

Yours Sincerely...

ἡμῶν. Ἀδελφοί, προσεύχεσθε καὶ περὶ
Ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς πάντας
ἐν φιλήματι ἁγίῳ. Ἐνορκίζω ὑμᾶς τὸν
κύριον ἀναγνωσθῆναι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν
τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς.
Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ
Χριστοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν.

How the New Testament writers 'signed off'

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth
6 studies for small groups

Yours sincerely...

How the New Testament writers signed off

	Page
Introduction	2
1. We Say It Together – 2 Corinthians	4
2. A Treasure Worth Guarding – 1 Timothy	8
3. Faith That Grows – 2 Peter	10
4. Any Old Idols? – 1 John	13
5. The Personal Touch – 3 John	16
6. Kept by Jesus – Jude	20

Writers:

Anne Morse Study 2, Gareth Davidson Study 3, Jon Birch Study 4,
Steve Roberts Study 6, Cedric Longville Studies 1 and 5.

Introduction

When we were first married we rented a TV. We hadn't really got ourselves organised with standing orders and the like, so we used to call into the showroom each month to pay the rent. Sometimes we forgot, and then we'd get a letter! Thankfully we had the money, it was just lack of organisation on our part. But if we hadn't been able to pay we would have lost the TV. No big deal perhaps, but some people get letters threatening to turn off the gas supply. Some are even warned they will lose their homes. In these difficult times we can thank God for those who regularly re-stock Pharaoh's Pantry to at least ensure that folk in Penarth don't go hungry to bed.

But back to our letter. It read something like this:

Granada TV

Dear Sir/Madam,

It has been brought to my attention that your monthly rental is overdue. If this situation is not rectified within the next 7 days our staff will be calling to collect our equipment and we will commence action to recover the outstanding debt.

Yours faithfully,

Yours faithfully!! You've got to be joking. How could they say they were 'yours faithfully'? Faithful to themselves no doubt, but hardly to us. No way! Perhaps there are many reasons to bemoan the passing age of the formal letter, but at least in these days of email informality we get the scope to break free from such bare-faced fibbery. 'Yours faithfully' were never faithful to their recipients. 'Yours sincerely' never sincerely belonged to the letter reader. As for 'yours truly' well hopefully they were at least telling the truth in the rest of the letter.

How different it was in Bible days. When the New Testament writers ‘signed off’ they really meant what they said. So we’re going to spend the next few weeks looking at the different ways that Paul, John, Peter and Jude, ended their letters. Of the twenty-one New Testament letters almost every ending is different, carrying a different message. But they all have one thing in common. They all ‘sign off’ with an important message – and that’s why it’s left till last. When it comes to personal letters I guess that rather echoes our own experience. Many of us can recall letters from our grandmother that ended ‘*Don’t forget to come and see me soon...*’ Even one letter that Paul wrote to Timothy ends like that.

In this short series we can’t cover all twenty-one letters, so we’ve chosen six. Some of these letter endings are well known, others less so. There’s one we say to each other every Sunday. Do you know which letter it comes from? If you don’t, you’re about to find out.

One last thought. If we want to read the end of a letter in context, it’s best to start at the beginning. So how about setting ourselves the task to read through each letter during the week before each study? Apart from Study 1, all the letters chosen are relatively short.

Cedric Longville

Study 1

We Say It Together

The Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

2 Corinthians 13:14.

We say it twice every Sunday, but have we really thought about the words? Has it become something of a ritual? What’s going through our minds as we say it to one another? Are we thinking “that was a good service”, “that sermon really helped me a lot”, “the worship was really uplifting”, or “great – time for coffee”, or “did we really need to sing that song ten times?” or “thanks goodness – now we can go home for dinner”, or “they’re looking grumpy today”, or “did we put the oven on?”

They say confession is good for the soul, so I’ll confess that pretty much all of those thoughts have gone through my mind on one Sunday or another. And if you echo at least some of that, welcome to the fallen human race.

But this time let’s stop and think of the words in that verse. We could describe it as a blessing which Paul seeks for his readers, but the blessing which Paul desires from the Godhead is different for each member of the Trinity:

The Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son:	Grace
God the Father:	Love
The Holy Spirit:	Fellowship

We’ll have a look at those three words in turn: ‘grace’, ‘love’ and

‘fellowship’, and ask the question why each of them is especially associated in Paul’s mind with a particular member of the Trinity.

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

Paul uses this expression to close seven of his letters: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 2 Thessalonians and Philemon. But what does ‘grace’ mean? The New Dictionary of Theology describes it as ‘undeserved favour given by a superior to an inferior’. So we could talk of the undeserved favour of the Lord Jesus Christ to us.

