

Standing Firm in True Grace
1 Peter 5:12-14

Let's turn in our Bibles for the last time in this series to the book of 1 Peter. Let me show you this picture which Pastor Kevin showed us on Sunday once again.



You recall that that is Jonathan Isaac, a professional basketball player who plays on the Orlando Magic, who took a stand when everyone around him was kneeling during the national anthem to protest during the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. I just want to reread the quote that Pastor Kevin read on Sunday because it really sums up what we are going to talk about tonight so well.

"I thought that kneeling or wearing the Black Lives Matter t-shirt doesn't go hand-in-hand with supporting black lives... I do believe that black lives matter, but I just felt like it was a decision that I had to make, and I didn't feel like putting that shirt on and kneeling went hand in hand with supporting black lives. I believe that for myself, my life has been supported by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and everyone is made in the image of God... I think that the gospel of Jesus Christ is that there's grace for us, and that Jesus came and died for our sins and that if we all come to an understanding of that and that God wants to have a relationship with us, we'll see that racism isn't the only thing that plagues our society, that plagues our nation, that plagues our world, and I think coming together on that message, that we want to get past not only racism, but everything that plagues us as a society, I feel like the answer to that is the gospel." Jonathan Isaac, NBA Basketball Player

Tonight, as we wrap up the book of 1 Peter, we are going to hear Peter's closing appeal, which is that we would stand firm, just like Jonathan Isaac, in the true grace of God. Read with me beginning in chapter 5 verse 12.

¹² By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. ¹³ She who is at Babylon, who is

likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. ¹⁴ Greet one another with the kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.
(1 Peter 5:12-14)

We begin with the words at the center of it all: the true grace of God. These are the words Peter uses to sum up everything he has written. He has been at pains to exhort and declare to these Christians what they need above everything else.

The central need of our life in this world is the grace of God. We all stand as equals in this. There is no human being who needs less of God's grace than another. We all need an endless supply of God's grace. Our need is as deep as the ocean.

The revelation of Jesus Christ is the revelation of the grace of God. It is worth noting that in Peter's phrasing grace is the noun and true is the adjective. Here at the end, as he sums up all that he has written, the noun he uses to put his entire message in a nutshell is grace. He began his letter offering grace and peace, and here at the end, he says that what he has written is the grace of which they stand in need, which offers peace to those who stand in it.

When God reveals Himself to us in His word, He begins with grace. Grace is always the starting point of our contact with God. There would be no contact between us and God were it not for His grace. The mere act of revealing Himself is an act of grace to undeserving sinners on His part. In Exodus 34, God gave Moses one of the clearest revelations of Himself that has ever been given to any man. Moses pleaded with God to see His glory, something which no man can do and live. God said no, you, a sinner, cannot contain the vision of My glory, but I will give you a glimpse. I will put you in the cleft of a rock for protection, and then I will pass by so that you can see My backside.

When God passed by Moses, hidden in the rock, He made Himself known in these words,

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:6-7)

Notice what God said first. I think it is incredibly significant that the first thing God wanted Moses to hear out of His mouth when He gave this self-revelation were the words merciful and gracious. The phrase "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" is echoed in the New Testament in the words "full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) The Hebrew word translated steadfast love is...

Checed (kheh'-sed): God's lovingkindness in condescending to the needs of His creatures, specifically in redemption from their enemies, in preservation of life from death, in quickening of spiritual life, in redemption from sin, and in keeping His covenants.

That is what is referred to in the New Testament in Greek as *charis*, or in English grace.

The Hebrew word translated faithfulness is...

emeth (eh'-meth): reliability, sureness, stability, continuance, faithfulness, reliability, or truth.

This is connected with His immutability, or unchangeableness. By His very nature, He is completely firm and stable, unchangeable in all His ways. Not a single word which He has spoken has any shadow of falsehood in it. Every word of God proves true. So, you have the perfect combination of these most excellent virtues, grace and truth, held in perfect harmony at the same time in the very being and nature of God. That is the one of the clearest revelations of God given in the Old Testament, and we can see how His grace is foremost even there.

