

It's More Than a Greeting

II Peter 1:2

Please take your Bible this morning and turn once again to the opening greeting of Peter in his second letter to believers in Asia Minor. We are looking at verse 2 where Peter begins to stress the importance of knowing God.

Let's read verse 2 and then I want us to talk about three things. The more we know God, the more we understand and receive His grace and peace.

The abundance of grace and peace

The availability of grace and peace

The application of grace and peace

There is a connection between knowing God and His grace and peace.

I. THE ABUNDANCE OF GRACE AND PEACE

– v. 2a

Let's first talk about the word "multiplied" or "abundance". It is a mathematical term indicating a numerical increase. It is in the optative mood which stresses a sincere, prayerful wish for something to happen to someone else. In this case, it's to experience more of God's grace and peace. It's also in the passive voice referring to grace and peace coming from some other source. According to the verse, grace and peace come from knowing God. Even though Peter is the one expressing it, the originator or grantor of grace and peace is God.

The word multiplied is used in the Old Testament, for example, in Genesis 1:27 of the command given to Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply or increase in number."

In the New Testament it's used to describe sin abounding (Matthew 24:12); when the number of disciples (believers) had increased (Acts 6:1); and in a passage talking about generous giving, Paul reminds that God will "increase your store of seed

and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness" (II Corinthians 9:10).

In our verse Peter refers to the increase of both grace and peace. Both were common expressions used in Greek and Hebrew greetings. They used these terms in addressing a letter or in meeting someone on the street or in their home or at the market. It was a type of blessing that the person you were greeting would receive through the day.

Grace and peace are essential virtues. We begin with grace. I would suggest to you that the order is important. More than just a mere greeting, these terms demonstrate what is available to people in a personal relationship with God. Peter wanted to convey to them that in spite of what was going on they could experience genuine grace and peace. I would also suggest that without God's abundant grace we cannot experience His peace. Such an abundance of grace transforms our character.

A. Abundant Grace Transforms Our Character

We know grace to be God's unmerited favor toward us giving to us what we don't deserve. Grace is not based on anything we earn or who we are or by what we do. It is giving us His riches at Christ's expense. If a personal relationship with God was based on our performance it would not be His grace.

When we talk about the abundance of God's grace we look at passages like John 1:16 which refers to grace this way: "From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another."

The KJV says "we have received grace upon grace."

In the Message we read: "We all live after His bounty, gift after gift after gift."

Just as waves continue to roll on the shore one after another so waves of grace continue to roll onto the believer. In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Walvoord and Zuck write "The Christian life is the constant reception of one evidence of God's grace

replacing another.”

As we have come to understand from our study in I Peter, God’s grace is abundant for any situation we find ourselves in. Grace gives us the strength to endure the storms of life.

II Corinthians 12:7-10

Charles Spurgeon wrote “You will never find a bundle of affliction that does not have in it somewhere sufficient grace.”

Scholars have speculated about the circumstances surrounding what Paul was encountering at this point in his life, but one thing is for sure, whatever it was, God told him that His grace would be enough to get him through. Can I get a witness?

There is no lack of people blaming God for His lack of compassionate action in tragedies. I think people who continually call God out like that have never experienced the grace of God or don’t care to. They would rather have an excuse to be mad at God.

Paul says that he would rather boast about being weak in order to experience Christ’s power because when he is weak in himself he is strong in Christ and it’s because of God’s grace.

When we experience more and more of the grace of God we experience more of the peace of God. You may ask how you can know if you are experiencing the grace of God and I would say, that if you have a genuine peace in the trial you are going through then you are experiencing the grace of God.

My Dad had a Dr. visit two weeks ago to see a specialist for a low hemoglobin count. The Dr. reviewed his charts for the past 10 years and found that for the last several years his hemoglobin has been low. She said that if any of the other numbers were out of whack she would have suspected blood cancer. She’s running some more tests. He goes for a follow up visit this week and if those tests are still

inconclusive she’ll do a bone marrow biopsy. My Dad isn’t concerned at all, not that he doesn’t care, but rather because he has come to fully rest on the abundant grace of God that gives him peace.

