

Grace and Peace

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[0 : 00] O Lord, our gracious God, we would indeed echo the words of the psalm we have been singing to express our delight at coming to gather in the presence of God and to anticipate your blessing and to anticipate that you will take your word and apply it to us by your Holy Spirit.

O Lord, our God, we know that it is our great privilege to come to worship the Lord, our privilege to recognize in our hearts the importance and the meaningfulness of doing so in such a world as we live in.

And we pray that our gathering here tonight will have been noticed by many others, for we know, Lord, it is a testimony to the world that your people have a desire and do come together to worship the Lord.

We pray that that will be impressed upon others, that they will come to ask themselves why they are not here and why we are, and come to see things in the light of eternity.

We give thanks, O Lord, for every opportunity that you give us to worship you, to draw near to you, to serve you, to call upon you in prayer and sing your praises, to be with your people and to testify to the world around us of your grace and love and mercy in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

[1 : 23] And we thank you again, Lord, that we come before you claiming his merits and coming to avail ourselves of the certainty that we are made acceptable in him as we come trusting in him.

We thank you for all that is provided for us in the gospel, for the richness and the depth and the breadth of all that we find provided in your salvation, that meets us at every point of our need, even in every detail and all its extent.

Lord, we give thanks that you are the God who has provided against our need and who has provided so richly in your grace all the things that we were entirely unworthy of and indeed were worthy only of their opposite.

We thank you tonight that we gather as members of your church, that we gather as part of your worldwide church, and we thank you for the links that you provide in your grace and by your spirit that unite your people together.

We pray that we may value those, that we may prize the unity of your church, that however much we may differ in certain points from one another, whether locally here or with others that worship you elsewhere.

[2 : 41] Help us, we pray, to unite around those things that are basic to salvation. Help us to unite around the person of our Savior and around our triune God.

We pray tonight, Lord, for the help of your Spirit. Looking back upon the help that you have been to us right through to this moment, we acknowledge, O Lord, that you are always our help, that we have no one else to turn to, nor would we want to when we come to find ourselves in our deepest need.

And we thank you for your promise that you will meet with your people, that you will provide them with that sustenance and grace, that you will indeed, as you promised through your apostle to the Philippians, that you would supply all their need according to your riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Help us then, Lord, to draw near to you with confidence. Enable us to resist the pull of the world on our mind and upon our persons. And help us through each day, O Lord, as we find so many temptations to be drawn away from our security in Christ and to be drawn away from a life of true and beautiful fellowship with Him.

Help us, Lord, we pray, to overcome them, to rise above such temptations, and help us to do it not only with a sense of duty and a sense of what is right or wrong, but a sense also of beauty, the beauty of our Saviour and the beauty of a living relationship with Him, and the beauty of that hope that you give to your people.

[4 : 22] So remember us, Lord, in these days as a congregation of your people. We thank you for the encouragements you continue to give us and for the ways, O Lord, that you are able to do far more abundantly than we can ask or think.

We thank you for all that you have been to us through these difficult months and for all that you continue to provide by way of encouragement and by way of being led of your spirit and of your truth.

Bless us then tonight as we come together this week. Bless those who are online as well. We thank you for the numbers that join with us in worship through these means. O Lord, we pray for them and we pray especially tonight for those who cannot be here.

for various reasons, whether it be illness or other reasons that keep them. We pray that you bless them and if they are watching and taking part with us in the service online, we ask that your blessing will be with them richly.

Bless all those who are ill of our number. We know, Lord, that there are many even in recent days who have come to be known to us and are suffering in different ways.

[5 : 32] We pray that you would help us to take the time individually to remember them before you by name.

We ask that you would lay your good hand upon them. And if it please you, Lord, grant that those who are seriously ill especially will be turned by your grace back into health and strength.

And where that is not going to be the case, O Lord, be with them, we pray. Grant to them your peace in their hearts, your preparation of them for all that lies ahead.

Remember, too, tonight those who miss loved ones, those for whom this time has been a time of remembrance, of anniversary, of the death of loved ones.

We pray for them and ask that your rich blessing will console them and guide them and continue to uphold them, Lord, we pray, and strengthen them. Remember those who have lost loved ones in recent times, too.

