

Prayer - 2 Peter 1:2, 3

by A.W. Pink

The sermon emphasizes the importance of praying for growth in grace and peace, and the medium by which these blessings are conveyed, through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 10:17, 1 Samuel 16:7, 2 Chronicles 19:7, Psalm 62:12, Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11, 1 Corinthians 3:13, 2 Corinthians 5:9, Hebrews 12:5, Revelation 20:11

Topics: "Gods Impartiality", "Future Judgment"

Description

The preacher delves into the concept of impartiality, explaining that God does not show favoritism based on outward appearances or worldly standards. Various Bible verses are explored to highlight God's attribute of impartiality, emphasizing that He judges everyone based on their character and deeds, without partiality. The sermon also touches on the future judgment of believers and unbelievers, underscoring the importance of living a life that pleases God and striving for rewards in heaven through good works.

Transcript

No thorough study of the prayers of the apostles, or of the prayers of the Bible as a whole, would be complete without an examination of the benedictions with which the apostles (James excepted), prefaced their Epistles. Those opening salutations were very different from a mere act of politeness, as when the chief captain of the Roman soldiers at Jerusalem wrote a letter after this manner: "Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting" (Acts 23:26). Far more than a courteous formality were their introductory addresses, yea, even than the expressions of a kindly wish. Their "grace be unto you and peace" was a prayer, an act of worship, in which Christ was always addressed in union with the Father. It signifies that a request for these blessings had been made before the throne. Such benedictions evinced the warm affection in which the apostles held those to whom they wrote, and breathed forth their spiritual desires on their behalf. By putting these words of blessing at the very beginning of his Epistle, the Apostle Peter made manifest how powerfully his own heart was affected by the goodness of God toward his brethren.

That which is now to engage our attention may be considered under the following heads. First we shall look at the substance of the prayer: "grace and peace"--these are the blessings besought of God. Secondly, we shall ponder the desired measure of their bestowal: "be multiplied unto you." Thirdly, we shall contemplate the medium of their conveyance: "through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." Fourthly, we shall examine the motive prompting the request: "According as his Divine power hath

given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (v. 3). Before filling in that outline or giving an exposition of those verses, let us point out (especially for the benefit of young preachers, for whom it is especially vital to learn how a text should be pondered) what is implied by this prayer.

The Vital Implications of This Benediction

In the apostle's seeking from God such blessings as these for the saints the following vital lessons are taught by implication: (1) that none can merit anything at the hands of God, for grace and merit are opposites; (2) that there can be no real peace apart from Divine grace--"There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa. 57:21); (3) that even the regenerate stand in need, constant need, of grace from God; and (4) the regenerate, therefore, should be vile in their own eyes. If we would receive more from God, then we must present our hearts to Him as empty vessels. When Abraham was about to make request of the Lord, he demeaned himself as "dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27); and Jacob acknowledged that he was not worthy of the least of His mercies (Gen. 32:10). (5) Such a request as Peter is here making is a tacit confession of the utter dependence of believers upon God's bounty, that He alone is able to supply their need. (6) In asking for grace and peace to be multiplied to them, acknowledgment is made that not only the beginning and continuance of them, but also their increase proceeds from the good pleasure of God. (7) Intimation is hereby given that we may "open thy [our] mouth wide" (Ps. 81:10, brackets mine) to God. Yea, it is an ill sign to be contented with a little grace. "He was never good that doth not desire to grow better," says Manton.

The Special Character of the Second Epistles

A word needs also to be said upon the character of the book in which this particular prayer is found. Like all second Epistles, this one treats of a state of affairs where false teaching and apostasy had a more or less prominent place. One of the principal differences between his two Epistles is this: whereas in his first Epistle Peter's main design was to strengthen and comfort his brethren amid the suffering to which they were exposed from the profane (heathen) world (see chapter 4), and he now graciously warns (2 Peter 2:1; 3:1-4) and confirms (2 Peter 1:5-11; 3:14) them against a worse peril from the professing world, from those within Christendom who menaced them. In his first Epistle Peter had represented their great adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). But here, without directly naming him, he depicts Satan as an angel of light (but in reality the subtle serpent), who is no longer persecuting, but seeking to corrupt and poison them through false teaching. In the second chapter those false teachers are denounced (1) as men who had denied the Lord that bought them (v. 1), and (2) as licentious (vv. 10-14, 19), giving free play to their carnal appetites.

