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The Evangelical Quarterly

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GRACE, MERCY AND PEACE

“ Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord ”
(1 Tim. i. 2).

A BENEDICTION! What is a benediction? It is a solemn invocation of God's blessing by a fellow-believer on a friend or a group of friends. Especially we call the blessing, with which a minister dismisses the congregation to which he has been preaching, a benediction. There is a great Old Testament illustration of a benediction in the well-known words which, at the command of God, Moses instructed Aaron and his sons to pronounce over the children of Israel. “ The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace ” (Num. vi. 24-6). There is the great parallel to this in the New Testament in Paul's blessing on the Corinthians: “ the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all ” (2 Cor. xiii. 13).

There are those who hesitate to use the second personal pronoun “ you ” in dismissing the congregation. I understand that their hesitation is dictated by a feeling that to say “ you ” implies a certain priestly assumption. (And on the other hand there are those who cherish a sort of proprietary right to pronounce the blessing at any gathering in the church of which they are ministers.) But why should not a minister who has been preaching the Gospel, speaking for God (2 Cor. v. 2of.), dismiss the worshippers with a prayer for them to God that His blessing may follow the message and rest upon them? Does it not bring the whole service and worshipping company very close to God when they are sent away with a prayer that God's blessing may go with them?

There are several forms of benediction, one of which is very familiar, and yet the full significance of it, I am afraid, often

escapes us. It is the blessing at the head of this paper, the blessing with which Paul salutes his young friend Timothy and perhaps Titus also in his letters to them. It is noteworthy that in his epistles to the Churches, Paul simply says "grace and peace"; to the individuals, "grace, mercy and peace". I am not quite sure why there is this difference. It may be, of course, that when Paul wrote these letters he was "such an one as Paul the aged". Timothy and Titus were young men entrusted with very responsible work, the trials of which Paul by experience knew well. They were young men peculiarly dear to him, of strong kindred spirit—*γνησίῳ τέκνῳ*, "mine own son in the faith", is what he calls each of them. And as he thought of what they would have to face, and were facing when he wrote, he adds a petition for mercy to strengthen and reassure them for their task. That may be the reason why it stands there.

Let us rather consider the words as a formula of benediction at the close of a service. What does it mean; "Grace, mercy and peace be with you"? There is a temptation to treat grace, mercy, and peace as just three very desirable blessings to wish for and pray for in the lives of the departing company without thinking of any connection between them. There is a sweet musical rhythm in the phrase as the words fall one after another—grace, mercy, peace—on the ears of the bowed, silent, waiting, standing company. But, on reflection, is there not much more than that in the sequence? Compare this with the great benediction in 2 Corinthians, that magnificent summary of essential Christian truth—"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost." Here are the several activities of the Holy Trinity in the redemption of lost humanity ranged impressively together. Is there not something analogous to this in this other benediction? Consider the terms and the order of them. "Grace"—the grace of God! Is not the grace of God the basic conception of the kindly, condescending attitude of the fatherly heart of the Eternal towards the children of men? Is not this the source and spring, the initiative, from which all blessings flow? Next, "Mercy!" In Mercy the grace takes practical shape. Feeling expresses itself in action. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed." The mercy of God takes shape in the mission of our Lord to save mankind by His life amongst us and His death for us upon the tree, that our sins may freely be forgiven. And what is the

sequel when this has been accomplished, and offered mercy humbly and thankfully accepted? It is peace—peace between man and God and peace in the man's own soul. "In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise Thee: though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away and Thou comfortedst me." The forgiven child is at rest on his heavenly Father's breast. Understood in this way, it is a great Trinitarian formula. It states the way of salvation wrought by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from its source to its fulfilment in the three words, grace, mercy, peace.

Where this is pronounced by a preacher over those to whom he has been proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation, what does it mean but this; may God grant you to enjoy in all their fullness the blessings of the Gospel about which we have read and sung and studied and prayed together?

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