

2 Thessalonians (13): “The Lord of Peace”

Introduction:

Today, Lord willing, we will complete our study of Paul’s second epistle to the church at Thessalonica. The Apostle Paul gave a concluding salutation, which is recorded for us in 2 Thessalonians 3:16 through 18. Paul first expressed to them his desire, perhaps even prayer, that the Lord of peace would give them peace (v. 16a). Paul then expressed his desire that the Lord would be “with” them (v. 16b). This is followed expression of Paul’s desire for them is followed by his authentication of this epistle as having come from his own hand (v. 17). And then Paul’s final word is an expression of his desire that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ would be with them (v. 18). Here are the concluding words of the apostle:

¹⁶Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all. ¹⁷The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. ¹⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (2 Thess. 3:16-18)

We might address these matters in an order perhaps more conducive to our understanding. We will consider the contents in this way: first, we will speak of Paul’s self-authentication of this epistle; secondly we will address the Lord of peace as the giver of peace; third we will say a brief word regarding Paul’s desire that the Lord would be with them; and then lastly we will say a few words about the grace of our Lord Jesus being with His people.

I. Paul’s self-authentication of his epistle (3:17)

We have spoken of this matter before when the apostle was alerting the church to beware of receiving letters falsely attributed to his authorship. Paul had warned the church about those who taught the wrong teaching that the second coming of the Lord Jesus was an immanent event, that it would happen very soon. Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff these words:

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, *or a letter seeming to be from us*, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and ⁴the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. (2 Thess. 2:1-4)

Paul was always contending with those who sought to discredit him and his gospel message. False teachers commonly followed the apostle to a city that he had recently evangelized and where he had established a new church. These heretics would come into the new assembly of Christians and corrupt the gospel message that Paul had proclaimed. They taught “another gospel”, sometimes were quite successful in their efforts. This is what had happened in the churches in the region of Galatia. Paul wrote of false teachers who had corrupted his gospel among the churches of Galatia:

⁶I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we

have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (Gal. 1:6-9)

These heretics, these troublers of the churches, were Jewish men, some of whom claimed to believe on the Lord Jesus as the Messiah. But they taught that salvation was not through faith in Jesus Christ alone, but through faith along with works of righteousness, works of the law. Paul's epistle to the Galatians was Paul's major corrective of this heresy. In his epistle he contrasts his gospel, in which people are saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ, and those false teachers who were teaching that salvation is obtained through faith in Jesus Christ in addition to performing "meritorious" works of the law.¹

This error was in some ways quite subtle, but the heart of their teaching was blatant heresy. It was subtle, for it is true that Christians are to order their lives according to God's law as a rule of life. Paul wrote elsewhere, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12). He taught that the law of God as directed by Jesus Christ and as He empowered His people with the Holy Spirit, continues to serve as the rule for Christian living. Paul could write of himself as a Christian,

²²For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! ***So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God***, but with the flesh the law of sin. (Rom. 7:22-25)

But though the law continued to be the standard of God's righteousness for the believer, through the death of Jesus Christ the law as a covenant, as a basis of relating to God as mediated through Moses to Israel, was no longer in force. Prior to the death of Christ the law of Moses as a covenant had set apart the ethnic Jewish people, the nation of Israel, as the people of God. Gentiles were excluded from this privileged relationship. But upon Israel having transgressed the law, having broken their covenant with God, incurring His wrath, the Jews became as guilty as the Gentiles who knew not God. Through Jesus Christ, therefore, the former law of the Mosaic covenant between God and Israel had been rescinded. As long as that legal covenant was in force, the Gentiles were strangers to God's promises and aliens to God's people. But then through faith in Jesus Christ God could be just in having mercy on Gentiles just as He could have mercy upon Jews.

After the Lord Jesus died upon the cross and rose from the dead to become Lord, Israel was reconstituted under a new covenant. "Israel", also called "the commonwealth of Israel" or "the household of God", is now comprised of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ. We read of this in Ephesians 2:11ff.

