



By Grace I'm Saved, Grace Free and Boundless

Text: Christian Ludwig Scheidt (1709-1761)

Tune: Kornelius Heinrich Dretzel (1705-1773)

Time and time again through the Church Year the theme of justification, our salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, arises. Lutherans have composed many excellent hymns on this topic. Many monumental hymns such as "Salvation Unto Us Has Come" and "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" come to mind. Another that is an obvious part of that laudable group of hymns is "By Grace I'm Saved, Grace Free and Boundless." This laudable hymn teaches us what grace is and what its comfort is to us through life and death.

Christian Ludwig Scheidt wrote this hymn around 1742 and it was first published in the *Ebersdorfer Gesangbuch*. Scheidt was born in Waldenburg, Germany, the son of an official there. He received his university education from 1724 to 1730, studying at the Universities of Altdorf and Straßburg. In the first two years after his graduation from Straßburg he served as Hofmeister (literally *court master*, a live-in tutor and caretaker) in a small German city. After that he went to Halle to study theology and Göttingen to study philosophy. While attending at Halle, he studied diligently and debated theological questions with his professors. It is said that he attended Halle to study and understand the things of God, spiritual things; and his reason for attending Göttingen was to receive a full understanding of the thoughts and works of men. In other words, he wanted a very broad knowledge of men and God. Shortly after he graduated from Göttingen he received the degree of doctor of laws and was appointed to their philosophical faculty. Later he taught at the University of Copenhagen. He died in 1761 in Hanover, where he was Hofrat (court counselor) and librarian.

When Scheidt wrote this hymn text, he wrote it as an explanation of Ephesians 2:8-9. What we have is an abbreviated translation. Scheidt wrote this hymn in ten stanzas. What *The Lutheran Hymnal* omitted was the original stanzas 6, 7, and 10. They read:

6. By grace! But think not, thou who livest
Securely on in godless ways,
That thou—though all are called—receivest
The promised rest that wakes our praise;
By grace none find in heaven a place
Who live in sin in hope of grace.
7. By grace! They who have heard this sentence
Must bid hypocrisy farewell;
For only after deep repentance
The soul what grace imports can tell:
To sin while grace a trifle seems,
To faith it bright with glory beams.
10. By grace! May sin and Satan hearken!
I bear my flag of faith in hand
And pass—for doubts my joy can't darken—
The Red Sea to the Promised Land.
I cling to what my Savior taught
And trust it whether felt or not.

As we sing this hymn we are taught to rely firmly on the grace of God. Because Scripture, penned by God's saints by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (st. 5), teaches this comforting doctrine and Scripture cannot lie (st. 1), we cannot help but rest on the undeserved grace of God. No matter how much our sins oppress us and Satan tries to convince us that we are not saved (st. 3), God's grace is our place of rest and refuge. The omitted stanzas 6 and 7 are a word of admonition to us, to strive against sin and not to take God's grace lightly, sinning with an attitude that "it doesn't matter" because we're saved. Even when we do sin in such a way, Jesus died to forgive us for it (st. 2). Because the strength of our faith rises and falls, there are times that we may not feel forgiven. Even in those times, we have God's grace "whether felt or not" (st. 10). In the end, it is on this grace and its promise that we rest when dying (st. 9). The Father's heart is opened wide (st. 8), and we will hear our Savior's voice welcome us to heaven because we are saved by grace alone.