

A Debtor to Mercy Alone, #463, by Augustus M. Toplady, 1760's.

Augustus Montague Toplady was born at Farnham, England, on November 4, 1740, the son of a Royal Marine. His father died on duty in the service while his Toplady was in infancy. Augustus was left to be raised by his mother, who took him to church frequently in England.

Toplady had an interest in religion during his younger years, shown in his spiritual journals. However, it wasn't until he was 15 years old, while away visiting Ireland, and attending a Methodist revival in an Irish barn, that he felt "brought near to God."

Here is what he wrote, "Strange that I, who had so long sat under the means of grace in England, should be brought right with God in an obscure part of Ireland, midst a handful of people met together in a barn...Surely it was the Lord's doing and is marvelous."

Having been converted under Methodism, Toplady initially adopted that understanding and aimed to become a Methodist minister. After he studied the 39 Articles of the Church of England, he became convinced of the Calvinistic perspective and desired to become a minister in the Church of England. Later Toplady graduated from Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, and was ordained in 1762 to the ministry of the Anglican Church.

The issue of Calvinism versus Arminianism remained a hot topic in the church in those days, and for the remainder of his life Toplady would write and debate on the subject, debating at length for the doctrine of election.

His various pastorates included the French Calvinist Chapel at Leichester Fields, London, where he was known as a powerful and zealous evangelical preacher. Because of his frail constitution, he died of overwork at the early age of thirty-eight, having contracted tuberculosis.

He had never married, his life and ministry were short, and he had his share of flaws, but God was pleased to use him to write a few hymns that would powerfully communicate the gospel and encourage the saints.

Verse one begins the hymn with a declaration of two things: the helplessness of a sinner, and the salvation found in Christ.

Verse two speaks of Christ, the object of the Christian's faith. The Christian can never point to a time in his or her life where Christ failed to keep His promises.

Verse three moves from the object of faith to the effects of faith: the perseverance of the Christian. Our security is won by the sacred wounds of Christ.