Yet somehow all attempts to fully explain it fall short. There’s even a sense in which it resonates differently from person to person, according to our own Christian experience. The most we can hope to do in this short study is to explore how the Bible writers explain ‘the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ’, so let’s start with what Paul says about it in 2 Corinthians itself.

Questions

- ✠ Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. How does this verse help us to understand ‘the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ’?
- ✠ Now read 1 Timothy 1:13-14 and Titus 3:3-5. What do these verses add to our understanding of our Lord’s grace to us?
- ✠ Read Revelation 22:21. Why do you think this is the last verse in the Bible?

The Love of God

In 1 John chapter 4 verses 8 and 16 we’re actually told that God *is* love, and that we can rely on the love he has for us. In the New Testament the love of God the Father for us is intimately bound up with the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

Questions

- ✘ Have a look at the following verses: John 16:27, Romans 5:8 and 8:39. From these verses why would you say God loves us? How can you respond to this love?
- ✘ Read John 3:16. Why does God love the world? Does Colossians 1:15-16 help us to understand why?

The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

As a youngster I was taught mainly from the Authorised (KJV) Version of the Bible. It renders this phrase 'the communion of the Holy Ghost'. That always sounded a bit scary to me! But maybe there's something to be gleaned from both versions. You can have 'fellowship' with someone when you walk and talk together, but 'communion' suggests a deeper and more permanent relationship – almost a 'union' but not quite.

This phrase doesn't occur anywhere else in the Bible, so we'll need to do some digging to find out what the Holy Spirit does. Paul only refers to the Holy Spirit one other time in 2 Corinthians, and that's in chapter 6, verse 6.

Questions

- ✘ Read 2 Corinthians 6: 3-10. Why does Paul mention the Holy Spirit in the middle of this long list of his sufferings?
- ✘ Read John 14:26, Acts 1:8 and Romans 14:17. How do these verses help us to understand why Paul wanted to bless his readers with 'the fellowship of the Holy Spirit'?



Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is an intensely personal one. While the topics he covers are varied and his language is sometimes strong, it's that same grace, love and fellowship which he finds in God that permeates the whole letter and gives him the

strength to write it. If you haven't managed to read 2 Corinthians this week, try to do it soon. You'll be glad you made the effort.

And some things to think about

In the whole of the New Testament the picture of God's love for us is amazing, but it does invite a response from us, both to God and to others, so here are two rather different practical things to think about:

Perhaps next time we say 'the Grace' together you might want to ask God to place someone in the congregation on your heart and pray the Grace especially for them.

And as our verse is from 2 Corinthians we can't really avoid Paul's only other reference to God's love in that letter: It's in chapter 9, verse 7: *'God loves a cheerful giver...'*

And for next week...

Try to read Paul's First Letter to Timothy

Study 2

A Treasure Worth Guarding

The First Letter of Paul to Timothy

***‘Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care.
Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of
what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed
and in so doing have departed from the faith.
Grace be with you all.’***

1 Timothy 6:20–21.

When our daughter was very young she received a pair of bookends as a present. Noah looked out from one end of the row of books, whilst Mrs. Noah smiled out from the other end of the row in a completely complementary piece of ark.

If we are to make sense of Paul’s final words to Timothy we need to read his opening greetings and remarks. The beginning and end of this letter are like two halves of a pair of bookends keeping the contents in place.

Questions

- ✧ Read chapter 1 verses 1–11 and chapter 6 verses 17–20. What themes and problems are mentioned in both these passages?
- ✧ This letter was written to Timothy who had been left in charge of a new church in Ephesus. After only a few weeks with them Paul had been forced to flee to safety, but he was still concerned to find out how the new Christians were getting on. What do the following passages in this letter tell us about Timothy and the problems he faced? See chapter 4 verse 12; chapter 1 verses 3–7; chapter 6 verse 11; chapter 5 verse 23.
- ✧ Paul wrote to Timothy at a time when the church faced many problems. False teaching was rife; there was pride, argument,

intellectualism, asceticism and loose living. It was Timothy's task to preach the truth and lead the church back to God's ways. Paul commands Timothy to guard what had been entrusted to him. What had been entrusted to him and what has been entrusted to us? See 1Thessalonians 2:4; Jude 3.

- ✘ How can we guard ourselves and our church from false teaching and godless chatter? Why is this so important? See 1 Thessalonians 5:21–22; 1 John 4:1; Titus 1:9; 2 Timothy 2: 16–18.
- ✘ Paul ends his letter to Timothy as he ends many of his others, praying that he, and the Christians in Ephesus, will experience the grace of God. Young Timothy had a difficult task, but God would give him the grace to see it through. What is God's grace and how does it affect our lives every day? See Romans 3:23; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 4:16.



