

GRACE & PEACE

February 11, 2018 | Pastor Alex Lessler

Introduction

This Life Group lesson is not a part of our ongoing Sunday morning series on cultivating "Patience and Kindness". In this lesson, Pastor Alex explores the subject of "Grace and Peace" from Philippians 1.

Alex told a story about his 3-year-old daughter (2 ½ at the time) who is in transition to a "big girls bed". Early on, she woke up one-night screaming, something of this new experience scared her in the middle of the night. Her dad, came in the room, realizing she had become tangled in her sheets and blankets. He told us that he had to work very hard not to laugh, (many of us have been there) but it was her father's presence that changed everything, including her perspective of the situation. Our heavenly father's presence does the same for us, just his presence changes everything, even our perspective.

MOVEMENT 1: MAKING A GREETING

Philippians 1:1-2, "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

When Alex was 21 years of age he went on a missionary trip to Zimbabwe. At that time a beautiful country had come under the rule of a dictator, which resulted in severe poverty, unemployment, severe health consequences and more. A man he spoke with, spoke English, but Alex soon realized even though they had a common language there was a lack of understanding for many reasons.

Just because we speak the same language doesn't mean we will always understand each other. So this morning we realize that just because we read our text together doesn't mean we understand what is being said.

The structure of Paul's greeting in every one of his 13 letters is very similar to the structure of a greeting in any first century letter.

The common greeting of Paul's day can be seen in Acts 23:26:

"Claudius Lusias, To His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings [Cherin]"
[Name] to [Name]: Greetings (Cherin)

Here is what Paul is saying, and some of the ways it is unique from his contemporaries:

"SERVANTS OF"

"Dulos" - "A person belonging to another carrying connotations of humility and servitude; in the Septuagint it was also used to designate 'Servants of God' where it carried a sense of distance from and dependence upon God, but at the same time became a kind of honorific title for those in special service to God." - Gordon Fee

"TO ALL GOD'S HOLY PEOPLE"

"Hagios" - A common designation of God's new covenant people. It means "called out of, and set apart for special purposes."

Philippi was a Roman colony which meant they were a "Rome away from Rome". Later in Philippians, Paul would tell the church their **"citizenship is in heaven"** which is the equivalent of calling the church a "colony of Heaven" (co-opting the "Colony of Rome" idea to communicate this deep and purposeful calling to be a "Saint").

This colony of Rome was an out-post of Rome, Paul is saying, you are citizens of heaven, an out-post of Heaven. In other words:

"The church is a "called out of the world people, set apart for the special purpose of being a colony of heaven- a representation of the Kingdom in the world NOT apart from it"

In reality we all have our Philippi.

Together with Overseers and Deacons Paul would give an exhortation to unity.

They are in it together. No one (including the leaders) can exclude themselves from receiving the message and responding to it.

Philippians 2:4-7, "value others interests... same attitude as Christ Jesus"

LEADERSHIP IS INFLUENCE: Influence (leadership) should be about coming under and lifting up, instead of lording power over for self-promotion.

MOVEMENT 2: GRACE

Paul changes the first part, what about the next?

[Name] to [Name]: Greetings (Cherin)

"Cherin"- Standard Greek Greeting Paul changes to "Charis".. Why?

"Grace"

"Charis": that which causes joy, pleasure, gratification, favor and acceptance. A favor done without any expectation of return the absolute free expression of the love of God finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the giver. Unearned and unmerited favor. - Spiros Zodhiates

Many of us are very familiar with Grace: "Unearned and Unmerited favor" BUT Paul uses Charis about 88 times in his writings and sometimes there are other uses...Let's look in another letter where Paul uses "Charis":

1 Corinthians 15:1-11, "Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, i and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed".

Grace is not just what prompts salvation by extending the "absolute free expression of the love of God uniting us back with God" BUT **Grace is also the creative force that energized Paul to work hard.**

Examples:

- "By God's grace I was able to finish that report"
- "By God's grace I was able to rebuild that fence after a hard week"
- "By God's grace I was able to teach that class even though I knew that person in the back corner was critiquing and criticizing me the whole time to her friend"
- "By God's grace I was able to acquire that company and keep 50 employees from being unemployed"
- "By God's grace... you fill in the blank" It was by Grace through faith that Paul was saved, but also he was graced to work hard.

By the grace of the Holy Spirit that he was empowered to perform miracles. It was by Grace he could fathom the mysteries of God, it was by grace he could write and communicate so effectively.

You get my point- grace moved him into and empowered the work of God he was to participate in.

MOVEMENT 3: PEACE

"Peace"

"Eirene": the state of harmony that is available to believers through having a right relationship with God and others and is especially associated with the presence of the Holy Spirit; in certain contexts, seen in the Old Testament concept of Shalom.

