

## **THE GRACE OF GOD THAT I AM WHAT I AM**

Hear again the Word of the Lord,

*But by the grace of God I am that which I am, and His grace, the one for me, has not become empty; but abundantly more than them all I labored to exhaustion, but not I, but the grace of God [the one] with me.<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

As many of you heard through these Lenten Wednesdays, our series has been progressing through the verses of the Hymn of the Day, or Office Hymn. Today, the fifth verse of the hymn receives the attention. It is used again to deliver the Good News of Jesus to you. The last verse in particular proclaims the Savior who grants His help through the Holy Spirit and His Word, to call the erring sinner back to Christ, and asks Him to grant grace, now and as the singer falls into sleep in Christ.

Please turn back to in your hymnals to hymn 611 for a few more minutes. As you do so, I remind you that the words of “Chief of Sinners Though I Be,” have been sung for just over 100 years in English-speaking US Lutheran congregations. Some of those even now remain in the English District of the LCMS. The hymn proclaims our Redeemer, to Whom we may call out in Confession to receive His blood-bought Absolution. Let us look through it line by line, after hearing it read as a unit first:

“O my Savior, help afford  
By Your Spirit and Your Word!  
When my wayward heart would stray,  
Keep me in the narrow way;  
Grace in time of need supply  
While I live and when I die.”<sup>2</sup>

The verse begins with a plea. Your words are sung to One Who you have learned to be your Savior. You declared, “O my Savior, help afford... .” The very words indicate that you believe that the One to whom you offer this sacrifice of sung praise is truly able to save.

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<sup>1</sup> *1 Corinthians 15:10*

<sup>2</sup> McComb, William. *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnbook*. “Chief of Sinners Though I Be,” St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1918, 99, v.2.

You then offered to Him the reasons for your confidence in His hearing and answering your sung prayer. You declared, *By Your Spirit and Your Word!*” That is to say, you believe that Jesus is your Savior because you have heard His Word and the Holy Spirit has worked through that Word to create and sustain you in the Faith. St. Paul, in our Epistle reading for today, expresses that Word that saves. He declares:

*I continue to make known to all of you, O brothers, the Gospel which I gospelized to you all, that which also all of you received, in which you all stand, through which also all of you are being saved, by which Word I gospelized to you all if all of you hold fast, except [which] without cause you all believed.* <sup>3</sup>

To our ears, that sounds like a convoluted sentence. In the original language it appears to be one sentence, one thought. It is listed as two verses in our English Bibles. Its emphasis is found at the beginning and the end, “I continue to make known to all of you... you all believed.” What is it that St. Paul continued to make known to the Corinthian believers, and that which he has made known to all generations since?

In the middle of the text, there are two words that depend, hang, upon one another which really bring out the Word that saves. You have heard them translated, “Gospel,” and “gospelized.” The word, “Gospel,” means “Good News.” That is how you often hear that word translated here. The word, “gospelized” means to “bring or announce good news.” (It is not exactly the same as “preaching,” by which we mean, “public proclamation.”) By tying two words together, as in, “the Gospel I gospelized,” the Apostle Paul indicates that the Good News he proclaimed has done something to/in its hearers, that is, “*except [which] without cause you all believed.*”

Further, such “Good News proclamation” tells of something done in the past which is sort of active in the present. In fact, it actively works on the hearer of the Good News to react to it. St. Paul indicated to that long-ago troubled Corinthian congregation that they had “received” the Good News, and had taken their stand in it. That Word which Paul “gospelized,” allowed the faithful to claim that Jesus was their Savior.

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<sup>3</sup> *I Corinthians 15:1*

It is the same Good News that allowed you to sing of “my Savior,” today. For, without having heard the Word of God, through which the Spirit works, there would be no saving Faith in you. Hear again that which you confessed in song today:

O my Savior, help afford  
By Your Spirit and Your Word!  
When my wayward heart would stray,  
Keep me in the narrow way...

