

Grace Be with You. Amen.

Let us turn to our Bibles to 1st Timothy chapter 6. 1st Timothy chapter 6, verse 22. Verse 21, excuse me. I was on 2nd Timothy.

1st Timothy chapter 6, verse 21. It's actually the latter part of verse 21. Let us listen attentively to the word of God.

Grace be with you. Amen. Let us pray.

Here in this short, simple benediction from the Apostle Paul, God above, may we see the great depth, the width, and the breadth of the graciousness of the long-suffering and the great mercy and the majestic grace bestowed upon us, God Almighty. May you continue to humble us as well as strengthen us, God, to follow you all the days of our life, we pray. Amen.

This simple prayer for that is what it is, grace be with you, is powerful and deep. These words are often at the end of Paul's epistles, or at least the sentiment is. Places like 2nd Corinthians 13, 14 you will recognize.

It's the longest of his benedictions. It's a well-known prayer, because that's what a benediction is, a good speaking or a good word, a prayer. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen. What these differently worded blessings he has at the end of all his epistles, minus one, shows the way to understand what Paul has in mind. The grace he writes about is a divine grace.

It's not man's mercies. The prayer is to be with or to you, the people of God, a desire for more help and mercy. And the object of the prayer that is the who he's praying for is the Christian reader, indeed all Christians.

The last point is explicit in Ephesians 6, 24 where he ends the epistle. Grace be with all those who fear our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

Certainly Paul wants non-believers to be saved as well. He wants them to have the grace of our Lord and Savior. But these particular prayers at the end of the letters were for the saints of God.

They're for additional grace for their walk in this world, a grace that is comforting for their battle. To better understand that good prayer, this benediction of the saints, let's explore the Lord's grace from the birth of our spiritual life into eternity. And so I'm going to explore it in three ways here.

Grace in conversion, grace in justification, and grace in sanctification. So that we can, as we delve into these wonderful truths and doctrines of the word of God, meditate upon and I pray be moved all the more of the wonderful mercies of our Lord and Savior.

Grace in Conversion

The first point, grace in conversion, grace being unmerited favor, things you do not deserve.

And we live in a culture where we think we deserve all kinds of things. And in one sense we do, to be sure. We have given political rights and the like.

At the end of the day, as we all know, we deserve nothing before our God and Savior. He didn't even have to give us this nation, but he did. But grace here in conversion, that unmerited favor with respect to the saving of our soul.

When I use the word conversion here, it can be used in a broader or narrow sense, historically, although over time it becomes in systematic theology more specific. I'm using it in a broader sense here to make it more simple for the sermon, and that is the beginning of spiritual life to include both regeneration, repentance, and faith. Regeneration, repentance, and faith was called by Calvin, for example, conversion.

It's just your whole life the life of conversion in that sense. Regeneration, of course, is more specific here, and that's what we deal with first. That's being born again, John 3, right? Talking to Nicodemus.

Don't you know you're a leader in the church of God? You don't know these things? The implication being you should know these things, even without the New Testament. That you must be born again from the power of the Holy Spirit, from on high. That's what we call regeneration.

A spiritual life given to us by God Almighty. And it's expressed there in sundry ways in the Old Testament, the prophecies in particular, showing us the greatness of grace, the wonderfulness of God's mercy in Christ Jesus, and the covenant of grace, and these promises way back in Deuteronomy. The first five books, the Pentateuch of the Old Testament, written down by Moses, so about 1200 or 1300 BC, way back then, we read of regeneration.

The language is different in the Old Testament, but the effect is the same. Therefore, he's talking about the same thing, isn't he? Deuteronomy 30, verse 6, and the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, that you may live. Circumcision is a sign, a picture of regeneration, of God cutting off sin and the effects of sin in your life, and bringing redemption so that you would have a heart.

It's to this end, to love the Lord your God. This is why he does it. And it's God who does it.

It's divine. And he has this purpose in bringing about this new spiritual life promised of the Old Testament, and given to the saints, of course, like David. He indeed had the fulfillment of this in his life, for example.