For further reflection

Paul's last words to Timothy in this letter remind us that we have a treasure worth guarding, a truth to proclaim, and God's grace to sustain us every day of our lives.

Pray for each other that we may know and live out God's word, relying on His saving, keeping grace.

And for next week...

Try to read the Second Letter of Peter.

Study 3

Faith that Grows

The Second Letter of Peter

***‘Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord
and Saviour Jesus Christ’***

2 Peter 3:18.

Famous last wordscollectors of quotations seem to have something of a fascination for recording peoples’ final utterances. From the noble – ‘Thank God, I have done my duty’ (Admiral Horatio Nelson); to the reflective – ‘Don’t die like I did’ (George Best); the humorous – ‘I told you I was ill’ (Spike Milligan); to the misguidedly optimistic – ‘They couldn’t hit an elephant at this distance’ (General John Sedgwick) - last recorded words are frequently memorable and profound.

Verses 13-15 of chapter 1 of the Second Letter of the apostle Peter suggest that he knew he was approaching the end of his life, and the manner in which this would happen had already been told to him years previously by Jesus himself (see John 21: 18,19). Peter’s message has both an urgency for its immediate intended recipients and a continuing relevance for the church today.

At its core, this letter is a reminder that our faith is a living thing, and as such it needs to be nurtured, and we should expect to see signs of growth and maturity as we immerse ourselves in the things of God. The call to grow in faith begins and ends this letter (chapters 1:2 and 3:18) - and remains central to our calling to discipleship.

Read 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 3-11

Questions

- ✘ Why is the need for our faith to grow so important? Why do we as Christians often appear content to settle for a ‘maintenance’ or ‘stagnation’ situation in relation to our faith?

- ✘ Peter tells us that we receive the gifts of faith, grace and peace as a result of Christ's righteousness and our knowledge of God (verses 1-2). How does our spiritual well-being depend in part on Christ's righteousness and in part on our knowledge of God?
- ✘ What part of the faith that you have received from God really inspires you? Is there anything which you can identify that gets in the way of your faith growing? What can you do about that?
- ✘ This passage emphasises the need for a balance between knowledge of Jesus and holy living. How are these related to each other? What problems arise if the two are out of balance?
- ✘ In verses 5-7 Peter lists a total of seven virtues or attributes that he says should supplement or be added to our faith. Consider each of these, and say in your own words what you think is meant by each one.
- ✘ Love is considered to be the essential fruit of a true Christian faith (see 1 Corinthians 8:1 and 13:13, and Colossians 3:14). Why is this? How would you define it? How do you know when it is real?
- ✘ Peter warns us against becoming spiritually myopic? How can this happen? How can we prevent it from happening?



For further thought

Look again at the qualities listed in chapter 1, verses 5-7. Pick just one that you would like to see developed more in your own life. How would your discipleship improve if this were to happen? Pray that it will !

In chapter 1, verse 3 Peter says that the divine power of Jesus has given us everything we need both for now and for eternal life. How would your life change if you were to rely more fully on this power? So what's stopping you!!

And for next week...

Try to read the First Letter of John

Study 4

Any Old Idols?

The First Letter of John

‘Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.’

1 John 5:21

When we read the first letter of John, the final verse can catch us by surprise. It might seem that this last instruction has been added as an afterthought, yet these short concluding remarks invite us to reconsider the letter as a whole, and to think deeply about what it means to live righteously in a fallen world.

Idol worship was an everyday fact of life in the ancient world. Nations, cities and households all had their own gods which required sacrifice and worship, as did the growing imperial cult of the Emperor. For the early Christians, refusal to take part in these ceremonies marked them out as anti-social and subversive, and could often lead to persecution.

While the idea of idol worship might seem strange and far removed from day to day life in the West, modern-day idols of wealth, celebrity, materialism and achievement (to name but a few) are no less serious than the ancient idols carved of stone or wood.

Have you ever come across physical idols, for example, while you were on holiday or visiting someone’s house? What was your reaction?

Moses and the golden calf - Read Exodus 20:2-6 and 32:1-10

By choosing to put anything ahead of God in our lives, we turn it into an idol and break the first commandment.

- ✠ What do you think are the most commonly worshipped idols in our own nation?
- ✠ The Israelites were impatient with God and so fashioned their

own idol out of gold. How serious is the temptation for Christians to turn away from God when His timing takes longer than we would like?

Rachel and the household gods - Read Genesis 31:17-20, 31:30-32 and 35:16-19.

