

# The Self Reflections Of an Inspired Man of God

Tim Conway | [illbehonest.com](http://illbehonest.com)

Ephesians 3. Now, we're going to read this again. We'll read through it pretty quickly, and then we're going to go back, and we're going to look at some things. What I want you to notice - I'll tell you right off. The title of my message is: "The Self-Reflections of an Inspired Man of God." This section of Ephesians is special. Now, I know that there's other portions of Paul's writings where you get glimpses into his life; his person. This is autobiographical - these first 13 verses of chapter 3. We get a lot of information about Paul, from Paul under inspiration.

So let's read this. "For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus..." And we remember last week, the reason - because the Gentiles are fellow heirs; because the Gentiles are in the family of God; because they're included. "For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you..." So, you see that. Paul's a prisoner. Paul is a steward. "...how the mystery was made known to me by revelation." He's the recipient of revelation. "...as I have written briefly." When you read this, you can perceive my insight. Again, autobiographical. He's looking at himself. What's true of himself. He has revelation. He has insight into the mystery of Christ. "...which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed..." to him. He's one of the holy apostles "...and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs." There's the mystery. "...members of the same body, partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. Of this Gospel..." again, self-reflecting here. "...Of this Gospel, I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of His power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things." And then if we jump to v. 13, "So I..." again, Paul, speaking specifically to them. "I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering." He's a sufferer. He's in prison. "...Which is your glory."

Brethren, example is powerful. All you have to do is think about Scripture itself. We could think of Hebrews 11. I've heard John Piper say that based on Hebrews 11, He is convinced that he ought to be doing the biographical sketches that he does every single year at his pastor's conference. Because holding up such men - I find that to be true. I find that to be true in my own life that when I read about men, what I'm hit with is their example. I'm hit by their life and it's powerful. Imitation and example. God has designed us to be affected and influenced by the example of others.

You think about the Proverbs. If you want to be wise, what do you do? Walk with the wise. If you walk with a fool, you're going to suffer harm. Or you come to the New Testament. You think about maybe Hebrews 13. What does the author say to us about those who are leaders over you? Imitate their faith. Exactly. Imitation. That is the reality of Scripture. You want

to surround yourself with bad companionship? What does it do? It corrupts good morals. Good influence. Bad influence. They affect us. And Scripture speaks about both of them.

I was just talking to a brother yesterday, and he was telling me about a season of life where he began to associate with a guy that was lost, and he was hoping to impart truth to him. And in the end, he ended up being corrupted by him. And you know what? When I was first saved, same thing was true. I thought in the beginning, I'm going to hang around with my friends from my old way of life because I want to influence them. And you know what I began to recognize they were having more influence on me than I was having on them. And I needed to break rank.

This section of Ephesians is special because what we have is the example of Paul in certain aspects of his life; certain truths about his life that are displayed before us. It's autobiographical. But you know what especially? It's inspired autobiography. You know when you read - we're talking autobiography here - somebody that writes about themselves. You know what the problem is when somebody is uninspired? When they're inspired, it means that the Spirit is carrying Paul along to show us about Paul, which means it's all true. You know, when you have uninspired authors writing about themselves, two things happen, I find. On the one hand, they don't want to tell you the bad because they're trying to protect reputation. Or on the other hand, if they're humble men, they won't tell you the good, because it seems like they're boasting.

But you know what's interesting about Paul? There are times when you read him when it does sound like he's boasting. And he's going on about his strengths, but he also does not leave out his weaknesses. And he tells you about his weakness. And he tells you that he's the least. I like that. There's truth. There's reality in that. We don't always know what's embellished or omitted when it's an uninspired writer. But when Paul pens Scripture, we know it isn't just true, but it's God bringing out of Paul's life what is true that He wants you and I to know about. I mean, you think about that. Paul is being guided here to tell us the things about himself that we need to know. And that could be helpful to us if we think about them.

Here's Paul writing a letter to somebody else. He can say this. He can say, I am the least of all the apostles. Unworthy to be called an apostle. Don't you like that? Is that true? But you know what he can come right around within one verse and say this: I outran them all - speaking of the apostles. It's like basically saying, I'm the best of them. I ran the hardest. Now, he gives credit where credit is due. He says it's not me, it's the grace of God in me. But still, he can tell us where he excels and beats everybody else, but he can also tell us at the same time, he's not even worthy to be called an apostle. I love that transparency.

