

BY THE GRACE OF GOD, I AM WHAT I AM

1 CORINTHIANS 1:15 • TV169B

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1 Corinthians 15:10

“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.”

If you will, I want you to look at **1 Corinthians 15:10**. That Scripture says this; *“By the grace of God I am what I am.”* I am interested to know who said this, why he said it and what were the conditions under which he said, *“By the grace of God I am what I am.”*

It is the apostle Paul speaking. It was Paul who ministered to this church in Corinth for almost two years (someone said he was there for a year and a half). While he was there he said, *“As a wise master builder I laid the foundation.”*

That foundation is Christ; *“Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Christ our Lord.”* He laid that foundation. He preached faithfully the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

After he departed problems began to arise in the church and he wrote this epistle in **1 Corinthians** to correct these errors, to rebuke these people, to deal with their problems. What were some of their problems?

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Well, the church was filled with factions and divisions. He said, *“You are acting like infants; you are behaving like little babies. You are acting like carnal men, not like spiritual men, whereas there are divisions among you and factions among you.”*

Some of you say, *“I am of Paul”* and some of you say, *“I am of Apollos and I am of Cephus”* and so forth.” He said, *“Are you not acting like carnal men?”*

The thing that ought to characterize believers is love and unity. *“By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, (not by your debates, arguments, and divisions) but by your love for one another.”* That is how people know that you are my disciples, *“if you love one another.”*

Then, intellectualism had invaded the church, worldly wisdom had crept in. They were trying to appeal to the world and get along with the world. Paul had to rebuke them about that; he said, *“When I came to you, I didn’t come to you with enticing words of man’s wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.”*

He said, *“I preached Christ to you that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, (not in the arguments of men) but in the Spirit of God.”*

Then, they allowed open sin to go un-judged and not dealt with. Then, brother was taking brother to courts of law. He said, *“I’m shocked that there any of you having a matter against another go to law, (to the courts of men, before unbelievers)?”*

Then, marriages were in trouble. People’s homes were breaking up. Some people were even questioning apostolic authority and when they did they were questioning the Word of God.

Some were even questioning the resurrection. *“How say some among you there is no resurrection of the dead?”* They were misusing the gifts, tongues, and healings, and other gifts. They were taking pride in their knowledge and their wisdom.

The Lord’s Supper had been violated and turned into some type of feast of pleasure and feast of fellowship. The apostle wrote the **Book of 1 Corinthians** to deal with these errors, to deal with these problems in the church.

When he had faithfully dealt with these errors here, in the latter part of the epistle, **Chapter 15**, he sets forth again the very foundation of our faith. He said, *“This is our message; this is the thing that brings us together. This is the thing that unites our hearts. This is what we came to preach.”*

“We didn’t just come to straighten out men’s lives, behavior, conduct, and these things with laws, rules, and regulations. This (the gospel) is that which unites the believer; this is that which joins us in a living relationship with Christ and that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

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“Brethren,” he said; I preach to you the Gospel. I preach to you the Gospel and you receive this Gospel. You said that you were standing in this Gospel and that you were saved by this Gospel. He said, *“You are, if you keep in memory what I have preached unto you.”*

“What did I preach unto you? Did I preach salvation by works, salvation by law, salvation by human merits, or salvation by ritualism? No sir!” *“I preached unto you that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”*

That’s our hope; that’s our life; that’s our refuge; that’s our message; that’s our foundation that Christ died for our sins. The Son of God went to Calvary’s mountain and there He suffered, *“the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God.”*

In bringing us to God He brought us to one another. Oh, great is Mount Sinai where we see the thundering’s and the lightning and hear the voice of God as He gives His great law to Moses.

And great is Mount Horeb where Moses saw the bush that burned but was not consumed. He heard the voice of God give him directions about leading the people out of Egypt.

And great is Mount Pisgah where Moses stood and looked over into the Promised Land and then went by God’s power into the very presence of the Lord.

Great is Mount Moriah where Abraham would sacrifice Isaac and God gave a ram to take the place of Isaac and thereby demonstrated the Gospel to his son.

Great are these high mountains of purpose but greater, far greater, infinitely greater, is Mount Calvary, where Christ died for our sins. This was Paul’s message; this was Paul’s objective to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“I am determined.” He said over and over again to this church at Corinth; *“I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.”* *“The Gospel that I preached unto you is the gospel of God’s Son, his Son who died for our sins, who was buried and rose again.”*

Now watch this statement here; *“according to the Scriptures.”* Do you see that? It is there two or three times. It is right there in the first four verses, *“according to the Scriptures.”* What does that mean?