And again, in Jeremiah 31, 31, the highlight against the backdrop of the growing apostasy of the Old Testament church, the Jewish nation, and how there is so much rank idolatry and violations as we see in the afternoons through Hosea, right? Kind of depressing after a while. This is crazy stuff. God gives more promise that he is not finished with his people.

Jeremiah 31, 33, we read, Again, that's why it's important to remember the context and the growing disobedience across the nation of the Old Testament church. And how God's response is not, I give up on y'all. Rather, I'm giving you more promises.

I'm going to forgive your sins. But there in verse 33, he gets specific and uses a different language than service. He says, which again is used elsewhere in the Bible.

I gave you just the one verse in Deuteronomy 36. Here in Jeremiah 31, To write on their hearts is again a divine act. It's initiated and empowered by the Holy Spirit in particular.

And you are a passive agent. You don't give birth to yourself. The Spirit of God gives birth to you.

John 3. In the language of the Old Testament, it uses this different description again, but the same effect, which means the same thing. That the law will be written on their hearts. The law is now then taken as a sweet thing, as a good thing, instead of something to violate and to break as they did over and over again.

It's a picture of external power. Regeneration is outside of us. It's not a manipulation of emotions and the way the preacher pushes upon your heart.

It's an effective power. It will come to pass. Men's stony hearts will become softened hearts, as we'll see in Ezekiel, for example.

And again, it's a picture, like in Deuteronomy, of passivity. It is not the Jews themselves, we ourselves, who are regenerating ourselves, bringing about our own spiritual birth. But God does it Himself.

New Testament language here, I already mentioned John 3. Let me go ahead and read it more specifically here in this text. In John 3, verses 1 and following, we read, There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with them.

And Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Do not marvel that I said this to you. You must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes.

So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. Jesus parallels the work of the Spirit to like the work of the wind that you cannot control. You run across the wind out here, as we know a lot of times, it gets really worse out further east in many ways.

I remember driving down I-80 in Nebraska with ruling elder Harvey, and going into Nebraska the northwest side on the highway where four or five semi-trucks, 52 foot long trucks, laying on their side. The wind had blown them down. And they didn't know what was going to happen.

It was a sudden gust. It was a complete surprise. Otherwise, obviously they would have pulled over and stopped.

And that's how the Spirit of God works. And He has more power than pulling over a 52 foot truck. He has the power of God Almighty, because He is God Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, to regenerate souls, to bring them new life.

So they wake up and say yes to God and no to sin. By the time of the New Testament, as we all know, the Jews had reduced the religion of God to externality. The Pharisees were really good on the external, the visible, the things that you can see and do.

And Jesus brought them back home again and said, no, it begins in the heart. Of course there's externality. You've got to do some good works.

You've got to take care of one another. Those are external things that you do. But it begins with the heart.

You must be born again. Doing these actions doesn't bring rebirth. You have to have the rebirth to have these actions as God's people.

When Jesus corrects them, and it's in harmony with the Old Testament verses that I quoted, that God does it Himself. He sends the Spirit, we read elsewhere in Ezekiel, upon the dry bones in the valley. We are those dry bones.

Wherever His people were before they were saved were the dry bones. So that's regeneration, the more specific, narrow point of being born again. That starts in the mystery of God's power and His Spirit.

And that leads forth what we today often call conversion, more narrowly speaking. Repentance and faith. Repentance and faith.

A child born will do things reflexively, we say. They can't help but breathe, and they can't help but cry when they're born. And so you, being moved by the Holy Spirit of God, can't help but repent, and can't help but believe.

It's in your nature. It's what you're going to do. That's what it means to be born again.

It's the very breath that you breathe. What is repentance? Repentance is simply turning away from sin, having a different mind about sin, that it's wrong. It's wrong in my life, not just in the life of others.

And it is you who repents. The Spirit of God doesn't repent for you. God doesn't repent for you.

You are repenting. You have that frame of mind. You have those words, even if not in your mouth, certainly in your heart, that I am wrong, Lord God.

Have mercy upon me. What I've done is wrong and wicked. I hate it.

