

New Year 2024 Pt. 3

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, January 28, 2024

ABM FOLLOW-UP

NOTE 1 – Before we dismiss the children and corresponding volunteers, please allow me to note the following:

NOTE 2 – Firstly, thank you for attending our recent Annual Business Meeting. Your presence is always critical!

NOTE 3 – Secondly, we do well to publicly note the new configuration of our Board (i.e., servant-leaders of NLAG):

- **Chairman** – Pastor James Foley
- **Deacon** – Tim Lee
- **Deacon** – Marty Lee
- **Deaconess** – Elysia Phelps
- **Deacon** – Bob “Bubba” Noel
- **Trustee** – Shawn Barry Jr.
- **Trustee** – Ryan Barry
- **Treasurer** – Tracey White

NOTE 4 – Thirdly, we noted that Tracey White has established a new non-profit organization for New Creations. Moving forward, those who would give to New Creations should no longer do so through the church. NLAG need not serve as a financial intermediary when her ministry is able to receive direct donations. Those who wish to financially support and/or invest in New Creations should see Tracey White at their leisure!

NOTE 5 – Thus said, the Children’s Church, Nursery and all corresponding volunteers are dismissed at this time.

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Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, January 28, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us. Whether you are here in person or joining via the livestream you are most welcome! Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take notes as you like. We have much to cover in a rather short space of time.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

NOTE 1 – In recent weeks we have been exploring the introductions and/or openings of the epistles of St. Paul. I can think of no better way to begin 2024 than by considering the manner in which Paul began his writings!

Q. What have we gleaned thus far in this series?

A1. The openings to the letters of Paul reveal him to be a man who knew his **IDENTITY** in Christ Jesus. We noted that Paul understood himself as the following: **a)** servant; **b)** divinely-ordained apostle of Christ; **c)** member of the people of God; **d)** member of the household or family of God; **e)** co-laborer or worker; **f)** soldier in the army of the Lord; **g)** spiritual father (i.e., to individuals and bodies); and a **h)** prisoner of Christ.

Q. To what degree do we know our identity in Christ in 2024?

A2. The openings to the letters of Paul reveal him to be a man who knew his **CIRCLE** (i.e., family and friends). Said openings reveal the names of figures like Sosthenes, Apphia, Philemon, Titus, Timothy, etc. Though Paul was bold, indefatigable and full of faith, he had not transcended the need for family and friends! Rather, he trafficked in three tiers of relationship (i.e., mentor figures, peers for the journey, and sp. proteges).

Q. To what degree do we know our circle(s) in Christ the Lord in 2024?

NOTE 2 – This morning I would like to consider Paul as a man who knew his **DESIRE(S)** for the Church of Christ:

Q. What did Paul desire for Church of Christ in antiquity?

A. He longed for the Church to know the grace and peace of God.

NOTE 3 – For the final time, let us read the openings of the epistles of Paul and consider this sentiment in kind:

Q. Do we have any willing to read?

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

Romans 1:1, 7 (NIV) (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God . . . 7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.**

1 Corinthians 1:1–3 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: 3 **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

2 Corinthians 1:1–2 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia: 2 **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Galatians 1:1–3 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—2 and all the brothers and sisters with me, To the churches in Galatia: 3 **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ . . .**

Ephesians 1:1–2 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God’s holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Philippians 1:1–2 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: 2 **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Colossians 1:1–2 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To God’s holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: **Grace and peace to you from God our Father.**

1 Thessalonians 1:1 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: **Grace and peace to you.**

2 Thessalonians 1:1–2 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: **2 Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

1 Timothy 1:1–2 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope. 2 To Timothy my true son in the faith: **Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.**

2 Timothy 1:1–2 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,
2 To Timothy, my dear son: **Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Titus 1:1, 4 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness . . . 4 To Titus, my true son in our common faith: **Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.**

Philemon 1–3 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—
2 also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home:
3 **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

KEY – In every letter, without fail, Paul expressed his desire for the people of God to know grace and peace. The sheer repetition of this expression should compel us to consider, at some length, this phrase and its import!