For Rachel, her decision to steal her father's household idols resulted in her being cursed by her husband Jacob, and eventually dying in childbirth.

- ✘ Do you think there are any spiritual consequences for us today if we become involved with the practices of other faiths or with superstitions?
- ✘ Many people would not think twice about reading horoscopes, having a good luck charm, practicing yoga or throwing salt over their shoulder. Are things like this incompatible with life as a follower of Jesus and, if so, where do you draw the line?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - Read Daniel chapter 3:4-6 & 3:16-18

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were all prepared to die rather than bow down and worship the idol of gold.

- ✘ Have you ever been challenged to take a stand for your faith, and if so what were the consequences?
- ✘ What do you think are today's idols that Christians may be forced to 'bow down' to and how much are we prepared to risk for our faith?

Gideon and the altar to Baal - Read Judges 6:25-27

Before Gideon led his people to a mighty victory over their enemies, God required him to tear down and destroy his family's

idol.

- ✠ Think back to the list of modern idols identified earlier. Are we prepared to tear them down, and is this necessary if we also want to do great things for God's kingdom?
- ✠ Gideon was afraid of his family's and neighbours' reaction. When we consider getting rid of the things in our lives which compete with God, what do we fear? What passages from scripture encourage us when making these decisions?

And for next week...

Read the Third Letter of John

Study 5

The Personal Touch

The Third Letter of John

'I have much to write to you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.' 3 John 13-14.

Read John's 3rd Letter (3 John)

Icebreaker: Have you ever been misunderstood when texting or writing, or have you misunderstood someone else? Have you wished you could have talked to them instead? Share your stories.

Fred's wife Jean was a very good cook – especially when it came to pork. One night he was on business in France and he sent her a text: 'Had some pig's cheek tonight and it made me think of you'. Yes it's very easy to say things the wrong way in text messages, emails, or even letters - but once the message is sent you can't get it back. And even in these days of instant communication it may take some time to spot what's wrong and do something to try to put it right. And joking apart, writing on Facebook and tweeting on twitter carries with it a big responsibility. That's why Tabernacle has issued a guide to using social media: 'Social Media@Tabs'. You can find a copy in the racks at the top of the church stairs. It's well worth reading.

It's different when it comes to a face to face conversation. Our words may still come out the wrong way, but there's always the chance to put things right straight away and, if needed, to apologise immediately. I wonder if this was one of the thoughts in the apostle John's mind when he told his friend Gaius that he had much to say, but would rather say it face to face than in a letter.

It's clear there had been problems with a church member called Diotrephes (verses 9 and 10), and John does put the bare bones of

the problem in writing. But we get the feeling that there was a lot more to say about the problem – perhaps sensitive details of which John was aware. If they had been put in writing and had been read by Diotrephes, it could have made a bad problem even worse. And in delicate situations the scope for misunderstandings grows with every word.

Questions

- ✠ From the content of the letter, can we imagine what John and Gaius might talk about when they meet face to face? What might John want to say about Diotrephes, Demetrius, and the church? And what about Gaius himself?
- ✠ The guide 'Social Media@Tabs' says '*When interacting remotely important aspects of communication such as body language, tone, expression etc, are lost and meanings can frequently get muddled or misunderstood, potentially causing hurt and offence*'. Without mentioning names or identifying circumstances, can you think of situations where this has affected, or could affect, our relationships both inside and outside the church?
- ✠ Before writing, or texting or tweeting someone, what should we consider?
- ✠ Would it be best to wait until we see them? (verses 13 & 14).
- ✠ Read verses 9 and 10. Again without mentioning names or identifying circumstances, can you think of situations in your experience which mirror the situation John describes? What was the consequence? What steps can we take in our own lives to try to help prevent such situations arising?
- ✠ So we have concluded that some things are best spoken rather than written down. But is that all we need to remember?
- ✠ Read James 3:1-12. If we want to say something that it would be unwise to write down, how do we decide whether it needs

to be said at all? What tests should we apply? Would you pray before deciding what to do? Read James 1:5.

- ✘ John ends his letter by saying 'Peace to you', sending greetings from 'the friends', and asking Gaius to greet the friends there by name. With those final greetings in mind, how important is it that we do the following, and which is the most important?
 - a. Speaking peace to one another
 - b. Sending greetings to God's family elsewhere
 - c. Greeting one another by name
- ✘ What other reasons do you think John might have had for wanting to wait until he could talk face to face? After discussing this have a look at 2 John 12, and also Paul's reasons for wanting face to face contact in 1 Thessalonians 3:6 and Romans 1:11-12. How do the reasons given in those verses compare with your own ideas?