But even that itself is a gift of God. Repentance. 2 Timothy 2.25. So we're going to get there eventually.

As we finish out 1 Timothy, I'm going to 2 Timothy. Then I'm going to go to Titus. We'll see what happens after that.

2 Timothy 2.25. In humility, this is a description of God. In humility, correcting those who are in opposition. If God perhaps will grant them repentance so that they may know the truth.

If repentance is native, it's something that's easy to do that's part of the human condition outside of being saved, then this verse makes no sense. He's praying to God to grant them repentance because repentance itself is a gift or grace of the Lord God Almighty. This is more grace, more evidence of unmerited favor given to us.

As an aside, the word sometimes translated grace in the New Testament is also other times translated gifts like in 1 Corinthians. It's an interesting, because of course a gift, that idea there is you don't deserve it. It's an unmerited gift.

It's not just a favor in general in the abstract from the Lord God Almighty. He's given us concrete things like being born again, new thoughts and new desires. And other gifts as well.

Gifts that he has given and blessed the church with. So repentance is more evidence of grace. Grace be with you.

What kind of grace? Grace that brings about regeneration and conversion of repentance and faith. Faith again is trusting in God, relying upon him instead of upon yourself, upon your good works, upon your good intentions in one sense really. It's not your intentions as such it's what Christ has done for you.

Ephesians 2.8 tells us, I think you probably saw the pattern already, that too is a gift of God. Of his unmerited favor. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves.

It is a gift of God, not of works as anyone should boast. And if repentance is native to the human condition before they are saved, if faith is native to the human condition before they are saved, it's an easy thing to boast about, isn't it? Look what I've done. I have something the rest of you don't have.

I exercise my free will. And I repented and believed. Instead of crying out to God and saying thank you Lord for waking up my will that was in bondage to sin and to the devil and to the world.

So that I would respond to you with faith and repentance, which are both a gift of the Holy Spirit. Your spiritual birth is from the Lord's mercy. We are called by him day by day to rely upon that mercy.

Because we are called not just at the beginning of our lives, sometime in your past, when you are awakened, you are aware. That's what we typically think of conversion more narrowly speaking. And therefore you repented and believed.

Regenerated, first. Repented and believed, second. You live the rest of your life in repentance and in faith.

You never stop it. And because you never stop it, that's a reminder again the Spirit of God is with you because it's a gift of God. Not just a gift he gave once, but he keeps giving and he's sustaining that gift in your life.

Grace in Justification

Next is grace in justification. Now, I could cover different particulars of the Christian life, but I'm just going to do these three points. Grace in justification.

Justification defined. It's when God pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight as our lawgiver. Pardons our sins and accepts us as righteous.

Not just simply forgiving our sins. Okay, you've done it. You repented.

I forgive you. It's over with. But more than that, accepts us as righteous in his sight.

That is a judicial declaration that we are perfect, but not perfect in ourselves, but perfect in Jesus Christ. Only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. So it's not only just a forgiveness, it's a declaration.

That declaration of righteousness and perfection before God's law is not your own, but an alien. That is a foreign righteousness. Jesus Christ's righteousness.

Not your inherent righteousness, because you have none. Imputed to you. That is a declaration in God's law courts.

I have declared you by Jesus' mercy as a cloak wrapped about you. God no longer sees your righteousness, but sees the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. And that is received by us by faith alone.

Not by your baptism, not by the Lord's Supper, not by good works. Again, not even by sincerity of the heart per se, but more precisely by faith and faith alone. Trusting upon him.

Because faith doesn't look to itself, it looks to outwardly. It's supposed to look outwardly. Towards the object of faith, which should be our Lord and Savior, our great God and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

God, in other words, declares sinners perfect in Christ. Think about that. God declares sinners perfect in Christ.

There's no way they can boast about why they're getting to heaven. It's all a grace from first to last. If we dig into that idea, God declares sinners perfect in Christ.

We see this as a summary of Romans 4-5 and other verses. Romans 4-5 we read, but to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly his faith is accounted for righteousness. Who justifies the ungodly? God justifies the ungodly.

