

Romans 1:7b-10 - "Walk In His Grace As A Grace Extender"

As Paul often does in his writings and as we have seen in the first few verses here in Romans chapter 1, he verifies his ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles and then places at the height of that ministry the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Many things he does in the name of Jesus Christ and for Christ's sake involves miracles, healings of all sorts, the demonstration of the Spirit of God in his life with power. But in the final analysis all of those things from above are designed to point above to the risen Savior who came in the flesh, died for sinful men, and then rose from the dead that we might have life in Him alone by faith.

This is the most important aspect of Paul's ministry. And as he ends his salutation in verse 7 he says "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

When you look at most of Paul's epistles this particular phrase is seen many times. And there's the possibility to gloss over this phrase simply because Paul so often uses it.

For example we read in 1Co 1:3 where Paul says to the Corinthian church..... "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

In the second letter he writes to them and says, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

The same is true when writing to the Galatian church. Gal 1:3 "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,"

Go to Eph 1:2, Phi 1:2, Col.1:2, 1Thes.1:1, 2Thes.1:2, 1Tim.1:2, 2Tim.1:2, Tit.1:4 and you'll see the expression "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Some Commentators would tell us that it was the style of Paul's day to start with a salutation or greeting and wish someone well. But to suggest that Paul's greeting was only the equivalent of our phrase, "Best wishes", is to miss the point of what the Holy Spirit, who inspired Paul's words, was trying to convey.

Let's take a few moments and dig just below the surface of this

wonderful word from God and see what nuggets our Lord has for us that would instruct and encourage and lift our spirits as He says, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

The word grace in the Greek is Charis and it can also be translated kindness, and as Charles Hodge says, "especially undeserved kindness, and therefore it is so often used to express the unmerited goodness of God in the salvation of sinners. Anything, therefore, bestowed on the undeserving may be called charis."

It was in this sense that Paul calls his apostleship charis or grace in verse 5. And all the blessings conferred on sinners through Jesus Christ, are graces, or gifts."

God gives repentant sinners the things they don't deserve. What we deserve are His judgment, wrath, and eternal punishment. In Christ what we receive from God are undeserved blessings like repentance, faith, love and hope. That's why these things can and must be referred to as gifts.

This is the reason for Paul's statement in Eph 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast."

Our salvation from God is a gift, and even here we see that our faith to believe is a gift from God.

God loves to give gifts, especially undeserved gifts. But His gift giving must be in accordance with His justice which demands satisfaction. God's law must be satisfied perfectly. So, the dichotomy: God is the Giver of undeserved gifts. But God will not give gifts to men until His judgment and wrath and punishment for sin is completely satisfied.

Enter the wisdom and mercy of God. 'I will satisfy My justice by sending mankind a perfect gift, My Son, who must first receive My judgment and punishment for sin as I forsake and destroy Him in death before I can allow my gift of eternal life to be given freely.'

The gift, totally undeserved, is God's Son, Jesus Christ. This is Charis, undeserved kindness extended to men. The punishment which should befall us was put upon our Lord Jesus, who took our places and paid our debt.

And in so doing, by becoming our sacrifice and then rising from the dead, charis, grace is given to all who would fall upon this undeserved mercy and kindness from God by faith, and see it for what it is..... a gift, and receive it in that manner by placing that gift as the highest privilege and honor to share in.

Because, without such undeserved mercy and kindness we would all be bound for hell. Why? Because sinners who are not reconciled to the Father by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ are at enmity or war with God.

This is why Paul adds the word peace to the grace he speaks of. Peace is the result of grace. The undeserved kindness from God makes everything right with God. That ever-looming sense of fear and bewilderment as to whether God will condemn me or not has been dealt with once and for all at the cross.

Peace comes from grace which is undeserved. Once we realize we're lost, which is by the way also of grace, because only the Spirit of God can open our eyes to such lost-ness, then only will we see our need for a Savior who was sent to bring us peace with God.

If we truly appreciate from what we were saved, then our lives will live in that grace and seek more grace from God, knowing that salvation begins with grace, goes into eternity with grace, and during this life is sustained in His grace or undeserved kindness.

But like all gifts from God He offers it freely, but He tells us to ask by faith to receive it. We, as believers, need grace or undeserved gifts from God, like His strength, His mercy, His tenderness, His love, His steadfastness and so on to live in this world which rejects God's grace.

Ask God and He will give it. But with the gift will always come the responsibility to use the gift He gives. He will give strength. But He demands we wield His strength in the face of the enemy for God's glory.

He gives mercy and love. But to quench those graces by being selfish accomplishes nothing for God's kingdom, not to speak of ourselves. Grace and fruit go hand in hand. God say's I give you my grace, now let the world know what that grace or underserved gift looks like, which comes from Me.'