Why Shalom?

"Shalom": Hebrew greeting that is a one-word cipher pulling us back to the Garden of Eden. Paul was both a Roman citizen, and a Jewish man (once a Pharisee before a Christian and Apostle).

Why Eden? Because it was the place established as the perfect harmony of God and mankind. Mankind with each other. Mankind with creation.

"Eden" means "delight" and that was the world designed for us.

But it is also a sign post pointing to our future.

In other words:

"The Blessing of Grace and Peace is a call to the past and the future realities to be in the present in the hearts and minds of God's people- "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"

"From God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ" This is a way of saying that everything we could have ever want or desire is found in God.

In the First Century there was racism. Even Gentile and Jewish people worshipping Jesus together as brothers and sisters, as family. This is why Paul uses the greeting he does.

"Grace"- Greek Greeting

"Peace"- Jewish Greeting

Paul is saying that everything they are TRULY longing for is found in "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ". He is the source of the deepest desires that ache deep in us. Only in him can our lives find deep satisfaction, life is only found in Jesus.

MOVEMENT 4: 3 QUESTIONS

1. **WHAT IF EVERY GREETING MATTERED?**

- "Greetings matter because people matter"
- "You matter to me; you matter to the God who made you"

Maybe we need to reconsider the "greeting time" at the B4 church service. If you only had a few words you would want them to know they matter.

For Paul, this is not just a greeting but a Blessing

Blessing- part greeting, part prayer, part command

The first Blessings is Genesis 1- **"be fruitful and multiply"**

"Blessing": it is a life-giving word weighted with power to call something into existence.

Proverbs tells us that there is power in words, in fact there is death and life found in words.

"When you speak over someone you have the power in language and relationship to create or to destroy, to bring life or to bring death"

We have all heard people say terrible things to one another including Parents who say negative things to their kids.

“Their such a terror or demon”

When their young lives begin to manifest this behavior in reality all they are doing is living up to your expectations. Your children will become what you call them and say they are.

God speaks goodness, blessing and affirmation over us, shouldn't we do the same?

2. **WHAT IF WE SAW OURSELVES AS CONDUITS OF “GRACE AND PEACE”?**

Paul is the UPS Truck Driver- Grace and Peace. It is his job and responsibility to pass it on. Freely you have received now freely give.

Like Paul we need to be a Conduit of Grace and Peace. Meaning one source, divided out into many different intentional places. The photo below illustrates how we have one power source, but then it is dispensed or distributed to many areas...people.

Whomever you are with think: “How can I bring Grace and Peace” to this person.

3. **WHAT IF WE STARTED EVER LETTER WITH “GRACE AND PEACE”?**

- What if everything we started was with grace and peace?
- When you are feeling like you are so angry that you want to scream but you said “grace and peace”
- When your pushed to your utter limit but you say “grace and peace”
- What if the Christians in our city were all known as people as “grace and peace”?

As we grow in our faith and others around us, (including our own family), learning consequences for our actions is so important. But teaching them what Grace is and how we receive it, and how the Peace that comes from that surrender transforms our lives.

Paul starts all of his letters with grace and peace, and almost ends all with grace and peace. So what if we started and ended everything with the blessing of “Grace and Peace”?

The following was a Blessing that Pastor Alex spoke over our church family:

“May you be filled with grace. With lavish favor from God. Unending power of God’s presence to flood you and empower you to do whatever it is that God has called you to do. May you be filled with peace. A deep pervasive sense of well-being with God, with people, with your body, and with creation itself no matter what the circumstances of your life entail- a great season, a hard season, a great week, a hard week, may you be filled with peace. And may you be grace and peace people wherever you go and whomever you encounter. May you spread grace and peace of God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. It was pointed out to us that Paul began most of his letters with “grace and Peace” and ended them with “Grace and Peace”. Obviously this is so much more than just a greeting, before we dissect the subject, what does this greeting mean to you
2. Alex addressed the issue of “making a greeting”. What are some of the things that stuck out for you? Possibly, “speaking the same language but still not understanding”, or maybe the original words Paul used in his greeting, or “the colony of Rome/Heaven concept?”
3. Please discuss the insights into “Grace”. Consider how Paul used “Grace” in his letter to the church in Corinth and how it worked in his life.
4. Also discuss the subject of “Peace”. How does this pull us back to the past, yet point to our future?
5. Beginning at the bottom of page 6, please discuss the three questions:
 - a) What if every greeting mattered?
 - b) What if we saw ourselves as conduits of “Grace and Peace”?
 - c) What if we started every letter with “Grace and Peace”?