He is the he there. In verse 5. And we have that. Think about that in everyday jurisprudence.

You don't want a judge who justifies, that is declares before the courts of the land, oh, he's an upright good citizen when he's not. But God can do that. In a way, our judges could never do that.

And that's because the imputed righteousness given to us, what's called a forensic righteousness or judicial righteousness, a declaration that we are perfect before the law of God. But that perfection is not our own, but Christ's. Because he's our advocate.

He represents us. Because there's a first Adam, there's a second Adam. And that second Adam did what the first Adam could never do.

Satisfied of the demands of God's law in our step. And the greatness of grace and justification is seen in that phrase. God justifies the ungodly.

That is certainly unmerited favor, isn't it? Mercy we do not deserve ever, ever, ever. And we go a little bit into justification and realize that it's God through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit who pardons and declares the demands of the law fulfilled for us. He is the active agent, we say, and we are the passive agents.

Nothing that we did. Even faith itself is a gift of God and it simply receives what Christ has done for us in justification. Yes, I believe Jesus has died for me.

Simple as that. When I speak with my mouth in one sentence. Lastly, grace in sanctification.

Grace in Sanctification

The wonderful grace of God when he says, grace be with you. He doesn't mean something very narrow. He means from the very beginning, Paul does, of your conversion to your justification, your right standing in God's law courts by faith in Christ alone, by faith alone.

And then lastly here, grace and sanctification. We go through this doctrine of what it means to grow as a believer. The inward renovation of our mind, will, and emotion, and our conscience, and even our imaginations by the Spirit's work within us.

The omnipotent power therein is sanctification. It's not to be confused with justification. That's a judicial declaration.

This is your everyday life. Justification never changes. Once you are justified, you are always justified.

You're going to sin, yes. You're going to fall, yes. David fell, but he was still justified.

God justifies the ungodly, not the perfect. And your sanctification is that inward working that comes out in your hands and your actions of growing and becoming more like Jesus. Becoming holy and taking his law seriously.

What? That law written on your hearts. Jeremiah 31. Now, what's interesting about the doctrine of sanctification, that is, you are sanctified and justified in your life, and you're both you who are justified are also sanctified, you who are sanctified are also justified.

In your sanctification, it's less obvious sometimes to see the greatness of grace. What do I mean by that? In this sense, you can't see justification. You don't feel it.

What you have is the Word of God and you believe. But you can see good works, because that's part of sanctification. We're called to follow the Lord, the fruit of the Spirit, the obedience to the Ten Commandments.

You can see the good works. So you can imagine seeing good works, now you're going to start thinking about, I did the good works, look how wonderful I am. And unlike justification, sanctification is overt that way.

It's faith working through love, we read in Galatians. Love of our neighbor and love of the Lord. So there's an activity.

We are an active agent in a way we are not in justification. We are active in our sanctification. We are willing and doing His good pleasure.

Philippians tells us this. It's a domain of obedience. In justification, we flee our obedience.

We don't look to that. Those are filthy rags of wretchedness. In sanctification, we embrace obedience as the fruit of the work of the Spirit within us.

And so easy to fall into resting upon our works therein in the context of our Christian walk. And also, through a truncated theology, we can be confused about the greatness of grace, the marvelousness of God's mercy in our holy walk, our sanctification, if we have a truncated theology or teaching that our free will, as some call it, is independent of God. That our sanctification is about us walking with God only.

The Spirit of God is waiting for us to let Him do something in our life. But we should know that even our desire to follow Him, this too is a gift of God. For it is He who works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure.

It comes from the greatness of grace therein. That you want to follow Jesus. That you want to reject the influence of the sins of the world around you.

It's because of grace already working in your life right then and there. He's sustaining you in your desires, in your wants, in your thinking, in your doctrines, in spite of your sins that you struggle with. So He's working in and with us as promised there in the picture of the Old Testament saints.

The active agents already touched upon this. There's always God, of course, specifically the Holy Spirit. We're not left to our own devices.

