

PHILIPPIANS—WEEK 1
The Fellowship of the Gospel: Phil. 1:1-11

For the next 10 weeks, we will be walking through the book of Philippians. This short epistle, written by the Apostle Paul, is packed full of instructions on how we as a church can reach our full potential for Christ. Chapter 1 is all about being a focused church—a church that puts first things first. Of course, as Paul reminds us in 1 Cor. 15, the thing that is of primary focus should be the gospel. What separates our church from any other social organization is that our fellowship is rooted in the gospel. If our fellowship is rooted in something other than the gospel, it is doomed to failure. But how do we make sure that our fellowship remains rooted in the gospel? Why is it so important?

The key to our fellowship, and really the linchpin for this entire epistle, is found in verse 2. It is a phrase that Paul includes in all of his epistles, so it is easy to overlook. Verse 2 begins with the words, “Grace to you and peace.” In using these words, Paul is not merely coming up with a snappy greeting for Christians. Paul is preaching a message of unity. In combining “grace” and “peace” in a single greeting, he is combining two worlds who had been at odds with each other and bringing them into fellowship. Let’s look at these two words to see how important this greeting is.

Grace:

Grace (*charis* in the Greek) was a traditional greeting in the Greek, or gentile world. While this word carried with it the ideas of beauty and charm, it also carried with it the idea of love. Yet, this was no ordinary, passive love. This word was meant to convey the idea of love in action. Paul was reminding his readers of God’s active love in their lives. Paul was reminding them that God’s grace was not just at work in their past (saving grace), but it was also at work in their present (sanctifying or enabling grace). Grace would enable these believers to do what they could not do on their own.

Peace:

Peace (*eirene* in the Greek) was the traditional greeting of the Jew. It developed from a root word that conveyed the idea of joining together again that which had been separated and divided. In Scripture, it was never used in just a negative state; it always conveyed the positive as well. In other words, Paul was not merely praying the readers would have the absence of trouble; he was also praying they would have the presence of everything that was good. Thus, peace was understood to be a state of rest in God that transcended circumstances.

Thus, in this greeting Paul was reminding the Philippians of their very special place in society. The Church was to be a beacon of fellowship that transcended race, nationality, social status, or circumstances. Rooted in the transforming power of the gospel, the Church was to bring back together what had been divided, and it was to do so by being the living embodiment of love in action.

Questions:

1. Why is it so important that we have both grace and peace?
2. Currently our society seems bent on division rather than peace. Even believers are being divided by politics, theology, etc. How does “grace and peace” help us maintain fellowship and unity?
3. Are there any areas in your life where you fail to display grace and peace? According to 1 Cor. 15, what’s the key to regaining these keys to the Christian life?