Then, in the New Testament, it becomes very clear through Jesus that God's grace is His central purpose for creation. The reason the present heavens and earth exist is so that God's glorious grace can be put on display in us. This is Paul's central theme in the first, second, and third chapters of Ephesians. He also works it out in detail in the book of Romans, perhaps most clearly in the fifth and eighth chapters there. As we've seen through this series in Peter, it is the central theme of Peter's first epistle as well. Let's just take a brief look at a few passages from Ephesians which bring this out clearly.

⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:5-10)

You see there how central His glorious grace is to His unchanging purpose. It is the grace of God revealed to us in Christ Jesus which makes known the mystery of His will. It is a plan for the fullness of time. Our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, all of this happens according to, or on account of, the riches of His grace. The end of it all is that His glorious grace would be praised by all things in heaven and on earth. This is what God is ultimately aiming at in His creation. The angels in heaven will praise Him as they witness His glorious grace being given to us. We will praise Him as the recipients of the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us in all wisdom and insight. That is Paul's summary of the gospel.

He goes on in the second chapter to unpack in more detail how God's grace has been lavished upon us. He gives a brief synopsis of our fallen nature and condition before Christ brought God's grace to us.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ 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. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

That is life in this world apart from the grace of God. It's really not life at all, but the outworking of spiritual death. Without faith in Christ, all of us are dead in the trespasses and sins in which we walk. We all follow the course of this world. We are all blind to this true condition of mankind until Jesus opens our eyes. No one can see that this is his condition without the Holy Spirit bringing conviction of sin, and righteousness, and judgment, and opening his eyes to see the truth. If anyone would receive the grace of God, he must first recognize that he is dead in sin and captive to Satan, and that there is nothing he can do to change that condition.

When the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see the reality of our fallen, helpless condition, we are then given the revelation of God's glorious grace.

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:4-10)

There you have it worked out in detail. That is the gospel in which the true grace of God is declared. God did all this, past tense, in the Greek aorist tense, which means once for all. It was a one-time action performed by God Himself in Christ, when God raised up His Son as the firstborn of many brethren. He was the firstborn from among the dead. His resurrection is the guarantee of ours. That maybe doesn't even go far enough. It's not only the guarantee, but it *is our resurrection*. There is mystery here, but Paul declares that when God raised His Son Jesus from the dead, He raised us up with Him. Because God knows all those who are His, and because He sees the end from the beginning, the future is present with Him. He is the one who was, and is, and is to come. Right now, past, present, and future are all one and the same to Him who is from everlasting to everlasting. Therefore, what remains future for us is not future for Him. It is as good as done. The end is written, and in God's mind, we who have faith in Jesus were raised with Him in His resurrection. That's what our baptism represents, and that's why we are baptized. Our baptism is the one-time outward display of the fact that we died with Christ and have been raised with Christ.

This is meant to give us unshakeable faith in God's glorious grace. It is His purpose, and nothing can thwart it or change it. It is already done! Jesus finished it. All we have to do today is walk in the good works which God has prepared for us.

That brings us to the adjective which Peter connects to this grace. It is not just any grace, but it is the *true* grace of God. I'm so thankful for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in inspiring every word of Scripture so that it is perfect and infallible. It is not just by chance that Peter chose this word to describe the grace of God. It was absolutely necessary that he should have done so. Because by describing this grace as true, he intends to protect us all from our greatest danger: deception. He is so eager to help us maintain a firm hold on what is true because, remember, he just described our enemy.

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

He is the liar, and the father of lies. He devours us with all that is false, including false grace. Yes, there are many ways in which the devil lies to us about the grace of God. Paul makes this abundantly clear in Romans 3.

⁸ And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just. (Romans 3:8)

In that one verse, I believe you have the two primary ways that the devil lies to us about God's grace. The first is contained in that devilish suggestion, "Why not do evil that good may come?" The enemy prowls around to devour us by suggesting that God's grace gives us license to do whatever we want. This is the danger of license, or the big theological word is antinomianism (which means being against the law). This is something which is running rampant in our postmodern, secularistic, materialistic, relativistic, individualistic culture. We are a licentious culture, where the individual has been crowned as king. In such a culture, a false grace which tells people that they are free to be whoever they want to be with no fear of consequences or judgment is incredibly attractive and appealing.