He's not like He brings us a new birth, gives us with repentance and faith. He says, okay, you're on your own. See what you can do with that.

Some churches teach that. Something like that. Like a child dropped off at birth.

Now you're on your own, kid. Get to work. But He's working in and around us and through us.

Every step we take. You are an active agent as well in the path of holiness. We get this from Ezekiel 36 in the picture thereof, describing regeneration again with yet a third metaphor.

The first one was circumcision. The second one was the hand or chiseling on the heart, the law of God, which you would desire holiness. And here in Ezekiel 36.26 we read, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.

I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you what? A heart of flesh. And I will pour my spirit within you and cause you to walk on my statutes and you will keep my commandments and do them. There's a lot going on there in Ezekiel 36.

I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh. A heart of stone. Stone is what? Hard, non-responsive, resistant.

But a heart of flesh is responsive, pliable, and does not resist God's truth and His spirit. That's the picture there of a new heart. Of a fleshly heart.

Not a heart of flesh in the sense of a literal new heart. Got a new heart for my doctor here. But rather of the soul, the mind, the will, the emotion has been transformed and renewed by the Spirit of God.

Specifically in verse 27, I will put my spirit within you. There he makes it more explicit what was implicit in Deuteronomy and in Jeremiah 31. I'm working within you, God says, in an intimate way that I don't do with anything else in creation.

And cause you. It's very interesting in the Hebrew is they have a specific way of saying that. Cause you.

God is the engine and the power in your life that you are indeed walking in the statues. Yes, you don't walk perfectly. Yes, you will fail because again what? You are a sinner saved by grace.

By unmerited favor. But you will walk. You have been walking.

And God will continue to preserve you. It's not perfect again. But God is greater than our imperfections.

And it's every day, the grace of God and our sanctification. Our decisions to do the right thing, to love the saints, to love the church, to take care of one another, take care of our family. These things that we do what? With respect to God in Christ.

Cause we know lots of neighbors do lots of good things, but they don't do it with respect to God. They don't care about God. God's not on the horizon in their lives, but He is on our horizon.

He's always in our lives, in our eyes, in our minds. And that is sustained by God every day. 2 Corinthians 6.2 in our sanctification.

To show again the marvelousness of God's mercies upon us. The greatness of grace. This grace to be with us.

To be with you. Therefore we do not lose heart, even though our outward man is perishing. Yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

The spirit of truth and life who energize you, regeneration, doesn't leave you alone, but is with you day by day. Yes, even hour by hour. Not just on Sundays, but through the remainder of your life, your entirety of your life.

He is molding you, purifying you unto righteousness. These, this, and those things show, and this is just a small portion of the different things I can highlight of God's grace being with you. This is the idea of what Paul has in mind when he says grace be with you.

Specifically in sanctification of course, cause once you're justified you're always justified. But even then, God's grace sustains that. He doesn't renege on that promise.

Same with regeneration. Grace be with you. God will never take back that regeneration of being born again.

Oh, well, I changed my mind. Never in a thousand years. A million years for eternity.

This is the focus of Paul's consistent use of the benediction in almost every one of his epistles. That God in Christ, by the power of the Spirit, the Trinitarian benediction implied, explicit there in 2 Corinthians 13, that he would grant you more grace, more power, more growth in sanctification. He's not just waving his hand trying to say something nice.

He has something concrete in mind. That you would become more like Jesus. That your sanctification become more holy.

And it's not a special benediction either, brothers and sisters, that only Paul the Apostle can give. It's a prayer that all of us should have for one another. That grace be with you.

That God sustain you. That God purify you. The grace of the Lord God Almighty and his power and omnipotence will continue to sustain you.

And so I leave the same prayer for you. Grace be with you. And he says, amen.

That is, let it be so. May it be so. Always relying upon God's will.

So let us pray. Heavenly Father, may we contemplate your great love and grace poured upon us by the blood of your dearly beloved Son. That's effective on our lives by the power of the Spirit of God.

May such meditation move us to walk in the path of obedience and love to our neighbor. And above all, love to you we pray. Amen.