

THE OPENING SERMON  
for the  
**53rd Annual Convention**  
of the  
**CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**  
Delivered by the Rev. David T. Mensing, Conference Secretary

Text: **I Corinthians 1:10**

In the Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, and the Head of His dear Church, beloved fellow-Christians and hearers of His Word:

The Apostle Paul begins his first letter to the church at Corinth with a prayer of *thanksgiving*—thanks to God on behalf of the congregation there for the rich measure of His grace given to them in Christ Jesus. For that grace had enriched them as Christians. We read that they had been enriched by the Lord “*in all utterance*”—they were enabled to speak up boldly, confidently and fearlessly concerning their faith. And they had been enriched also “*in all knowledge*” so that they knew what they were talking about, were convinced of its saving truth, and could speak authoritatively “*as the oracles of God*” [I Peter 4:11]. In fact, these Corinthians had been so enriched by the wondrous grace of God in them that Paul tells us *they were not lacking in any gift*.

But now as we get to the verse which is the basis of our meditation this morning, we find that, although these Christians had been so enriched by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, they were still **far from perfect**. Their flesh was still actively warring against their spirit and tempting them to **disunity**, to **divisions**, to **heterodoxy**. And so the Apostle Paul had to *admonish* them for their lack of true unity, as this was evident in how they spoke and in the opinions they advocated. It is *this admonition* of the Apostle, given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which we consider today and note in it

**The Marks of True Christian Unity.**

We see in this text how that unity is **recognized**. It is evident, first of all, **(I) in perfect agreement** in the doctrines of God’s Holy Word; and secondly, **(II) in perfect uniformity of practice**, that is, the consistent *application* of doctrine to our faith and life. For it is purity of both doctrine and practice which marks *true Christian unity*.

**I.**

Having just expressed his thanks to God for the richness of His grace to these Corinthian Christians, and having at the same time enumerated for their benefit various spiritual blessings which had been bestowed upon them, Paul now pleads with them not to throw away their priceless pearl of unity. “*Now I beseech you,*” he says. “*I beg you!*” Note the urgency in this fervent plea: If you truly want to **keep** the “*unity of the Spirit*” in which you have been enriched by the manifold grace of God in Christ Jesus; if you want that unity also to “*shine [forth]*” to others, so that they too may glorify God for it, then ***please HEED this urgent admonition!***

Notice that the Apostle does not command or threaten them with the clenched fist of the Law, but he rather **appeals** to the Corinthians (and also to us, for whose learning this is written) by the motivation of the **Gospel**, urging them and us to consider as Christians how *disunity* and *division* in the church grieves our dear Lord and Savior. **That** is the motivation to which a Christian responds in his New Man of faith; for the Bible tells us that we who are under grace,

that is, in a true state of grace, are not *under the Law*, and that instead of acting out of fear, “*the love of Christ constraineth (or forces) us*” to do God’s will gladly, from the heart.

Moreover, the Apostle calls the Corinthians “*brethren*.” They were already in true God pleasing **fellowship** together in “*the unity of the Spirit*,” but this blessed fellowship was being threatened by those who, even *occasionally* or *casually*, spoke contrary to the true doctrine of God’s Word. Therefore Paul lovingly addresses them as “*brethren*” to gain them from such lapses in unity, so that true one mindedness may be preserved.

And finally, the Apostle introduces his admonition “*by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” This was not just some idle phrase or optimistic whim, nor was it the expression merely of a goal to strive for. But the use of our Savior’s Name as authority for this admonition shows that it is indeed His holy will that His Name be *hallowed among us* by the teaching of His Word in its truth and purity and by our living according to it as the children of God. For **false doctrine** (even in so-called “non-fundamentals”) and wishy-washy, **inconsistent practice** does nothing to hallow God’s Name but only profanes it! And we pray that our heavenly Father will ever **preserve** us from such profanity of His precious Name!

