

Evidences of Grace

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-3

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One of the great writers of the past, Arthur W. Pink, used to call his messages “Studies in the Scriptures.” And that is what I am going to try to do today, bring you a study in the Scriptures taken from the book of 1 Thessalonians.

Would you open your Bibles to the book of 1 Thessalonians chapter one? Now Paul is writing to the Church at Thessalonica and he says that he is addressing this letter to the Church at Thessalonica “which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

These people, believers, are in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now what does this mean “in God the Father” and “in the Lord Jesus Christ?”

Well, our Lord described it. He identified this relationship in John 10. He said, “My sheep hear my voice and I give them eternal life and they will never perish.” And he says, “I give them eternal life. They shall never perish and neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. They are in my hands and they are in the Father’s hand.” This church is in Christ and in God the Father.

And then in John 17 he describes this relationship again. He is praying to the Father and he says, “The glory that you gave me, I have given them that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me that the world may know that you love them even as you love me.”

And Paul describes the relationship in this way. “Christ in you the hope of glory.”

So this church is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then in the last part of that first verse Paul greets them with this salutation. He says, “Grace be to you, grace be to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now Paul often uses that salutation in his epistles, grace and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes he adds the word mercy. He said, “Grace, mercy and peace be unto you.”

What is grace? What is grace? Well, grace is the special good will and favor of God. Grace is the special good will and favor of God. The first time the word is used in the Bi-

ble over in Genesis chapter six verse eight the Scripture says, “God saw...” This is the first time the word “grace” is used in the Scriptures. “God saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth and the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man from the face of the earth.’ But Noah, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord,” special favor. “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.”

And in Ephesians two verse eight the Scripture says, “For by grace, that same favor of the Lord, are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God.”

When the angel came to Mary the mother of Jesus of Nazareth he said to her, “Fear not, Mary, you have found favor with God, unmerited favor, undeserved mercy, special good will, special grace. Grace be to you and peace from God our Father.”

So grace is the unmerited favor of God, the special good will of God.

What is peace of which Paul writes here? Grace and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, three things. If you will listen to these things it will help you understand what this peace is that Paul is talking about.

It is peace through the blood of his cross. Colossians one verse 19 says, “It pleased the Father that in Christ should all fulness dwell. And having made peace through the blood of his cross he reconciled us to God by his blood.” We are reconciled to God. The enmity is gone. God is reconciled unto us. We were enemies. Now we are friends with God.

So we have peace through the blood of his cross. And then we are justified before God’s law and before God’s justice. You see, by nature we are under the curse of the law. But when Jesus Christ was made a curse for us he redeemed us from the curse of the law. Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then, thirdly, it is not only peace through the blood of his cross and peace before the law and before justice, reconciled to God. But it is peace of conscience. Our sins are forgiven.

Paul said in Ephesians 1:7, “In Christ we have redemption through his blood. We have the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace and the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin.”

So that’s the peace. Writing to, “The Church at Thessalonica who is n God the Father and in Christ Jesus our Lord, grace be unto you, the special good will and favor of God. Grace be unto you, unmerited favor.”

Someone said years ago, “Grace is God giving us what we do not deserve and mercy is God giving us what we do deserve.” And we have peace with God. We are reconciled to God through the blood of his Son. And we have peace of conscience. Our sins are all forgiven. Grace and peace rest and assurance which causes us to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and to say with Job, “I know, I know my Redeemer liveth. I know he lives,” and to

say with the apostle Paul, "I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." It is a rest. It is a peace of conscience. It is a peace of heart. It is to trust the Lord.

Christ said, "You come to me and I will give you rest. And if you take my yoke upon you and learn of me you will find rest, continually in me rest."

All right. Look at verse two. Paul says, "To the Church at Thessalonica in God the Father, in Christ Jesus the Lord, grace and peace be unto you. I give thanks. I give thanks to God always for you, always for you making mention of you in my prayers for I remember without ceasing, I remember three things about you without ceasing. I remember, first, your works of faith. I remember, secondly, your labor of love. And I remember, thirdly, your patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, faith, love and hope."

Where have you heard those three words before? Well it is mentioned that way frequently in the Word of God. They three chief graces. He said, "I remember these three chief graces I found in you, works of faith, labor of love, patience of hope."

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13, "Now abideth faith, hope and love, these three. But the greatest of these is love."

And notice this. He says, "Now abideth, abideth faith, hope and love." Every true believer in every true believer there is faith in Christ. There is hope of eternal life and there is love for Christ in his people and these three chief graces abide in them. They are not occasional feelings. They are not fancies or fads that come and go. This is the character of God's people. These are the evidences of faith. These are the chief graces, faith, hope and love. And they abide.

Now abideth in you faith, hope and love.

Well, let's see these evidences of grace, these three chief graces. Paul says this. "I remember your work of faith, your work of faith."

What is faith? Faith is to believe God. That is right, to believe God. We go back to Genesis again and read in Genesis 15 the first mention of this imputed righteousness through faith. The Scripture says that God took Abraham out under the stars and showed him the stars and said, "Count them." Abraham couldn't count them.

