

A Testament to Grace: But by the Grace of God I am **sermonaudio.com**
what I am

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 15:10
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If you'll turn with me this morning, our text will be found in 1 Corinthians 15:10.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Let us pray.

Dear heavenly Father, how great is thy grace. O Lord, you must testify to us in this hour how great thy grace is, how amazing thy grace is. Lord, may you bring forth thy testimony in our souls this hour to show us, Lord, what we are in thee, what we have in thee, what we are saved from in thee. Show us, Lord, the depth of that grace. May you be glorified. May you be praised for great things thou hast done. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

I'm going to save my comments for our text until we read down to it, so we move back up to chapter 15 at the beginning where Paul writes, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel." Paul said that he preached and declared unto the church at Corinth the Gospel. Not a Gospel, the Gospel. He writes if any man preaches any other Gospel or says anything to the Gospel, adds to the Gospel, takes away from the Gospel, has some other kind of Gospel, let him be accursed.

So much today is made of the word "Gospel." Man has made it out to be a doctrine. Man has made it out to be a thing, but the Gospel simply put is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel is a man. It is the God-man. Paul will go on to explain to us real quickly what the Gospel is to him. I pray that that Gospel is the same to you today, that it's not a bunch of thoughts or a bunch of things you can string together, but what the Scriptures testify of is Christ.

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you." That is our first time that Paul exhorts them about their memory, to keep in memory, "unless you have believed in vain." I thought deeply

about that verse this week and I thought and I've sat here with many people who have come in and worshiped with us and heard the testimony of some who've left, I haven't heard of some who have left. I don't know where they stand. I don't know whether the Gospel that we preach here is precious to them but I do know that all of those who followed Christ and all of those that followed him for a time and turned at the end and chose another path and went another path, all that they ever did was in vanity. All that they ever did to follow Christ was vain.

The grace of Christ transforms a soul. It keeps a soul. Yes, the path is hard. Yes, the path is difficult, and as I said, I can't tell you the ones that have been removed from us whether they're God's people or not. The Lord knows that. If they are, this grace, this one Gospel, the Lord will return them to. Many times in the word of God we've seen sheep stray, we have seen those go away from what they've been wrought in and what they've been taught and what they believed, but grace saves to the uttermost. The grace that is in Christ Jesus, as I said at the beginning, the depth of it no minister can get to. I can't portray to you today the depth of grace. This what we're reading today, when we get down to 10, you're going to see this is the testimony of the Apostle Paul but it's also the testimony of the child of God because that's the path that the Lord puts us on to show us the need and the value of grace. But we'll get there.

"Unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." This is the Gospel. Christ. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He fulfilled all that was written of him. All the prophets said this one would come and lay down his life for his friends, for his church, for his elect people that were elected before the foundation of the world, and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. We know that Paul's testimony, Peter's testimony, John's testimony, they all talked of resurrection life in Christ. This is the great resurrection chapter that speaks of the life we have in Christ, the life here, the life to come. All that we have in Christ.

"And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve." Paul goes on to tell us the validity of this Gospel. As he's writing this letter, he's telling them how Christ's resurrection was seen of many, the validity of it, the factualness of it. It's such under attack this day. It's always been under attack but Paul said it's true, he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve.

"After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep." Some have passed on but they're sleeping in Christ.

"After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles," again. "And last of all," as humbly as this is Paul says, "last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." What you will see in these next three verses is everything in Paul's life he attributes to the saving grace that's in Christ Jesus. Grace humbles the child of God. In Paul's life, he could not boast that he was one of the apostles who was there at the

forefront that walked with Jesus. He could not boast that. What he could say was that he was last of all was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. In the Lord's time which is perfect for each and every one of us in this room if we be in Christ, and each and every one of God's people scattered throughout all of the world today wherever they are, whatever false church they sit in today, whatever false doctrine they're listening to, wherever they are, when it pleases the Lord to call them forth, to call them in their soul to come unto him, they will come.