Let me be very clear tonight. God's grace does not mean that you are free to be whoever you want to be. It means you are free to be who *God* wants you to be. It means you are free to be *holy*. It means you are set free *from* sin. The false grace which the devil is promoting in our culture says you are free *to* sin without any consequences. That is not true. It is not the freedom Christ died to make possible for you.

The other way the devil lies about God's grace comes out in the group of people whom Paul says slanderously charged him with saying that God's grace means that we have the license to do evil. These people were likely the Judaizers, who did not like what Paul was teaching about God's grace being a gift, rather than something we earn or work for. You see, the devil wants us to think that our works are the cause of God's grace. He wants us to think that we somehow

have to earn God's favor. This is a works-based approach to grace that makes grace of none effect. It denies the fact of our utter ineptitude to please God. It denies what Paul teaches as the summary of the Old Testament doctrine concerning sin, "There is no one righteous, not even one." It denies the necessity of Christ's righteousness in our place. It denies that our righteousness is a gift from God on account of Christ's perfect, sinless life in our place and His propitiatory, expiatory death in our place.

In many ways, this is a danger that may hit a little closer to home for those of us within the church. Here's how you know whether you've fallen prey to this lie about grace: do you take any credit for your good works? Do you think that you somehow deserve a pat on the back from God for being here tonight? Do you ever find yourself looking down on others who aren't as good as you? Do you ever feel insecure about your salvation? Do you feel like God has turned against you when you fall into temptation or sin? If you answer yes to any of those questions, you might be buying the lies that God's grace depends somehow upon your works rather than His.

These two types of false grace are not grace at all. They are poison, and they are as deadly to your soul as the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was to Adam and Eve. The result of one, the licentious view, is a joyless, pitiable life of sin and shame. The result of the other, the works-based view, is a joyless, pitiable life of self-righteousness, insecurity, and hypocrisy.

Therefore, this word true that Peter uses is essential to our spiritual warfare. It is our defense. It is our knowledge of the truth which is our protection in the battle. This is also the central message of the New Testament. Jesus came full of grace and truth. Both are essential. Both are held in union in His person. He, as the Son of God and the Son of Man, is held out to us as the fulness of grace and truth. He is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. The Scriptures are absolutely essential in shaping our understanding of this true grace. You cannot know the true grace if you do not go to the source. You will be like a rudderless ship, adrift at sea, if you set out to stand in grace without holding fast to God's Word. It is your anchor and your rudder, to hold you stable and to steer your course through all of life's subtle dangers.

So, Peter says we should stand in this true grace. The verb stand here is in the aorist imperative active tense, which means it's a command (imperative) to do something with the beginning and the end of the action in view. In other words, it is a clear command for a temporal action. The temporality of this command is due to the fact that it is for the time of our sojourn in this world only. As long as we are in this world, we are commanded to stand. Till I breathe my last breath, the command of God for me is that I stand firm in His true grace. This command covers the timespan between your conversion and your departure from this world. As long as you remain in this body, in this world, stand firm in the true grace of God.

This is the central act of obedience in the Christian life. Standing in the true grace of God involves every action we take in this world. We are to take our stand upon it. It is that which

gives a solid foundation for our feet. It is what makes us immovable. It is our stability. Paul also spoke of our standing in this grace in Romans 5.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2)

I love that word access because it is intertwined with the Holy of Holies in the Temple. Access into the Holy of Holies was not something to be taken lightly. As you recall, only the high priest had access into that place, and that but once a year, and not without blood. Through Christ our high priest, we all have access by faith not only into the Holy of Holies made by human hands on earth, but into the true Holy of Holies made by God in heaven. That is the grace in which we stand. We have obtained access to the throne room of God. We can approach His throne at any time and in any place. No matter where we set our feet in this world this true grace gives us access to the throne of grace in Heaven.

