

But For the Grace of God Go I.

Is this another way to blame God?

I was reading the paper today about a tragic accident that happened on I-95 where a six year old child was killed. The driver was the father who had a car load of children on their way to a church function. All came out fine except for the death of the father's child. One of the children said to another, "God was with us," which those around were in agreement and with much thankfulness. But I can't help but think, was God not there for the six year old who was killed? And what about the grieving family?



How many times have we heard, "***There but for the grace of God go I?***" Often we hear that phrase when it has to do with escaping some horrible accident, escaping death, various addictions, or some type of disaster. We may hear something similar, "*By God's grace*" he helped me find a job, a spouse, pay my bills, that my house didn't get flooded during the storm, etc., etc..

I used to have a co-worker who used that phrase quite often. I couldn't help but cringe every time she said it. Finally one day I asked her, "What about those who were not as fortunate to experience all of this *supposed* grace? What about those who end up with flooded homes, no job, or loss of a child in some horrible accident, etc. etc.?" I could see I caught her off guard and she stumbled for an answer.

I have never noticed anyone using the phrase directly at the person experiencing the tragedy. Could using the phrase, "*There but for the grace of God go I*" be an unintentional smug remark when others are faced with disaster, disgrace, or the like, as a result of their choices or no fault of their own? Does it not imply that the person making the remark could have been in the same position but was fortunate enough to escape such disasters because God *avored* them more than the other? Is such an expression Biblical or implied? I have yet to find it.

I have a friend from Germany who needed help with the grammar of this expression, "There but for the grace of God go I." He could guess from the context but didn't get the exact meaning. He said the sentence would not work in his native tongue, German. My reply to him was:

I guess one could explain it as a person who experiences bad things in life and it could have happened to me, but it didn't because God was watching over me. I can give an example. This past May my neighbors around the corner from us were flooded out of their homes. They lost everything and had to find shelter. I could easily have said, "There but for the grace of God go I." It's another way of saying, "Too bad God wasn't watching over and protecting them, but God protected me instead from such disaster."

His response hit the nail on the head, because **it is** the fruit of Calvinism.

But isn't that exactly the attitude of everyone who believes in an unconditional election of the individual either to salvation or to damnation? They say, this way all honor goes to God, if we see his "sovereignty" in this way. And people would be humble then, as they believe to have added nothing to their salvation. But I'm convinced it's the other way round. It is no coincidence that the "Apartheid" ideology was developed in a country that was dominated by Calvinist Boers. If you believe to be "elected" because of reasons not intelligible to human minds, you have to feel "metaphysical" superior, superior in a way that isn't even intelligible to human minds. And you believe the others deserve to be eternally tormented because of reasons they never had a chance to even understand. This is the ultimate arrogance and a great wickedness, indeed.

I would have to agree. I think it is such a terrible saying for those who face such disasters and to think we come out unscathed because God favored us over them. It is one of the dangers of attributing an event to God's direct involvement when it could have been natural causes.

Another danger of this kind of thinking is concluding that disastrous events did not happen to you because of your good relationship with God, or by those who *think* they have a relationship with God. There is one thing I do know. Jesus said,

“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. “ Matthew 5:45.

It is not a matter of who is getting blessed and who isn't. Or who is enjoying life and who is not. As someone has aptly said, "God is not rewarding the unjust with his rain, nor is he trying to frustrate the just by raining on the unjust. It is simply a testimony to God's impartiality."