[6 : 32] Be near to them, Lord, we pray. And as we find so much in our world of suffering and of pain, both locally and elsewhere, Lord, as these things come to our notice, help us to look to you as the man of sorrows, the one who is acquainted with our grief, who has come into this world so that you would come to bear the sorrows of your people and be familiar with all that is true in human experience as we come through these difficult times.

And we remember, too, O Lord, tonight those who carry your word into difficult circumstances in the world. Remember those who have gone on mission endeavors in different parts of the world.

Again, we commend our own Muriel to you in Cambodia, praying for her protection, praying that you would bless her, O Lord, and her witness there and testimony. And keep her safe, we pray.

Grant your blessing to us now as we commend to you ourselves and our loved ones, our families, our acquaintances, all that we commit to you, Lord, that we have contact with and have knowledge of from day to day.

Be pleased to be our God and our guide, our stay and our strength through life. Hear us, Lord, we pray and accept us and pardon our many sins and cleanse us. For Jesus' sake.

[7 : 51] Amen. Amen. Amen. I'm going to just take a wee moment to speak to the children, especially if they're online, as well as to ourselves, I'm sure.

As somebody once said to me, not in this congregation but elsewhere, when I was asking him, are you able to follow any of the sermons, any of the teaching? Well, he said, I understand your children's addresses, which probably didn't say much for the rest of what I was saying.

But anyway, children's addresses are designed mostly for children, but I'm sure we always find something in them. Now, roundabouts. When you're driving, you're inevitably nowadays going to come across roundabouts.

Roundabouts much bigger than those we find locally here in Stornoway or in the surroundings of Stornoway. And I have to confess, I'm not very good or very confident with the really big roundabouts, ones that you get with two or three lanes in them and have goodness knows how many exits from them.

And even though the lanes are marked as you come into them, it's still a bit of a dilemma for me to make sure that I'm actually in the right lane to begin with and keep to that as I go through these large roundabouts.

[9 : 06] And very often I'm told, you're in the wrong lane. You need to move into the other lane. And just in a recent break with the family in Livingston, Donna, my wife, was telling Joanna, our young granddaughter, who's not yet six, she's at that stage when everything's of interest.

And she was telling her how useless I was with roundabouts and finding my way around these roundabouts. So it just happened one day we were going into the town centre in Livingston and she was sitting in her seat in the back seat, Donna was in the front.

And of course we came up to a large roundabout just coming towards the centre of town there. And I heard this little voice from the back seat saying, now Shen, focus.

You need to focus. So I duly did focus. And then I thought, well, that's a very good biblical emphasis too, isn't it?

Focus. God very often calls out to us from Scripture, now focus, or through some providence or other, focus. You need to focus. And when I was thinking about this afterwards, I thought of a few Scriptures where you find that sort of thing very clearly emphasised.

[10 : 19] For example, Psalm 25, where the psalmist is saying, one thing I desired and will seek to obtain, that I may dwell all the days of my life in the house of the Lord, that I might behold or gaze at His beauty.

There you see is the psalmist with one thing on his mind. He's focused on this one thing, to know the beauty of the Lord and to do that. He wants to be found where He's worshipped.

That's what we're doing this evening. And if you're joining us or as children online, that's what we are actually doing. We're coming together in the Lord's name, hopefully to appreciate once again His beauty coming across to us as God teaches us from His Word.

Or if you go to Philippians chapter 3, you'll find the Apostle Paul there giving his testimony and telling us about what he is doing at that moment in his life. And this is one amongst other things. This is what he says, one thing I'm doing, forgetting those things which are behind, and pressing forward to those things ahead of me, I press towards the mark for the prize of God's high calling in Christ.

[11 : 31] Jesus, now Paul is saying he's not forgotten about everything that was in his life up to that moment. But what he's saying is, I'm not letting the things that are now past in my life interfere with my progress as I push on as a Christian.

And as young people, that also is something you must do. Even the disappointments, the things that perhaps you'd rather not have happened in your life that make you sad, you've still got to say like Paul, well, these things are now behind me.

They happened. I can't change that. But I can ask God to change my mind and to give me the grace, the help that I need to press on in following him.

Or you might think of two places in Bible where instead of one thing I do or one thing I seek, we find seek first.

Matthew chapter 6, seek first, Jesus says to the disciples, seek first the kingdom of God. You see, he was saying to them, you've got all these things around you and many people are actually living for them.