John Phillips writes that “Grace is God’s provision for our every need while we live down here. All of the infinite resources of God’s throne are at our disposal to enable us to face each situation and to meet every demand made upon us. Come heresies from within or hatred from without, God’s grace is sufficient.”

We have a great example of this in the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. He was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. He was very troubled by the news that the city of Jerusalem was still in ruins. One day the king asked why he was so sad so Nehemiah told him how disturbed he was that his homeland remained in ruins. The king asked Nehemiah what he needed. In essence, the king made all his resources available to Nehemiah that would be required for rebuilding. He didn’t have to, he could have just blown it off as a conquered nation who deserved to remain in ruins, but instead he extended grace. Take what you need and gave what was needed.

We have the resources of God through His grace. It will never run out. It will never fall short of what we need, anytime or for anything. His grace is always sufficient.

God’s grace will see you through the disappointments of life.

God’s grace will see you through the death of a loved one.

God’s grace will see you through the diseases that linger.

God’s grace will even see you through the doubts that languish.

If God’s grace isn’t sufficient for everything then it is not sufficient for anything.

Remember from our study in I Peter 5:10 that He is the God of all grace. Such grace begins at salvation.

1. Grace begins with salvation

Ephesians 2:8-9

Ephesians 1:7-8

Romans 3:24

If we don't know God first by His saving grace we will never know His sanctifying grace. Salvation is God's grace alone and nothing else. Until and unless we experience grace at the saving level we cannot know His grace for any other trial we go through and neither can we know anything about His peace.

Grace begins with salvation.

2. Grace continues through sanctification

These folks were already believers so they didn't need God's saving grace, they needed His sanctifying grace, a grace that is experienced by the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer who yields himself to that transforming power of a changed life maturing in godliness.

Jerry Bridges explains in his book *Transforming Grace* that "To live by grace is to live solely by the merit of Jesus Christ. To live by grace is to base my entire relationship with God, including my acceptance and standing with Him, on my union with Christ."

Growing in grace means that we have a growing desire to obey Him, to trust Him, to live for Him. Such transformation isn't merely an external change in behavior, it is a change of character that begins on the inside changing our desires and motivations and thoughts which becomes evident on the outside in our actions and words and attitudes.

Galatians 5:22-23 and Colossians 3:12-15 provide an understanding of the kinds of attitudes and actions that are evident when we are transformed by grace through the indwelling Spirit:

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control

Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, love, peace, and thankfulness

Are you experiencing that kind of sanctifying grace today or do you need to begin with saving grace?

His is a grace that transforms our character. But it isn't just grace that Peter wants them to experience in abundance. He wants them to experience a peace that transcends comprehension.

B. Abundant Peace Transcends Comprehension

The more you know God's transforming grace, the more you will know God's transcending peace. Grace must come first, then peace. Peace results from His grace.

Romans 5:1-2 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."

Before we can know the peace of God, we must first know peace *with* God and that comes through saving grace by faith in Christ. Our peace with God came through the death of Christ on the cross. That was the only way to bring us back into a relationship with God. No other way was possible. Peace with God comes through the saving grace of God.

The literal meaning of peace conveys a binding together of what was once broken, to join what was separated. Once we have peace with God we can then know the peace of God so that when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we will fear no evil because He is with us (Psalm 23:4); we will not be anxious about anything as we give our requests to Him (Philippians 4:6-7); we will learn to cast all our cares on Him (I Peter 5:7); we will not fear because He is with us (Isaiah 41:10).

Such transcending peace comes through the sanctifying grace of God. Such peace is available only through God and is developed by the indwelling, empowering Holy Spirit as He produces that peace in us (Galatians 5:22).

John Phillips writes that “Peace is God’s provision for our inner need.”