Paul tells us what that grace from God looks like in the believer in Gal 5:22-25 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

All of the undeserved gifts from God are at our disposal as we ask Him to increase our faith, increase our love, increase our joy. But, as Paul says in Galatians, they will not yield the kind of fruit unless we crucify the sinful passions and desires. That's living in the Spirit as we obey God who gives all good gifts.

Turning from the world and its desires, and turning to God and obeying, in His power, is what the Spirit-filled life is all about. It's a great life to have God as the One who is constantly giving us grace, that we may live for Him, not ourselves.

And yet unfortunately, many Christians take a ho-hum attitude towards such grace as though God owed it to us anyhow. 'And one day God we'll get around to showing You how thankful we really are. But, right now we're still intrigued with all of the wrappings of such a gift and I'm sure when we get to the substance of the gift we'll be more motivated.'

What many Christians don't realize is that there are no wrappings. The gift, the substance, Jesus Christ Himself, has always been in full view to be tasted for who He really is. Life and fellowship with our God, who desires that we walk in that life, with Him at the helm.

He doesn't wrap Himself from us, He opens His arms wide to wrap us in Himself. And though Paul is the one who records these words they are a love note from our Great God and Redeemer given to us to be taken personally. "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ", which is God saying, 'I give My grace and peace to you. It is from Me. Look to Me and ask and receive and then walk with Me in that grace.'

The Holy Spirit would remind us through such servants as Paul, that only God is responsible for such a great gift. It is for us, freely to be taken by faith. It is from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead so that we may have it.

It's all grace, it's all God. Give Him glory and honor by giving Him the gift of yourself which is His anyway. Since He purchased us we belong to Him. He personally adopted us into His family

and we receive an eternal inheritance. Grace upon grace. God is so good.

Rom 1:8 "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world."

We might say, "what a nice thing to say." And it really is. But even in this compliment Paul doesn't divorce God's grace from their faith being reported all over the world.

Paul gives credit where credit is due. To God. 'Lord, God, thank You for these people and the work You're doing in their lives to the extent that they are taking Your grace given to them, and in gratitude they are giving it to others as their faith is literally seen and tasted by the world.'

Paul wasn't just trying to win friends and influence people, he was genuinely thankful that the gospel of Jesus Christ was being extended through these people. He wasn't making this up; their faith really was being proclaimed everywhere.

And I'm sure Paul was also thankful for the way in which God's grace was being made manifest despite the fact that no apostle, no great leader from the church of Jerusalem, was responsible for this work.

The Holy Spirit of God and the leaders who were raised up by God in Rome were doing a pretty good job of teaching the people to appreciate the grace they had received. No one, not even the apostle Paul is indispensable, in the sense that our Almighty God needs any particular man to carry out His will.

It reminds me of how the Jews were boasting to Jesus how they were sons of Abraham as though that forced God to look upon them with favor.

Jesus had a word for them in Mat 3:9 "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham."

Paul puts it in a similar way in this same letter to the Romans.....
Rom 12:3 "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

Paul was a great servant used by God, and the Lord was glorified through Paul's ministry, but Paul never forgot that his salvation and

his ministry were only the result of God's grace or gift. And so, only God got the glory if Paul had anything to say about it.

And that's what God wants from us as well. We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, because we are all still sinners saved by grace. Yes, God can and does manifest His life in us and He delights to show forth His love through us, but had it not been for Christ we would not have life.

Remember, your salvation is a gift, but so are the ministries He gives to each of us, along with the specific gifts we need to minister to each other. So, if we're going to boast in anything let it be Jesus, not ourselves.

The Psalmist understood what Paul would say hundreds of years later when it came to boasting in God and not in ourselves. David, speaking to the Lord, records these words.

Psa 44:6-8 "I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame. In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever." Selah

The word boast here in the Hebrew is *halal* and it means to shine; make a show; rave. The world raves over the latest fashions. Would that all Christians rave over their God who saved them.

Now, before we leave verse 8 there's something I'd like to say about Paul's exhortation toward the Roman Christians, and it has to do with Paul's prayers for the saints. This is a good practice for all of us to get in. It seems that whenever Paul contemplates those believers, whom God places on his heart, his desire is to lift them up to the Lord in prayer. But his prayers always seem to begin with thanks.

The Christians in Rome come to mind and Paul looks to God and says, "Thank You Lord." "Thank You that they're brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank You that they're my friends. Thank You that we can minister to one another. Thank You for being faithful to them with Your love, and thank You for their faithfulness and love to You.

Paul prays for the Church in Philippi in Phi 1:3-6 "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who

began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

He has a similar prayer for the Collosians in Col 1:3-5 "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth."

