

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND
THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:
A STUDY OF EPHESIANS
(LESSON THREE)
“MORE ON GRACE AND PEACE”

EPHESIANS 1:2

“Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In the second verse of his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul informs them about the benefits that they should be enjoying resulting from their salvation experience. He does so in the words which formed the common greeting of the saints in the first-century church: *“Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”* This greeting is charged with intense meaning and contains some of the deepest truths of the Christian faith. There are no two words which are more important in the language of Christianity than “grace” and “peace.”

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones the Welsh Protestant minister, in his commentary on **Ephesians 1** made the following remarks: *“Grace is the beginning of our faith; peace is the end of our faith. Grace is the fountain, the spring, the source. It is that particular place in the mountain from which the mighty river you see rolling into the sea starts its race; without it there would be nothing. Grace is the origin and source and fount of everything in the Christian life. But what does the Christian life mean, what is it meant to produce? The answer is ‘peace.’”*

He goes on to say that it is very important for us to always bear these two words in our minds in light of the fact that everything that pertains to the Christian faith is included within the ambit that begins with grace and ends with peace!

But what exactly is grace? The noted English Bible teacher, **Arthur W. Pink** defined grace in the following terms: *“Divine grace is the sovereign and saving favour of God exercised in the bestowment of blessings upon those who have no merit in them and for which no compensation is demanded from them. Nay, more; it is the favour of God shown to those who not only have no positive deserts of their own, but who are thoroughly ill-deserving and hell-deserving. It is completely unmerited and unsought, and is altogether unattracted by anything in or from or by the objects upon which it is bestowed. Grace can neither be bought, earned, nor won by the creature. If it could be, it would cease to be grace. When a thing is said to be of grace we mean that the recipient has no claim upon it, that it was in no wise due him. It comes to him as pure charity, and, at first, unasked and undesired.”*

We may refer to grace as love that reaches down or love that stoops. Grace is condescending love. Perhaps the most concise but compelling definition of grace that I have ever heard is this: **“Grace is the almightiness of God that invades the helplessness of man.”** We tend to have a concept of grace that is greatly deficient because our concept of sin is greatly deficient. If we want to measure grace accurately, we must measure the depths of sin accurately.

What is peace? Peace in the biblical sense does not merely mean the absence of disturbance. It means the presence of an assurance, and the basis for that assurance is the grace of God.

But why do we need grace and peace? The answer to this question leads us into fundamental truths about Christianity. The struggle that human beings have with God and consequently, with themselves is rooted in the tension that exists between God’s righteousness and our unrighteousness. God is holy and we are unholy. God is just and we are unjust. God is perfect and we are imperfect. This tension creates fear, hostility and anger within us toward God.

Unfortunately, this fear, hostility and anger often remains with us after we are saved. Many of us continue to behave like fugitives, scared and fleeing from a God whose perfection overwhelms us and whose righteousness and justice condemns us. The truth is that we will never experience genuine peace with God until we understand what the grace of God has accomplished for us. Only a person who understands grace can really be comfortable in the presence of a Holy God.

In **Romans 5:1**, Paul writes the following: *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* It is critically important for every saint to know that he or she has been justified by the grace of God.

So, what exactly is justification? Justification is the act by which unjust sinners are made right in the sight of a just and holy God. When a believing sinner is saved by grace alone through faith alone, God transfers to his or her account all the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to every believing sinner by God, and His righteousness becomes their righteousness. This transaction is a legal transaction. The imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ to believing sinners is similar to an accounting transaction where no real property is exchanged. God almighty puts the righteousness of Jesus Christ in a person’s account the very moment that person is saved.

By His life of absolute perfection, Jesus Christ acquired for His people a positive righteousness which is imputed to them when they are saved and which guarantees for them eternal life. In Him, His people have fulfilled the Law of perfect obedience. In Him they have also borne the penalty for their sins.

There is a double imputation that takes place in justification. Paul makes reference to this double imputation in **2 Corinthians 5:21**: *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”* Here, we are informed that our sin is imputed to Christ. We are the offending party. He is without sin. He kept the Law perfectly. Yet, on the cross, God poured out His wrath on Christ. Why? Because our sin was imputed to Christ. He took upon Himself our sin. Our great debit was put on His account. Christ paid the horrible penalty as the cup of God’s wrath was poured out upon Him.

There is also a second imputation. Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. He not only takes our debit, but we also get His credit.