¹¹Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹²remember 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. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of ***the household of***

¹ It is very important that when one reads Galatians the Paul's repeated reference to the "law" (32 times) has to do with the Mosaic law as a covenant, which God instituted at Mount Sinai but set aside at Calvary. Even in Galatians, however, the law is a standard that is maintained by the Christian who is empowered by the Holy Spirit, who lives motivated by love for God and for the brethren. Galatians 5:14 reads, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph. 2:11-22)

But these false teachers had corrupted Paul's gospel. They taught the people that they needed to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. But then they taught that faith alone was not enough. They taught that believers in Jesus Christ were also required to keep the Law of Moses *as a covenant of works* in order to be saved. In other words, they taught that through faith in addition to doing the works of the law, people were saved from their sins.

These false teachers were relentless in their efforts to discredit Paul, distort his gospel, and convert Paul's converts to themselves and their teaching. And apparently these false teachers even resorted to writing to Paul's churches claiming to be Paul himself, but these letters contained their corrupt doctrines. In order for Paul to protect these churches and assure them that his letters were authentic, Paul signed his epistles with his own hand.

Paul had commonly dictated his letters to a scribe, or secretary. On occasion these secretaries may have inserted a personal word. Paul's scribe for the epistle to the Romans inserted these words, "I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord" (Rom. 16:22). And so, in order for Paul to authenticate his letters, he would take pen in hand and write a few words at the end of his epistles, so that their recipients could be confident they had before them an authentic Pauline epistle.

Paul indicated this practices in several places. Paul wrote at the end of 1 Corinthians, "The salutation with my own hand-- Paul's" (1 Cor. 16:21). At the end of his epistle to the Galatians, he wrote, "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!" (Gal. 6:11). Here is reference to "large letters" probably speaks to very large writing. I believe that this reveals Paul's chronic problem with his eyesight. And then here in 2 Thessalonians 3:17 Paul wrote, "The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write."

II. The Lord of peace as the giver of peace (3:16)

We read in 2 Thessalonians 3:16 Paul's desire for these Christians in this church: "Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way." Let us first consider our Lord's title, "the Lord of peace." We will then consider what it is to experience His "peace always in every way."

A. "The Lord of peace"

Paul makes reference of "the Lord of peace." Now there are a number of occasions when the Scriptures refer to "God" as "the God of peace." Here are examples of this description of our God:

Romans 15:33. "Now *the God of peace* be with you all. Amen."

Romans 16:20. "And *the God of peace* will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."

Philippians 4:9. "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and *the God of peace* will be with you."

Hebrews 13:20f. "Now may *the God of peace* who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

1 Thessalonians 5:23. “Now may *the God of peace* Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

But though “the God of peace” is a common appellation (designation) of God, the phrase, “the Lord of peace”, is found only here in 2 Thessalonians 5:16.²

On most occasions, the reference to “the Lord” is a reference to Jesus Christ. But sometimes it may be a reference to God the Father, or God as the holy trinity. Earlier in the chapter Paul use “Lord” specifically for Jesus Christ. This is probably what Paul intended in verses 1 through 5, which reads,

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of *the Lord* may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you,² and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.³ But *the Lord* is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. ⁴And we have confidence in *the Lord* about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. ⁵May *the Lord* direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

Yes, I think Paul’s reference to “the Lord” here in verse 16 is a reference to Jesus Christ. **William Hendriksen** thought so. “The Lord of peace is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is he who established peace through the cross.”³ But others believe that here “the Lord” is a reference to the one God, the Holy Trinity, or at least possibly so. As **James Moffet** once wrote:

κύριος (*kurios*) is probably, in accordance with Paul’s usual practice, to be taken as Jesus Christ, but the language of verse 5 and of 1 Thessalonians 5:23 makes the reference to God quite possible.⁴

The word “Lord” (*kurios*) as a title of Jesus Christ speaks to His deity. Jesus Christ is God. **Κύριος** (*kurios*) is the Greek word that the translators of the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament) into Greek used to refer to Jehovah. In most instances when the word, **κύριος** (*kurios*), or “Lord”, is used in the New Testament, the deity of Jesus Christ is being asserted.