DELVING IN

NOTE 1 – Allow me to begin by noting that the remarks of Paul are not so much a prayer as they are a blessing. Whereas a prayer appeals directly to the Lord for some spiritual agency, a blessing evokes and/or calls forth the activity of God in a more indirect manner. Paul did not pray: “May God grant you both grace and peace.” Rather, he blessed them (e.g., Rom. 1:7): “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

NOTE 2 – Such spiritual blessing was quite common in antiquity (i.e., particularly among the Jewish people). In fact, when I consider the blessings of Paul, I am reminded of the Aaronic blessing prescribed in Numbers. Consider that Paul, a Jew trained in Scripture and the traditions of his people, would have known the following:

Numbers 6:22–27

22 The Lord said to Moses, 23 “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

24 ““The Lord bless you
 and keep you;
25 the Lord make his face shine on you
 and be gracious to you;
26 the Lord turn his face toward you
 and give you peace.””

27 “So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

NOTE 3 – As a sidenote, I wonder the degree to which we traffic too little in such blessing? Are we missing out!

KEY 1 – Returning to the matter(s) at hand:

Q. Can you see the similarities between the blessing(s) of the apostle Paul and this ancient Jewish blessing?

A. Consider that both place tremendous emphasis upon the presence of the grace and peace of God in living!

KEY 2 – Let us explore the themes of GRACE and PEACE:

DELIVING IN PT. 1 (GRACE)

Q. What is grace?

A1. Grace is defined as unmerited favor; the giving of what one does not deserve.

NOTE 1 – Do you realize what we deserve as those who have sinned against the Lord? The Bible unequivocally proclaims that the “wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23a). Tragically, sinfulness is a universal condition, for “all have sinned” and fallen “short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23)—a condition we are powerless to remedy left to our own capacities (cf. Rom. 3:20). This is the worst of news and an immutable human reality!

NOTE 2 – Yet God has chosen not to abandon us to such a condition. Rather, He has opted to extend grace (i.e. providing a way of escape through His only Son). You see, the wages of sin may be death for our race, “but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23)! It is the very best of news that God would extend life and favor to those deserving of death and judgment! Consider these texts on the matter:

Ephesians 2:1–9 (Emphasis Mine)

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, **we were by nature deserving of wrath.** 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by **grace** you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the **gift of God**— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

John 3:16–17

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

A2. Grace is also connected to the concept of transformational empowerment in life and living.

NOTE 3 – The grace of God does not simply provide pardon for the condemned sons and daughters of Adam. Rather, it is the mechanism through which we find transformation and conformity unto the image of Christ. You see, the Lord did not save us from the penalty of sin alone; but from its corrupting power as well. Consider:

Titus 2:11b–14 (Emphasis Mine)

11 . . . the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. 12 It teaches us to say “**No**” to ungodliness and worldly passions, **and to live** self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

NOTE 4 – We must reject any concept of grace which condones, justifies or excuses sinful behavior in the Lord:

Jude 3–4 (Emphasis Mine)

3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. 4 For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who **pervert the grace of our God** into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Romans 6:1b–14 (NLT, Emphasis Mine)

1 . . . should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more . . . of his wonderful grace? 2 Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? 3 Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? 4 For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

5 Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. 6 We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. 7 For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. 8 And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. 9 We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. 10 When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. 11 So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

12 Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. 13 Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. 14 Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. **Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.**

NOTE 5 – Consider the connection between the grace of God and transformational living in the following texts:

Acts 4:32–35 (NIV, Emphasis Mine)

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's **grace was so powerfully at work in them all** 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

2 Corinthians 7b–10 (Emphasis Mine)

7 . . . in order to keep me from becoming conceited [i.e., due to surpassingly great revelation], I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My **grace** is sufficient for you, **for my power is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

KEY – It is, therefore, little wonder that Paul desired for the people of God to abound in the grace of God! Paul wanted the Church of Jesus Christ to know, experience and walk in the divine favor which genuinely saves, transforms and empowers for service!

DELVING IN PT. 2 (PEACE)

Q. What is peace?

A. To many, peace is the absence of conflict or strife, yet there is more; it is the presence of harmony or accord.

Q. In what arenas may we know harmony and accord?

A1. Firstly, we may know peace, harmony and accord in our relationship with God the Father through Christ. Consider that we who were alienated from and at enmity against the Lord can find restoration, access and intimacy through Christ. Was this not the sentiment expressed by the apostle Paul in this aforementioned text?