Now the substance of the admonition itself: We read, “*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing*.” All the brethren are to “*speak the same thing*.” —**What** thing? Since these words are written in Jesus’ Name, we go to **Him** as the Authority for the clear-cut answer, and hear Him say in John 8:31, “*If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed*.” And Peter adds in his first epistle, “*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God*,” that is, in accordance with God’s Holy Word. For **SCRIPTURE ALONE** is the perfect measuring stick of doctrine. All other speaking, contrary to or supplementary to the Word of God, is “*teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*,” “*profane and vain babblings*,” which “*eat like a cancer*” to destroy the precious “*unity of the Spirit*.”

But can Christians in this life really and truly “*speak the same thing*”? Aren’t we allowed some latitude to **digress** here and there in “liberty” because of an “honest” difference of opinion, or even because of a weakness in our flesh?? This is precisely what the “loose,” liberal compromisers in church circles today will throw at you when you speak of **real unity** in doctrine. The answer, of course, must be a resounding “NO!” For the Savior’s Word allows no such thing as “latitude” to veer off the straight course into the by-ways of error. “*If ye continue in My Word*,” says Jesus, “*ye shall know the truth*.” And that goes equally the other way around: If you don’t continue in Jesus’ Word, you won’t know the truth, you won’t be sure of anything, but you will be “*tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine whereby [the wolves] lie in wait to deceive*.” Through Jeremiah, the Lord says: “*He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully*,” [23:28] “*...that ye all speak the same thing*,” says Paul in our text. Yes, my beloved brethren, true unity, though a matter of the **heart**, is **recognizable** by clear and unmistakable **oneness in doctrine** and in the unwavering profession of the same, the “**fruits**” by which the Savior Himself teaches us to discern between true and false prophets, saying, “*By their fruits ye shall know them*.”

And the purpose for which brethren are all to “*speak the same thing*” now follows, as Paul continues: “*...that there be no divisions among you*.” Divisions are splits, cracks, and gaps in the unity. As soon as they appear, the unity is destroyed, just as a fine piece of china or crystal becomes worthless when it is chipped or cracked. What **causes** such divisions or splits among Christians? Those who like to “go with the flow” of do-it-yourself doctrine nowadays

accuse YOU and ME of causing divisions in outward Christendom because we by God's grace are completely "unbending" and "inflexible" in our stand on the Word of Truth. But what does God's Word say about the cause of divisions? Paul writes to the Romans: "*Mark them which cause divisions and offenses **contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.***" [16:17] Who is the **cause** of divisions and offenses? The **false teacher** is who departs from the "*doctrine which [we] have learned*" from the Holy Scriptures. He no longer serves the Lord Jesus Christ, but his own belly, and fulfils the purpose of the devil. —**Perfect unity**, on the other hand, has its model in the perfect unity of God Himself, for the Lord Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father for the unity of His disciples—including you and me—saying in John 17: "*That they all may be **one**, as Thou Father art in Me and I in Thee.*" **THAT**, beloved of the Lord, is the **true unity**, without any divisions, splits or gaps, in which the Holy Spirit will preserve also **us** by His grace, when we cling in **uncompromising loyalty** to His precious Word!

## II.

But now we want to see in the second place that not only oneness in **doctrine** and in its faithful profession is a mark of **true unity**; but also that **perfect uniformity in practice** is essential, lest we belie the confession of our lips with the very opposite in application. In this sense, the old adage holds true that "*actions speak louder than words.*" This does not mean that a kind of "Christian perfectionism" is taught in this text; rather, just the **contrary**. Listen first of all to the Apostle's words: "*...but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*" Oneness in **mind** and oneness in **judgment** (or opinion) has the very same source or fountainhead as oneness in doctrine and profession: The **perfect, infallible, and all-sufficient Word of our God and Lord**. The only way that **doctrine** can be different from **practice** (that is, simply-put, the consistent **application** of doctrine to our faith and life)—the only way these could be at variance with one another is if there is a conflict between what a person **says** and what he **does**. Either the profession of his mouth is shown to be a *sham*, a *lie*, and an empty *smokescreen*, OR his conquering flesh has defeated the willingness of the spirit to put his actions where his mouth has been, and some earthly consideration has taken priority in his life. In either case, the *true unity* is broken where there is inconsistency between doctrine and practice, and the Lord Jesus asks such "two-timers" and "fence-sitters," "*Why call ye Me 'Lord, Lord!' and do not the things which I say??*"

