

Grace and Peace

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the gift of grace and its relationship to peace in our lives.

Duration: 31:38

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-6

Topics: "Grace"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding God as our Father. He highlights that when we pray, we are not approaching a distant God, but rather our loving Father who provides protection, identity, and supplies for us. The speaker also emphasizes that everything God does is an act of grace, which is defined as love in action. He explains that grace is unearned and comes to us through faith and prayer. The sermon concludes with a reference to the letter of Paul, Silas, and Timothy to the church in Thessalonica, where they extend grace and peace to the believers.

Transcript

So on this first Sunday of the New Year, we're so happy you're here. We're beginning a series now from the book of 1 Thessalonians, and we're going to read through 1 Thessalonians, and that's something you might want to read during the week. But we're going to go, I think, it seems real slow.

In fact, we're not going to make it past 1 Thessalonians 1, verse 1 today, because there's some key words there that I want to talk about with you. Whenever you read one of the epistles of Paul, who is the Apostle Paul? He was an enemy of Christianity, for those of you visiting or new to the Bible. He hated the name of Christ.

He was persecuting, probably killing Christians. And then he had an experience, an appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was converted, and lo and behold, he became a leader in the church.

He became an apostle, which is a special sent one from God. And the Apostle Paul, after some years, went on some missionary trips. He went with companions to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

On his second missionary trip, he went with a man by the name of Silas, and they went to Greece for the first time. The gospel came to Greece, to a city called Philippi. And in Philippi, he got thrown in jail, and God delivered him.

Some wonderful things happened. And then his group went from Philippi to Thessalonica, which is still a good-sized city in Greece today, by the name of, I believe, Salonica. He went to Thessalonica.

We don't know how long he stayed. Some people feel just weeks, others feel months, but not very long. He preached the gospel.

Gentiles and Jews made up the congregation. And then he had to leave there from Thessalonica, and he went on to other cities. Well, Timothy wanted to know how the church was doing.

You know, when you love people, you want to know how they're doing. Anyone who says they love you and they don't care how you're doing or what you're going through, that's a funny kind of love. So Paul cared about the church like pastors and leaders should.

So he wanted to know, how is the church doing? Because he knew the devil is active, and he wants to check on people and see how they're doing, like a doctor would. He sent Timothy to find out, go back to Thessalonica, find out what's happening. Is their faith still strong in Jesus? Is there trouble going on in the church? What's going on? Timothy came back with a good report, basically.

So now Paul is writing this letter and telling him, wow, I sent Timothy, he gave me this report, and here's this letter to the church in Thessalonica, which we call First Thessalonians. So let's look at just verse number one. Paul, Silas, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace and peace to you.

Would you say it with me? Paul, Silas, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace and peace to you. Let's just analyze quickly the parts I don't want to talk about. The form of a letter back then in the Roman Empire and in that world, the form of a letter was not like we do.

We do, Dear Timony, Dear Richie, then the letter, and then Sincerely Yours, Pastor Jim Cimbala. They started with who was sending it first. So he's following the form of those letters.

And notice, even though he's this famous apostle and a leader, notice his humility and his team spirit. He includes Silas and Timothy with him. You know, if you're fully yourself and you're a minister, you make it all about yourself, just like individuals do.

Hey, it's Paul writing you. Remember the one who saw Jesus on the road? I'm the father of that church. I started that church.

You remember who I am now, don't you? Oh, by the way, I got some guys who are helping me named Silas and Timothy, but they're not really important. It's me. Give me a P. Give me an A. Give me a U. Give me an L. Not like that at all.

Notice what he says. Paul, Silas, and Timothy. We're writing together.

Later on, he's going to talk in the next verse about how the three of them prayed together for the church at Thessalonica. We see some humility and team spirit there. Notice then, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's analyze those two. This is the way you should read the Bible. You read slow, you repeat it, and you analyze.

You ask questions of the text and then let the text answer you. So, what's the name that is given to God there? God the what? God the Father. So, Paul there.

This is, by the way, the first letter that Paul ever wrote. This, 1 Thessalonians, chronologically is the first letter he ever wrote to any church. So, this is the beginning of the gospel being put down in writing in terms of the apostle Paul, who was so prolific a writer.

God is our Father. Remember what Jesus said, when you pray, pray how? How or what? Well, that's a good thing that God is not just judged to us. He is a judge of the living and the dead eventually.