Paul calls our Savior, “the Lord *of peace*.” Recently we spoke of the difficulty at times to interpret a phrase that begins with the preposition “of.”⁵ This phrase has a few possible meanings. “The Lord of peace” may speak of the Lord who is Himself at peace, or, “The Lord of peace” may mean that the Lord is the one who gives peace; in other words. This latter meaning is clearly set before us. The context makes this clear. Again, the verse reads, “Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way.” The Lord is the one who is able to impart peace to His people, for He is the Lord who is at peace with His people. He has the authority to grant peace and bestow peace on His people.

Now when we consider the Lord as the Lord of peace, we should understand that He is not the Lord of peace to all people without distinction. The Lord is the Lord of peace to His people only. He only gives peace to them who are in a state of peace with Himself. And His people, who are now in a state of peace with Him, were not always so. Every one of us at one time was in a state of war with our Creator, whether or not we were aware of our standing before Him. We were in need to be at peace with God, but the way of

² In fact the addition of words to describe “the Lord” is not all that common, with one exception. In the Holy Scriptures, the expression, “the Lord of hosts”, occurs 236 occasions in 226 verses of the NKJV.

³ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, in New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 2007), p. 207.

⁴ W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, James Moffet, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (William B. Eerdmans, 1951), 53f.

⁵ There is no preposition “of” in the Greek NT, rather, the idea is conveyed by the form of the noun. Nouns in the genitive case may be translated into English with the proposition “of.” See the appendix for a further explanation.

peace was not open to us. It would be necessary for God Himself to reconcile us unto Himself, thereby establishing peace between us. Let us consider this matter more carefully.

The blessing of peace can only be appreciated fully when we consider the state of the non-believer who is *not* at peace with God. We live in a world in which people will allow you to believe in any kind of God that you like, but if you say that you believe God is a God of wrath against those that are outside of Jesus Christ, you will be rejected and opposed. Paul declared, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). But what of those who are not justified by faith? They do not have peace with God, rather, the wrath of God rests upon him. John 3:36 reads, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." People who are outside of Jesus Christ are not in a state of peace with God. There exists *a state of war* between God and them. They are in need of reconciliation with God; only then may there may be peace between them.

Jonathan Edwards wrote of their dreadful condition in his sermon entitled, "Natural Men in a Dreadful Condition."

They are not only without God, but the wrath of God abides upon them... There is no peace between God and them, but God is angry with them every day. He is not only angry with them, but that to a dreadful degree. There is a fire kindled in God's anger; it burns like fire. Wrath abides upon them, which if it should be executed, would plunge them into the lowest hell, and make them miserable there to all eternity. They have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger. God has been angry with them every since they began to sin. He has been provoked by them every day, every since they exercised any reason. And he is provoked by them more and more every hour. The flame of his wrath is continually burning. There are many now in hell that never provoked God more than they, nor so much as many of them. Wherever they go, they go about with the dreadful wrath of God abiding on them. They eat, and drink, and sleep under wrath. How dreadful a condition therefore are they in! It is the most awful thing for the creature to have the wrath of his Creator abiding on him. The wrath of God is a thing infinitely dreadful. The wrath of a king is as the roaring of a lion. But what is the wrath of a king, who is but a worm of the dust, to the wrath of the infinitely great and dreadful God? How dreadful is it to be under the wrath of the First Being, the Being of beings, the great Creator and mighty possessor of heaven and earth! How dreadful is it for a person to go about under the wrath of God, who gave him being, and in whom he lives and moves, who is everywhere present, and without whom he cannot move a step, nor draw a breath! Natural men, inasmuch as they are under wrath, are under a curse. God's wrath and curse are continually upon them. They can have no reasonable comfort, therefore, in any of their enjoyments; for they do not know but that they are given them in wrath, and shall be curses to them, and not blessings. As it is said in Job 18:15, "Brimstone shall be scattered upon his habitation." How can they take any comfort in their food, or in their possessions, when they do not know but all are given them to fit them for the slaughter.

John Gill wrote of the wrath of God under which unbelievers exist and for their need of reconciliation with God.