The question often bandied about as to whether truly orthodox, consistently orthodox practice is even **possible** here in this world among sinful human beings is like the question we considered before regarding doctrine. Our practice **MUST** be consistently orthodox, or we belie our doctrinal profession; and our hypocrisy becomes as transparent as a sheet of plate glass! Both **doctrine AND practice** are included when Jesus tells us to "*continue in [His] Word.*" It is the consistent application of **the Word**, not our so-called "sanctified opinions" and "history of orthodoxy" that makes our practice right and true. And this is all-important for the preservation of our precious unity! —Without truly orthodox **practice**, the Word of God is **not** applied to the sinner to bring him to the knowledge of his sins and to his knees in humble contrition. —Those who cause divisions and offenses by departing from Scripture are **not** marked, admonished, and, when admonition proves fruitless, also avoided. —The works of the flesh are **not** reprov'd, but the poor sinner is permitted to continue on and on in them to his own detriment—all of these scenarios **common** today in churches and church-bodies because of inconsistent, lax, or decidedly **FALSE practice**.

Where, however, brethren are "*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment,*" **Christian discipline** is maintained according to the Savior's ordinance for the

gaining of erring brethren back again to the true unity of the Spirit; **false and pernicious doctrine** is challenged and checked, so that wolves (from without **or** from within) are not permitted to destroy the precious unity; and the members of Christ's body are exhorted, not only by **words** but also by the **actions** of dear brethren in sound, orthodox practice to serve as examples, as lights and beacons, as savory salt, to edify and strengthen one another to the glory of God and to the praise of His wondrous grace!

Now, many people will *tolerate* at least the preaching and teaching of the pure Word of God. They will *hear* it (at least with their ears); and they will surely have someone in mind whom the words of the sermon fit to a "T". But let the orthodox **application** of God's Word be directed at them, and you hear charges of tyranny, legalism, and arrogance leveled against a pastor who is faithful in **practice** as well as in **doctrine**. In such cases, those who decry or reject **sound practice** are themselves breaking the precious unity of the spirit; for they are no longer "*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" on the basis of God's Word.

*"Now I beseech **YOU**, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* that you examine yourselves according to our text and look diligently for the marks of true Christian unity right here in your own midst, right here in our own fellowship.. For merely having called a properly-trained and faithful pastor to preach and teach the Word of God in its truth and purity in your local congregation does not let you "off the hook" as to your own responsibility for Christian unity is concerned. For each and every one of you individually is besought by the Apostle Paul in our text to "*speak the same thing,*" to be ready to give a straight answer from the Word of Truth concerning what you believe, and, to that end, to "**know the truth**" according to which doctrine is to be judged. And this ability will be yours only if you "*grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ*" by gladly hearing and learning His Word.

Moreover, just as you rightly expect from your pastor faithful and consistent orthodox *practice* in accordance with the Word of God, it behooves you in turn to submit to his rule with the Word, to support his orthodox practice in the face of opposition, and to insist that your brethren do the same. But that alone does not fulfil your individual responsibility to "practice what you preach" as a faithful confessor of Christ's Word. For as cases arise regarding a brother or sister — or even regarding yourself — you must judge on the basis of **the Word** and not on the basis of emotion and private opinion, family ties and personal friendships. For **you too** must be "*perfectly joined together*" with your brethren in "*the same mind*" and in "*the same [opinion]*" in the application of God's Word, judging righteous judgment for the preservation of the precious unity of the spirit among those who "*speak the same thing.*"

O may God graciously pardon us where we have ever **compromised** true unity with one another in doctrine **or** in practice by not always "*speak[ing] the same thing,*" by not consistently **applying** what we profess to be the full truth of God's precious Word, by "safely" **straddling the fence** in cowardly indecision when principles of Holy Scripture were being challenged, debated, ignored or undermined, or by **failing to stand up** for brethren who courageously put their own necks "on the line" for the sake of God's truth. And may He grant us, like the Corinthians of old, to be "*enriched*" by Him through His grace in Christ Jesus —enriched "*in all utterance*" and "*in all knowledge*" by regular growth in the doctrines of His Word— so that "*[we] all speak the same thing*" according to the only source and standard of faith and life, with "*no divisions among [us],*" and that in our application of sound doctrine we be "*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment,*" always "*endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,*" for Jesus' sake. Amen.