And listen to this. "Are they servants of Christ?" Now here, he's not talking about the other apostles. Here he's talking about the false apostles. He says, "Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one. Far greater labors, far more imprisonments, countless beatings, often near death..." You see, this is the kind of thing when a guy isn't inspired and he's a Christian he would hesitate to tell us, because it sounds like he's boasting. The truth is if you look at 2 Corinthians, it sounds like he's boasting. In fact, he says he's boasting. And he says he sounds like a mad man. But he's being driven to it because he's trying to vindicate his ministry. Then, in the same verses, he can tell us about his weakness.

Look, I'm thankful for the transparency here because this is a man that you and I are called to follow. I find this very interesting about the Apostle Paul. Very interesting. Paul seems to be the prototype saved sinner. Now look, I know that Jesus Christ is the preeminent example, but He's not a saved sinner. What you have in Paul is somebody who actually has been saved, and then is walking through this world with the weakness of a sinner saved by grace enduring the sanctification process that Jesus never had to go through. And so Paul is the prototype saved sinner. God worked in Paul in such a way as specifically to make him a pattern for us. And you know what's interesting? I never find that Peter or John ever said follow me or imitate me. Maybe I'm wrong. But I find this, that Paul said it more than once. He said, "I urge you, then, be imitators of me." 1 Corinthians 4:16. 1 Corinthians 11, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ." Philippians 3:17 "Brothers, join in imitating me..." But he says, not only me. He says "keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us." Keep your eyes on them. Isn't that interesting! We often say keep your eyes on Jesus. True. And Scripture says that. But you know what? Equally, Scripture says keep your eyes on those who are made of the same stuff we are. I mean, we come from fallen stock. And we've been converted. Look for the people who run the best as saved sinners. Keep your eyes on those.

Paul sets himself as an example. And it's interesting, at one place, yes, he can say, imitate me as I imitate Christ. Christ is the ultimate example. But in Philippians, it's interesting that it's almost like he's making himself the pattern and he says, imitate me and anybody else who is like me. And that's what we need to do.

Brothers and sisters, surround yourself with the godliest people. Surround yourself with the wisest people. Read biography. Read autobiography. And read the best ones. Read the ones that are an example, that are worthy to follow. Be in churches where there's actually leadership whose faith you would want to imitate. Don't go to churches where you wouldn't want to imitate that. Don't go to churches where you wouldn't want to invite somebody to come to. We want that, brethren. We want it. It's good. It's right. You want to go to churches where you want to be like the majority of the people that are there, and surround yourself with the best. Surround yourself with that.

Now, the self-reflections of an inspired man of God. That's my title: "The Self-Reflections..." Paul looking at himself. "...of an Inspired Man of God." And I have four points that I want to draw out.

The first one is this: Paul's self-assessment of himself as a prisoner. Check this one out. V. 1 You see it there. "I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus." Now, I want this to be personal with each one of us. Because I got to thinking last night. I went outside and I was thinking about this very statement of Paul. I think each one of us need to wrestle with this, if we're really going to benefit from Paul's example as we ought. Let me tell you what I mean.

Where was Paul? Every bit of the evidence is that Paul, you remember Felix, Festus came. Wanted to do a favor to the Jews. Left him in prison. Basically what happened was there was an appeal made to Caesar. Paul was sent there. He was in chains. Apparently, he's at Rome. He's in prison. Now, look, we don't have it in inspired fashion all the rest of Paul's life. Could Paul have been released from prison there and gone on? Some think he went to Spain, even all the way up to Britain. I mean, is it possible that he was let go and he did more

evangelism and he was in prison in various places along the way? Perhaps. The assumption is he's in Rome.

Now you think about it. You're in a Roman prison. The assumption is Nero is Caesar. But Paul doesn't say, I'm a prisoner for Nero; I'm a prisoner for Rome. It's putting his place in life in perspective to Christ. That's the issue.

He was a prisoner for Christ. This singular fact held sway with him. And it should hold sway with us too. If we think about our lives correctly, like he did, Paul sized up his whole life according to how it related back to his Savior.

It's the most important thing. It's the highest thing. Do you remember what Paul said? Listen. Paul said this dealing with differences in the church about convictions over things. He said, look, if you're going to observe a day, what do you do? You observe it unto the Lord. And if you're not going to observe a day, you don't observe it unto the Lord. And listen, this isn't cheap talk. This is serious. Oh, it's so easy to tag that on there. Well, if I eat, we eat unto the Lord. If I don't eat... no. This is something that's done with the will. It's done with the thought. It's done with an allegiance to Him.