But he's our Father. What does a father provide? Protection, identity, supplies for us. When you pray, you're not going to a distant God.

You're going to God our Father. What's the name he gives Jesus Christ? The Lord Jesus Christ. That means he's the ruler of our lives.

He's the ruler of Paul's lives. What's Jesus? Jesus is the Greek form of the word, the Hebrew name, Joshua or Yeshua. And it means God is salvation.

So, Jesus was a common name, is a Greek form of the word, Joshua. Christ is the anointed one or the Greek counterpart. Greek is the language of the New Testament of the Hebrew word, Messiah.

So, the Lord Jesus, his human name, his relationship to us, Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, the anointed one, the one that was promised in the Old Testament. So, Paul, Silas, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in, this is your new identity. You might be in Thessalonica, but really you're in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice the equality of Jesus with the Father. This is the mystery of the Trinity. Not two gods, one God in three manifestations or persons, co-equal, coexistent, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So, we have this greeting, and then his wish to them is grace and peace be to you. Now, the word grace there is a key word in all the writings of Paul and in the New Testament, but especially Paul. And it's interesting how he uses it now, because the Greek greeting would be a word almost like grace.

C-H-R-I-S is the Greek word there, charis. There's a slightly different word like that. I don't know exactly the spelling, but it was the typical greeting, and it went greetings, salutations.

C-H-A-R-E-I-N, I think. Paul is writing a letter, and he switches it a little bit, and instead of using the word for salutations, he says grace to you. So, what's he saying? He's saying, I'm wishing grace, I'm praying grace in your life, and peace.

All his letters that he writes, he writes this wish slash prayer to the Christians. Grace and peace to you. Sometimes he puts in mercy.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you. But this is the constant thing that Paul wanted for the church and for us in our lives. Grace and peace.

If you don't understand the word grace, you'll never understand Christianity. There are many people now living in condemnation because they don't understand grace. There are many people who are living compromised lives, practicing sin, sleeping with other people, doing all kinds of nasty things, going to

church because they don't understand grace.

They've misused the word grace. So, all of Christianity hangs, as I point out to you, in an understanding of the word grace. No grace turns you into legalism and condemnation.

Greasy grace or a wrong understanding of grace means, you know what, God loves me so much, I can do whatever I want because he's going to work it out in the end. It doesn't matter how you live, right? And those are the two extremes of this beautiful word grace. I want to point out one other thing to you.

This word grace really is separate from peace. It's not, the more literal translations have it, grace to you and peace. Because in this case, it's not like I want two apples and two oranges.

No, it's I want two apples and then the juice that comes from the apple is the peace. Grace to you. And if you have it, it will produce peace.

I want grace in your life and that grace will produce peace. You'll have peace. So, now let's unlock these terms and then bring this to a close.

See what we can learn. What is grace? Well, there's so many definitions. God is called the God of all grace.

Really, what you can say is, since God is love, grace is all of God's actions toward us as his people. Anything God does in your life, that's grace. Does he give you guidance in a hard situation? That's grace.

Does he give you strength when you're running out of gas? That's grace. Anything God does is grace. The way the Bible defines it, when God works because he's love, love in action is grace.

So, anything God does is grace. The Bible says we're saved by grace through faith. Faith appropriates the grace.

Notice we're saved by grace. Why? Because God sent his son Jesus into the world. That's his love and action.

Jesus is grace. The gift of salvation is grace. Everything God does is grace.

When God heals your broken heart, that's an act of grace. Everything God does is grace. So, let's unfold that a little bit.

Notice, if that's true, what does that tell us? Number one, everything that God does that's of grace in our lives is unearned. If you earned it, it's not grace. Then God's paying you.

A salary is different than a present. You get a salary check because you did work. If they don't give you the salary check, you sue them, right? But that's not grace.

You don't go, oh, thank you so much for my check. No, you go, give me my check, right? I worked, right? But if a person then walks up to you at the end of this service and puts a hundred dollar bill and says, God impressed me to give this to you, that's grace. That's a gift.

Did you earn that? No. Why is it coming? Person must love you. They're full of grace.

The Bible says when Jesus grew up, he was full of grace. He was full of all these things that God was doing. Same thing with John the Baptist growing up.

Grace, God working, doing things in him, working in him. And then it goes out. See, when a Christian is full of grace, the grace comes in and the grace goes out.