First, by observing the character of the persons reconciled; which will show the cause, reason, and necessity of a reconciliation to be made; they are "enemies"; and in one of the texts referred to, they are said to be "enemies in their minds by wicked works": which is expressive, of the internal enmity there is in their minds and hearts; the carnal mind, as every man's mind is naturally carnal, is not only an enemy, but "enmity" itself, "against God" (Rom. 8:7), to the Being of God—wishing there was no God—to the nature and perfections of God, denying some of them, misrepresenting others, and framing him in their minds, as altogether such an one as themselves—to the purposes and decrees of God, which they cannot bear, and to which they insolently reply; and to the providences of God, they charge with inequality and unrighteousness: and they are inwardly and secretly enemies to Christ, to his person and offices; particularly his kingly office, being unwilling that he should reign over them; and to his gospel, and the

special doctrines of it; and to his ordinances, they care not to be subject unto: and so they are to the Spirit, to his Person, whom they know not, nor can receive; to his operations, which they deride and ridicule; the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to them: and they are enemies to the people of God, there is an old and implacable enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; the saints are hated by the world, because chosen and called out of the world; God's elect themselves, while in a state of nature, are hateful, and hating one another; Paul, a chosen vessel of salvation, was, while unregenerate, exceeding mad against the saints.

But, there is an external enmity, which appears by wicked works and sinful actions openly committed: which are acts of hostility against God, are contrary to his nature and will are abominable in his sight provoke the eyes of his glory, excite his wrath, and cause it to be revealed from heaven, and for which it comes on the children of disobedience; and all are deserving of it: sins are breaches of the law of God, render men liable to the curses of it, and to death itself, the sanction of it; they not only all with enmity to God, and show it to him, but set men at a distance from him; so that they have no communion with him, are far off, are without him, and separate from him.

But, men are not only enemies internally, and externally to God, but there is an enmity on the part of God to them; there is a law enmity, or an enmity declared in the law against them; they are declared by the law of God as enemies; traitors, and rebels to him; and as such God's elect were considered, when Christ died to make reconciliation for them; for it is said, "while they were sinners Christ died for them, and when they were enemies they were reconciled to God, the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:8, 10). Now the far greater part of those for whom Christ died, were not then in an actual sinful state, nor in actual rebellion and enmity against God; for then they were not in actual being; but they were considered as in their apostate head, as sinners in him, and so as rebels and traitors; as such they were deemed by the law, and proceeded against, proclaimed guilty, judgment came upon them to condemnation; they were, in the eye of the law, and in the sight of justice, viewed as enemies, and declared such: and this law enmity is what was slain by Christ, and removed at his death; and not that enmity that was in their minds; that was not removed by and at the death of Christ; that is removed at conversion, when the arrows of the word become sharp in these enemies, which bring them to fall under, and be subject to Christ; when they are made willing in the day of his power, to be saved by him, to submit to his righteousness, and to have him to reign over them: this is the work of the Spirit of Christ: there is a two fold reconciliation, one of which is the work of Christ, and was made at his death: the other the work of his Spirit, at conversion; when, by his grace, men are reconciled to the way of salvation by Christ; and both may be seen in one text (Rom. 5:10). If there had been no other enmity than what is in the hearts of men against God, there would have been no need of the sufferings and death of Christ to make reconciliation; but there was a law enmity on the part of God, and his justice, which required the death of Christ to take it away. Not that there was any enmity in the heart of God to his elect; that would be inconsistent with his everlasting and unchangeable love, which appeared strongly towards them at the time Christ died for them, reconciled them, and became the propitiation for their sins (Rom. 5:8,10; Titus 3:3, 4; 1 John 4:10). But they were, according to the law, and in the view of justice, deemed and declared as the enemies of God. So when the subjects of a king rise up in rebellion against him, there may be no enmity in his heart to them; yet they are, according to law, proclaimed rebels, and enemies to him, and may be treated as such, and proceeded against in due form of law; and yet, after all, be pardoned by him. There was, in some sense, a reciprocal enmity between God and men, which made a reconciliation necessary; and which was brought about by the bloodshed, sufferings, and death of Christ, when he slew the enmity of the law, and blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that were against sinners, so making peace (Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 2:14).

B. Reconciliation through Jesus Christ brings peace with God to the believer.

Reconciliation is a word that describes the cessation of hostility between two warring factions, resulting in peace between them. And how does this reconciliation take place? It can only take place when their former hostility and rebellion ceases and the justice of God toward their crime has been satisfied. God is at war with sinners and has purposed to punish them for their sins because they have violated His laws.