Because of that, we can rejoice even in our sufferings, because even in our sufferings we know the grace in which we stand. They could put Paul and Silas in prison, but they could not strip them of their standing with God in heaven. There in a prison cell they could still sing His praises because they knew He was with them, and they still had access to His throne. We stand firm in this grace by continually fixing our minds on things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Speaking of Silas, here's how this works in practice. There is actually a beautiful depiction of how Peter stood firm in the grace of God here at the end of his letter. You see, the names he mentions here at the close are a display of the grace of God at work.

¹² By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, (1 Peter 5:12a)

Sylvanus is another name for Silas, Paul's humble companion and fellow servant, who traveled with him on his second missionary journey into these regions to which Peter was writing. Now, with Paul in prison, he is serving Peter by carrying this letter around to the various churches in Asia minor. How is the fact that Peter mentions him here at the close evidence of God's grace at work? Well, it is evidence that Peter and Paul were actually quite close later in life, and were working hand-in-hand in the gospel. Peter and Paul, who had been great enemies before Paul's conversion, and who even had at least one major disagreement after it as we learn in Galatians 2, were now brothers, fellow Apostles, and co-laborers for the Lord Jesus Christ. These two leading men could very easily have been rivals. How natural it would have been for both of them to compete with one another rather than working together. But standing in the true grace of God means putting to death the enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy of the flesh. (Galatians 5:20)

I mentioned the time when Paul opposed Peter to his face due to the fact that Peter would not eat with Gentiles for fear of the circumcision party. Had Peter been operating in the flesh rather

than standing in the true grace of God, he likely would have parted ways with Paul then and there. Who was Paul, after all, to oppose Peter? Think of it. Paul, who by his own mouth confessed to be the last and the least of the apostles and the chief of sinners, opposing Peter, the one Jesus named “rock,” and who was the first to confess that Jesus was the Christ! Peter could have very well stiffened up and been at odds with Paul after this confrontation, but that is not what happened. Instead, Peter ends up writing this letter to the very churches which Paul labored to start, and distributes the letter by the right-hand man of Paul. In 2 Peter, we see that Peter regarded Paul as a beloved brother, and his writings as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16).

The other man mentioned is Mark. ¹³ **She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. (1 Peter 5:13)** This is John Mark, who wrote the second book of the New Testament. The first time we encounter Mark is in the early church in Jerusalem in Acts 8, when the believers were gathered in his house to pray for Peter who was in prison because Herod wanted to put him to death to please the Jews. After that, Mark traveled with Paul and Barnabas on Paul’s first missionary journey, but turned back after things got difficult, something which clearly irritated Paul. So much so that when Barnabas suggested they take Mark on their second missionary journey, Paul refused and parted ways with Barnabas. Here in 1 Peter, we see that Mark was very close and dear to Peter, who regarded him as a son. We know that Mark’s gospel was written from the first-hand account of Peter.

How does this show us the true grace of God at work? Well, we see a young man who could have been cast off as too weak and fearful to be useful in the church after Paul refused to take him on his missionary journey. But that is not what happened. Instead, Peter clearly continued to mentor Mark, and Paul, at the end of his life regarded Mark as being very useful to him in ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).

You see, the true grace of God doesn’t give up on us just because we have a moment of failure. When we are standing in true grace, we don’t give up on each other, either. We strive together side-by-side for the sake of the gospel. Paul and Silas, Peter and Mark, these men could have been at odds with one another, but they were reconciled and loved one another dearly. Sure, they had their fair share of disagreements and arguments, but that didn’t mean they couldn’t work together. They were brothers and fellow bondservants of Jesus Christ. This is just a small portrait of the church functioning as she should. The church is a body of believers who are all uniquely gifted, and who all have their own unique shortcomings, but who can all work together as one body in the love of Christ.

Let us learn from the example of these men. Let us learn to work through our disagreements face-to-face, just as Jesus has commanded us (Matthew 18:15). Let us learn not to give up on each other when we have moments of failure. Let us learn to put petty disagreements aside in order to preach Christ crucified. Let us, ¹⁴ **Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.** ¹⁵ **See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled. (Hebrews 12:14-15)**

Yes, let us greet one another with the kiss of love, and extend peace to one another. We are all sojourners, and we are all journeying to the same destination if we are in Christ. Let's arm ourselves with the mind of Christ and humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and stand firm in His true grace until Christ comes again.