You start blessing people. Why? Because I got so much from God. I got to give something to you.

Grace is unearned. IE, grace is a gift. Everything God gives us is a gift.

Is salvation a gift or did we earn it? It's a gift. If God fills you with the Holy Spirit in a new way, is it you earned it or a gift? If you get one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, look at the definition, a gift. Anything God does in our lives is a gift.

We can never earn. He's holy and great. And we're these sinful people.

So all of God's dealings, notice not just when you get saved, all God's dealings after that. This is the problem that I ran into as a kid. I got somewhat of an understanding that I couldn't wash my sins away.

I got an understanding that the blood of Jesus was a gift. The cross was a gift. The cross was grace.

I got that. Oh, I'm saved now. The moment I realized I was a Christian, I went back to trying to earn things or struggle.

I can live the life that God wants me to without receiving his gifts. But the whole Christian life has to be gifts every day. God never works any other way than by grace.

So many of us, we get started. Oh, thank you for the Calvary. Thank you for saving me.

Now today I'm going to... No, you're going to do nothing. You need to receive more grace that day. How many are with me? Put your hands together if you're getting this.

So everything is by grace. Everything is a gift. No one in heaven is going to be strutting.

I saw some program about some people who worship on a certain day on Saturday, make that the big thing. We're proud. And the way the message was coming across was, we worship on the true day.

These other people don't worship on the true day. When you really know the Lord and his grace, you don't boast in anything except the cross of Jesus. Because everything you realize is, oh my goodness, if he ever dealt with me to what I deserve, where would I be? Everything I am today, I am by the grace of God.

Lift your hand up if you believe that. Everything we have, everything we do, no one in heaven is going to be walking and going, I'm here because I did this and I kept that and I understood this. No, no.

Everyone in heaven is going to be saying, worthy is the lamb. Worthy is the lamb that was slain. Worthy, worthy to him be glory and honor forever.

Everything is by grace. That's going to help someone right now because now instead of struggling like self-effort, you're going to fall back into grace. This is what Jesus meant when he said, abide in me and I'll abide in you.

For without me, you can do what? Nothing. That's easy to say, much harder to live. Because we're all self-starters.

We're all legalists by nature, the reformer Martin Luther said. We're all going to do something. We don't like this helpless thing.

We don't like to wake up and say, God, unless you work in me today, I can't make it. You are my wisdom today. You are my strength.

You're the only one who can help me make decisions. You're the only one who can keep me out of a bad mood. You're the only one to give me patience with that nasty co-worker.

You're the only one who can give me love for people who have hurt me so bad. You're the only one who can make, help me forgive people who have put the knife in and stuck it once or twice, right? Turned it once or twice and then we fail and then we have to run back. It's all by grace.

Everything God does is by grace and that's why he gets all the glory. If anything was of Jim Zimbala, I would deserve some of the glory. If I could do anything, I could say, all right, God gets 98% of the glory, but I get 2% because look what I did.

How many will acknowledge today? 100% of your life, all the glory goes to God. Can you lift your hand? Okay, so that's by grace. Starts with salvation, receiving Christ, having your sins washed away.

Can't do that for yourself. You can't die on a cross and resurrect. He did that all by grace.

Now, grace, Paul says, working in our lives produces peace. Now, peace is the Hebrew greeting, shalom. Everyone say, turn to your neighbor and say, shalom, shalom.

Give another shalom to somebody. Come on, shalom. So now we use that as just like, hi, how are you, shalom or peace, but it had a much deeper meaning.

Peace here, as I close, is not just absence of agitation, absence of conflict. When they signed a peace treaty, it means both parties are going to stop fighting. It's now peace.

It means more than that. It means that. But the word, the way it comes to us from the Old Testament is not just absence of agitation and conflict.

It's blessing, wholeness, wellness in every part of your being. In your mind, rest, in your soul, peace, the glow of God, prospering in the things that you do. God being with you, God helping you in everything.

It's a very rich term. So Paul is saying here, I pray and I wish grace in your lives so that you will live lives of peace. God is called the God of peace.

What his will is for all of us is to live 2016 every day, every hour with his peace. Notice, the same grace that has to come from God, this same peace has to come from God, and it's linked to the grace. This is not peace like the world gives.

Things are going good. I have peace. Uh-oh, things went sideways.