[12 : 32] What we're going to eat, what we're going to be done, what we're going to possess, things that you find in this world of a material nature, financial nature. But he says, seek first, focus on the kingdom of God.

And then all these things that you need, God will actually give to you if you need them. Seek first. So for your children as well, that's important. That's what you need to put first.

So do we as adults as well. And one more where the focus comes across strongly in the Bible, and that's in Colossians chapter 3, where the apostle is saying, if you then are risen with Christ, or you could say since you have been risen, raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is.

Seated at the right hand of God, set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth. Seek those things which are above.

And for you children and young people, there are so many attractions in this world that would want to draw you away from putting first the kingdom of God and also the things which are above, the things that belong to heaven, that belong to your salvation.

[13 : 45] So here's the word for this week. Focus. Keep your focus. Don't lose your focus. Keep your mind on Jesus.

As the writer to the Hebrews said, running the race set before us, looking unto Jesus. So now we're going to say the Lord's Prayer. And although we're saying the Lord's Prayer very often, I hope you and I are going through it in a way that's really praying it, rather than just reading it as a scripture, which it is, because we wanted to begin with that our children, young folks, would learn it off by heart, which many of them, of course, have already done.

So we'll just go through it and pray the Lord's Prayer together. Amen.

We're going to turn now to read God's Word as we find that in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, reading chapter 2. And then once we've read through chapter 2, we'll turn immediately to Philippians and chapter 1 at the beginning.

First of all, Ephesians chapter 2, where we read, And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

[15:52] But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved.

And raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

But we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called a circumcision which is made in the flesh by hands, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

[17:08] But now in Christ Jesus you who were once afar off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. And we pray that God will follow with his blessing that reading of his word.

And if we turn now please to Philippians chapter 1, we'll begin again reading at the beginning there, chapter 1, verse 1. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and the deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, we began a study of this letter to the Philippians last time, and on Lord's Day evenings we want to try and maintain that study as God allows us through these Sunday evenings.

[19:11] And in Paul's day, letters would have almost exactly the same sort of introduction, ordinary letters I mean, letters that people sent to one another, and very often they would just have three words in Greek, which would just be the name of the person being written to, sorry, the name of the person writing, the name of the person or people being written to, and then greetings, just a word, greetings.

And Paul pretty much keeps to that custom when he wrote his epistles to these churches and to these people like Timothy and Titus that he wrote to, as you find now in the New Testament.

Except there is a difference. Instead of saying, Paul, to so-and-so, greetings to you, just as here he says, Paul and Timothy, to the saints, grace to you.

He has substituted the word greetings, although in a sense this is really greetings as well, but he has substituted the word for greetings with a much deeper and a much more meaningful word for him and for these Christians, the word grace.

Grace and peace to you in Jesus Christ from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now it's interesting that Paul here doesn't refer to himself as an apostle.

[20 : 36] Apostle. He most of all, mostly refers to himself as an apostle, such as to the Romans, and in other letters as well, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

And then he follows on with the rest of the salutation. But he doesn't do that here in Philippians. He doesn't do it in the Thessalonian letters either, or to the letter he wrote to Philemon.

Although in the Thessalonian letters, he does refer to himself as an apostle in the body of the letter, but not in the introduction. In any case, in Philippians, there's no reference to him being an apostle, and various views have been put across as to why that is.

Probably because he was so well known to the Philippians and well loved by the Philippians as the Philippians were by him. There wasn't the same need to emphasize or just mention that he was an apostle.

Apostle, and of course, in the likes of Corinthians, in the Corinthian epistles, you find Paul writing to a church that was problematic, a church that really were divided, a church that were in many ways listening to people who were saying, this man, Paul, is actually not an apostle at all.

[21 : 44] He's not a real apostle. He's not an authentic apostle. So they were challenging his apostleship. So it stands to reason that he would want to emphasize his apostleship to the likes of the church in Corinth.

Here to the Philippians, he doesn't do that. He doesn't need to stress his authority to them. They have recognized it. They continue to recognize it, and they continue to hold him in such high esteem.

Now, we saw last time in the introduction here, we focused mainly on the words servants of Jesus Christ and also saints in Christ Jesus.

And we saw something of the importance and the meaning of the word servants there, the bond service that we have in our relationship by faith to Christ, and also saints, how that means people whom God has taken and set apart for his service, and how that applies to this church in Philippi, as indeed Paul mentions elsewhere as well.