God says, "So shall your seed be, as the stars of the sky."

And the Scripture says, "Abraham believed God." He believed God. He didn't just believe in God. And he didn't just believe there is a God, but he believed the Word of God. God spoke to Abraham, gave him a promise and Abraham believed him. That is what faith is. It is to believe God. Not to believe there is a God. The devil believes there is a God. It is to believe him. It is to believe his Word.

Over in Romans 4:21 it describes this faith of Abraham. “Abraham being fully persuaded, absolutely confident that what God promised, what God said, God was able to perform. Therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.” And that is what he said in Genesis 15. The first time when God called Abraham he said, “Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him for righteousness. He believed it.”

How do we know Abraham believed God? What is faith? It is to believe God, to believe the Word of God, that what God promised he was able to perform. How do we know Abraham believed God? His works prove his faith. His works are evidence of his faith. God said to him, “Abraham,...” Abraham was 75 years old when God called him. He said, “Abraham, get out of your Father’s house and go to a land I will show thee. And Abraham left not knowing where he was going. God called him. He believed God.

God said, “I will give you a land.”

He believed it and he went out not knowing where he was going.

God said to Abraham, “You will have a son.” Abraham was 100 years old. His wife was 90. But he said, “You will have a son. You will have a seed. And through him all the nations of the world will be blessed.” And Abraham believed God. He didn’t know how, but he believed God. He believed God was able to perform all that he said.

And then one day God told him to take that son to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him on an altar as an offering for sin. And Abraham believed God. He went to that mountain and laid that boy upon that altar believing God. And even so this is what Paul is saying to the Church at Thessalonica. “I know your works of faith. Your faith is believing God and your faith is evidenced and proven by your works.”

James says that over and over again. “Faith without works is dead.” Faith that is in profession only and word only cannot save. You see, believers do not work to be saved, but believers who are saved and who know God and who believe God work because they are saved, because they know God, because they believe God. They act on that faith.

So that is the reason they...Paul is saying this church here, “I know about your works of faith.”

And then secondly he said, “I remember your labor of love.”

There was an interesting encounter, labor of love. There was an interesting encounter between our Lord Jesus and Peter the apostle of Christ. When our Lord had risen from the grave and he appeared to the disciples down by the seashore and they came in and our Lord had prepared a meal and they sat down and ate the meal. And the Scripture says in John 21:15, “And when they had eaten, when the meal was over our Lord said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me more than these?’”

Now what was our Lord talking about, “Do you love me more than these?” Was he talking about the other disciples? Certainly not. Our Lord never pitted the love and obedience and belief of his people against one another. He didn’t say, “Do you love me more than John or do you love me more than James?” He says, “Do you love me more than these?” More than what? More than these boats, more than these nets, more than your profession, more than your way of life, more than your way of making a living, more than your family, more than your friends, more than all your earthly possessions and your earthly pursuits. Do you love me more than these? This is the question of questions, the question of questions. Do you love me?

“Peter, do you love me?”

You know, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 16, “If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ let him be accursed when the Lord comes. “So, do you love me, Peter, more than these things, more than these things?”

And our love for our Lord is to be greater than our love for any thing on earth or any one on earth.

Now the word “more” is important. When Christ said, “Peter, do you love me?” He said, “More than these. Do you love me more?”

The word “more” is important. We are to love our parents. We are to love them deeply. We are to love our families. We are to love our friends. We are to love our wives and children. But the Scripture says, “He that loveth father, mother more than me is not worthy of me. He that loveth husband or wife more than me is not worthy of me. He that loves these things of the world more than me...” That is the key. That is the key.

Our Lord said, “Peter, do you love me more than these things?”

And Peter answered, “Yea, Lord. Thou knowest I love thee.”

And this happened three times. Our Lord said, “Do you love me?”

Peter said, “Yea, Lord. I love thee.”

Christ said, “Feed my lambs.”

He asked him again, “Peter, do you love me?”

He said, “Yea, Lord. Thou knowest I love thee.”

“Feed my sheep.”

He asked him a third time, “Peter, do you love me?”

Peter said...he was grieved that the Lord should ask him three times if he loved him. He said, "Lord, you know, everything. You know I love you."

And Christ said, "Feed my sheep."

This is proof of your love for me. That's what I am saying, see?

Works of faith, Abraham's works proved his faith. Abraham's works were evidences of his faith. And Peter, being commanded by the Lord to feed his sheep, to provide for his sheep, to care for his sheep, to give his thoughts to the well being of his sheep, was saying to Peter, "If you love me you will do this." And just as Abraham's works were proof he believed God, our labor of love is proof that we love Christ and love his people.

And we are interested in their welfare, interested in their wellbeing and it is proof of our love for Christ Jesus.

Listen to these Scriptures, Ephesians 4:32. "Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another as God for Christ's sake forgave you."