If I watch the Super Bowl today, well, I'm going to do it unto Him. Why? Because I'm a Christian, and if I do it, it's got to be unto Him. That's not even thinking right. We should be measuring our life by Him. Everything. Everything. He says this: If you eat, you do it unto the Lord. If you don't eat, you don't eat unto the Lord. You see, everything is within perspective of that.

Or you go over to 1 Corinthians 7, and you know what you have there? He says to slaves, he says if you are a slave, he said basically, don't be concerned about it. You know, today, we'd get all up in arms! Slavery! It's so horrible! Did you know that some of those church fathers had slaves? We better boycott them. You know what Paul would say to you? Don't be concerned about that, because even if you were a slave back then, don't be concerned about it. Why? Because brethren, sometimes the things that we count to be the big issues in life just aren't the big issues in life when you see things with the proper perspective.

And see, this is what I love about Paul. He sees things by the proper perspective. And we know it because he's under inspiration. He sees life the right way. There in 1 Corinthians 7 it says, "he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed man of the Lord." Don't you love that? He's a freed man of the Lord. Again, it's all with regards to the Lord. If you're a free man when you were called, you're a slave of Christ. Everything has to do with Christ. It has to do with that perspective. A Christward perspective in all things. This is what gives value to anything and everything.

Are you a wife? Don't just say, yeah, I'm a wife, and I'm a Christian, so it must be unto the Lord. No. It's more than that. It's a proper heart attitude and a perspective in your brain about where you fit into the whole scheme of things. You're a wife for Christ. Do you recognize what it's saying? All for Him. I'm going to live for Him as a wife. It's for Him. You remember what's said: Fear nothing. Remember that's what Peter said? You don't have to fear anything. Why? Because you're living for Him.

If you're single, don't just say, well, I'm single and I'm a Christian, therefore I'm single for Christ. You know what it is to be single for Christ? It means you're not going to go hang out looking at pornography to try to satisfy your singleness. See, single for Christ. It's a right

perspective. Paul didn't flippantly just append that name on the end of things. And don't you either! Oh well, I'm single. So, I'm single for Christ. None of that. None of that. You think about what that means. Ok, yes, you are a Christian. You are single. I would say this. Be what Paul was. Be single for Christ. Be a wife for Christ. Be a husband for Christ. You say, I have lost children. Then be a father or a mother of lost children for Christ. You see it looks like something. It isn't just empty words. It means I live my life as though He is at the center and everything branches out from Him, and He is the one around which everything else revolves. If I'm going to be a parent of a lost child, then I'm going to parent them for Christ being lost children. That's the idea. Don't use His name in vain. There must be wrestling.

Do we ever sing the song that "I surrender all"? I would say that anybody with a real conscience; anybody who's really under the influence of the Spirit, you cannot sing that song flippantly. There has to be some self-survey; some self-examination. Those words come out of your mouth. You're saying them before God. I surrender all. Same thing here. You ought to be able to say whatever place you find yourself in - I'm a homeowner. Be a homeowner for Christ. You see, you ought to be able to put that on the end of everything you are. But it shouldn't be flippant. You shouldn't use His name in vain - tag it on the end just to try to sound like Paul. You see, what Paul recognized is to be a prisoner for Christ, his whole life was invested in everything that that meant. (incomplete thought).

And you know what? You had people in the guard getting saved. Why? Because he was speaking the truth. And while he's there in prison, what's he doing? The anxiety of the churches; the care of the churches rested upon him. He was penning letters to them. Undoubtedly praying for them. This is something to wrestle with. Wrestle with it.

You work. What is your line of work? I'm a stay-at-home, homeschooling mom. Well, be a homeschooling mom for Christ. What does that look like? Does that look like getting agitated with the kids? Not if it's for Christ. Don't offer Him that. You see, it's for... For. What a preposition. A prisoner for Christ. It's like something to offer Him. You think about offering your life up on the altar. This is Paul. This is how he lived. Everything with a Christ perspective. That's how we should be living. What an example! Can you imagine walking with him? Everything - his decisions, his choices, it's for Christ. It's all for Christ. No split allegiances.

You know what? A prisoner for Christ. This is what a man says about himself who's able to step back and see the whole picture - the big picture of things; see that in the whole scope of things what's really happening in the world. Where's history going? Do you recognize in the end every one of us stand before Christ as judge? Everything is moving in that direction. Everything. Why would you want to do anything or be anything that you could not append that prepositional phrase to? For Christ.