And so tonight, we're following on into verse 2. Now, it's not always going to be a verse-by-verse study, I assure you. We're not going to actually just take each verse as it comes.

[22 : 56] There'll be, next time God willing, a larger passage or a longer passage of a number of verses together. But it's important to take where the emphasis is in the epistle and try and put that together and keep it together for our own benefit.

So we're doing that tonight, where we're seeing that he also includes the overseers and deacons amongst those that he writes to, and then to all of them, both those and the rest of the people in the congregation in Philippi, he says, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So just a word, first of all, at how he introduces or refers to the leadership of the church in Philippi under Christ himself, of course. And then we'll look at these two words, grace and peace, as they come from the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So here is Paul referring to the leadership of the church in Philippi, and he's not just referring to the elders as overseers, he's including in the leadership the deacons as well.

So we'll need to look at what these mean very briefly. Overseers is really the same emphasis, the same meaning, the same function, the same office as the word elder as it's used elsewhere in the Bible.

[24 : 20] You remember in the New Testament, you remember in Acts chapter 20, that the elders from Ephesus came to meet with Paul, knowing that they were not going to see him again.

He gave them some last words of advice. But when he spoke to them and reminded them and taught them again about what their function was as elders in the church, God, he said, has made you overseers.

It's the same word as used here, which in the older translation was somewhat misleadingly, at least nowadays, translated by the word bishops.

It really means an overseer, somebody who's set over a group or a congregation, and it's exactly the same person, the same people, the same function, the same office as you find in the word elder.

Think, for example, of Paul writing to Titus in chapter 1, verses 5 to 9. He says, this is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained in order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

[25 : 26] And he spoke about what was necessary to be an elder. If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

For an overseer, you see, he changes the word then to overseer, but it's obviously the same people. As God's steward, he must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

Then he says in verse 9, he must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also in rebuke, and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

So you can see so much crammed into these verses as he speaks about an elder as an overseer, someone that God has appointed over the flock, over the people of God, over the covenant people of God, so as it combines both rule and care.

That they have an overseeing function, but also a caring function, which is why they're referred to as pastors or shepherds, not just the minister who's pastor. The eldership is a pastorate.

[26 : 45] The eldership is a shepherding body of overseers, as God has placed them like that in his church. But there's also, as he wrote to Titus, the element of guarding the truth, because they have to be people who guide others in the truth, who teach others as they've been taught themselves.

And this is why he's saying they must hold firm to the trustworthy word. They must not be led a word away from the word itself as foundational. And the word, as they were taught it, in other words, as the apostles themselves passed it on.

Not as those who came subsequently might think it would be better changing this or that. It's as they received it, so that they may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine.

Somebody asks you, why do you have elders in your church? What's the function of elders in your church? Well, your first response in that is because God has so required it.

This is something the apostles did in all the churches that were set up through their ministry. They appointed elders in these churches, overseers in these churches, charged by God with overseeing the spiritual well-being and health of the congregations, the churches that were set up.

[28 : 05] That's what your elders are for. They are there to be overseers, to be shepherds, to be people who devote themselves to the ministry of the word, both practically in terms of it being taught.

So that's the first thing that Paul means with the word overseer. He's writing to the overseers as well as to all the saints, to those who are overseers, and then deacons.

Now, deacons, again, we're not going to spend much time on this. It's worth a study in itself, of course, but deacons arose out of a sense of need that the church faced, as you find that described in Acts chapter 6.

Let me just read these verses at the beginning of Acts chapter 6. Now, in these days, when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint was made by the Hellenists, that's the Greek-speaking section of the church.

A complaint arose by them against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. It's a very, very important practical issue that was laid upon the church at the time to care for those who were in need, particularly widows who were so vulnerable in those days.

[29 : 25] And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, It's not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Now, it's important, firstly, to notice that the deacons were not chosen chiefly because of their practical abilities.

They were chosen chiefly because they were men full of the spirit and of wisdom, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom. That is what really lay at the bottom of their qualification to be deacons who

were going to be involved in a practical ministry.

But they weren't to look first and foremost, the church wasn't to look first and foremost at the practical gifts. They were to make sure that they were spiritually qualified first. And then they would look at the more practical side of things.

