

Proper 17 (Series B)

“By Grace I’m Saved” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #566)

What’s in a name? Many who read this devotion are probably parents and can remember when as expectant parents they started thinking about possibilities for naming their child. Typically we choose a name that both parents agree is suitable, perhaps one with pleasant associations. For our daughter, we chose a first name that was my best friend’s name as I grew up in St. Louis, and our youngest son’s middle name is Phillip, spelled just the way my mom had spelled my youngest brother’s name. He had passed away suddenly the fall before our son was born. Our older son’s middle name is Christian—he was named with a prayer that the name would always be true for him on his journey through life.

It seems our daughter and son-in-law had similar ideas when naming their children. Both first names were family names. Our grandson’s middle name is Luther (for obvious reasons), and our little granddaughter’s middle name is Charis. The first time I heard it, I thought it was a beautiful name, but I did not know where they found it. My daughter and son-in-law had both studied Greek; *charis* is the Greek word for grace! What would be a better gift than to be named after God’s greatest gift to us—grace in Christ Jesus! God’s grace is a key element in the Apostle Paul’s writings; two key passages follow:

Romans 3:23-24

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—**9** not by works, so that no one can boast.

As I was looking over the hymn for this devotion, “By Grace I’m Saved, Grace Free and Boundless,” I realized how well these words articulate God’s grace to us in sending Jesus. Read through the text for yourself—no further explanation is needed! God’s grace is free and boundless throughout our earthly lives; it is what will sustain us in our dying moments and carry us to God’s presence when we die.

Although the text to this hymn is profound, and certainly could be used to teach the Christian faith, the tune is not at all weighty. For me it has an almost dance-like quality, in a lilting 3/4 meter. I love to play it in an upbeat tempo, hoping to capture the phrase “grace free and boundless” in the way the people sing it. The text is filled with joy, especially the ending lines:

My heart is glad, all grief has flown
since I am saved by grace alone.”

No matter what your first, middle or last name is, you, with all believers, can joyfully receive that *charis* (grace) that God so freely gives, and the name that goes with it: Christian, or beloved child of God.



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1 By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless;
My soul, believe and doubt it not.
Why stagger at this word of promise?
Hath Scripture ever falsehood taught?
No! Then this word must true remain;
By grace you too will life obtain.

2 By grace! None dare lay claim to merit;
Our works and conduct have no worth.
God in His love sent our Redeemer,
Christ Jesus, to this sinful earth;
His death did for our sins atone,
And we are saved by grace alone.

3 By grace God's Son, our only Savior,
Came down to earth to bear our sin.
Was it because of thine own merit
That Jesus died your soul to win?
No, it was grace, and grace alone,
That brought Him from His heav'nly throne.

4 By grace! This ground of faith is certain;
So long as God is true, it stands.
What saints have penned by inspiration,
What in His Word our God commands,
Our faith in what our God has done
Depends on grace--grace through His Son.

5 By grace to timid hearts that tremble,
In tribulation's furnace tried,
By grace, in spite of fear and trouble,
The Father's heart is open wide.
Where could I help and strength secure
If grace were not my anchor sure?

6 By grace! On this I'll rest when dying;
In Jesus' promise I rejoice;
For though I know my heart's condition,
I also know my Savior's voice.

My heart is glad, all grief has flown
Since I am saved by grace alone.

Text: Christian Ludwig Scheidt (1709-1761), a German jurist and historian.

English translation from *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941).

Tune: O DASS ICH TAUSEND (Dretzel) Cornelius Heinrich Dretzel (1697-1775), a German organist and composer. He was born in [Nuremberg](#), where he appears to have spent his whole life in various organists' posts.

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[This devotion was prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music. It may be downloaded and reprinted for local use.]