I lost my peace. I've had peace sometimes. I lost it in like a second.

Have you ever had peace like that? It's like, yeah, this is nice. Boom, gone, all agitated, all up in somebody's face and grill. So anyway, no, this is God's peace.

This is supernatural peace. This is no matter what's happening around you, you have this peace, this well-being. So now let's just look at this.

In the Bible, there's, first of all, peace with God, means I'm no longer enemy of God. I'm now a child of God. Before you become a Christian, the Bible calls us in enmity against God.

Why? Because we break his law and we look right in his face. We say, I'll live the way I want to live. Whether you're a homeless person or a yuppie or a hipster or a multiplied millionaire, it's I shake my fist in God's hand.

Listen, don't tell me how to live. I reject your rules for my life. That's enmity against God.

But Jesus Christ came and died on the cross so that if we put our faith in him and confess our rebellion and our sins, he works a change in us, not only inside of us, but in our relationship with God. We're no longer enemies now. We're children of God.

Oh, you know what? I'm a child of Nicholas and Estelle Cymbala. I was born Polish and Ukrainian. But better than all of that, today, I'm a child of God.

How many can say amen that you're a child of God? Can we just put our hands together? We belong to the Lord. We've been born again. So there's that peace.

But then there's another peace. Then the Bible also uses peace this way. That inner peace and tranquility and glow of God.

And just, you know, you lay in bed at night and it's a mixture of so many things. It's just, thank you, Jesus. Haven't you ever laid in bed at night and just said, thank you, Jesus? I mean, everything is just and you know it's him because you can have it in the midst of stress.

So there's that peace inside peace. But then there's also this. Paul is saying, I not only want peace.

I know you have peace with God. You're Christians. I want you to have individual peace.

But I want to have peace with each other. I don't want you fussing and fighting. When God's grace is in a person, they don't want to fuss and have grudges with other people.

They do not want to fight. You can always tell people who don't have much grace. They're always ready to at the drop of a handkerchief.

They're ready to fight. What did you just say? A church which has grace in it has peace among the members. They don't want to fight.

Why? Because God's grace produces peace. He's the prince of what? Not war. He's the prince of peace.

So a church where there's not much grace from God. Oh, there's fussing and fighting going on. But when people have peace because God's grace is working in their lives, they're always being peacemakers.

They don't want fighting. Oh, that's terrible. Fighting is just horrible because he's the prince of peace.

I don't want to have a grudge against someone. And this goes deeper than just, hi, how are you? Shalom. Because then once they walk away, you can say, it's the real peace.

How many want to have all year long the real peace of God? And then when something alters that peace, when someone says something that offends you, you go to them. I got to talk to you. You know why? Because I'm being tempted not to have peace with you.

Because what you said, you know, you said that hurt me. Oh, you didn't mean it that way. Oh, come on.

Can we pray? Let's pray so we establish peace again with us. Who wants to go to 2016 with no peace with people? No. That's what his first prayer and wish is.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. So grace, we understand now, is this gift, this love and action from God, and it produces peace. So now we have to ask ourselves this question.

Notice if Paul is saying to them, more grace, more peace to you. He didn't say like the positive confession people today. This is where faith talk and really get weird.

And it's done away with prayer and prayer meetings all across America. I get 100 emails a year saying, do you know any church in my area that would have a prayer meeting? Why? Because the teachers now are all teaching. We have everything we need in Jesus Christ.

So we don't need anything more. So we don't have to ask God for anything more because I already have everything because I just confessed it. But why would Paul be asking people to pray? And why would he say to them, i.e., more grace and peace to you? I know you have experienced grace and peace.

But my wish and my prayer is, and some of his prayers and his other letters are this. I pray that God would do this new thing in you and fill you with this. And then come over here and do even more in your life.

So you can be a Christian, but listen, and be lacking in grace that God wants you to have. You can be a Christian here today and lacking in the peace He wants you to have. Are you a Christian? Yep, you are.

Do you have peace with God? Have your sins been forgiven? Yes. But are there rivers of grace and result in peace that you're missing? Oh, yes. That's why he's saying, I want you to have more grace, more peace.

So everybody in the choir, for example, not to pick on you, but everyone in the choir, there's different levels of grace and peace that are in people's lives. There are some deeper Christians among the choir who have so much received, so much from God that they're more mature. They don't rock and roll with every little wind that comes by.

