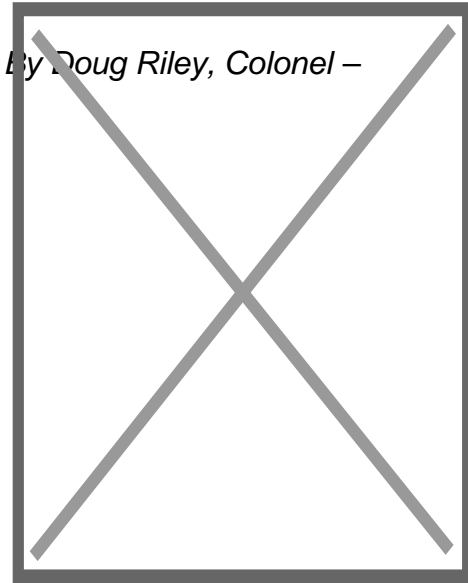


## Grace and peace



*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 (Rom. 1:7 NIV).*

Driving late at night, you start to search for a good radio station. I was doing just that, searching for a sound bite that interested me enough to lock in on a station. And there it was. I was captured by a man's deep, resounding voice and these words: "I can give you the whole Bible in two words." I immediately began to ponder what my response might be that someone might dare summarize the glorious gospel with two simple words. And then I felt my own challenge to come up with my two words to summarize it. Faith, love, forgiveness, freedom, liberty, salvation. My mind spinning, I was frustrated and overwhelmed at the same time. Listening with anticipation and interest, the voice on the radio delivered: grace and peace.

Last year we celebrated the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing those 95 theses on the All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517. He sparked the revolution—the Protestant Reformation—that would change everything. His bold actions were based on a new understanding in his relationship with God. To say these words changed Martin Luther's theology would be extreme, but he did realize that only by God's grace and peace will you find a true relationship with him.

As you study the Scriptures, you will see these two words 18 times in the New Testament. Paul and Peter both use this statement, and in this order, which is important. Luther understood this

importance, in that it is impossible to be saved by works, doing good or upright living (Eph. 2:9). The beauty of the gospel is found in the grace of God. Luther was raised watching people who were beaten up by severe guilt and shame. But we don't have to bear the guilt or shame—we can be saved by the grace of God, which is the beauty of the gospel. We often have similar experiences, stewing over our own guilt as sinners, living in discouragement and various degrees of despair, driven by the law. No man or woman, however good they might be in human terms, can ever match up to the perfection of God or deserve all that God would give us—but that's the wonder of grace. It's not what we can do, it's what God freely offers!

Paul, in his writing to the Ephesians, starts his letter with grace and peace (Eph. 1:2). You certainly can't overlook the importance of these two words in his greeting. Paul mentions peace after grace and for good reason because peace flows from grace. I once heard grace described as a fountain and peace as the river that flows from it.

Just as there is mystery around the word "grace" as it is an amazing concept to grasp, so it is with the peace that comes from knowing God and doing his will. Christ is our peace (Eph. 2:14). Through the blood of Jesus, we have peace with God. In the Bible, peace is not the absence of trouble or strife; it is concerned with all that is good in a person's life, a wish for wholeness that has nothing to do with external circumstances. While facing imprisonment, death, temptation and severe trials, Paul brings us to this understanding in our relationship with God. He writes to us Christians, who are being pressured to compromise our faith, and shares these two words so that we can overcome. *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (Eph. 1:2). We do it through God's "grace and peace," which are showered upon every believer.

We can fight the darkness of despair, persecution and trials by our understanding of these words. So now as I read or hear these words, they have become powerful. If you allow them to sink in, follow and study them in Scripture, they come alive and you'll begin to understand. Once you understand his grace, you know his peace.

And that's the hope of the Christian.