Well; it doesn’t mean according to the report of the apostles in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, although that is true. The apostles gave an accurate, eyewitness account of the sufferings, the death, the burial, the resurrection, and the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, when Paul comes to this church at Corinth and says, *“I preached unto you the gospel; I have declared unto you the gospel and you have received this gospel by which you are saved and this gospel is how Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. He was buried and rose again according to the scriptures.”*

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He means according to the Old Testament Scriptures. That's right, my friend, because Christ died according to the Old Testament Scriptures, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and all the way through the Psalms, Isaiah and Jeremiah.

All the Old Testament Scriptures; *"these testify of me,"* Christ said. *"To him give all the prophet's witness. Moses wrote of me."* Christ said, *"All things must be fulfilled in Moses, in the Psalms, in the prophets, concerning me."* All the prophecies, promises and pictures of Christ, are fulfilled in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God.

This is what Paul is saying. This Gospel that I am preaching to you is no new Gospel; it is the ancient Gospel; it is the eternal Gospel. It is the Gospel of God from the beginning, from the foundation of the world. *"Christ was the lamb slain from the foundation of the world."*

Almighty God decreed that Christ should be *"the surety of that everlasting covenant."* His blood should be the blood of the everlasting covenant and everything done from the creation of Adam until the day that Christ died on that cross, pointed to that cross.

That's right; every sacrifice, every priest, every atonement, all the ministering about the tabernacle; everything pointed to Christ. All the prophecies, promises, pictures, types, and symbols of the Old Testament are pointing to Christ.

That rock in the wilderness is Christ. That Passover is Christ. That ark floating on the waters of judgment is Christ, all the way through were types of Christ. I wish I could get that across to you.

I wish that every time you opened the Old Testament, my friend, that you would see what God would have you see, and that is Christ His Son, the Redeemer. *"Abraham saw my day. He saw it and rejoiced,"* Christ said. *"Moses wrote of me."*

When our Lord died, He was buried and rose again, *"according to the Scriptures."* He was fulfilling the Scriptures. Then He said, *"After his resurrection, the Lord Jesus was seen by Peter. He was seen by the other disciples and then he was seen by over 500 brethren at once."*

Then He was seen by James and then Paul says, last of all; *"he was seen by me as one born out of a due time,"* or an aborted birth. In other words, he said this; when he is talking about a birth here, a child is conceived and it spends nine months in the womb and it is born.

If it is born prior to that time, it is an aborted birth. It is one born out of due time; it is born not in its season, not in its intended time, not in the full time, but born out of due time. That is what Paul is saying.

The other apostles walked with Christ. The other apostles lived with Christ. The other apostles were chosen by Christ during His life here on earth. Paul said, *"I saw the Lord* (as one that

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wasn't following that pattern, not born like the ordinary 12 disciples), *one born out of due time.*"

But, "I saw Him. I saw the Lord and I received my Gospel from the Lord. I was not with the apostles when they walked with Christ. I did not stand with Him in the early days of persecution and death. I was a persecutor myself."

He said, "I stood with the Pharisees against Him. I stood with the enemies of the Gospel and the enemies of the cross." He said, "I am the least of the apostles, although I am an apostle. I am not worthy to be an apostle but I am an apostle. I have not earned any rights or any respect, but I am still an apostle for I persecuted those who were called by his name."

But; here is where he comes to my text: "*But, by the grace of God I am what I am.*" Do you see what I am saying? "*By the grace of God I am what I am.*"

"Whatever I was; it matters not; wherever God found me; wherever road I have traveled; it matters not. Wherever God brought me from it matters not: '*by the grace of God I am what I am.*'"

You can say that; if you are a child of God you can say that. Where I serve, in whatever capacity I labor, the abilities or the lack of it, the gifts, or the lack of them I possess, matters not: "*By the grace of God I am what I am.*"

Whether I am known or unknown, whether I am rich or poor, whether I am old or young, whether I am male or female, whether I am black or white, it matters not: "*By the grace of God I am what I am.*"

That is what Paul is saying, "By the grace of God, whether I am acting as a bond-slave, or whether I am acting as a servant or whether I am acting as an apostle, whether I am acting as a messenger of God, or whether I am under the chastisement of God or the trial of God, whether I am in prison or whether I am free." "*I know how to abound, how to be abased, but by the grace of God, I am what I am.*"

My friends; this is an attitude and the spirit and the watchword of every true believer; "*by the grace of God I am what I am.*"

I want to divide this into four parts. I would like to share with you four things that I see in this text, "*by the grace of God I am what I am.*"

First of all: This is my doctrine! I am a preacher; I am a pastor. I have been a pastor of the church 30 some, odd, years. This is my doctrine when I preach to you, this is my doctrine; "*by the grace of God I am what I am.*"

His grace elected me. He said, "*You didn't choose me; I chose you.*" He says that very plainly. "*We love him because he first loved us.*" If God had not loved me I would have never love

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Him. If He had not chosen me I would have never chosen Him. If He had not sought me I wouldn't have sought Him. If He had not called me I wouldn't have called Him.