The Apostle Peter addresses his Epistle "to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1; word order here is according to the Greek text and KJV marginal note). The word faith here refers to that act of the soul whereby Divinely revealed truth is savingly apprehended. Their faith is declared to be "precious," for it is one of God's choicest gifts and the immediate fruit of His Spirit's regenerating power. This is emphasized in the expression "have obtained" (lagchanō, no. 2975 in Strong and Thayer). It is the same Greek word found in Luke 1:9: "his lot was to burn incense" (ital. mine). It appears again in John 19:14: "Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it" (ital. mine). Thus these saints were reminded that they owed their saving faith not to any superior sagacity of theirs, but solely to the allotments of grace. It had been with them as with Peter himself. A revelation had been made to them: not by flesh and blood, but by the heavenly Father (Matthew 16:17). In the dispensing of God's favors a blessed portion had fallen to them, even "the faith of

God's elect" (Titus 1:1). The them whom Peter addresses are the Gentiles, and the us in which he includes himself are the Jews. Their faith had for its object the perfect righteousness of Christ their Surety, for the words "through the righteousness of" are probably better translated and understood "in the righteousness of" the Divine Savior.

The Substance of Peter's Benediction

Having thus described his readers by their spiritual standing, Peter adds his apostolic benediction: "grace and peace be multiplied unto you." The combined apostolic benediction and greeting (which contains the elements grace and peace) is essentially the same as that employed by Paul in ten of his Epistles as well as by Peter in 1 Peter. In 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, Paul added the element mercy, as did John in 2 John. Jude used the elements mercy, peace, and love. Thus we learn that the apostles, in pronouncing Spirit-indited blessings upon the believers to whom they wrote, combined grace, the watchword of the New Covenant age (John 1:14, 17) with peace, the distinctive Hebrew blessing. Those who have read the Old Testament attentively will remember how frequently the salutation "peace be unto thee" or something similar is found (Gen. 43:23; Judges 6:23; 18:6; etc.). "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces" (Ps. 122:7), cries David, as he expectantly contemplates the spiritual and temporal blessings that he desires for Jerusalem and thus for Israel (cf. vv. 6, 8, as well as the whole Psalm). This text shows that the word peace was a general term to denote welfare. From its use by the risen Savior in John 20:19, we gather that it was an all-inclusive summary of blessing. In the Epistles and the Book of Revelation (which was meant by Christ, the great Head of the Church, to circulate after the fashion of an Epistle), the terms grace and/or peace are frequently used in closing salutations and benedictions. The word peace is used in various ways eight times (Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 6:23; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 3:16; Heb. 13:20; 1 Peter 5:14; 3 John 14), six of those times in greater or lesser proximity to the word grace, which is used eighteen times (Rom. 16:20, 24; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 6:18; Eph. 6:24; Phil. 4:23; Col. 4:18; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18; 1 Tim. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:22; Titus 3:15; Philemon 24; Heb. 13:25; 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Peter 3:18; Rev. 22:21). Obviously, the clause "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you," or some variation upon it, is the most characteristic benedictory close employed by the apostles. In light of his grasp of the glorious realities of the Gospel age (Acts 10, 11, especially vv. 1-18), it is evident by this benediction that the Apostle Peter sees and embraces both believing Jews and believing Gentiles as united in sharing the full blessing of God's great salvation.

Having an earnest desire for their welfare, Peter sought for the saints the choicest bounties that could be conferred upon them, that they might be morally and spiritually enriched, both inwardly and outwardly. "Grace and peace" contain the sum of Gospel bestowals and the supply of our every need. Together they include all manner of blessings, and therefore they are the most comprehensive things that can be requested of God. They are the choicest favors we can desire for ourselves, and for our brethren! They are to be sought by faith from God our Father in reliance upon the mediation and merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Grace and peace" are the very essence, as well as the whole, of a believer's true happiness in this life, which explains the apostle's longing that his brethren in Christ might abundantly partake of them.