**SOLI DEO GLORIA!**

**THE SUNDAY SERMON**

for the

**53rd Annual Convention**

of the

**CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**

Delivered by the Rev. Paul E. Bloedel , Pastor

St. Mark's Ev. Lutheran Church • Sauk Village, Illinois

**Text: Ephesians 2:8-10**

The motto for this year's convention of the Concordia Lutheran Conference is the following quotation from the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "*By the grace of God I am what I am*"(15:10). The context of this verse shows us that Paul is not here referring to the many temporal blessings that he had received from God's gracious hand, but specifically to the *spiritual* blessings of faith and a productive Christian life. Now if each one of us would personalize those words of St. Paul, and give careful thought to the statement: "*By the grace of God I am what I am,*" then a natural question to consider would be this: "How exactly *am I* because of God's grace," or in other words, "How has the grace of God affected me?"

Of course, you should certainly be able to think of many earthly blessings of God's grace, so that you can say in the words of Luther: "He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life." All of these things are gracious gifts of God, which He gives also to the unbelievers, and for which we should be continuously thankful. But in our text for this morning, our attention is directed specifically toward how God's grace has affected us *as Christians* who have been saved from our sins and who serve our Lord with works that are pleasing to Him. So let us now consider the marvelous effects of God's undeserved kindness toward us poor sinners and meditate upon

**The Glorious Spiritual and Eternal Blessings of God's Grace.**

I. It saves us from our sins, and

II. It produces in us a life of good works.

**I.**

The punishment of eternal damnation in hell, the punishment that every sinner deserves according to the holy and just Law of God, is a dreadful thought to contemplate. Anyone who has been brought to a Scriptural understanding of the unimaginable pains of hell will most certainly desire to be saved from that everlasting torment. The only way that we sinners can be saved from the wages of our sin is set forth so plainly in the first few words of our text, where we read: "For *by grace* are ye saved" (v. 8). But in order for these words to benefit us and give us any comfort, we need to know what the term "*grace*" means.

“Grace” is properly defined as the *undeserved, unmerited* love, kindness, and goodness of God toward us unworthy sinners. So when the Bible says that we are saved *by grace*, it is saying that we are saved by the love, kindness, and mercy of God that *we do not deserve*. We are saved on account of God’s grace, without any merit or worthiness in us. The Roman Catholics, however, give a completely different meaning to the term “*grace*.” They define it as the *power* that God gives them *to perform good works*; and by these works they believe that they earn more and more of this so-called “*grace*,” which, again, they define as the power God gives them to do good. So when the Romanists say that we are saved by grace, what they actually *mean* is that we are saved *by our works*. In this way the term “*grace*” is twisted and changed by the Romanists from its true meaning, which has nothing to do with our works and merit, and it is given the very opposite meaning. But as St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, if *works* are brought into the definition of *grace*, then the *proper* definitions of both “*works*” and “*grace*” are lost. We read: “*If by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work*” (11:6).

All of us humans *need* the grace of God, as this is properly defined—the love and kindness of the Lord that we do not deserve—*because we all are sinners*. We have transgressed the Law of God so many times, and, therefore, we justly deserve His wrath and punishment, death and damnation; and we certainly do not deserve any love and kindness from Him. Each one of us should realize that we are all miserable sinners who offend against the Law of the Lord countless times each day when we do or say or even think things that God forbids in His Law, as well as when we do *not* do and say and think those good things that He requires of us. Even *one* sin renders a person completely guilty in the sight of God, and makes him worthy of damnation—the curse of the Law. In the Scriptures we are told: “*Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*” (James 2:10); and again: “*Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them*” (Galatians 3:10).