Same thing with the band. Same thing with, wait a minute, to go back and let me close. Let's look at it this way.

Who's the best Christian in the whole choir? I know who the best Christian is in the whole choir. It's the person who's received the most grace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It's nothing about the choir member.

Whoever has the most grace is going to have the most peace, and that's going to be the most loving, kind, patient choir member. And they might never sing a solo, never hold a microphone, but they're the best Christian. Why? Not because of them.

They just have learned to receive. Well, wait a minute. Now that unveils something else to me.

Christianity then is not about doing anything. It's about receiving everything. Christianity is not about doing.

What am I going to do anything with if I haven't received first? Like the Bible says, what do you have that you didn't receive from God? And if I want to be more patient, can I be more patient without God giving me more grace to be patient? In other words, I don't have the equipment to do anything, or else God would have told me you don't need grace. So really, the secret of the more mature Christians are not their IQ or their education. It's they just learn how to receive, receive, receive more grace.

They constantly are leaning on God. When I was younger, just when in the ministry, I thought the strongest Christian was someone who walked like this, every place I put my foot, I put, and the word of God and the quoting verses and all of that. And then I learned totally different.

I learned that the strongest Christian is the one who's most bent over. And this is God, just help me through this hour. Oh God, help me through this day.

I look to you, God. I can't deal with this thing. It's too big for me, God.

Please, I receive from you. I trust you. That's the strongest Christian.

So how do you receive grace? If the whole secret of the Christian life is receiving, how do you receive? Well, number one, it's faith. It's faith. Faith receives.

You got to trust God to receive from him. The just shall live by what? Not just begin. How did you receive salvation? You trusted and you receive forgiveness.

You trusted and you receive mercy. You trust, you didn't do anything. You trusted and your sins were wiped away.

How are you going to live the rest of your life? By trusting, he sends more grace, new grace. Some of us are just scratching the surface. We got about two inches of grace and God's got the Pacific Ocean to pour into us.

But notice it comes by trusting him, expecting he will do this. Number two, quickly, remember it's faith that works in prayer. Remember what Jesus said? If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give good gifts or the Holy Spirit to them who ask him? So grace comes when we trust.

Grace also flows during times of prayer. Why do you think we're starting the year with a week of prayer? Because the church needs so much more grace starting with me. So you spend time in his presence and you ask him, he's going to give you that grace that you need.

Just trust him for it. Don't be trying. Don't be struggling and don't be bitter and don't give up.

Just whatever you need, God has it for us. Do I get an amen? Whatever we need, God has it for us. But it's going to come his way by grace.

It's going to come by a gift if you believe and ask. And here's one thing I've learned. Faith, prayer brings grace.

It doesn't earn it. It just like, you know what it is? Prayer and grace, it's reaching out for the gift. If I give you a Christmas present and you take it from me, would you ever go home and say, did you know what? I got that Christmas present because of this left hand.

No, I got this Christmas present because he gave it to me. My left hand just took it. How many get it? Say amen.

So what is faith and prayer? It's just the hand that says, thank you, thank you. And with that, another hand is the hand of worship. I have found in my life that grace pours into my life when I just focus and start worshipping God.

When I open mi corazon, my heart, and I begin to just commune with him. It shows trust. It's a form of prayer.

It's thanking him for all he's done in the past. And then he pours in more. I found this in my life.

As I pour out to him, he pours into me. Has anybody ever found that in your own life? As you give out to him, your worship and praise. Now God can give grace anywhere.

He can give you grace while you're sleeping. He can give you grace while you're taking a shower. He can give you grace when you're not even thinking about him.

He could do anything he wants, he's God. But I'm telling you that trusting him, asking him and worshipping him. Oh, it's beautiful places to receive more grace.

It's still a gift. All this does is it helps us receive it. Father, I pray as the pastor of the church among other pastors.

I pray for grace and peace to be upon all your people. Not just today, but all year long. Thank you for grace.

Thank you for love and action. Thank you for gifts, mercies new every day. Help us to live in peace, not only in our own hearts and peace with you, but help us to live in peace with one another, Lord.

Help us to love each other, encourage each other more this year. God, only you know who needs encouragement today. Help us to minister it, we pray.

Thank you for this service. We bless you in Jesus' name. And everyone said.

Tug each other and say grace and peace to you. Grace and peace. You're dismissed.

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