Christ paid the penalty we could never satisfy, but He also kept the Law perfectly, which we could not do either. Consequently, God credits to us His righteousness. We stand before God clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is a sense, then, in which we are saved by works. We are certainly not saved by our works, but instead by Christ’s work of perfect obedience, on our behalf. One theologian said that two of the most beautiful words in the Bible are *“for us.”* Jesus lived and died and rose again for us. All of His work was done on our behalf. Jesus Christ took the filthy rags of our sin and clothed us in the robe of His own perfect righteousness.

The transaction is real. God’s declaration that I am righteous is serious. God sees us as righteous because we have been covered by the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, the doctrine of the person and work of Christ is the gospel. Therefore, the doctrine of imputation is essential to this gospel. It shows us why the gospel is such good news. Jesus Christ really has done it all. He has met God’s standard of perfection for us, so we never need to fear God’s wrath if we are in Christ.

In **Romans 5:1**, Paul tells us that we have been *“justified by faith.”* We must bear in mind that even this faith did not originate with us. In **Ephesians 2:8-9**, Paul writes, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

What does Paul say is the result of our being justified by faith? He says the result is that “we have peace with God.” When we are justified, our war with God comes to an end forever. When we are justified, God signs an eternal peace treaty with us. Yes, we still sin; yes, we still rebel; yes, we still commit acts of hostility toward God. But God does not break His peace treaty. He is through fighting with us forever. We have a mediator who can be trusted to keep the peace because He is “The Prince of Peace” (**Isaiah 9:6**), and because He is “Our peace” (**Ephesians 2:14**).

Because we now have peace with God, we will never be condemned.

“I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life” (John 5:24, New Living Translation). “So now the case is closed. There remains no accusing voice of condemnation against those who are joined in life-union with Jesus, the Anointed One” (Romans 8:1, The Passion Translation).

“Who then would dare to accuse those whom God has chosen in love to be his? God himself is the judge who has issued his final verdict over them — ‘Not guilty!’ Who then is left to condemn us? Certainly not Jesus, the Anointed One! For he gave his life for us, and even more than that, he has conquered death and is now risen, exalted, and enthroned by God at his right hand. So how could he possibly condemn us since he is continually praying for our triumph?” (Romans 8:33-34, The Passion Translation).

It is an impossibility in the nature of the case for Christians who do not understand and appreciate the grace of God to be at peace with God. In **Lesson Two**, we made the following observation: *“In the framework of a works-based, externally regulated system of “Christianity,” persons are manipulated to think that their salvation and their standing before God is dependent on how well they perform. These persons are responding to another gospel, which is not another. Rather it is a perversion of the gospel. Religion is always about how well persons do; Christianity is always about the wonder of what Jesus Christ has done for persons!”*

Unfortunately, many genuine Christians are enmeshed in a legalistic, works-based, externally regulated system of “Christianity.” They are in a culture which has its own peculiar distinctive control factors, where fear is the primary control factor. Such a system and culture may have deep psychological and spiritual effects on the make-up of those who are controlled by it. These persons generally have very little, if any, assurance of salvation and consequently live in condemnation. Whenever they hear a sermon concerning “the rapture” they are traumatized because they can never be sure that they have done enough to be ready for that event. Such persons are in desperate need of spiritual repair. The repair work takes place as they are exposed to the true gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of grace. When the grace of God begins to saturate their minds and spirits, the peace of God will begin to rule and reign in their hearts.

Proverbs 29:25 informs us that *“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.”* **1 John 4:16-18** says, *“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”*

The Passion Translation renders the passage as follows: *“We have come into an intimate experience with God’s love, and we trust in the love he has for us. God is love! Those who are living in love are living in God, and God lives through them. By living in God, love has been brought to its full expression in us so that we may fearlessly face the day of judgment, because all that Jesus now is, so are we in this world. Love never brings fear, for fear is always related to punishment. But love’s perfection drives the fear of punishment far from our hearts. Whoever walks constantly afraid of punishment has not reached love’s perfection.”*

Brothers and sisters, we must bear in mind that truth is not confined to a church, an organization, or a denomination, or even a doctrine. Truth in its spiritual essence is a Person. That person is the Lord Jesus Christ. In **John 14:6**, Jesus confirms this. He says, "*I am the way, **the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.***" The truth that Jesus Christ revealed about God was that He was full of grace and truth.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (**John 1:14-17**).