God's justice must be executed. His creatures must answer to the Judge of all the earth. The reason that Christians alone can escape the condemnation of this unbending, inflexible justice, is that Christ Jesus bore their punishment on their behalf, when He died on the cross. And so by Him, through faith in Him, they may be reconciled to God.

Reconciliation with God is only possible if God works reconciliation on behalf of His people. Thank God that it was His desire to do so and His commitment to accomplish this work on behalf of His people. God did so, of course through the death of His Son. We read in Colossians 1:19ff,

“For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, **having made peace through the blood of His cross**.²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight...” (Col. 1:19-22)

C. “The Lord at peace with His people, may impart peace to His people.

This was Paul's desire and prayer for these Christians at Thessalonica. He wrote, “Now may the Lord of peace Himself **give you peace always in every way**.” All disciples of Jesus Christ **may** enjoy a **subjective** peace with God. This is a **feeling** of peace or well being which God bestows upon His people. Not all Christians do always experience this peace, but all may. Philippians 4:6 and 7 describe this subjective peace.

In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6)

Our peace with God was secured through the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf. This peace is a fact. It is the state of peace which each of us who believe on Jesus Christ enjoy fully. This peace knows no degrees or diminishment. Nothing changes this fact: God is at peace with His people due to Christ. But distinct and apart from the believer's peace with God, the believer may come to experience to varying degree peace from God. Whereas our peace **with** God is in the realm of fact, our peace **from** God is in the realm of feeling and experience. And there are any number of factors may cause one's sense of peace to increase or diminish--whether or not one is prayerful or prayerlessness, obedient or disobedient, believing or unbelieving, knowledgeable or ignorant.

We are able to sense peace, or a tranquillity of soul, a settling of our guilty conscience respecting sin. Most of us probably did so when we were first converted, when we sensed our free and full pardon of sin through faith in the crucified and risen Savior. But the true Christian may experience this subjective peace at any time in his or her life if Scriptural principle and teaching is understood and followed. Paul wrote of this peace in Philippians 4:6 and 7:

⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

This subjective peace is available for the child of God regardless of external happenings or circumstances. This peace “surpasses all understanding.” The child of God may enjoy peace in the most terrible of situations that are enduring the most terrible of circumstances. And so, whereas the objective peace that we have with God, the state of peace between the believer and God, is always the same and is unchangeable for every true child of God, the subjective feeling of peace and well-being varies greatly between us. It varies for any number of reasons. Some trouble themselves because they have refused or failed to order their lives according to the means by which God gives grace to His people. As a result their sense of peace has been shaken, even removed for a time. May the Lord restore a sense of peace to any

troubled Christian here. May we each use the means God has appointed so that we might be in a position in which He will bless us with this grace of peace.

To Christians God in Christ gives assurances of this peace: *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”* (John 14:27). To believers in Jesus Christ God gives fresh manifestations of this grace of peace, as Paul wrote, *“To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

None others but believers in the Son of God who was born into the world to die for sinners, may rightly enjoy the peace of God in their souls. The unbeliever deludes himself that things are right between him and God. God is his enemy until he sues for peace through faith in Jesus Christ.

III. We are to desire and pray that the Lord would be with His people (3:16b)

Paul expressed his desire for these Christians, “The Lord be with you all.” Here “Lord” is probably a reference to the Lord Jesus.

Now there is a sense in which the Lord Jesus is always “with” His people. He is our God; we are His people, and nothing can separate us from Him and His presence. As we read in Hebrews 13:5,

“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

But there is a sense in which a Christian can be aware of the Lord’s presence with him/her. The Christian can experience an awareness that the Lord is with Him, to guide him, strengthen him, pardon him, comfort him, and commune with him. On the Christian may go through times when he does not feel that the Lord is with him, but rather distant from him, perhaps even alienated from him. And so, when Paul expressed his desire, “The Lord be with you all”, he was expressing his desire that the sensible presence of the Lord with all the blessings that come through that fellowship with the Lord, be realized by them.