If we are anxious about anything, then we are neither experiencing the transforming grace or transcending peace of God which guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Horatio Spafford understood the abundance of transcending grace when he penned the opening stanza of his hymn “It is Well with My Soul”.

When peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

He knew transcending peace that comes through transforming grace.

Because of what these believers were experiencing Peter wanted to remind them that both grace and peace were in abundance.

Just as it appears in this greeting, so it is in reality that grace always appears before peace. We cannot know God’s peace until and unless we experience first his grace.

In the second part of the verse Peter explains how such grace and peace were so readily available.

II. THE AVAILABILITY OF GRACE AND PEACE – v. 2b

“Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Peter is now going to emphasize the importance of

knowing God.

Gnosticism as a philosophy, which began in the 2nd century, had its roots established in the first century. The Greek word from which Gnosticism sprang up comes from the word gnosis. To them it meant secret knowledge. Without going into a lot of detail about their beliefs, essentially they held that God was inaccessible to man and only a select group could know God through a mystic illumination. They believe that matter (basically the universe) and the human body were evil which created a great tension between the spirit and the body because of it. The spirit was good and the body evil because I was matter. Because all matter is considered evil, God, who is entirely pure, is absent because He won’t have anything to do with evil. Man is thus attempting to shed the evil body in order to get his spirit back to its origin.

The DaVinci Code came out promoting Gnostic ideas in an attempt to undermine orthodox Christianity.

Peter will throughout the letter help us to discover the importance of truly knowing God and Christ in order to stand firm in faith against false teachers. The availability of God’s grace and peace is ours through knowing God personally, knowing God persistently, and knowing God practically.

A. They’re Ours Through Knowing God Personally

Now understand as we go through this section that there is a distinction between God and Jesus Christ here, different from verse 1 which identifies Christ as God. In verse 2 Peter is referring to both. While Peter identifies them individually, I am going to just use the term God to refer to both. I want to make that clear.

In the Greek the word used indicates that this knowledge of God isn’t just to know them intellectually, but to know them fully or completely.

There is a prefix added to gnosis that suggests to comprehend thoroughly or to know exactly.

There's a big difference between knowing about God by having an intellectual knowledge about Him and fully or completely personally knowing Him through our salvation experience.

Let me see if I can illustrate. How many of you were ever told growing up never put your tongue between the posts of a 9 volt battery because if you do you'd get a shock. How many of you did it anyway? You hear that stuff or read about it and you believe it but then you decide to try it for yourself and sure enough just like they said you get a poke. In that moment you moved from a believer to a knower.

Reading about God's grace and peace is one thing, but knowing Him and experiencing His grace and peace at salvation is something entirely differently. Can I get a witness?

The word used means full knowledge and implies an intimate and personal relationship that can be established only through faith in Christ.

J. Vernon McGee states that it is the Holy Spirit who takes the things of Christ and makes them real to us and it begins.

Even in his death, Billy Graham is still evangelizing, helping people to know Christ and His saving power through the cross. Internet news and Facebook pages have passed on the gospel message that he proclaimed for decades. Even the network news which has been so antagonistic toward Christians has become a platform for people like Kathy Lee Gifford to speak openly about a personal relationship with Christ.

To know God personally is to know Him through conviction and conversion at salvation. They're ours to know God personally. They're ours to know God persistently.

B. They're Ours Through Knowing God Persistently

If the word means to know God completely, then that implies a persistent, not casual pursuit of knowing more about Him.

Someone once approached R. A. Torrey telling the Bible teacher that he didn't get anything out of the Bible when he read it. Torrey's response was to read the same passage over and over.

We need to develop study habits of the Bible that will help us to discover more about God all the while asking God's Spirit to teach us as it's His ministry in us to guide us in the truth.

II Timothy 2:15 "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of God."

I Peter 2:2-3 "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

Colossians 3:16 "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly."

Such knowledge of God moves us to obey. Such knowledge of God impacts us for godly living. Such knowledge of God experiences more of His grace and peace.

