

Let us pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, we come before You today to beg Your grace and mercy. Lord we know that far too often we rely on ourselves and our ways to earn us heaven, forgive us Lord. Please do not look upon our sins; rather, look upon Christ and His sacrifice for us, and then look upon us as Your redeemed and Christ-covered children. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in Saint Paul's second letter written to the Corinthian Christians the third chapter beginning at the fourth verse:

And we have such trust through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the

letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ⁷ But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, ⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? ⁹ For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. ¹⁰ For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. ¹¹ For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Whenever Moses would go up Mount Sinai or into the Tent of Meeting and sit in the presence of God, something truly awesome would happen: His face would begin to glow. Thus, when he came down the mountain or out of the tent his face would still be glowing and all the Israelites would fear him. It got to the point that Moses would have to wear a veil in order to talk to the children of Israel after meeting with God. And when Moses spoke to the children the message of God it usually consisted of “You shall” and “You shall not.”

At another time, Jesus Christ ascended the Mount of Transfiguration. When He went into the presence of God, His entire body would ‘glow’. His face shown like the sun. His clothes became whiter than anyone could ever bleach them. His entire appearance changed. Christ was transfigured. God Himself showed a mere glimpse of His glory and magnificence. During this event Peter, James, and John

were present... and they heard the voice of God, “This is my Son, listen to Him.”

At the Transfiguration there were no “You shall” or “You shall not;” rather, God spoke a “Listen to Him.” Hear the voice of Christ, hear the Gospel message of Christ, focus on what God Himself is doing. For we know that by ourselves we are not sufficient; however, ***God is sufficient.***

Of course, I would argue that being self-sufficient is a goal of many, if not most, of the people of the world today. Being financially ‘independent’ or self-sufficient is a goal that most people have. They do not want to rely on a job or a boss or a company or really anything for their money. They would much rather rely on themselves and on their abilities in order to provide and not on another.

Or think about how many want to be self-sufficient when it comes to planting gardens, growing food, having animals and the like.

Being self-sufficient is almost like a sign or a show of how much you have accomplished. To be able to live without outside help; to be able to survive on just what you have and can produce; to be self-sufficient is a great way to live.

Now, of course, being self-sufficient is not a sin. Being able to have food and supplies in abundance to not be a nuisance or dependent on another is not inherently evil or wicked... but when we make that our sum and substance, then something is a little off within us. When we purposefully put others at second place, when we put God in a lesser place, when we begin to focus so much on our selves and what we can do... then we sin.

It is like the Israelites who were going through the desert and God warned them about arriving in their new homeland. He warned them that they should not brag about the abundance that they were about to receive, they should not brag about the

sufficiency that God was providing... and still they did... and still we do.

But an even greater sin is when we take our self-sufficiency in this life and try to convert it into the next. When we begin to make rules and regulations that are not part of God's law and implement those into the meaning of Christianity; when we begin to look down on others who do not hold to our view of 'proper Christian living;' when we begin to think that we are better than others and, by proxy, God would of course accept us into heaven because of how good we are... it is at times like this that we are allowing our self-sufficiency to run amok in God's realm.

When it comes to sin and the law, there is no self-sufficiency. When it comes to sin all we can do is sin. When it comes to the law we cannot even begin to fulfill the first part of it. Our sinful nature fights with us and leads us further and further away from our God and our Savior. Instead of trusting in and

relying on the ‘ministry of the spirit’ we hold fast to the ‘ministry of the letter.’ We hold to the letter and assume that we are great and wonderful and so many nice glowing words... but we are holding to the wrong thing. When we hold out our hope of salvation by holding onto the law, we are fooling ourselves and we will wind up in hell. Trying to fulfill the law, apart from Christ, is a fool’s errand and only has one consequence: hell.

Yet, praise be to God that He has given us more than just the law. While the law is still present and still a good and God pleasing thing, God has given us the Gospel. The Gospel message of Christ, the message and hope of reconciliation and of forgiveness. The gospel which gives us the comfort that our sinful nature and conscience could never provide, and that only comes from God.

The Gospel which tells us about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us. The Gospel which tells us how

Christ was born into this world from a virgin and grew up a poor boy. The Gospel which tells us that Christ lived a perfect life, in perfect obedience to God and no one else, and He did so for us. The Gospel which tells us that Jesus Christ suffered and died to take away all of the punishment and guilt for our sins. The Gospel which assures us that Jesus Christ has done all of this and He has done it for us.

And three days later Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He rose to show that sin, death, and hell are conquered. He rose to tell all of His faithful children that they too will rise when this life is over. He rose to show that death will never conquer life; while it may sting and seem strong, life will always win... just as Christ has won.

And now through faith in Jesus Christ and in all that He has done, we know that heaven is ours. Heaven is not ours because of how many works we have done, or how great we have performed them; nor is heaven ours

because of how self-sufficient we are in earthly matters and definitely not because of how self-sufficient we are spiritual matters... no heaven is ours because we are completely dependent. We are completely dependent on Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us, and through faith we know this is true.

Through faith we can recognize that our own ways only lead to ruin and despair, but Christ and His ways are perfect life and reconciliation with God the Father. Through faith we can recognize that we will never be self-sufficient when it comes to heavenly matters, for we can do nothing spiritual apart from faith in Christ. And through faith we will know that our sufficiency is given to us from God through His means of grace: the Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. When we lean on God and all that He has provided, then we will know where we receive our sufficiency... at the foot of the cross and from the hand of God alone.

As Saint Bernard said about our sufficiency in this life, ***“Dear Lord Jesus, I am aware that my life at its best has been but worthy of condemnation, but I trust in the fact that thou hast died for me and hast sprinkled me with blood from thy holy wounds. For I have been baptized in thy name and have given heed to thy Word whereby thou hast called me, awarded me grace and life, and bidden me believe. In this assurance will I pass out of life; not in uncertainty and anxiety, thinking, Who know what sentence God in heaven will pass upon me?”***

Dear friends in Christ, self-sufficiency is a dream that I personally strive toward. But then again, reliance on God seems all the better. Instead of believing that I got everything by my means, I should recognize that God has given and blessed me with what I have. In the same way, when it comes to spiritual matters I need to know that I will never be self-sufficient... but with every ounce of who I am I will cling to God and trust in Him for all that He has given to me.

Thanks be to God for all that He has done for me, and for allowing me to realize my reliance on Him. Thanks be to God for sending His Son to live, die, and rise again for me. And thanks be to God for not allowing me to be self-sufficient; rather, thank God that *He is sufficient* for all that I need.

Dear friends, thanks be to God. Amen.