John 13. Christ said, "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. By this shall all men you are my disciples that if you have love one another. By this shall all men know, by this shall your love be proved, by this they will see evidence of your love for me, if you love one another."

You see, John wrote in 1 John four, "He that loveth not knoweth not God." He said, "If a man say I love God and hates his brother he is a liar and the truth is not in him."

So Paul says to this church at Thessalonica, "I remember constantly your works of faith. You believe God. And the proof and evidence of your faith in God is your faithfulness, your generosity, your willingness to help others. And I remember your labor of love. You love Christ and because you love Christ you love one another and you provide for one another and help one another."

Recently a young man in our church found out that both of his kidneys were diseased and he needed a kidney transplant and he needed it very, very soon. And one of his beloved friends, a brother in the church volunteered to donate a kidney. And they went to the hospital recently in Cincinnati and they took both kidneys from the man with the diseased kidneys, took them out and they took a kidney from his friend and put it in him. And both of them are doing fine.

Now why did this young man, why did he make this monumental sacrifice? Why did he do this? To be saved? He knows and loves Christ. Did he do it to gain God's favor, God's mercy? No. He already had God's favor and God's mercy. Did he do it to win eternal life? No, he already had eternal life. He is a child of God. Both of these men are children of God.

Why did he make this awesome monumental sacrifice? I'll tell you one word. Love. It was a labor of love. It was a labor of love. He did it for his friend. He told me. He said, "My scripture concerning this effort is Proverbs 17:17, 'A friend loveth at all times and a brother is born for adversity.'"

Here these three were faith, love...here is the third one, now, hope. Paul said, I remember constantly your works of faith, evidence of faith, your labor of love, evidence that you love God and love one another. And the third word is hope, hope, hope. Your patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is hope? What is hope? Well, in 2 Thessalonians the Scripture talks about a good hope for grace. It talks about a blessed hope. It talks about a living hope. Because he lives we live. It talks about a sure hope. Because Christ died for our sins and then God's mercy is sure to us. A sure hope, a blessed hope, a living hope and a good hope.

But our Lord Jesus Christ himself, listen to his from 2 Thessalonians 2:16, "Our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father who loved us has given to us everlasting comfort and a good hope through grace." It is a good hope through grace.

And here are five things it will help you to understand to hope. It is a hope in his person, in his blood, in his righteousness. God hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

So our hope is in Christ, in his blood, in his righteousness. Secondly, our hope is in Christ, our great high priest. We have a high priest. He doesn't offer sacrifices here on earth or go into a tabernacle made with hands, but into heaven itself. And he doesn't offer animal blood, his own precious blood on the mercy seat of glory to make atonement for our sins and he is our advocate, he is our intercessor. He ever lives to make intercession for us. So we have a mediator between us and God. It is Christ. That's our hope.

Thirdly, it is hope in his return. Christ said, "I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place I will come again and receive you unto myself because where I am there ye may be also."

Hope in his blood, in our great high priest, in his intercession, our Mediator and in his return and in his promise. Look at Revelation. He said in Revelation 21, "I'll be their God and they will be my people and I will wipe away all tears from their eyes and there will be no more sorrow, no more pain, no more tears, no more crying, but the former things are passed away. I make all things new." Our hope is in his promise. God has promised and God can't lie.

Fifth, our hope is being conformed to his image. The Scripture says, "Beloved, behold what manner of love God hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God. It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know this. When he shall appear we shall see him and we will be like him. And he that hath this hope purifieth himself even as he is pure."

So that hope what does it produce? Now faith produces works. Love produces labor of love, providing for one another, helping one another. What does hope produce? It produces patience, patience. It is called the patience of hope. Works of faith, labor of love, patience of hope.

Noah believed God and waited 120 years for God's promise to come to pass.

Abraham believed God. God promised him a land. He never in his life ever owned a foot of land. But he lived in tents with Isaac and Jacob and wandered. But he looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. And that hope was fulfilled when God called him home.

Job...you have heard of the patience of Job. Do you know what Job said? He said, "Thou he slay me I will trust him. I'll trust him.

Oh, he said, "I know my Redeemer lives and he will stand on this earth. One day I will see him for myself in my flesh."

And David said, "Listen." David said, "I would have fainted. I would have fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of God in the land of the living. I say to you, wait on the Lord, wait on the Lord. He will strengthen your heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord."

Let me tell you something. The grace of God and the peace of God is ours through Christ and by his grace he gives us faith to believe. He gives us love shed abroad in our hearts. And he gives us a blessed hope. And this faith is not in word only. It has works of faith. And this love, the labor of love and this hope, patience, waiting on his return because he said he would come back and receive us.

Now if you want this message it is called "Evidences of Grace." And I will preach next week, the Lord willing, from this same chapter. I am going to pick up right where I left off at verse four and preach again on this subject, "Evidences of Grace. number two." This is "Evidences of Grace, number one." And on the other side of the tape, "Evidence of Grace, number two," from 1 Thessalonians chapter one. Well, until next week, may God bless you everyone.