Although the *indwelling presence* of the Lord can never be broken between the Lord and the people He has wrought salvation, enjoying that indwelling presence may vary from time to time with any one Christian. The Lord is able and willing to “manifest” Himself to His people in a greater measure than they currently enjoy. The degree of this blessing varies due to several factors. There are seasons when the Lord in His sovereign purposes may manifest Himself more keenly to the mind and experience of a Christian, but there may be seasons when He withdraws the sensible presence of His person, for reasons we will not address at this time. But the sensible awareness of His presence with us may be enhanced or hindered by our own belief and behavior.

Consider these words respecting this matter: Our Lord Jesus taught His disciples, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him” (Joh 14:21). Do you desire that God would manifest His presence and power in your life? Then be obedient to His laws, His commandments. And then Paul wrote to the wayward church at Corinth:

¹⁴Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

“I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people.”

¹⁷Therefore

“Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you.”

¹⁸“I will be a Father to you,
And you shall be My sons and daughters,

Says the LORD Almighty.” (2 Cor. 6:14-18)

We may adversely affect our experience and enjoyment of His presence we ourselves turn from Him and run with those who know Him not. May we seek Him and His presence among His people.

May “the Lord be with you all.” May He manifest His love and peace to us. May we experience the joy of His presence, the comfort of His presence, the assurance of His presence, the fellowship of His presence. May we pray to this end.

IV. The grace of our Lord Jesus with His people.

The final verse of Paul’s concluding salutation reads, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Paul not only desired the Lord of peace to impart *peace* to them, but he also desired that the Lord would grant His *grace* to them.

What is grace? Its basic meaning is *God’s favor toward people*. The word “grace” is sometimes used to describe God’s attitude or disposition toward an individual or a group of people. God has grace toward people. In this use of grace one could substitute the word, “kindness.” The gospel message itself is an act of God’s grace (a manifestation of His kindness), which He shows to all people everywhere.

The word, grace, is sometimes used to describe God’s *power* working in a person. God *gives grace* to people. Often times in Christian writings you will read about “a work of grace” in the life of an individual. God saves people by His grace while they are yet in their sins, having bestowed His grace unconditioned on the person’s state (e.g. Saul of Tarsus; cf. Rom. 4:4,16). God gives “grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). All responses to God are due to His grace working in us (Acts 18:27; Rom. 12:3; Heb 12:28). It is our responsibility to see to it we have this grace (2 Tim. 2:1)

The word, grace, is sometimes used to describe a *state* in which we stand. When we believe it was state into which we came (Rom. 5:2; 1 Peter 5:12). And now we are standing in that state of grace, as we must, receiving more grace as we are being saved. But further, it is something we must yet receive if we are to be saved (1 Peter 1:13).

We might consider the basic nature of grace. First, grace is unmerited (Rom. 3:24; Rom. 4:4; 11:5, 6; Gal. 5:4). It is independent of all merit and worth on the part of its recipients. But this only goes halfway. Second, grace is dis-merited by us, yet it is freely given to us. We not only do not deserve God’s favor, but we merit His wrath. If you stopped by a needy person and gave to him such things that he had need of, that would be an act of kindness. Had this man just insulted and abused you, that would be an act of grace. And third, grace is the magnanimous display and bestowal of God’s blessing on undeserving sinners. It is the imparting of everything that God is and has to His creatures.

We might, therefore, propose a biblical definition of God’s grace.

“The grace of God may be considered as displayed in acts of goodness towards his creatures, especially men; and is no other than his free favour and good will to men; it is no other than love unmerited and undeserved, exercising and communicating itself to them in a free and generous manner; which they are altogether unworthy of.” [John Gill from his “Body of Divinity” (18th c.)]

In short, we might say that grace is “the free favor of God that He has toward His fallen creatures through which He bestows upon them blessing.” God is the subject of grace. His creatures are the objects of His grace. Grace is the manifestation of the kindness and goodness and mercy and power of God to people.

There are two major forms of grace set forth in the Bible. Grace is often divided into two categories. There is the *common grace* of God and there is the *special grace* of God.

A. Common Grace

Common grace is the manifestation of the kindness and goodness and mercy and power of God to all people alike, whether or not they are Christian. God is a good God. He is good to all that dwell on the face of the earth. We are commanded to love our enemies. Why? “That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mat 5:45).