“Herein is love, not that we love God.” We do not love God by nature; we love ourselves. But, “he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. He was in the world and the world knew him not. He came unto his own and his own received him not.”

“But, to as many as received him, to them gave power (the privilege) to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born, not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, not of the will of man, but of God,” born of God.

By His grace He elected me and by His grace He redeemed me. *“It's not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to his mercy he saved us. For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”*

It is the goodness of God that led you to repentance. Peter said, *“We know that we are not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold from our vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers but with the precious blood of Christ.”*

He redeemed me and it was by His grace; His grace made Him my Surety. His grace sent Him into the world as my representative. His grace took Him to Calvary as my sin-offering. His grace took Him into the grave as my scape-goat.

His grace brought Him forth as my justifier. His grace enthroned Him as my Mediator. His grace crowns Him as my King of King and Lord of Lords, His grace. I didn't have anything to do with it.

By His grace He called me. Paul said that; *“God who separated me from my mother's womb was pleased to call me by his grace. He hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ before the world began. I'll maintain this truth against all comers; “it is by the grace of God that I am what I am.”*

It was not my will that brought me to God but His will. He made me willing. *“Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.”* But, it is still true; *“whom he foreknew; he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son and whom he predestinated, he justified, and who he justified, he glorified, whom he, whom he called, he glorified.”*

“What shall we say to these things; if God be for us, who can be against us?” By His grace He keeps me. I am convinced of these things; this is my doctrine and I am not ashamed of it. By His grace He keeps me.

My friends; we teach a two-fold keeping; the Bible does. There is preservation and perseverance. Preservation is this; *“Unto him who is able to keep you from falling.”* Perseverance is this; *“We are kept by the power of God through faith.”* Do you see that?

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But, we wouldn't persevere without His preservation. That is exactly right; *"now unto him who is able to keep you from falling:"*

**"When life's journey is over
And I the dear Saviour shall see,
I am going to praise Him for ever and ever
For saving a sinner like me."**

That's my doctrine; *"by the grace of God I am what I am."* That sums it up.

Secondly: This is my experience!

"By the grace of God I am what I am." That's not only my doctrine and that won't do if it remains a doctrine. It is hard as nails if it remains the doctrine. It's a dead, cold, dry, letter of the law, if it remains a doctrine; it has to be the heart and experience.

I mean this: It's my experience but *"by the grace of God I am what I am."* Every day I am reminded of the fact that His grace makes the difference. **1 Corinthians 4:7** says, *"Who maketh thee to differ? What has thou that thou didst not receive? If you received it, why do you glory as if you didn't receive it?"*

My friends; there is not a day that goes by that I am not made aware of the depths of my own depravity and sin. Can you say that? Paul said it; he said, *"The things I would do I do them not. The things I would not do I do."*

"When I would do good, evil is present with me." He finally said, *"O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from this body of death?"* Thank God I have deliverance in Christ.

I am reminded of my sin and depravity, the depths of my corruption, every day. I think things I shouldn't think and say things I shouldn't say and do things I shouldn't do, do you? I am reminded every day of my depravity.

Not only that, but there is not a day goes by that I am not aware of the dullness of my heart, spiritually. Do you pray like you ought to pray? Do you love God like you ought to love God? Do you love your neighbor like you ought to love him as yourself, do you?

Do you give thanks in everything, *"in everything give thanks?"* Do you *"pray without ceasing?"* Do you have perfect faith or lack of faith? If you had faith as a *"grain of mustard seed, you could say to that mountain; be thou removed and cast into the sea."*

Have you moved any mountains lately? Aren't you aware of the dullness of your spiritual life? John Newton was; he said:

"Tis a point I long to know

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**Oft it gives me anxious thought
Do I even love the Lord or no?
Am I his or am I not?"**

"By the grace of God I am what I am." My friends, when I witness the fall of others and the departure from the faith, I ask; "why not me, why not me?" David said, *"Lord; who am I; what is my house that we should persevere?"*

Christ said to Peter; *"Satan hath desired you that he may sift you as wheat, but I prayed for you that your faith fail not."* That's the difference; by the grace of God I stand and no longer than His grace enables me to stand.

Not a day goes by that I am not aware of the blessings and mercies of God on me and my friends. I know that *"every good gift and perfect gift cometh from God."*
I want to say,

**"Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praise him all creatures here below,
Praise him above you heavenly host.
Praise father, son, and Holy Ghost."**

"By the grace of God I am what I am." That is my experience.

Thirdly: That is my comfort; *"By the grace of God I am what I am."*

In **2nd Samuel Chapter 24:10 through 14** David, impulsive David, yet blessed David, sinned against God in numbering Israel. He knew better. Joab told him better but he went on and numbered Israel.