And, you know, that's still how it is with the diaconate, with the deaconship of the church, especially as we ourselves see it. Because deacons, as they arose out of that need of the time and came to be set as an office in the church alongside of those who are elders and overseers, they were given the charge of distribution to the poor.

[30 : 53] That was their primary concern, to really meet practically the needs of those who are poor, who needed financially or practically to be given help.

And that's really still the function of the diaconate. I know today we've got a whole lot of other things. If you were actually at a deacon's court, you'd find a whole lot of different topics that needed to be dealt with, items on the agenda to do with practical matters.

But very often, and of necessity, they're to do with buildings, with health and safety, with all sorts of things that are related to those issues. But still, it's the case, the primary function of the diaconate is practical ministry to those who are in need.

And deacons really should be at the very forefront, spearheading the work of any congregation in terms of meeting the needs of those who are poor or those who are in debt or those who have fallen on hard times.

That's what the diaconate is for. The eldership is to do more with the spiritual, the guidance, the teaching of the truth of God's Word.

[32 : 04] So he's saying, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons. But you do notice this word, with, because it's important that he's saying, with the overseers and deacons.

Why is that important? Because it is itself a term of unity. It's a word that expresses the unity of the congregation in Philippi or the church in Philippi, made up of these saints, along with the overseers and the deacons.

They're all together. They form this church, this congregation in Philippi. And there's a reminder there both to the leadership and also to the congregation of a number of things.

It's a reminder to the leadership. We're just dealing with this, seeing it's come up in the process of going through the letter. That's one of the benefits of taking a letter. The letters were designed to be read by those who received them as a church all the way through in one sitting.

But we have the benefit of having them as part of Scripture. We can study them in detail. But it's still important to regard it as one body of writing from beginning to end. And here is Paul reminding, firstly, the leadership and then also the congregation of what is true of them as a church.

[33 : 26] He reminds the leadership that they actually belong to the fellowship, that they belong to the church. They are not outside it. They are not separate from it. Although they have a certain amount of authority to rule and to be overseers, that does not give them in any way a sense of being other than servants of Jesus Christ.

And you might call, as one person put it, they have what can be called a companionate leadership. It's not a leadership that leaves the rest of the people behind.

It's not a leadership that places themselves above the rest of the people as if there was somehow or other a gradation in importance or in significance. Because, as one person put it, one of the commentators here, Alec Motier, he puts it this way, both leaders and led.

And this is really an important, if you look at Paul's letters, also Peter, one of the important things that they put across is the relationship between those who lead and those who are led.

Because unless that's healthy, it's really going to result in all sorts of difficulties in any congregation. And this congregation that we belong to, it's important that the relationship between those who are led as the congregation and those who lead as overseers or in the diaconate, that it remains healthy, that it's kept healthy, that we look after it.

[34 : 56] This is what Motier wrote. It involves putting the welfare of the body of Christ before all personal advantage, success, or reputation.

It is the leadership of those who are content to stand among the saints as those who serve. See, the fact that they are servants doesn't interfere with the leadership.

The fact that they are leaders does not mean that they are no longer servants of Christ or servants even of the people that they have oversight of.

So that's a reminder really to us as leaders in the congregation, as overseers and elders in the congregation. This is where God has placed us. This is our privilege.

This is where God has given us this responsibility and privilege of looking after this flock and of putting them before our own personal advantage.

[36 : 14] That's the reminder to the leadership. That's the reminder to the congregation that they have overseers, that overseers are appointed deliberately by God, that they are answerable in their own terms to these overseers, that the overseers have authority not to be abusive with the authority, not to be of the kind of proud stance that somehow or other would just say, look at us, we're actually here and you just do as we say.

No, but they're still the authority of office that God has built into the office of the eldership. It's not because of the people themselves that belong to the eldership that they have that status.

It's because of what God has made, the office itself. And the people who occupied then carry that office, that authority of office. So he's reminding the congregation, look, when you're thinking of just pleasing yourselves, if he was going to say this, there were problems in Philippi.

We'll see some were actually disputing over different things with each other. Some had fallen out with each other. Some perhaps were insisting on their own way. If you go to chapter 2, you can see that Paul is addressing something like that by reminding them of Christ and of the way he became a servant.

And he's reminding the congregation here in Philippi, you have overseers. You are in your own, in the sense in which it is true of your relationship to them.