Peter Prays for Growth in Grace in His Brethren

Grace is not to be understood in the sense of God's distinguishing, redeeming favor, for these saints were already the objects thereof; nor is it to be taken as an inward spiritual principle of nature, for that was imparted to them at the new birth. Rather, it refers to a greater manifestation of the spiritual nature and Divine likeness that one has received from God and a greater and more cheerful dependence upon the

Giver (2 Cor. 12:9). It also refers to the Divine gifts that induce such growth. Speaking of Christ, the Apostle John declares, "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for ["upon," ASV margin] grace" (John 1:16, brackets mine). Matthew Poole comments as follows:

And grace for grace: nor have we received drops, but grace upon grace; not only knowledge and instruction, but the love and favour of God, and spiritual habits, in proportion to the favour and grace which Christ hath (allowing for our short capacities); we have received grace freely and plentifully, all from Christ, and for His sake; which lets us see how much the grace-receiving soul is bound to acknowledge and adore Christ, and may be confirmed in the receiving of further grace, and the hopes of eternal life... (italics mine).

It is evident from 1 Peter 4:10 that God's grace is manifold, being dispensed to His saints in various forms and amounts according to their needs, yet for the edification not only of the individual but of the Body of Christ as a whole (Eph. 4:7-16). At the very end of this Epistle Peter commands his readers, saying, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18; cf. Eph. 4:15). Thus we see the propriety of Peter's prayer, that God would further exercise His benignity toward them. We also see the necessity of our praying in the same way for ourselves and for each other.

Thus we see that though the fundamental meaning and reference of grace is to the freely bestowed, redeeming favor of God, yet the term is often used in a wider sense to include all those blessings that flow from His sovereign kindness. In this way is it to be so understood in the apostolic benedictions: a prayer for the continued and increased expression and manifestation of the good work that He has already begun (Phil. 1:6). "Grace and peace." The two benefits are fitly joined together, for the one is never found without the other. Without reconciling grace there can be no solid and durable peace. The former is God's good will toward us; the latter is His grand work in us. In the proportion that grace is communicated, peace is enjoyed: grace to sanctify the heart; peace to comfort the soul.

Though Peace Begins with Justification, It Is Maintained by Our Obedience

Peace is one of the principal fruits of the Gospel as it is received into a believing heart, being that tranquility of mind that arises from the sense of our acceptance with God. It is not an objective but a subjective peace that is here in view. "Peace with God" (Rom. 5:1, ital. mine) is fundamentally judicial, being what Christ made for His people (Col. 1:20). Yet faith conveys a response to the conscience concerning our amity with God. In the proportion that our faith rests upon the peace made with God by the blood of Christ, and of our acceptance in Him, will be our inward peace. In and through Christ, God is at peace with believers, and the happy effect of this in our hearts is a felt "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17). But we are not in a capacity to receive and enjoy those blessings until we have surrendered to Christ's Lordship and taken His yoke upon us (Matthew 11:29, 30). It is appropriate, therefore, for Paul to say, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Col. 3:15, ital. mine). This is the kind of peace that the apostles prayed for on behalf of their brethren. This peace is the fruit of a Scriptural assurance of God's favor, which, in turn, comes from the maintenance of communion with Him by an obedient walk. It is also peace with ourselves. We are at peace with ourselves when conscience ceases to accuse us, and when our affections and wills submit themselves to an enlightened mind. Furthermore, it includes concord and amity with our fellow Christians (Rom. 5:5, 6). What an excellent example was left us by the church in Jerusalem: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32, ital. mine).

The Measure of Bestowal Desired: A Multiplication of Grace and Peace

Grace and peace are the present heritage of God's people, and of them Peter desired that they should enjoy much, much more than a mere sip or taste. As 1 Peter 3:18 intimates, he longed that they should "grow in grace," and that they might be filled with peace (cf. Rom 15:13); he thus made request accordingly. "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you." By these words Peter calls upon God to visit them with still larger and more lavish displays of His goodness. He prays not only that God might grant to them greater and greater manifestations of His grace and peace, but also that their feeble capacities to apprehend what God had done for their souls might be greatly enlarged. He prays that an abundant supply of grace and peace should be conferred upon them. They were already the favored partakers of those Divine benefits, but request was made for a plentiful increase of them. Spiritual things (unlike material) do not cloy in the enjoyment of them, and therefore we cannot have too much of them. The words "peace be multiplied" intimate that there are degrees of assurance concerning our standing with God, and that we never cease to be dependent upon free grace. The dimensions of this request teach us that it is our privilege to ask God not only for more grace and peace, but for an amplitude thereof God is most honored when we make the largest demands upon His bounty. If our spirits are straitened in their enjoyment of God's grace and peace, it is due to the paltriness of our prayers and never to any niggardliness in Him.