God was angry with him and God said, *"David; I am going to chastise you. Now; I am going to give you some choices; do you want this, this, or this?"* David said, *"Lord; (listen to his reply) Lord; do what you will only don't let me fall into the hands of my enemies. Let me fall into your hands. Lord; let me fall into your hands for your mercies are great. You just deal with me like you will and I will be satisfied."*

This is my comfort, for God to order and determine my life, my blessings, my prosperity or failure, my sorrow or joy, my trials or my happiness's; I will leave them to Him.

What's the hymn writer, what did he say?

**"My times are in thy hands
My God; I wish them there."**

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called, according to his blessed purpose." That's my comfort.

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Whatever happens; it doesn't matter how dark the valley, how deep the valley, how rocky the road, how dark the clouds are overhead, or how stormy my surroundings, my God is too wise to make a mistake and too good to do wrong. That's my comfort.

Everything that He brings to pass in my life, everything I mean, everything, "*is for my eternal good and I believe for his eternal glory*" and I give thanks, I give thanks.

Fourthly: This is my testimony; "*By the grace of God I am what I am.*"

If I were to be permitted to give a testimony today, I believe that this is what I would choose. I believe that I would prefer to stand before the whole world and say, "this is my testimony; this is my doctrine; "*by the grace of God I am what I am.*"

This is my experience; "*By the grace of God I am what I am.*" This is my comfort, all my comfort, and it is based on this; "*by the grace of God I am what I am.*"

This is my testimony; "*I worship God in the spirit. I rejoice in Jesus Christ. I have no confidence in the flesh,*" yours or mine, or anybody else's. "*By the grace of God I am what I am.*"

Now; this will do two or three things, if this dawns upon us and we realize it:

First of all: It will teach us and lead us to praise God!

If I learn by the grace of God, "*I am what I am,*" then it will lead me to praise and glorify God for all things. If He is the source, if He is the fountain, if He is the giver of all that I have and all that I require and all that I need, then I praise Him. I give Him the glory. I won't rob God of His glory. I give Him all the glory.

Secondly: It will teach me to be humble. My friends; this thing of humility; I know that there are a lot of jokes about it but there is just one way to receive it and that is by the grace of God.

You know; John Newton said this; "For a recipient of God's grace to be proud is the most inconsistent thing in the world. For a man who says, '*By the grace of God I am what I am,*' is totally inconsistent for him to take any credit or praise or seek any, or revel in it; it's just inconsistent."

Thirdly: It will teach me to love and forgive. "*Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*" If I have received everything I have, I will be generous with it; I will be grateful for it; I will be thankful for it and I will be free with it.

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Fourthly: It will teach me to wait on the Lord. I want to give you a little poem that I learned one time; I think it fits right in with what I am trying to preach here, *“By the grace of God I am what I am.”*

“It was battered and scarred and the auctioneer thought it scarcely worth his while to waste much time on an old violin but he held it up with a smile and he said, ‘What am I bid good folk; who will start the bidding for me, a dollar, and two dollars? Somebody make it three, going for three, going once, going twice, no?’

From the room far back a gray-haired man came forward and picked up the bow and tightening the loosened strings, he played a melody on that old violin like a caroling angel sings.

Then the auctioneer in a voice that was subdued and low said, ‘What am I bidding now for this old violin?’ He held it up with a bow, ‘A thousand, two thousand, and three thousand? Going once, going twice, going and gone, he cried.’

The people cheered and some of them cried, ‘We don’t understand; what changed the worth of that old violin?’ He said, ‘The touch of the master’s hand.’”

Many a man with life out of tune, and we are out of tune by birth, by nature, and by practice. And battered and scarred; we are not only battered and scarred; we are battered and slain by sin.

It is auctioned off by a foolish crowd, just like that old violin, but then the Master comes, the Master, the only one who can, the one who has the power, the one who has the will, the one who has the ability, the one who has the grace, the one who has the love.

The Master comes and the foolish crowd can never quite understand. It is beyond man’s natural understanding what God does for a sinner. Stewart Hamlin wrote that hymn; what was it? **“It Is No Secret What God Can Do.”**

It’s a secret to everybody who doesn’t know God. It’s revealed to those who know God. The foolish crowd does not understand it now and they never will understand it.

The man upon whom God’s grace is operative and the man whose life God’s grace has been revealed; he understands but the foolish crowd never can quite understand the change that is wrought in a sinner’s heart and consequently in his life by the touch of the Master’s hand.

That’s my testimony; *“By the grace of God I am what I am.”* I give no soul-winner credit for it, no preacher credit for it, and no man credit for it and take no credit for it. Whatever I am by the grace of God, *“I am what I am!”*