[37 : 46] You have accountability to those who are responsible to look after your welfare. And so God has given them that place. 1 Thessalonians, for example, chapter 5, Paul writes, We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Be at peace among yourselves. Significantly, he added that, be at peace among yourselves. You see, again, the importance of the relationship of those who lead to those who are led.

Or in Hebrews chapter 13, verse 17, this is what the writer said, Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls. As those who will have to give an account, let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be no advantage to you.

I need not tell you that the world and the generation in which we live has really moved a long, long way from willingness to submit to authority other than just our own as individuals.

The individualism that has come and grown over these decades in our society, if not longer, has come to a head in our day as well, where people are very reluctant to accept authority, even if it's a rightful authority, whether it's in government or local authority or in the church.

[39 : 12] There's a very obvious reluctance. There's a very obvious insistence on the part of some, I'm just in charge of my own life. I don't need actually a session to tell me what is right and what's wrong.

I don't need an elder or the eldership to actually try and guide me in the things of my morality. Well, God is saying that's not the case. And it's to our advantage that we see the order that God has placed in his church, an order that involves all of God's people being saints in Christ Jesus and overseers, elders over them, and deacons alongside serving in the practicalities with a recognition on our part that that's God's will, that's God's order, that's God's choice.

We haven't invented this, and therefore we can't really depart from it without being untrue to our God. What we have to do is make sure, whether we're those who are being led or those who are seeking to lead, that we always act in accordance with the will of Christ, with the example of Christ, and with the purpose and aim of pleasing Christ in all that we set out to do.

So that's why he's saying, Paul and Timothy, servants to all the saints in Christ Jesus with the overseers and elders.

And then he goes on, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now these are, when you think about what the Bible says as we've just dipped into it, the responsibilities of the eldership, of the overseers and of the deacons, and indeed of those who are led in the church, the saints in Christ Jesus, the responsibilities in that, what's required of us in that, they're not small.

[41 : 08] They're significant. Where are we going to get the ability to carry through in the tasks that are involved, whether we're leaders or whether we're among the led? Well, the answer to that is in verse 2.

Grace to you, and you is plural, grace to you all, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Just in way of passing, although it's important, I don't want to keep you too long.

I know it's warm. You're sitting with masks on, and I really am concerned not to abuse the privilege of the pulpit in keeping you too long. But it's important that we see here what he's saying in regard to Jesus.

The word from here is only used once. So it's from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It covers both the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what Paul is actually doing effectively is uniting God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ under the one deity, if you like, the deity of Jesus Christ.

[42 : 19] The Godhood of Christ is brought out very fully in that because what he is saying there about God the Father as one who would give grace and peace. That can only come from God.

And therefore, when he's including the Lord Jesus Christ in that, it just goes along with God the Father as the source of this blessing. The source of the blessing that is God who is both the Father and the Son and, of course, the Holy Spirit as well.

And what a change there is in the Apostle Paul, a writer of this letter to the Philippians. And when you could look back over his life and how he explains or goes over what he was like previously before Jesus changed his life.

You remember when he was before King Agrippa near the end of the book of Acts in chapter 26. He says to Agrippa, this is really what it was like for me.

I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

[43 : 37] And I punished them, often in all the synagogues, and tried to make them blaspheme and enraging fury against them. I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

And now here he is saying to those that he would once have despised, grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is placing Christ firmly alongside of God the Father. And for a Jew like Paul, a zealous Jew, a man brought up in the tradition of the Pharisees who would have zealously protected the name of God from being associated with any form of idolatry, to have put the person of Jesus into the Godhead as one worthy of worship, must have meant for Paul a huge change in his outlook, in his heart.

And that's, of course, what it was when Jesus met him and changed him. Well, he's saying, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, you know that grace is the word that the New Testament uses for the undeserved favor of God to sinners like ourselves. It's free. It's the unsought love of God giving us the exact opposite of what we deserve as sinners.

[45 : 07] And you remember 2 Corinthians 8 and verse 9 how it speaks of Jesus that he became poor though he was rich with the richness of being God.

He became poor by coming into this world and taking our nature. And as we'll see in chapter 2, eventually becoming a servant, even obedient to the death of the cross. Well, he became poor. Why? What's the purpose? What is it all getting to? What's it all for? That you, by or through his poverty, might be made rich.