"For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." There are some who believe that the sins that we have committed in the past, we should never think of them again. Oh, that's part of easy-believism but the Lord brings them to our remembrance. He brings Paul's past sin to humble him and Paul said, "I persecuted the church of God." As you take inventory in that seat this morning, as the Lord comes to your soul to speak to you the depth of why you're saved by grace, you should have a backstory, you should have a delivering time in your life. The Lord brings forth, the Holy Spirit brings forth the conviction of sin. He brings it forth in our life to not only keep us humble but to keep us dependent upon the Lord.

This week, I was reminded of something in my past. I was 18 years old and my mom thought it was time that I was old enough to tell me some of the deep dark secrets of my family. She took me to the side one day and she sat me down and she said to me, "Shawn, I want to tell you some things about my family." This is her side of the family. We all lived in the same place. All of her brothers lived around her. She came from a family of five brothers and she was a sister, the only sister in the family. Her dad and her mom, they all lived in the same place and I was raised that way and it was always to me a big happy family. But that night when I was 18 years old, she told me some deep dark secrets about the family and what a few of my uncles did to my sisters, and if you can imagine the worst thing in your mind right now, you're there. And I remember telling her as soon as I heard it, I said, "If I'm ever given the opportunity, I'll kill them." And God tried me on that.

It was probably a month later, I was full of hate, full of anger, and I was dating Stephanie at the time, it was early, and I was coming home one night from where she lived. It was about a 45 minute drive from her house to mine and I didn't leave until after midnight. I was coming home that night and I lived on a dirt road way back off the main, we were way out so it was just me and God and one of my uncles in the middle of the street, in the middle of the dirt road that night. I saw him and I was in my car and I was full of hate and I floored it because I wanted to take his life and I tried. I know it was by God's grace that my car swerved and missed him. And I got home that night, I parked my car in the garage and I sat and I cried and I trembled. I don't know why. I was scared to death. I remember him looking at me right in my eyes when this happened and I know later the Lord revealed to me that I committed murder that night in my heart.

When I read a verse like verse 10, you see, Paul was brought to remember his sin and this week the Lord brought that back to me for two reasons: to show me not only the grace of

God that kept me from acting on my murderous thoughts, but also the grace that saves me, the grace, the depth of grace that the Lord took that sin that I committed and nailed it to the tree. Paul mentions that he persecuted the church because that was a deep dark, it wasn't a secret, it was a cross. Shamefully I could say to you I have many more. The reason I mention that one to you is because that's the one that was brought to me this week and as it was brought to me again, I shook, I shed some tears, and I thought about how great God's grace is. I don't know what life would have been like if that would have taken place. I don't know. All I know is the life that God made for me because it didn't take place. It's preserving grace, but the preserving grace goes deeper than that because I still committed the sin and I've carried that guilt with me and I've carried that guilt and I still carry that guilt with me but the Lord has overruled it. That's how great grace is.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am." I've heard people say that before, boasting of sin. "Well, by God's grace I am what I am." But God's grace does not make us cry out, "By God's grace I am what I am," that we're a sinner, but that we're a sinner saved by grace. Paul didn't see himself worthy in verse 9 because I want you to understand Paul in verse 9 is telling us how he views it. I'm telling you today how I view it. I'm not worthy of grace. That's just one of my many dark sins that the people close to me know. I'm not worthy of grace and that's the thing, grace doesn't choose out worthy people. Grace saves to the uttermost. Grace saves Manasseh who burned his children unto Molech. Grace saved Mary Magdalene who had seven devils. Grace saved the apostles that turned their back upon Jesus when he went to the cross. Grace saved Peter who said he would never do it and yet denied Christ three times. Grace saved David who committed adultery and murder, premeditated. And do you know something? You will never be able to pick up this book where God once called his people sinners, they called themselves sinners, but God doesn't look at us as sinners, he calls us saints. He sees us in his Son, dressed in the righteousness of his Son. By the grace of God, it's but by the grace of God, I am what I am.