No, you know what? I'm going to go do something this afternoon. I did my religious deal. I came to church today. Now, I'm going to live, what? For me. There needs to be a wrestling; a proper perspective. I'm a husband for Christ. I'm a father for Christ. I'm a pastor for Christ. I'm a citizen of the United States for Christ. I own a home for Christ. I have what I have for Christ.

This man is in touch with reality. Because the truth is, this isn't fiction. It's not just, well, it's good to think like this, but... this is necessary. It's not just good. It's necessary, if we're going to be in touch with reality, because this is really the issue. Everything is going to be measured against Christ. You recognize that? On judgment day. I was hungry and you fed Me. I was

hungry and you did not feed Me. I want you to notice the "I" in that sentence. You see, everything revolves around Him. Everything. And Paul lived that way. A prisoner for Christ. All for Christ. Are you poor? Be poor for Christ? Whatever He gives you, have it for Christ.

Paul says imitate me. You remember that? Imitate me. Imitate. I think if Paul showed up at this church, we would all of us have a hard time keeping step with him. The truth is if he came here and we saw him, we might not actually like the pace that he had set in his Christian life. Because it would kind of crimp our lifestyles. It'd be uncomfortable. He'd look at us and say seriously? You have all that stuff? What are you doing? I left all that stuff behind a long time ago. Did you never read Christ's words that you're supposed to sell your possessions and give to the poor? The security you're living for? I think we might not like him here. Really.

Do you examine the life of this man? I know sometimes we can write Christ off. You know, He's just surreal. He doesn't struggle with the devil and the flesh, and the world bombards us. Jesus seemed impervious to that. But listen, Paul's made of the same stuff we are. And God raised him up as an example. And He tells us (God tells us): Look at Paul. Keep pace with him. You imitate him. Do what he does for Christ. A prisoner for Christ.

Ok. The second thing. I want you to notice the confidence of a God-made minister. Notice v. 7. "Of this Gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of His power." Now look, I'm thankful for this. It's inspired. It tells me that God makes it plain to a man that he is called to the ministry. I was made a minister. He was made one. He didn't just become one of his own accord. He was made one. To be made one means he was acted on from outside of himself to become this.

Brethren, I can say that. I can say that. I believe that. God has communicated that to my own soul. That He has made me a minister. They're not man-made. Nothing could really be clearer from Scripture than this reality.

Paul says there in 2 Corinthians 3. He says God has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant. Sometimes people ask, oh, are you new covenant? Look, those men who are God-made ministers are always ministers of the new covenant.

God has made us sufficient. Do you like that? Sufficiency. The sufficiency that is given to a man to be a minister; to be in the ministry is given by God. It's God. A man's sufficiency is not from himself.

Listen to the Apostle Paul in other places. 1 Timothy 1:12 "I thank Him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful." Notice this: "...appointing me to His service." Again, confidence. I'm talking about here the confidence of a God-made minister. Or in 2 Timothy 1:11, "I was appointed..." Here's that confidence again. He knows it. "I was appointed..." Not just an apostle, he says, "I was appointed a preacher and a teacher." He knew that. Even being a preacher or a teacher comes by appointment. And he knew it. He knew it. And God tells us he knew it. God wants us to know that a man can be confident about his calling.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his series on Acts. I remembered this from listening to his messages. I went back and dug it up. He says this: "Why am I a preacher of the Gospel?" He says, "there's only one answer to that question. I'm a preacher because I believe I have been called." Paul had confidence. Pat Horner told me one time; he said, brother, you don't want to

go into the ministry, unless you know that God has called you to be there. He said you don't want to wait until you get in the midst of the battle before you try to figure that out.

And he's right, because you know what? In the days that I've wanted to fly away to the mountains and be at rest; in the days when I've thought about driving out, sticking the key in, starting up that car and just driving, it's never been serious. It's never been a serious thought even on the most difficult day, because I really believe that this is what God has called me to. And I believe that that is something that God tells us in His Word is indeed a reality.