For further reflection

Read a copy of 'Social Media@Tabs'. Ask God to give us wisdom as we communicate with one another. If you're not sure about how to say something to someone, read 1 John 4: 7-12 and ask

yourself, 'Do I need to write it, or should I speak it – or do I need to say it all?'

Take some time to pray especially for our young people who live their lives in the middle of the communications revolution. They, more than any other generation, are at the sharp end of the thoughtless tweets, the hurtful texts, and the cyber-bullying – with all the temptation to retaliate in similar fashion.

Are you living, texting, tweeting and talking the Jesus way?

And for next week...

Read Jude

Study 6

Kept by Jesus

The Letter of Jude

‘To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy, to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen.’ Jude 24,25

Introduction

Jude gives us a lot to think about as he signs off...

To Him

who is able

to keep you from stumbling and

to present you before his glorious presence

without fault and

with great joy

to the only God our Saviour

be glory,

majesty,

power and

authority,

through Jesus Christ our Lord,
before all ages,

now and

for evermore!

Amen

In his sign off Jude emphasises the magnificence, greatness and supremacy of the only God our Saviour. Jude reminds us that because of who God is and His limitless resources, He is able to keep or guard believers in this life and present them blameless in heaven in the future to live in an atmosphere of joy. Wow!

It's interesting to note that at the beginning of the letter as well Jude reminds us that believers are ...'kept (guarded) in Jesus Christ' (verse 2).

Jude attributes glory, majesty, power and authority to God as His testimony to the gracious character of God in the gift of salvation.

Read Jude

To summarise the letter, Jude writes to Christians (not for the reason he first planned), urging them to strongly defend 'the faith' and oppose false teachers. He was concerned that certain unbelievers had sneaked into the church unawares and were causing major problems, claiming the grace of God as a licence for immorality and perversion.

To help the believers identify these false teachers, Jude gives 7 examples from the OT of what to look out for - such characteristics as unbelief, disobedience, seeking personal gain from deception, despising authority and more.

He describes these false teachers with incredibly powerful language, as shepherds who feed only themselves, clouds without rain, trees without fruit, wild waves of the sea and stars that wander (ones that you cannot take direction from).

Jude also refers to Enoch who prophesied about such people and their downfall and the Apostles' messages warning that such people would infiltrate the church to disturb and spoil. As a result, Jude implores the believers to grow in faith, to pray, to immerse themselves in God's love, and to be merciful and discerning.

Do you know a capable sportsperson? If you were able to play a team sport on the same side as that person how would it make you feel?

Have you ever heard of anyone who secured a job under false pretences by claiming qualifications they didn't possess? How was this deception uncovered and if this had happened to you as an employer, how would you deal with the presenting situation?

Questions

- ✘ Look at power and authority in verse 25 and discuss how these characteristics of God should strengthen your faith.
- ✘ Jude uses some wonderful words to describe God. Make a list of words you could use in prayer/worship to Him.
- ✘ In Jude's sign off we are reminded of the power of God to keep (guard) His own. The word keep/kept is mentioned 5 times in Jude (verse 1, verse 6 twice, verses 21 and 24). Discuss these references and what does it mean to you to be kept (guarded) in Jesus Christ?
- ✘ Being kept by Jesus pictures Him as our perfect Shepherd. Read Psalm 23 and note some characteristics of the Shepherd. Contrast this perfect Shepherd with the false teachers/shepherds mentioned earlier in the letter.
- ✘ Read Hebrews 12:2 and consider whether the privilege for Jesus of presenting the church before the Father in heaven in Jude 24 is the joy referred to in the Hebrews verse. What would you like to say to Jesus based on these two verses?
- ✘ The recipients of the letter were reminded of 3 main things. 1: Old Testament examples to look out for 2: Prophecies of Enoch and the Apostles to remember and 3: The power of God to keep His own. Does God want to remind you of anything else from this letter today and how are you going to respond to that reminder?



Personal Reflection

The content of 2 Peter 2 and Jude are remarkably similar. Note the similarities and differences. Peter prophesied that these false teachers would come and Jude says they are already at work. What in particular are Jude and

Peter saying to you in these chapters?

What impact would the public reading of this letter have had on the different listeners?

Look at the stories of Cain (Genesis 4), Balaam (Numbers 22-25) and Korah (Numbers 16) and build up a clear picture of each situation. Identify each person's failing and consider positive actions that would prevent you from following their ways.

Write a list of all the titles of God found in the letter and see what you can learn about God from them.

© Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth, 2011

www.tabspenarth.org.uk