The Medium by Which Grace and Peace Are Conveyed

"Through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." The careful reader, who is not too dilatory in comparing Scripture with Scripture, will have observed a variation from the salutation used by Peter in his first Epistle (1 Peter 1:2). There he prayed, "Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied." The addition ("through the knowledge of God," etc.) made here is a significant one, in keeping with Peter's altered design and appropriate to his present aim. The student may also have noted that knowledge is one of the prominent words of this Epistle (see 2 Peter 1:2, 3, 5, 6, 8; 2:20; 3:18). We should also consider how frequently the Christ is designated "our Lord" or "our Saviour" (2 Peter 1:1, 2, 8, 11, 14, 16; 3:15, 18), by which Peter draws a sharp contrast between true disciples and those false professors of Christianity who will not submit to Christ's scepter. That "knowledge of God" alluded to here is not a natural but a spiritual knowledge, not speculative, but experiential. Nor is it merely a knowledge of the God of creation and providence, but of a God who is in covenant with men through Jesus the Christ. This is evident from its being mentioned in connection with the words "and of Jesus our Lord." It is therefore an evangelical knowledge of God that is here in view. He cannot be savingly known except in and through Christ even as Christ Himself declared: "neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matthew 11:27).

Inasmuch as this prayer was for grace and peace to be "multiplied" to the saints "through [or in] the knowledge of God," there was a tacit intimation that they would both abide and advance in that knowledge. Calvin comments as follows:

Through the knowledge, literally, in the knowledge; but the preposition en [no. 1722 in Strong and Thayer] often means "through" or "with": yet both senses may suit the context. I am, however, more disposed to adopt the former. For the more any one advances in the knowledge of God, every kind of blessing increases also equally with the sense of Divine love.

A spiritual and experiential knowledge of God is the grand means by which all the influences of grace and peace are conveyed to us. God works upon us as rational creatures in a way that is agreeable to our intellectual and moral nature, with knowledge preceding all else. As there is no real peace apart from grace, so there is no grace or peace without a saving knowledge of God; and no such knowledge of Him is possible but in and through "Jesus our Lord," for Christ is the channel by which every blessing is transmitted to the members of His mystical Body. As the more windows a house has the more sunlight enters it, so the greater our knowledge of God the greater our measure of grace and peace. But the evangelical knowledge of the most mature saint is only fragmentary and feeble, and thus requires continual augmentation by the Divine blessing upon those means that have been appointed for its perfecting and strengthening.

The Divine Accomplishment that Moved Peter to Prayer

"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (v. 3). Therein the apostle found his motive for making the above request. It was because God had already wrought so wondrously on behalf of these saints that he was moved to ask Him to continue dealing lavishly with them. We may also regard this third verse as being brought in to encourage the faith of these Christians: that, since God had done such great things for them, they should expect further liberal supplies from Him. Notice that the inspiring motive was a purely evangelical one, and not legal or mercenary. God had bestowed upon them everything needful for the production and preservation of spirituality in their souls, and the apostle longed to see them maintained in a healthy and vigorous condition. Divine power is the foundation of spiritual life, grace is what supports it, and peace is the atmosphere in which it thrives. The words "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" may also be understood as referring ultimately to eternal life in glory: a right to it, a fitness for it, and an earnest of it had already been bestowed upon them.

Finally, it is essential to our Christian growth to realize that the contents of verse 3 are to be regarded as the ground of the exhortation in verses 5 through 7. Thus the supply asked for in verse 2 is to be regarded as the necessary equipment for all spiritual fruit bearing and good works. Let us then exercise the greater diligence to abide in Christ (John 15:1-5) both in our prayers and in all our thoughts, words, and deeds.

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