A pastor or preacher without a calling, that's to have a name and nothing more. Brethren, you know it. It's the cause of many fruitless ministries and it's the cause of declining churches. Men in the pulpit - I come across examples of this - men who get in the pulpit, and they don't belong there. God said this: "I sent them not..." He says this in Jeremiah. "'I sent them not, nor commanded them. Therefore they shall not profit this people at all,' saith the Lord." That's what happens when men seek to be preachers, teachers, apostles, pastors. And brethren, the reality is that you know that this isn't just something that's said of the Apostle Paul. You remember what happened when the apostle was speaking to the Ephesian elders. He specifically said of those Ephesian elders, he said the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God. And again in 1 Corinthians, we know God appointed in the church first apostles, and then prophets, and third teachers. Appointed. Not just the position or the office; he's talking about individuals have been appointed. Anyway, I like that about Paul. He's confident of what God has called him to.

Third thing. The self-assessment of a great man. Notice v. 8. The self-assessment of a great man. Well, maybe we can talk about whether he indeed was a great man. He seems to not think of himself as a very great man. "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Again, I would just say this. The Spirit of God wants us to hear Paul speak this way. And I think if he does, we should wrestle with it. What's the benefit for me? Is the benefit for me to say, oh, well, he's the very least of all the saints, so that doesn't include me, so I must be greater than him. He's the very least. Is that basically the conclusion we should come to when we read that statement by Paul? I would just ask this. Was Paul the least saint? Now remember, he's under inspiration. Is it true? I mean, the truth is, many of us would regard him - like I just got done saying - of all the men in Scripture who's a saved sinner that is set up as examples for imitation by God Himself - the Apostle Paul. If that's true, we would expect him to be the greatest example among saints; not the least. Right? I would expect that.

Now look, on the one hand, this can't be false humility, because the Spirit of God isn't going to allow falsehoods in Scripture. Right? But does the Spirit perhaps allow Paul to express an opinion about himself - basically, Paul's perspective of himself in light of the shame he feels for what he did to the church in his lost days?

Is this perhaps hyperbole? Hyperbole is an acceptable exaggeration. You need to hate mother and father. See, that's acceptable exaggeration in Scripture. It drives a point home. Is it true that Paul was the very least of all the saints? And you know, he says things in similar fashion in other places. You remember what he said? Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief or foremost. And you know he also said - we already looked at it - he says there in 1 Corinthians 15 that I'm the least of all the apostles. Not even worthy to be

one. The self-reflections of an inspired man. You know what's interesting about the text in 1 Corinthians 15? It's right in the next verse. He says I worked harder than any of them. Don't you love that? I am the least, yet I'm the greatest. And that seems to be how he speaks. I love that.

But what I ask is this. He's supposed to be an example to us. So what does it tell us about how we ought to view ourselves? Should we strive to see ourselves in the same way Paul saw himself? Or was Paul really the least, and for us to try to think of ourselves as least is only trying to think of ourselves in a way that really isn't true? Or, is this a healthy self-reflection that each one of us should have? And if it is, how do we get to the place to where we really think like this? And it's almost like, ok, let's all try to think of ourselves as the least. Let's compete for that. Let's be in competition for trying to see ourselves as the lowest; the worst. Which is what? It's actually trying to be greatest in pursuing being least. And it's almost like you go down that road, the moment you start to even think that way and pursue it, by nature, you just move in the opposite direction. But how can we think about this in a way that's healthy?

I remember hearing John Piper one time. Somebody said to him; somebody asked him somewhere, (incomplete thought) I think the question was how do you remain humble in light of all the success that God has given to you? You know what he said? Piper responded with, I know who I am. In other words, I know how I talk to my wife when I go home. I know the thoughts that I struggle with. I know my failures. I know my sins. I know my struggles. And that's the issue. I would say this.

Do you know based on the facts available to me? Like, I can sit around an elder's meeting and think I'm the least. I can think about life in the church. And I can feel like, Lord, I'm the last guy You should have called to this. I can think about a Denton conference and compare myself to the other preachers. I can think that way, that I'm the least. Why? That doesn't mean that we don't struggle with pride. And that thoughts don't come into our head of superiority or even asking the question, which one of us is greatest? But you know when you really think about who you are - I mean, when you really think about who you are, sometimes the thought probably comes up, am I even really saved? Lord, how could I even have a thought like that? You know what? I know a whole lot more about me than I know about you. And the reality is that knowing what I know about myself - I don't know how it is for you, but images and words and actions from my lost life - they're in my dreams still. I can just be driving down the road and a thought will flash across my mind about some wicked thing I did. Or even in wanting to have a pure mind now as a Christian; wanting to think right.