Ephesians 2:1–9 (Emphasis Mine)

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, **we were by nature deserving of wrath**. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by **grace** you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the **gift of God**— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

NOTE 1 – Consider this seminal text on the topic of peace with God:

Romans 5:1b–2 (Emphasis Mine)

“1 . . . since we have been **justified** through faith, **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.”

A2. Secondly, we may know peace, harmony and accord in our relationships with one another. Please consider:

NOTE 2 – God has not called us to live with broken or fractured bonds. Rather, peace with God Lord is meant to produce peace one to another. How can we live at odds with our brethren when we have found restoration with Him? How can we refuse to forgive one another in light of how much we have been forgiven by Him? How can we tolerate discord and enmity when we have been called to be children of He who is called “Peace”?

Q. Have we forgotten the desire of the Christ who saved us?

John 17:20–23 (Emphasis Mine)

20 “My prayer is not for them alone [i.e., the immediate band of disciples]. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be **one**, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

NOTE 3 – Who are we to say no to the desires of Christ for His Church? Let us put the work in and obey in kind:

Ephesians 4:1–6, 25–32

1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 “In your anger do not sin” [Psa. 4:4]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

A3. Thirdly, we may know peace (i.e., inward harmony and rest) amidst the trials and (–) circumstances of life:

John 14:27 (Christ Speaking)

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Philippians 4:4–9

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

KEY – It is, therefore, little wonder that Paul desired for the people of God to abound in the peace God offers! The apostle Paul wanted the Church to know, experience and walk in the peace which was available through Christ Jesus alone!

DELVING DEEPER (SOURCE)

KEY 1 – Before we move to a close, we do well to realize that Paul posited the only source of grace and peace:

Romans 1:7 (Emphasis Mine)

7 Grace and peace to you **from** God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:3 (Emphasis Mine)

3 Grace and peace to you **from** God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:2 (Emphasis Mine)

2 Grace and peace to you **from** God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:3 (Emphasis Mine)

3 Grace and peace to you **from** God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ . . .

Ephesians 1:2 (Emphasis Mine)

2 Grace and peace to you **from** God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:2 (Emphasis Mine)

2 Grace and peace to you **from** God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:2b (Emphasis Mine)

2 . . . Grace and peace to you **from** God our Father.

2 Thessalonians 1:2 (Emphasis Mine)

2 Grace and peace to you **from** God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 1:2b (Emphasis Mine)

2 . . . Grace, mercy and peace **from** God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Timothy 1:2b (Emphasis Mine)

2 . . . Grace, mercy and peace **from** God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Titus 1:4b (Emphasis Mine)

4 . . . Grace and peace **from** God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Philemon 3 (Emphasis Mine)

3 Grace and peace to you **from** God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

KEY 2 – Those who would know, experience and walk in the grace and peace of God must know their source!

Acts 4:12 (Remarks of Spirit-Filled Peter re: Christ Jesus)

12 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

DELVING DEEPEST (APPLICATIONS)

NOTE 1 – Clearly, Paul wished for the ancient Church to experience, know and walk in grace and peace! Time and again his blessing was meant to remind them of the import of such elements, for what good is a life devoid of divine favor and the harmony God alone can bring? However, we do well to consider the following:

NOTE 2 – I put forth that the One who inspired Paul in antiquity yet desires for us to know His grace and peace! Therefore, there remains a timeless and timely element to these Pauline texts, and a choice must be made in kind:

Q1. Will we seek to know such grace and peace by coming to their source?

Q2. Will we spurn the opportunity to walk in His grace and peace in rebellion?

Q1. What say you?

Q2. What about your house?

Q3. What about this local fellowship?

CONCLUSION

NOTE 1 – Feel free to give either in person or online at www.NewLifeBarre.org.

NOTE 2 – Check out our website for any of our beyond Sunday ministries (MM, WM & CYC).

NOTE 3 – I can think of no better way to close out this “gathering” than with the following blessing:

Romans 1:7

7 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.