Everything that we enjoy as human beings is a manifestation of the common grace of God that He extends to His creatures, irrespective of who they are and how they regard Him. All we have, all that we do, all that we are, is due to the grace that He has given to His creatures. He gives life to all through grace. We are “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). He gives a quality of life to all peoples in that He gives health and wealth to the people of the earth. God governs their weather, graciously giving them seasons in which food may be grown. He sends the rain at needful times. He withholds it at other times (Cf. Amos 4:6-12). God preserves through His sovereign power a stable society. The reason that our country is not more wicked than it is not because people are less wicked than they can be, but because God is preserving society by restraining sin. God keeps people from sinning more egregiously than they would do by not removing His restraints upon them.

God in His common grace reveals Himself and His nature generally to all people. God has manifested Himself to all through His creation, in the conscience of men. He has in His common grace made His written Word widely available so that most of the world’s inhabitants have a resource whereby they might learn of Him. That we have His Word in our possession, that we are able to comprehend in our mind what is written is due to the common grace of God. In short, all that we have, all that we do, all that we are, is due to the grace that He has given to His creatures. We read in Acts 17:28, “*In Him we live, and move, and have our being.*”

But the supreme act of His common grace that He has bestowed upon this world is the sending of His Son into the world so that the world might know Him and be saved. God “so loved the world” in that He gave His only begotten Son” to die on the Cross. Any and all that come to Him in repentance and faith may have eternal life.

B. Special grace

Second, there is the *special grace* of God. Special grace, or as it is sometimes called, particular grace, is the grace of God that He shows and bestows upon the recipients of salvation alone. All of the benefits of salvation to us are of grace. We were chosen to salvation by grace. We were called to salvation by grace. God justified us through grace. We were adopted into God’s family by grace. We are sanctified in this life by grace. God keeps us through grace. We shall be glorified by grace. This is special grace that God bestows on His people alone. It is unique to them. The Apostle Paul desired that the Lord would grant His grace, this special, sanctifying grace, to be with His people.

Conclusion.

Often the letters of the New Testament open with a salutation, of “grace” and “peace.” Our epistle under study opened with the words, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess. 1:2). And here we have Paul’s closing salutation expressing the same desire, even prayer,

¹⁶Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way... ¹⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (2 Thess. 3:16, 18).

May our blessed Lord, the Lord of peace, grant us who believe His peace and grace.

May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace! (Psa. 29:11)

Appendix

Phrases that begin with the preposition "of"

In English the word “of” is a preposition, but in New Testament Greek there is no equivalent word. Rather, the Greeks would express the idea of this preposition by a special form of a noun. When a noun in the Greek text is in the “genitive” case or sometimes the “ablative” case, it is frequently translated into English as a prepositional phrase using the word “of.” It is important that we deal with this kind of prepositional phrase separately, because this little word conveys different meanings than other prepositions.

The preposition “of” defines or describes a word in relation to a verb or a noun. The fact that this phrase may be identified with a noun rather than a verb in a sentence reveals its unique character. The following meanings of the preposition are expressed by this preposition:

- 1) Description: “John came preaching a baptism *of repentance*.”
- 2) Relationship: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to be the sons *of God*.”
- 3) Apposition (meaning to put side by side); this is when the noun in the prepositional phrase is identified with the word it modifies: “And he received the sign *of circumcision*” (i.e. “which was circumcision”). “Taking the shield *of faith*.”
- 4) Partition: “A third *of the earth* was burnt up.”
- 5) Possession: “Paul and Timothy, bondservants *of Jesus Christ*.”
- 6) Subjective when a prepositional phrase beginning with “of” is related to a noun of action, the noun in the phrase emphasizes the source of the action: “And the peace *of God* shall keep your hearts and minds.” Also, “I long for you all with the affection *of Jesus Christ*”
- 7) Objective when a prepositional phrase beginning with “of” is related to a noun of action, the noun in the phrase receives the action: “I thank my God in all remembrance *of you*.”
- 8) Source: “that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power *of God*” (i.e. “the power that comes from God”).