

CHAPTER 1

GRACE AND PEACE TO GOD’S SERVANTS

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:1–2)

First impressions are pivotal. Consider the substantial contrast between entering the office on a Monday morning and enthusiastically declaring “Good morning, team!” as opposed to merely stating “I made it.” Similarly, envision the profound effect of a pastor commencing his sermon with the authoritative proclamation “Thus saith the Lord!” in comparison to the same pastor hesitantly searching through his notes and murmuring “Well, folks, here’s what was on my mind this week.”

The opening words of any letter are important, and Scripture is no different. For the apostle Paul, operating under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, greeting his audience wasn’t just a matter of routine. It was a chance to set the tone for how he felt about his beloved readers—and how God Himself feels about them.

Paul first identifies himself and Timothy as “servants” (*douloi*, literally “slaves” or “bondservants”) of Christ Jesus. Paul is not pulling rank as an apostle—he’s doing the opposite. He is a slave of Christ, a sinner saved by Christ and subject to the one who saved him. He comes to his fellow believers sincerely and tenderly with open palms upraised.

The apostle then identifies his audience as “all the saints” in Philippi, a Roman colony. In the Western world, especially among those influenced by Roman Catholicism, we may be inclined to think of a saint as an especially exemplary Christian leader, cleric, or martyr. But that isn’t Paul’s meaning. For Paul, all followers of Christ are saints—*hagioi*, “holy ones”—made holy not by their own merit but by virtue of the redemptive work of Christ on their behalf and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Paul further addresses the overseers and deacons “with” the saints. In one sense, pastor-elders and deacons are not *above* the laity *per se* but are *alongside* or *with* them. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Paul loved each member of this church dearly.

Then, Paul greets his audience: “Grace to you and peace from God....” This salutation is laden with theological significance. “Grace” (*charis*) is a play on the common Greek word for “greetings” (*chairein*), transforming this ordinary word to evoke the unmerited kindness of God in salvation. “Peace” recalls the Hebrew greeting *shalom*, still heard today among Hebrew speakers, which suggests the total wholeness of life and society in tranquility that only God can provide. Importantly, true saving grace and peace with God can only come to us from God in Christ. Grace and peace are our birthright in the gospel. They undergird the whole Christian life, assuring believers of their total acceptance before God.

When times and seasons cause us to reflect—major holidays, trials, or the simple turning over of the calendar—we are tempted to live in regret, shame over past sins, or worry concerning future events. Regardless of the season in which we find ourselves, we all acutely feel the need for a clear word from God. Those serving in ministry in local churches, ministry organizations, or on the

mission field are even more prone to think in this way. *What does God think of me? How am I doing?*

In addressing the Philippians in these opening verses, it is as though Paul marches into his pulpit and declares, “Thus saith the Lord: God sends you His grace and peace.” If you are a Christian, rest assured: God has shown you His undeserved grace and granted you absolute peace in relation to Him. With this foundation, we can rest confidently in Christ’s love and press on in our love and service to Him in return.

Paul also specifies that this grace and peace comes “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The doctrine of the Trinity teaches us about God’s inseparable operations—that when one divine person undertakes an action, the whole Godhead is, in a sense, engaged in that action as well. For many, this is a new way of thinking about God. We are accustomed to seeing the Father as a vengeful judge who must be appeased by Christ’s sacrifice before He is willing to love us. This is akin to what the ancient heretic Marcion (AD 85–160) taught, but it is not the biblical gospel.

The Father and Son are unified in their love for us (John 16:27). It is true that Christ’s sacrifice appeased the just wrath of God on our behalf (Rom. 3:25). But the Son is sent on His mission to save us *because* the Father already loved and chose us (John 6:39). Thus, Paul assures the Philippians that God’s love for them is as pure and undivided as the Trinity itself. God’s grace and peace are sent from the Father, purchased by the blood of the Son, and applied to the believer by the Holy Spirit. Praise God for the unchanging reality of His grace and peace in our chaotic world.

PRAYER

Triune God, thank You for regarding all Your servants, ministers, and children as beloved, holy saints. Thank You for giving us Your saving grace in Jesus Christ. Thank You for Your peace—refuge from judgment and confidence to face the trials of life. Help us to always remember that we are under Your grace and have peace with You. Grant our families, our churches, our leaders, and the missionaries we support to know this same grace and peace. In Jesus's name, amen.

MORE PRAYER PROMPTS

- Pray for the pastors and deacons of your church to know the grace and peace of God in a special way in their present season of ministry.
- God's peace comes to us amid a conflict-drenched world. As wars continue in countries where serving Christ can be especially challenging, pray for the peace of God to rule in the hearts of frontline workers in war-torn contexts.
- Pray for pastors, evangelists, or missionaries who may be struggling with discouragement. Pray that they would sense God's grace and peace personally and intimately.