



A BIBLE STUDY ON CHARLES V

The Emperor who risked all to suppress the Turks and Lutheran Princes

“Grant Peace, We Pray, in Mercy, Lord”

(LSB 777)

(2 Thess. 3:16; Ps. 62:2, 6; Is. 31:5)

How can the writings of one monk be right and a thousand years of Roman Catholic tradition be in error? (A rhetorical question reportedly asked by an examiner when Luther appeared before Charles V at the Diet of Worms)

The life of Charles V (1500–1558) was one of numerous alliances and armed conflicts as he risked everything to beat down those who threatened his family’s vast empire and their Roman Catholic faith. His armed conflicts and interim treaties reflected his desire to maintain his kingdom and its religious beliefs. He suppressed the writings of Martin Luther and the Reformation: in 1521 he issued the Edict of Worms, making Luther (and anyone who gave him aid) an outlaw. Relations between Charles and the Lutheran princes in Germany worsened after the Augsburg Confession was presented to him in 1530. After diplomatic tactics proved unsuccessful, Charles V attacked the Schmalkald League, soundly defeating them at the Battle of Mühlberg on April 24, 1547 and took Elector John Frederick of Saxony and Landgrave Philipp of Hesse as his prisoners. Interim treaties continued under Charles’ reign. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) established a temporary truce that allowed each regional ruler to determine if his territory was to be Roman Catholic or Lutheran. While Luther abandoned the monastic life early in his life, Charles V lived out his final years in a Spanish monastery, battling poor health.

LINES ONE AND TWO

*Grant peace, we pray in mercy, Lord; / Peace in our time,
O, send us!*

Martin Luther wrote this hymn in 1529, several years after he was branded a heretic and outlaw. Charles V was adamant in his resolve to snuff out the troublesome Reformer along with the German princes who gave him aid and shelter. The Turks, however, presented a more immediate concern, when they besieged Vienna in May 1529. An all-out war against the Lutheran princes would have to wait.

In this hymn Luther brings together Biblical texts that had been sung for centuries and weaves them into one grand petition for peace.

1. The first line of the hymn is adapted from an ancient Gregorian chant, “*Da pacem, Domine, in diebus nostris*” (Give peace, O Lord, in our days). In times of unrest, violence and chaos, the Christian Church sang these words drawn from 2 Kings 20:19; Ps. 72:6–7; 2 Thess. 3:16. How does the language of the first line (grant / bestow) present the peace of Christ as an undeserved gift from God?

2. In what way is the chaos and warring in our communities and world symptoms of a greater lack of peace and order? Is the peace of the world anything like the peace we have been gifted in Christ? Why is it dangerous to emphasize peace in the world without connecting it to the peace we have received as redeemed Christians?

3. Luther adds “in our time” (2 Kings 20:19; 2 Thess. 3:16) to the prayer for peace. What force or emphasis do these words “in our time” give to the hymn? Did the translators of Luther’s hymn get it right when they ended the sentence with an exclamation point? Where else in Scripture do we hear prayers with a sense of urgency? (Ps. 143:7–8)

4. The Christian life in this fallen world is one that continues to sadden us but not surprise us. How can we and the true Christian Church on earth pray for peace, knowing that chaos, violence and evil will continue until Christ comes again?

LINES THREE AND FOUR

For there is none on earth but You, / None other to defend us.

The Lord is our defender. Jesus as our only defense is a recurring theme in Holy Scripture and in the hymns of both Luther and the Lutheran Church. A great example of our confession of Jesus as our Defender is “Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense” (LSB 741). Notice the strong ties between the resurrected, never-to-die-again Christ and our trust that He has conquered all our enemies, even the great enemies of death and the grave. This is the true source of courage that overcomes our fears in times of civil unrest, in times of wars and rumors of war. (Matt. 24:6)

5. How does Christ's glorious resurrection from the dead and His place at the right hand of God bring comfort to the Lord's people threatened with violence and persecution?

6. In faith we confess in this petition that there is nothing in us that can redeem us or our neighbor or the death-spiral of our dark and dying world. What does 2 Chron. 20:12, 15 say to those who mistakenly believe peace will be established through political treaties and threats of military intervention?

7. Martin Luther was convinced that he lived in the last days. Though he once foolishly looked to St. Anne for rescue when he found his life threatened by the lightning and thunder of heaven, he later believed that his cause was with the Lord Christ. Study the hymn "Christ the Lord of Hosts, Unshaken" (*LSB* 521) for sources of strength and courage for the Christian under the assault of the devil, the world and their own sinful flesh.

8. Our defense is not trying to manufacture within us more Christian faith or Christian obedience. We as Christians know our suffering is not defined by the world but by and through Christ and His cross. It is the blood-bought righteousness given to us by the empty hand of faith that produces not only courage but hope and true Christian joy. Review the important distinction between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross, as first presented by Luther during the Heidelberg Disputation (1518).

LINE FIVE

You only, Lord, can fight for us. / Amen.

Our defense is rightly in the nail-marked hands of our resurrected Redeemer. By God's grace, Luther rediscovered the Christ of Holy Scripture and His eternal Gospel promises. Luther was a servant of the Word, not a political strategist. Like the prophets of old he knew that only the mercy of God was able to spare His people from the ravages of the marauding Ottoman armies or the well-equipped armies of the Holy Roman Emperor.

9. Hymnologists have noticed that the expected structure of this hymn was four lines. Martin Luther not only added a fifth line, but used that final line to underscore the theme of the entire hymn: "You only, Lord, can fight for us."

10. "Only you, O Lord." is the confession of a Christian who believes that outside of Christ's merciful intervention there is no deliverance, there is no redemption. Compare this with the kind of unbelieving prayer the world throws up to heaven in times of violence and chaos — a prayer that goes something like this: "O great God of the Universe, give us the power to crush our enemies and silence all who speak against us. If You come to our aid, we promise we will . . ."

11. Read Ex. 14:10–28. How did the Lord Christ in His mercy fight for the Lutheran princes during the time of Luther? How does the Lord Christ in His mercy fight for His people today?

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