Christ.

And what happens in sanctification is that our character catches up with our status. See? We are now in Christ, but we aren't perfect. We're not sinless.

Hence, the Spirit of God is at work within our lives to conform us to the status which he has now given us in his Son. As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. I was once in Adam as a result of my sin and my rebellion.

I have been placed in Christ by his grace, and I am being now conformed to the image of his Son. There is great strength in that, loved ones. There is sanity in that.

There is psychological stability in that--living in an environment that buffets and shakes us and living in a church environment, visible church in the Western world that is full of false prophets. Turn over to 2 Peter, which we may do next. I'm toying with the idea.

2 Peter 2, but there were also false prophets, verse 1, among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

In their greed, these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. So the necessity of standing fast in the true grace of God is not simply that we might convey to the watching world a dimension that it doesn't understand, but in order that we might be saved from the heretical nonsense that will arise within the very framework of the visible church of Jesus Christ.

God, by his Spirit, said it would be so, and history reveals the truth of the Word. No one this morning in this building knows anything of a genuine Christian experience unless you have made the discovery of amazing grace. And when you have, what a difference! Now, the second element--and I'll spend less time on this--is love.

Love. I was going to quote, incidentally, under that last heading, from John Calvin's Will, which I read this week. It's interesting, because Calvin's whole will is riddled with the fact that my only confidence in going to face my Maker is in the fact that Jesus died upon the cross.

Neither my writings nor my preaching nor anything else will commend me. Love. The foundation of grace and then the priority of Christian love.

Greet one another so we know that our relationships are important, with a kiss of love. Now, I want to point out, fairly straightforwardly, first the obligation. The obligation within the body of Christ is to love, and it is an obligation which is timeless.

Jesus set the standard for this in John chapter 15. He reminded those who were his disciples in the twelfth verse, My command is this, that you love each other as I have loved you. That's the standard.

In Deuteronomy 10 and 19, you will discover the scope. And in 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 22, we are reminded of the nature and necessity of sincerity, now that you have purified yourself by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love--love without wax, love that is not simply skin-deep or eye-deep, as it were, but that goes right to the very core--sincere love for your brothers. That's the obligation, which is timeless.

What about the expression here? 1 Peter 5, verse 14, What are we to do with this this morning? Some of you are getting excited, especially the teenagers. Let me explain to you. First of all, we're dealing with an Oriental custom.

With the Jews, it was customary for a disciple to kiss his rabbi on the cheek and to lay his hands upon his shoulder. It was a customary greeting. Both hands went on the shoulders, and a kiss went on the cheek.

Hence, Mark 14, 14, in the approach of Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane, what does he do to Jesus? He kisses him. Why does he kiss him? Because it's the customary response of a disciple to his teacher. And as the pattern developed in the early church, it became part and parcel of Christian worship that the inward discovery of peace was outwardly expressed in this act of love.

And both Tertullian and Augustine refer to it. However, it began to be abused. And Athenagoras insists in his writings that the kiss must be given with the greatest care for, if there be mixed with it the least defilement of thought, it excludes us from eternal life.

So now they're beginning to recognize that this kiss may not be just all it's cracked up to be, because the kiss may actually prove to become a vehicle for lust on the part of those who are in the body of Christ. Clement of Alexandria condemns the shameless use of the kiss, whereby, quote, certain persons make the churches resound and thereby occasion foul suspicions and evil reports. Okay? And this struck me when I read this phrase, because a couple of weeks ago, preaching at the church in the West Coast, at the end of the evening service, a girl ran right up to me, grabbed me right around the neck, kissed me, and squeezed me so hard.

And I was surrounded by thirty or forty people at the time. And as I tried to extricate myself from the bear hug, I was saying to the group, This is my cousin! My cousin! And she is my cousin. My dad's sister's daughter, therefore cousin.

But I felt so embarrassed by it. I wanted somebody to say, No, no! This isn't happening! No, no! By the time the apostolic constitutions were put together in the fourth century, the kiss was confined to the same sex. So after three hundred years, they said, Only men can kiss men, and girls can kiss girls.

Which, if you think about it, is not a real smart idea in our present context, okay? By the thirteenth century, they scrapped it altogether. And the Western equivalent, which is essentially a handshake, is probably safer all around. The obligation to love is timeless.

The expression of that love will vary with time and with culture. It's really straightforward. Finally, peace.

Peace. The quality of this peace, at its center, concerns peace with God--Romans 5.1. In its expression, it involves the peace of God--Philippians 4.6. I'll never know peace of God within until I know peace with God without. And some people are searching desperately this morning for peace within, but they're trying to do it without God, without coming to peace with God, without acknowledging sin and their need of a Savior.

Loved ones, I tell you this morning, it can't be done. It just can't be done. The whole world testifies to the fact that it can be done.

If it could be done other ways, people would be able to offer all their solutions. They are only able to offer their questions and their meanderings. The peace with God releases the peace of God.

Those who have received this letter were in trouble, they were in distress, but for them, peace, shalom, is to be a reality. And notice how this peace is intricately, inseparably interwoven, dependent upon a personal relationship with the Messiah Jesus. Final phrase of the letter--peace to all of you.

Not a full stop, right? Not even a comma. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. No peace without Christ.

One commentator put it this way, No one can enjoy real peace apart from him, and all may enjoy it who belong to him. It's that simple. The quality of genuine peace in a world that is fractured.

But there's a question that this raises, I suggest to you. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. The question is, Am I in Christ? Am I in Christ? Not, Am I in church? Am I in Christ? Have I tasted, 1 Peter 1, that the Lord is good? Have I had, as we said when we studied that verse, a life-giving taste of Jesus, a life-changing taste of Jesus? If the answer is yes, then let's be about the business of sharing it.

It's good news. If the answer is no, then right where we sit this morning, let's be about the business of crying out from our hearts to God and saying, O God, I repent of my sin, and I receive your Son as my only Savior. I long to know your grace.

I long to know this love. I long to live in this peace. I ask you, is this not a wonderful message for a beleaguered society in which we live? How may I come to terms with the living God? Answer, grace.

How may I live in genuine reality with people around me? Answer, love. How may I come to terms with myself as I make my journey through this life? Answer, peace. Three essential elements of genuine Christian experience.

Are they yours this morning? They may be. Need a Truth For Life. If you'd like information on ordering additional messages from Alistair Begg and Truth For Life, then call our resource line at 1-888-58-TRUTH.

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