Paul said in Romans 3:23 and 24, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Yes, we are sinners by birth, we are sinners by nature, we are sinners by habit, we are sinners by practice. And this may bug you but when I look out in this room, I see sinners. I don't see anyone that is worthy of the grace of God. And sometimes we get so upset with one another because our flesh is revealed to one another about how bad we can be. Why though? Why is there such an offense when we realize how bad we can be ourselves? We have to be shown that. That's the magnification of grace.

Turn with me a little bit back to 1 Corinthians 6. I want you to listen to Paul once again earlier in this letter. Beginning in verse 9, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" I just named you a bunch of unrighteous people. That's how we see it. That's how we see ourselves. That's what the conviction of the Holy Spirit does to us and shows us, "thou art the man." That's what Paul put on record many times, "I'm a sinner." As I said, that's not how God sees it.

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." And you might be ready to say, "That's right! The kingdom of God is not for any of those people." And then the depth of grace, Paul says,

"And such were some of you." It doesn't sound like who we would fill heaven with, but Paul said, "such were some of you," and then he explains the depth of what grace does, "but ye are washed," you are washed in the blood of the Lamb. You are washed in the fountain that is open. And that's the only way I could stand before you today and share that experience with you of what the depth of grace was in my life because the Lord has shown me that his blood has covered that sin and the other sins and the sins today and the sins next week. And that makes me hate sin. It makes me hate it. It makes me hate myself for continuing to sin over and over. There are nights I lay down on my bed to pray and to give thanks unto the Lord but the wickedness of my mind takes over and all of these thoughts come rushing into my mind and I think, "Lord, how wicked I am that I can't take five minutes out to thank you, Lord, for what you have done." And the Lord shows me I'm dependent upon him.

"And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified." You are set apart for the Lord's holy use. You are washed in the blood of the Lamb. You are justified and the Lord has said you are not guilty because my Son has died for you, my Son has paid the debt for you.

"Ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." The Holy Spirit applies and reveals to the child of God the depth of grace that the Lord has done for his soul, for his life that's hidden in Christ. And if you ever look at sin and think that it's not wicked, or you look at sin and you make light of it and you joke about it and you say, "That's just who I am," you don't understand what sin, the price that was paid for that sin. It's the depth of grace.

Turn with me now over to 1 Timothy 1. We'll read another testimony of Paul's real quick, something I just hinted on. 1 Timothy 1 starting in verse 12, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." He didn't say, "Look, I was qualified. Look, I went to school for this. Look, Lord, this is what I've done for you. He put me into the ministry." All of him.

"Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." You say, "Oh, well that's why he had mercy." Listen, when we don't believe, it's out of ignorance. It's out of ignorance of a salvation that Christ has wrought for you and for all of his people. That's what unbelief is but that's not an excuse. Paul never counted it as an excuse.

"I obtained mercy." I obtained mercy. All that I did, I thought I did it in a religious setting and I did it for Jehovah. I did it for God. I did it and I listened to all the religious crowd

that was around me praising my name, telling me go and do this. I was the Pharisee of the Pharisees and I thought that was where life was. I really did.

"I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Does that make it any better? Do you sit today and say, "Yeah, that's right. I do things ignorantly therefore sin is not so bad." You won't see that in Paul's letters. You won't see that in his testimony.

"And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." He gave me faith and love. Faith to believe what he had done for me, and love to love him with. Love to love him because of what he's done. And I can read these words to you and we can all mouth that we love him because of the great salvation but yet our life proves out that we don't love him unless he reveals the love and empowers us to love him. That's what Paul just said, "the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant upon me with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." Once again, Paul didn't say, "This is in me." He said, "This is in Christ Jesus."

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Do you see how he was brought there? Do you see how Paul was emptied to say, "Not of me, but all, Lord, what you have done"? Which is in our text again today, "I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, Lord, but the grace that was upon me." That's the conversation of the child of God, it's heavenward. It owes its life, it owes its being, it owes everything to the Lord and the grace of the Lord. Without the grace of God, there go I. I shudder to think sometimes about how that night could have gone. How anger and how murderous thoughts and how the wicked one can come and just pollute your mind and if it's not for the grace of God to keep, there go I.