Seeking to know God cannot be just a weekend hobby, but a daily discipline.

Bruce Barton adds this thought: "Knowledge must not remain static; that is, believers must not have knowledge for the sake of knowledge. This knowledge must lead to changed behavior."

The pastor from New Park Street Chapel in Southwark, England began his message by stating

that the study of God by the Christian is important. He went to say that “The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.”

He stressed that people can study and explore all kinds of topics and come to understand them, but through the study of God we can never come to the conclusion that we know everything there is to know about Him. Such a pursuit not only humbles us it expands us. He further stated that day that “Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.”

Those words were spoken by Charles Spurgeon. He was just 20 years old.

Besides the Bible, if there is a book which you should read and have in your library it is *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer. He writes that knowing God is critical for living or lives and that we are cruel to ourselves for any attempt to do so without knowing God. In 1973 he stated that “The conviction behind the book is that ignorance of God – ignorance both of His ways and of the practice of communion with Him – lies at the root of much of the church’s weakness today.”

At that time in the life of the church he cited two troubling trends about the church.

The first trend is that “Christian minds have been conformed to the modern spirit: the spirit, that is, that spawns great thoughts of man and leaves room for only small thoughts of God.”

The second trend is that “Christian minds have been confused by the modern skepticism.”

Those words are as true today as they were then. How important then it is to truly know God.

The prophet Jeremiah invites us to know God and gives us the reason for such a worthy endeavor when he wrote “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Jeremiah 6:16)

This past week at my annual physical the nurse asked me if over the past number of weeks I have felt depressed. There is a rest for my soul in knowing God that modern medicine cannot comprehend. The cure for anxiety isn’t in a pill or a bottle or a hobby or an exercise regimen, it is in knowing God.

To experience the abundance of God’s grace and peace, we need to know God persistently. Then we will begin to know His grace and peace practically.

C. They’re Ours Through Knowing God Practically

God has spoken to us and given us His Word in order that we might know Him, in order that we might experience His grace and peace.

A couple weeks ago I received an email from someone excited about what God is doing in their life because of spending daily time in His Word and concluded that it is a testimony to the truth of God’s Word.

His Word lights our path and guides our way.

His Word keeps us from sin.

His Word convicts us, challenges us, changes us.

His Word judges our thoughts and attitudes.

The person who sent me that note understands the value of God’s infallible and inerrant Word, the importance of being in it regularly.

How much time in a day do you spend on social media – Facebook, Twitter, email, Instagram,

Snapchat, YouTube, Pinterest?

How much time in a day do you spend watching TV?

How much time in a day do you spend reading novels or magazines?

How much time in comparison do you spend reading the Bible?

I'm not suggesting that they are bad in and of themselves, but when you compare the time spent on those things with how much time in the Word is there a disparity?

I know I have to begin my day with devotions because if I wait until the end of the day it probably won't happen. Too tired. Too busy.

The call of Peter to these believers is to know God and we can't do that without reading His Word more than just once in a while. That is the invitation we find in verse two and the conclusion to the matter in 3:18. Paul's desire was to "know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering." (Philippians 3:10)

I don't have any hard evidence, no scientific data, no research to back this up other than what I believe to be true. The degree to which you spend time knowing God through His Word has a direct correlation to the degree of its application for the godly character you exhibit in your life each day. The more we know God the more we will experience His grace and peace practically through a godly life.

Now, let me wrap this up with my final point. Peter included in his greeting a wish for grace and peace to be experienced by these believers. There is the application of grace and peace. It was something they needed to hear, to be encouraged, and to be warned about. This will be Peter's message throughout. This will be Peter's message throughout this letter.

III. THE APPLICATION OF GRACE AND PEACE

Grace and peace can be applied for times of fiery trials.

Grace and peace can be applied for times of false teachers.

Grace and peace can be applied for times of finding truth.

Do you need God's grace and peace today?

It's available, in abundance ready to be applied for whatever you are going through in your life right now.