1Co 1:4 "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus."

What's interesting about this is that Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, has every intention of bringing their carnal lives into the light of God's word. They were to get a rebuke from Paul. And yet, he begins his letter with thanks for them.

Was he lying and just setting them up? No. Robert Gromacki in his commentary on 1Corinthians says, "In the face of Corinthian unfaithfulness, Paul was thankful for God's faithfulness. God is not just true, He is also trustworthy. His word is sure and His promises are certain. His faithfulness can be seen in His sovereign call of the Corinthians to unique fellowship with other believers and with the Lord Jesus Christ in spite of God's obvious, prior knowledge of their carnal behavior subsequent to their regeneration experience. Their local fellowship was disjointed. Paul wanted them to manifest their spiritual communion with Christ in visible expressions of love within the church."

And so, whether a particular church was all that it was supposed to be or not, Paul could still thank God for them, because he knew the Holy Spirit resided in their hearts, and there was hope that God would in fact be true to His promise that He would be with them and never leave them, and He would finish the work He began in them.

Paul might rebuke a group like the Corinthians, but he saw past their carnality to the transforming power of the God who saved them for His good will and pleasure, to bring them into conformity to Jesus Christ, so that their carnality would come to an end.

Paul was truly excited about the faith of the Roman Christians, as it was demonstrated in their love for God, and yet we'll see later in the letter that some within the Roman church had their problems as well. And yet, Paul would always thank God that the Lord was working in other believers, and extending grace, even as He was working in Paul's own life and extending grace to him.

And so, though there may be times when you and I find it hard to pray for someone, even another believer, we should still be able to thank God that He showed them mercy and grace and loved them enough to bring them into His Kingdom. And with that attitude we can then pray effectively for those whom we find it hard to pray for. God will bless that attitude in prayer.

In the next couple of verses Paul shares how much these people mean to him and how he would love nothing more than to be with them.

Rom 1:9-10 "God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you."

A couple of things to be noted here. Paul was not half-hearted about serving God. He says, 'I serve Him with my whole heart.' The word heart, which is used in NIV, is the Greek word *pneuma* and is better translated, spirit. And so, the sense here is, 'I serve my God in my spirit, as opposed to the flesh.'

Paul saw his ministry as a spiritual walk everyday of his life. And this spiritual walk was in the service of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. This whole verse is designed as an oath taken by Paul. He calls Christ to be his witness, the same Christ whose gospel Paul spends his life preaching.

And here's why Paul calls on God to be his witness..... 'To bear witness to the fact that I pray for you continually.'

And as verse 10 continues the thought; 'I also call on God to be my witness of how much I want to be with you, and if God will be pleased to make the way I'll see you soon.' My paraphrase.

Paul's conscience was always clear before God because he was a doer of God's will not a bystander. If God desires for Paul to pray, Paul says, Amen, 'let me intercede for others with thanksgiving.' If God say's to forsake the old man or the old nature, Paul says, Amen, which is why he said in Gal 2:20 "I have been crucified

with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Paul understood God's grace given to him and in the joy of serving Christ he wanted others to live in that grace as well. In fact, this is one of the reasons he wants to see the Romans.

Rom 1:11-12 "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong-- that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith."

Paul was on a mission to strengthen the saints. And he desired to give them a spiritual gift to accomplish that. Next week we'll find out what that spiritual gift was.

For Paul, strengthening was the issue. He knew that to do spiritual battle one must be strong and without God's grace, His undeserved gifts, we would not accomplish His will, nor represent Him in the Spirit as we ought.

But he also knew that all of the grace extended meant little if we weren't willing to walk in that grace through faith as we obey Him out of a love for Him. And so receiving grace is not an end in itself. In fact what we receive we are to give to others. Grace, undeserved gifts, are from God and our Lord Jesus Christ. If we are to be imitators of Christ then we are called upon by our God to extend undeserved gifts or grace to others.

But as we extend undeserved gifts like love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness self-control and of course the gospel of Christ, we should not give with an attitude of holding our recipients hostage.

That is, we should never give with an attitude that someone owes us. If it is an undeserved gift or grace that we give them, then we must leave it as such and do all things as unto the Lord who rewards in secret.

As we are receivers of God's grace by faith and as we in turn give grace to the world and to fellow believers, we are built up in Christ's love and the unity of the Spirit reigns supreme. Our strength comes from our God who desires to give us what we need that we may serve and honor Him. And despite what our need may be He is always there for us.

That's what Paul tells us in 2Co 9:8-10 "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." [Psalm 112:9] Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness."

Paul's exhortation to the Romans is for us today. Take it to heart, it's from God.

Rom 16:20 "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."