And then Paul says in 16, "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering." That's why Paul sharing his testimony with Timothy, that's why he shared it with the church. This is what Christ has done for me. That is, Lord willing, why I'm sharing this with you because of the depth of grace, because Christ has shown such longsuffering toward me.

"For a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." Paul said, "This is how the Lord works in the child of God's life, he brings you to the end of yourself. He reveals to you the depth of what you are without him, the depth of what he's kept you from." And listen, there have been sins in my life I haven't been kept from. I've been allowed to fall, but not to hell. Not to hell, for grace snatched me from hell, the grace that's in Christ Jesus.

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen." What unmerited favor.

Go with me to the last place we'll go and that's Ephesians 1. You know, we spend a lot of time in Ephesians 1 because as I've said many times, I believe the heaven was opened for the Apostle Paul to see what great riches we have in this grace that's in Christ Jesus.

Begin with me in verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." That's the depth of grace. All that we ever need, the spiritual blessings are in Christ and we possess them in Christ if we be in Christ. This is all that we have in him. Listen to how this flows.

"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world," that's the riches of his grace, "that we should be holy." Listen to the things that we are in Christ that we shudder at to sit and walk down the street and say, "This is what I am." This is the depth of grace. This is how God sees it. I told you how Paul saw it in verse 9, I've told you how I see it, I know how we all see it when we're revealed our sin and the wickedness of it, but how does God see it? How does God see you if you're clothed in the righteousness of Christ? If you're in Christ, how does he see us?

"That we should be holy and without blame before him in love." In love. We're elected before the foundation of the world. It's an amazing thing that the children of God...think about it for a minute, think about if you didn't have that past or you didn't have sin revealed to you. It wouldn't be grace. You would certainly sit here and believe that you have merited the favor of God because of some kind of life that you have lived but that is not the testimony of the saints. The testimony of the saints is that we are sinners saved by grace.

We are holy in him and without blame. You see, that night, that was all on me. That's my blame. I took it upon myself, I was wrapped up in my anger, I didn't let it go, I didn't.... Listen, I didn't know the depth of grace then. I didn't know anything about grace. In fact, that was just the beginning that I started sitting under the ministry of the pastor. I was an Arminian. I felt pretty good about the fact that I didn't hit him that night. I did something good. But I didn't do anything but sin and I'll tell you, from the moment I wake up in the morning, I sin. As I come to work, I sin. When I go home at night to my family, I sin. When I lay down on the bed at night, I sin. And I wish I could paint you a better picture of the plight that we have in this life but that's what we are by practice. That's what we are by nature and anyone that tells you otherwise doesn't know the depth of grace. And if they tell you today by easy-believism or some kind of progressive sanctification that you're getting holier and that you sin less, I ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you today whether that's the truth or not.

"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself." We have been adopted. We've been taken from that line in our father Adam and we've been saved by our Father, Christ. We've been taken out of that line, that line that certainly and certainly all men have fallen in Adam and there is only one way out of that line and that's through the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children." You see, it was all predestinated. Before the foundation of the world the Lord said, "These are the ones that I'm going to take out of that line." That means the fall was predestined too, no matter what man wants to tell you about free will or whatever it is.

"According to the good pleasure of his will." The salvation of a sinner in Christ is the good pleasure of his will.

"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." Only. No other way. We're accepted in Christ. Just as beautiful as that picture is in the ark when Noah made that ark and the Lord gathered up the eight souls and he put them in that ark and he shut the door, he shut the door on that ark and then all of everything else came and all broke loose and everything was wiped out but those eight souls were saved in that ark, those eight lives, I should say. That's the way grace is. We're accepted only in Christ. His merit. What he's done. What he has accomplished. What he has finished.

Verse 7, "In whom," in this great union, in this great depth of grace, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." According to the riches of his grace we have redemption through his blood. He has bought us by the great price that he has paid, from sure death.