That last phrase is a confession of your sinfulness. As you sang it, you were to be mindful that you, in yourself, do not keep to the narrow Way. That Way is Christ alone, the Christ of the Scriptures. In our Epistle for today, St. Paul declares Who that Jesus is when He says,

*For I handed over to you all that which in (the) first place, (that) which I also received, “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,” and, “He was buried,” and, “He was raised by the third day according to the Scriptures....”*<sup>4</sup>

That is the core meaning of the Good News. So many Christians seem to have difficulty in our day in articulating the Gospel; they have trouble gospelizing. The way from which one’s heart, the center of one’s being strays from is the Way of God in the crucified Christ. The Good News is simply that Christ died in your sins. He fulfilled all the Holy Writings declared God would do to save you! Christ was buried, in the flesh. He carried your sins into the grave, that you need not bear them now. Christ Jesus was raised then, on that third day, having conquered sin, and death, for you. He freely gives of that Good News, for His sake, for your benefit. That is grace – that which is God’s favor unmerited by you. We return to the hymn as it goes on to declare that you believe the Gospel results: that Christ your Savior has the power to return you to God’s Way of truth.

“O my Savior, help afford  
By Your Spirit and Your Word!  
When my wayward heart would stray,  
Keep me in the narrow way;  
Grace in time of need supply

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<sup>4</sup> *I Corinthians* 15: 3-4.

While I live and when I die.”<sup>5</sup>

There you sang of God’s grace in time of need. That is God’s gift that you need, in all times, in good and bad. In fact, are there not times in your life when you fail to offer the third of the sacrifices of your Christian priesthood –thanksgiving? It is easy to cry out to God when times are tough and deliverance is needed. Yet, perhaps, it is more difficult to cry out in thanks, with praise when times are easy, and life is smooth.

Even so, at all times, we are free to remember that God gives us His grace in all times of need, easy and difficult, times of plenty and times of want. That is what you sing of in the hymn, as you remind yourself that God gives you grace in Christ for life and into death. St. Paul expressed as much when he declared:

*But by the grace of God I am that which I am, and His grace, the one for me, has not become empty; but abundantly more than them all I labored to exhaustion, but not I, but the grace of God [the one] with me.*<sup>6</sup>

The Apostle, by the time he wrote the words that translation is based upon, had truly “owned” God’s grace for himself. Remember, as Paul was persecuting the nascent Church, under the authority of the Church leaders of the Old Covenant, God called him out for his sins. God showed grace for Paul in only fully blinding him for a while in his sins. God declared his grace as He caused the scales to fall from the man’s eyes, and as he was washed with the water and the Word.

The man who had thought to vindicate himself by keeping the Law, was declared right by the only Man who kept the Law perfectly. Faith was granted. The Apostle responded to the Word planted in him. He set about gospelizing the Gospel until his last hour had come – apparently under a Roman sword. Before he died, Paul received that which he passed on to you, about which you sing this time of year as your prayer offering for yourself:

“Keep me in the narrow way;  
Grace in time of need supply

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<sup>5</sup> McComb, William. *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnbook*, “Chief of Sinners Though I Be,” St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1918, 99, v.2.

<sup>6</sup> *1 Corinthians* 15:10

While I live and when I die.”

Today’s Epistle goes on to declare the reasons why you may have confidence in Jesus the Christ as your sin-bearer. The word gives record of eyewitnesses to Him Who has been raised to present believers right with our heavenly Father. Here the testimony again:

*He appeared to Cephas and then by the Twelve; thereafter He appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, out of whom the greater (part) remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; thereafter He appeared to James then to the sent ones again, and last of all as though it were to (a) miscarriage He appeared to me.<sup>7</sup>*

That, dear ones in Christ, is record of eyewitnesses, more than enough, over enough a time period, to discount theories of either wishful thinking or mass hysteria. Their record, in multiple texts, indicates that Jesus Who was killed to atone for your sins was raised for your justification. As you remain in Him you are found in the Truth, in the narrow way in His grace, as you live, and when you fall asleep in the Lord.

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Lent V Wednesday

Psalm 43:3ab (1-2a); I Corinthians 15:1-10; John 16:12-15

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*Pastor Michael A. Morehouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***

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<sup>7</sup> I Corinthians 15:5—8.