You are rich tonight as a Christian. You have riches that cannot be measured in any human terms. You have riches in Christ Jesus with which you have the richness of eternal life in your possession. and it's come about to you through the poverty of Jesus. He made himself of no reputation. He took the form of a servant for you and I to be elevated to the riches of salvation and glory.

[46 : 18] And it's not just any poverty that he made himself liable to and took to himself. The very degradation of the cross is what Paul has in mind. That's what it took to make us rich.

To make us who were so poor that we had absolutely no claim upon God or his blessing. But Jesus has changed all that.

God in Christ has changed all of that. And that's why he now says grace to you and peace. Well, the first fruit you might say of grace is peace.

And how beautifully John captures that for us near the end of his gospel in chapter 20 verse 19. On the evening, this is after the resurrection of course, on the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, peace be with you.

[47 : 26] This is the risen Christ, the victorious Christ. Then what does he do? Well, as if to just say, if you're asking yourselves, where has this peace come from? How has it come about?

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The evidence is of his suffering and of his death. Here he is on the other side of death, risen from the dead, but he wants them to absolutely grasp this, the peace that he's bestowing, that he's announcing over them, that now properly belongs to them as his people, he has bought it and this is the cost of it.

He showed them his hands and his side. What is that peace? Well, we would need a lot more time. It's peace with God. Romans 5, 1 to 2, where God becomes our best friend.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is your own best friend? We often refer to our spouses or somebody else if we're not married or even if we are, others might be friends with us as well.

Who is our best friend? How do you describe your best friend? Somebody asked you tonight, tell me, who's your best friend? Who's the friend really that's more precious to you than anyone else?

[48 : 47] Well, surely, surely, surely for you the answer is as it is for this man, this apostle, Jesus Christ, through whom we have come to be friends with God our Father, to make God our best friend.

Is that true of yourself? Is that how it is with you? Do you know Jesus as your best friend? Have you come into such fellowship and relationship with Him?

Have you come to trust Him? Have you come to accept Him as He's offered in the gospel message? Have you come to really receive Him to yourself? I'm not asking, have you just come to know about Him?

Do you know more about Him tonight than you did before? That may be true, but the real question is this, is He your best friend? Have you come to be placed in friendship with God through Him? Has your enmity and the hostility between you and God as is between God and every sinner by nature, has that come to be taken away by your turning to Christ?

If not, tonight, here's the emphasis here before you in this wonderful scripture. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[50 : 01] This peace that we read about in Ephesians 2 because it's not just peace with God, it's peace between human beings as well. and that passage is between Jews and Gentiles.

In other words, the peace that Jesus gives is a peace that meets with and overcomes racism which is so prominent in our world. There is Paul saying in Ephesians 2 that He has made through the cross peace not just with God for Jew and for Gentile but peace between them so as to make of the two one.

through the cross. Dennis Johnson, one of the commentators on this epistle writes and I'll close with this.

God designed us for togetherness and created us for community but indifference, isolation and competition have seduced us into thinking that freedom is found in our individualism and looking out for number one, keeping options open, avoiding long-term commitments.

Paul and Timothy challenge our self-defensive individualism, throwing their arms wide to embrace all the saints in Christ Jesus. None of us stands alone.

[51 : 26] Each needs the support and accountability of the rest of the body of Christ. Paul is very much aware that God had already given the Philippians peace and grace.

But what verse 2 is a reminder to them and to us is that God is of an unchanged mind. not just that they had received grace and peace but God goes on giving it.

He's not changed his opinion of what they are in Christ Jesus. Nor will he for you or for me. May God bless these thoughts on his word to us.

Let's conclude from Psalm 85 in the Singed Psalms. Psalm number 85 and that's on page 113 verses 8 to 13.

I will hear what God the Lord says to his saints he offers peace but his people must not wander and return to foolishness. These verses to verse 13 I will hear what God the Lord says.

[52 : 44] I will hear what God the Lord says to his saints he offers peace but his people must not wander and return to foolishness.

Surely for all those who fear him his salvation is at hand so that once again his glory may be seen within our land love and truth have made together righteousness and peace and grace and grace righteousness looks down from heaven from the earth spring faithfulness to the Lord will give and our land his fruit will bear righteousness will go before him and his royal we prepare as usual please after the benediction if you just await for guidance from those who are at the doors just to keep your distance on the way through now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always Amen