Now since God is perfectly *holy and just*—demanding perfection and threatening to punish all that transgress His Commandments—how is it possible for Him also to be perfectly *gracious*—showing us sinners love and favor that we do not deserve? The answer to this important question is found in the saving work of Jesus Christ. By His vicarious active and passive obedience, the Lord Jesus completely *satisfied God’s justice*, and purchased for us the saving grace of God. The Second Person of the holy Trinity came into this world as a true Man; and as the Substitute for all mankind, Christ kept the Law of God perfectly for us, so that we could be counted righteous for His sake. He also took all of our guilt upon Himself, and suffered our punishment on the cross, even all the torments of hell in our place. Through this work of redemption, God and man have been reconciled with each other. For Jesus’ sake, God has forgiven the sins of the whole world. As the Scriptures testify: “*God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation*” (II Corinthians 5:19). This “*Word of Reconciliation*” is the message of the Gospel—that, for Christ’s sake, the saving grace of God is freely offered to all people.

And yet, the sad fact of the matter is that most people die in their sins and go to hell, because they deny Christ and reject the grace that He purchased for them with His blood. St. Peter writes in his second epistle that the unbelievers “*[deny] the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction*” (2:1). So even though the grace of God has been purchased for all people, and has been given to all through God’s objective justification of the world, yet most people do not receive it but instead spurn it by their unbelief.

So how does a person *receive* the grace of God that is given to him? Our text for this morning gives us the answer in the following words: “*By grace are ye saved through faith.*” *Faith* is the

*means* by which an individual comes into personal possession of God's grace for the forgiveness of all his sins and for the salvation of his soul. But how does this saving faith come about in a person's heart? It is *not* the result of any self-decision on the part of man. On account of original sin, natural man is spiritually blind, dead, and the enemy of God; and, therefore, he is completely unable to bring himself to God in faith. It is only through the *gracious* and miraculous working of the Holy Ghost that a person can truly say from his heart that Jesus is his Lord and Savior. The Apostle Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians: "*No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost*" (12:3).

Like the term "*grace*," the term "*faith*" is not always rightly understood. Too often, faith is thought of as a good quality or virtue in us that makes God want to forgive us our sins. But this is a very wrong idea. Faith is *not* a work that *earns* the forgiveness of sins. Rather, the function of faith is to *receive* what is freely given—to receive the promise of God's gracious forgiveness (Galatians 3:14). Faith has been compared to the hand of a beggar, which *receives*, but in no way *earns*, the gift that is given. The Bible clearly states that justification, or forgiveness, *by faith* means that our justification *is not based on our works*. We read, "*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified [or forgiven] by faith without the deeds of the Law*" (Romans 3:28), and again: "*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the Law: for by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified*" (Galatians 2:16).

The fact that our salvation is by *grace* through *faith* means that we cannot take any credit for it. The false opinion that our *works play any part at all in our salvation is contrary to the very definitions of the words "grace" and "faith"* as these are used here in our text. But the Apostle Paul writes still more by inspiration of the Holy Ghost to drive this crucial point home even further. We read in our text: "*By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast*" (vv. 8–9).

We are specifically told that our salvation is *not of ourselves*—it is not the result of anything we did or anything that we refrained from doing. It is completely by the *gracious* and powerful *work of God* that we have been saved from our sins. As our text says: "*It is the gift of God.*" Salvation is *not* referred to as *wages* that the Lord owes us for our services; but it is called a *gift*! Far from being anything that we deserve, our forgiveness and salvation is purely a gift of God's love and kindness toward us sinful human beings, who have only earned the wages of eternal death in hell (Romans 6:23).