"The forgiveness of sin." You see, that's the thing. That's the beauty of the Gospel. The Lord says to you, "You're forgiven." That's the freedom. The truth will set you free. The truth that's in Christ, you're forgiven. "I've covered that sin with my blood. My Father will never see that because my righteousness will cover you. My righteousness. My perfect obedience is yours by imputation. My righteousness is yours by imputation." "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

Now let's go back to our text. "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me," was given, it's a gift. The grace of God is a gift. That gift that was bestowed upon me "was not in vain." It was not in vain. How could Paul say that? Because of preserving grace it was not in vain. He's kept. But you see, that grace that's in our life is action grace. That's the life of faith, it's action faith. The life of Christ lived out in his people is power. It's life to live.

And he said, "but I laboured more abundantly than they all," and he's speaking at the time of the ministers there. He says, "I've laboured more abundantly." He's not boasting because as you see in the next phrase, he says, "yet not I." It wasn't me. I'm not the one doing all these things, it's the grace of God. It's the transforming grace of God. It's the power of the grace of God. And if you ever hear someone speaking about what they've done, they don't know grace. If there was ever one that could boast in our eyes, it would be the Apostle Paul. But he didn't. He owed everything as a debtor to grace.

Ephesians 4:7 says, "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." For everyone in this room that be in Christ, the Lord has given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Every day we need that measure that the gift of Christ gives us. Every day. Grace for today, grace for tomorrow, because we're

sinner, because we have a great need of our salvation to be shown to us daily, to be applied to us daily.

Peter said in 1 Peter 5:10, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while." Isn't that the testimony of the people of God? We suffer. We suffer in unbelief. We suffer in trials. We suffer in afflictions. We suffer in what we see this mainstream, what they say about our God. We suffer in this religious world who sends up what they think is religion. We suffer so much in this life and because of the suffering, the ordained suffering of God, "after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect," in Christ, "stablish," in Christ, "strengthen," in and by Christ, "and settled in Christ." That's the depth of grace. Do you need anything else on a daily basis than to be established and strengthened and settled? That's the faithfulness of the grace of the Lord. That's what he is to his people on a daily basis. That's the manna that Christ represents that we feed upon daily.

I want to share with you this morning before I leave one of Hart's hymns. He wrote in the 1700s. I'll tell you, if you ever read the testimony, the experience of Joseph Hart, he was a blasphemer. He was basically an atheist. He wrote against the church of God. He wrote against the Gospel. He wrote violent articles about the nonsense of it and then the Lord came mightily to his soul as you'll hear in this little hymn that's called "Christ the Believer's All."

"Lamb of God, we fall before Thee,
Humbly trusting in Thy Cross.
That alone be all our glory;
All things else are only dross.

Thee we own a perfect Savior,
Only Source of all that's good.
Every grace and every favor
Comes to us through Jesus' blood.

Jesus gives us true repentance
By His Spirit sent from heaven;
Jesus whispers this sweet sentence,
'Son, thy sins are all forgiven.'

Faith He gives us to believe it,
Grateful hearts His love to prize;
Want we wisdom? He must give it,
Hearing ears and seeing eyes.

Jesus gives us pure affections,
Wills to do what He requires,
Makes us follow His directions,
And what He commands, inspires.

All our prayers and all our praises,
Rightly offered in His name,--
He that dictates them is Jesus;
He that answers is the same."

When we live on Jesus' merit,
Then we worship God aright,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Then we savingly unite.

Hear the whole conclusion of it,
Great or good what 'ere we call,
God or King or Priest or Prophet,
Jesus Christ is all in all."

I leave you today with the words of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:18 and the Apostle John in the very last words of the Bible, Revelation 22:21, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

Dear heavenly Father, may you add thy power and thy clarity and, Lord, may you come and thy word be a mirror to our souls this day to reveal the depth of thy grace that, Lord, we may be able to proclaim this day, "But by thy grace, we are what we are." O Lord, may you humble us before thee to see what we are in thy Son, to see what we are by nature, and to see what we are by thy great appointment of grace to the praise and glory of thee. O Lord, give us thankful hearts in this time of thanksgiving and throughout all the years and it, Lord, would be accepted of thee for the praise and glory of you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.