

Lord, Pour Out Your Grace

✠ to save us from violence (vv.12-14)

✠ to equip us for your glory (vv.15-17)

In the Name of Jesus, full of grace and peace, dear family of God:

It was all over the news this week. We remember vividly twenty-seven years ago because our son Joel was just going off to kindergarten. All these years the kidnapping of Jacob Wetterling remained a mystery. We don't need to recap the case here. You've heard plenty about it. It's just that this Sunday also happens to fall on a day made infamous by one of the most dreadful terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. We've gathered in God's house today as we do week by week to be refreshed. But today we are also beginning our Sunday School year with a huge focus on Christian education for kids of all ages. It's a great day for the Holy Spirit to teach us to pray more fervently: **Lord, Pour Out Your Grace...**

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Our Adult / Teen Bible Class also began the Fall session today. If you're new to Bible Study or just listening in on our website, first of all, welcome! We're glad to have you along on this journey, grateful to God that we can travel together. But I have to warn you, what we hear the Lord's Apostle Paul confess in these verses of his first letter to Pastor Timothy is as shocking as anything in the news. The one we often call "Saint Paul" was Jesus' carefully selected missionary to the Gentiles, us non-Jews. Paul looks back at his former life as Saul the Pharisee and admits: ***"I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man."*** Saul said the most vile things about God's Son Jesus Christ, but also demanded that Christ's followers do the worst thing against their own conscience. On trial Paul confessed, ***"Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them."*** (Acts 26:11 NIV84) Saul was the worst tyrant; Saul was trying to destroy eternal souls.

How can he admit this so often in writing and on trial before Jewish and Gentile courts? How did violent, persecuting, blasphemer Saul become Paul, the Lord's chosen missionary to the Gentiles? And why should we care? Because we're not any better. It shocks our sense of self worth, but God sees all sin as punishable by eternal death in hell. As far as the almighty Judge is concerned, it's not *what* you did, or said, or thought, or felt. It's not *what*, but *who* we sin against constantly. God is so holy, righteous and true, that every sin is **violence** against God and His holy will. We must learn to say of other sinners, "There but for God's grace go I." Otherwise, we commit a greater sin than Saul by denying God's grace to receive sinners after we have tasted the sweetness of God's grace ourselves.

Years ago some New Life Sunday School kids told their teacher they were not sinners. A few weeks ago a neighbor insisted she didn't have any sins. She thought it despicable someone would have to die for others, especially God making His Son a Substitute. Don't we sometimes think of others as worse than us? Do we welcome missing members back with open arms and Christian love, or do we comment about how long they've been away? Would some folks feel unwelcome, maybe not "our kind of people"?

Today's Gospel told of a leper named Lazarus so poor that even the dogs licked his sores at the gate of a rich man. Both died. Lazarus went to heaven, which means according to God's Word, the Bible, Lazarus believed in Jesus as his Savior. The rich man did not believe as his selfish life showed. He woke up in torment of that eternal fire pit. Way too late he was worried about his brothers, that they might end up there too. He argued with Abraham that someone like Lazarus rising from the dead would do the trick.

But Abraham's final words are God's verdict: ***"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."*** (Luke 16:31 NIV84) Through His Word in worship, Bible Class and Sunday school God will **Pour Out His Grace to save us from violence.**

By grace Paul got it. We and our kids will too as God gives us a clear conscience and sincere faith by leading us to repentance. Echoing Paul we sing, "Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me." (CW 385) Also with Paul we confess, ***"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service."*** In spite of everything he had done, not making any excuses, just telling the truth, ***"I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief."*** God heals all ***"ignorance and unbelief"*** with Sunday School facts first: Christ died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. God gives us the faith to receive this water of life like thirsty ground, plowed to soak up this: ***"The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."***

Lord, bring us and our children to a whole new way of living. Pour Out Your Grace...

✠ to equip us for your glory (vv.15-17)

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst." There's room for sinners – all to bring **glory** to God. Once we admit our unworthiness, then everything we do and say as a congregation can focus this light on the warmth and wonder of God's love that everyone is welcome.

In his *Grow in Grace* letter to pastors, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor Richard Gurgel wrote about "that twenty-something young man...[who's] struggled with same sex attraction since his teens. Confused and uncertain – frequently wrestling with the voice of conscience – he's stumbled again and again to the temptations of the homosexual lifestyle....Or...that college educated young professional whose expressed views on all things political..." may not match yours.... "Or [a] street-smart teen who's fought his whole life to gain the façade of respect...when one has proved himself tough by clenched fist or gun barrel....Sinners like [these] flocked to Jesus." Saul the Jewish rabbi could have grown rich and powerful if he'd stayed away from "sinners." But as a violent persecutor and blasphemer, Saul was on the self-righteous road, that broad and easy way to hell. God welcomes sinners like Saul and us. Why?

Here's the most amazing thing about God's outpoured **Grace**. It really is undeserved love. Paul says, ***"But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."*** The crucified and risen Son of God, Christ high ascended, wanted to make a point that no one could miss. God is patient beyond anything we humans can imagine. God paid in full for our crimes against him. He washed us clean with the only cleanser that can give us a good conscience. He threw open the gates of heaven to criminals like us. Since our debt to God is already paid why not confess sin freely and honestly. God will never demand that we pay Him back. He just wants our heartfelt gratitude.

Since God gives a clear conscience and sincere faith through His Word, where is your treasure? Do you see the opportunities of Christian education again this Fall as your best bet for growing wealthy on what really matters? Think of how many people all over the world jumped into the fun of playing *Pokémon Go* in recent months. But players are dropping out. Some are shut out by software updates. How many sensations have come and gone in recent history. Even popular shows like *Friends* and *Simpsons* finally died. But if you treasure the things of God in heaven, your heart will be in heaven too. ***"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*** (Matthew 6:21) You can *Find Real Wealth in Heavenly Treasure* as God cleanses away the dross of apathy and indifference. As He opens your eyes to needy Lazarus near you. As He gives you ***"godliness with contentment [which] is great gain."*** **Lord, Pour Out Your Grace – to save us from violence. Equip us for your glory. Help us "fight the good fight of faith" to win. Amen.**