This gift of salvation is "*not of works, lest any man should boast.*" Our works do not contribute one bit to our salvation. No matter how good our works may seem in the eyes of men, and no matter how good and well-pleasing they are in God's sight for Christ's sake, *these works are not in the least bit responsible for saving our souls*. Remember that Christ has done *all* the work necessary to earn our salvation. Therefore, there is nothing in and of ourselves of which we can boast, as if we were in any degree responsible for saving ourselves. No, our forgiveness and eternal salvation are a glorious effect of God's pure *grace* alone—His *undeserved, unmerited* love and kindness for us unworthy sinners, on account of Christ Jesus' work of redemption.

## II.

This saving grace of God does not leave the heart of the Christian unaffected. On the contrary, it fills the believer's heart with a deep love for his Lord and Savior, which gladly and willingly



produces all kinds of good works. And this is the exact effect that God intends the Gospel of His grace to produce. For immediately after St. Paul writes in our text about the Gospel's promise of salvation by grace, through faith, without works, we read the following: "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*" (v. 10). So even though our works are completely eliminated from consideration as a cause of our forgiveness and salvation, they are still a necessary part of being a true Christian. As James writes: "*Faith without works is dead*" (2:20, 26).

Man, in his *natural state of corruption* since the fall of Adam, is unable to do any works that are truly pleasing to the Lord. The Scriptures tell us, "*Without faith it is impossible to please Him*" (Hebrews 11:6), and again: "*The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God*" (Romans 8:7–8). But when the Holy Ghost brought us to saving faith in Jesus, He implanted in us a new spiritual creation, a partial renewal of the image of God. This is the *new man*, "*which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*" (Ephesians 4:24), and according to which we are able to bring forth God-pleasing works. In this way, we Christians have been designed and equipped by the Lord to resist the temptations of the devil, the world, and the sinful inclinations of our own flesh. As our text says: "*We are His workmanship [or handiwork], created in Christ Jesus unto good works.*" This new creation has taken place "*in Christ Jesus,*" our text says. For it is only by faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin that we become new spiritual creatures (II Corinthians 5:17), who have been delivered from the slavery of sin (John 8:34, 36), who are no longer walking in darkness but are able to live as children of light (Ephesians 5:8).

The good works that we Christians perform are *not* pleasing to God because they are so good in and of themselves, for then they would have to be perfect. Certainly, none of us can claim to be perfect; but we must all confess with the Apostle Paul: "*I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do*" (Romans 7:18–19). Our Old Adam corrupts and defiles even our best works, so that on their own merits, all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in the holy sight of the Lord (Isaiah 64:6). It is only through faith in Christ that our works can be pleasing to Him, because that faith receives the forgiveness of sins. When viewed through the perfect righteousness of Christ, every sinful stain is washed away and our works appear truly good and acceptable in God's sight. As the Apostle Peter describes us Christians in his first epistle: "*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*" (2:5).

Long before we were born, before we had received the Lord Jesus by faith, before we had done anything good, God already had our life of good works chosen and planned out according to the standard of His Law. As our text says concerning these works: "*Which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*" So all glory must go to God for every good work that we perform, as St. Paul writes to the Philippians: "*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*"(2:13). Instead of looking at our works and boasting of ourselves, we should, in all humility, praise the undeserved love and kindness of God, saying in the words of our convention theme: "*By the grace of God I am what I am.*"

It is only because of the marvelous grace of God in Christ Jesus that we are able to do anything good and pleasing to Him. It is through the Gospel's message of grace that the Holy Ghost has brought us to faith in Christ, and has given us a new man through which we are able to serve Him with good works. It is God's grace that fills us with Christian zeal and motivates us to

serve the Lord gladly and willingly. And it is gratitude and appreciation for God's grace that also causes us earnestly to contend for the true faith as we have learned this in the Scriptures (Jude 3), and

to hate every false doctrine (Psalm 97:10; 119:104, 128). May God the Holy Ghost through the power of His Word impress upon our hearts how much the Lord loves us sinful creatures who only deserve His wrath and punishment, and cause us to be all the more zealous and cheerful in our service to Him as grateful recipients of His saving grace, through faith, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

***SOLI DEO GLORIA***