I was out praying yesterday and I thought about a fellow preacher, and such thoughts of jealousy came up in my mind, and I stopped... (incomplete thought) I started going to Scripture. Lord, You promised that those who come to You, You will not cast out. And I have come to You. And You've also said without holiness no one is going to see the Lord. And those go together. I have come to You. That's a promise. I see that as a promise. You are going to make me holy. And that is not a holy thought that I just had, and I hate that! And all of a sudden, thoughts of heaven where we're not going to live in the realm that Craig was preaching about concerning the people of Christ in the first hour where we have to forgive each other and we have to bear with each other. Can you imagine glory where you're able to see other people's success and totally rejoice?



As I was walking yesterday, and I got to thinking about this, I got to thinking, Paul... do you know what? Paul could hear about the success of the Gospel in any one of God's churches and rejoice equally. And I've thought about how well do the people in our church here equally rejoice when God brings success in a sister church? And I thought if we're really living like Paul, and everything is for Christ - I'm a prisoner for Christ - I'm in Grace Community Church for Christ. If you're here for Christ, then there's no party spirit. We can rejoice with the success of the Gospel in another place. I'm just saying this, based on what I know about myself, I think this is where Paul is coming from. He knew.

You know he replayed Stephen in his mind over and over and over. They wept for Stephen. Stephen was a champion in that early church. Paul probably felt his whole life he didn't hold a candle to Stephen. And he recognizes these other guys, while they're walking with Christ, he hated Christ. You just think about the background you came from. See, we know. We know so much about ourselves and about our own sin. We know. I'm the least.

And what a healthy place, because I'll tell you what, when you know that - they said of Charles Simeon, that that was one of his great strengths, is how deeply he loathed his own self. They said it brought such ballast to the ship of his life, and yet, he could bemoan his own wickedness at times, but then he would be lifted up to the greatest heights of appreciating the grace of God. And I think they go hand in hand.

You know, if you have the self-deprecating views of yourself, but they also don't lift you up to the heights of the grace of God, then you're looking at it all wrong. You stay down there, you'll just end up in depression and despair. But see, Paul, he could think of himself, but it was only a few words before he was - I think that's why he lived on the mountaintops, because he recognized: this salvation is mind-blowing when you think about what you were and what God has now done.

So, one last thing. Paul's reflections on grace toward himself. Notice this: V. 1-2, "For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you." Now listen. Listen to the title of this point again. Paul's reflections on grace toward himself. We're dealing with grace. And Paul saw grace given to himself. I'll tell you this, he talks in this section about grace three times. And every single time, he uses two other words as well: "given" and "me." Notice them. V. 2, "...God's grace that was given to me for you." V. 7, "...God's grace which was given me by the working of His power." And then notice v. 8, "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given." Three times "grace." Three times "given." Three times "given to me." This is personal. This is personal to Paul. Grace given to me.

Now, it's not difficult to see what he has in mind. V. 8, He says this grace is to preach to the Gentiles. Do you see it? "...to me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given." What grace are you talking about, Paul? "To preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." What I particularly want you to notice is what Paul says in v. 7. Because this is the point. When Paul reflects on grace towards himself. "Of this Gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace." Now watch this: "Which was given me by the working of His power."

I think Mark Webb hit it right on the head. May great grace fall upon me. Do you know how many times the word "power" came up in that song? You might want to notice it the next time we sing it. Great grace and continuous references to power.

I wonder, do we think - again, Paul's the example. Now just stick with me. This is the last point here. Paul, what do you think about grace? When you think about grace and it's personal - given to me. See Paul didn't leave that word "power" out of his sentence. If you're asked to define grace, I would just ask you this. Do you imitate Paul this way? When you're asked to define grace, do you put power in the definition?

I remember years ago out at Community Baptist Church, Pat Horner preached a message: Grace and Power. I looked it up to see if there was any record of that message anywhere. I don't even remember what he preached on specifically, but I remember, he was saying, if you're going to properly define grace, you need to speak of power.

Listen to this. the Friberg Greek Lexicon: here's the definition of grace. "The exceptional effects produced by God's favor." See, we like to say unmerited favor. But even when you look at the lexicons, "the exceptional effects produced by God's favor; by God's ability; by God's power; by God's enabling." I'll tell you this, honestly, when I hear grace defined as unmerited favor, I immediately think to myself - every time it comes from this pulpit, I think to myself, you left power out. I think every time that way.

Simply defining grace as unmerited favor, in my estimation is a rather bland definition. It's lacking something of the fullness of the enablement that God gives to His favor. The power, the fullness, and the glory of grace is missing. Now listen. Listen. This place here is not the only place where Paul speaks like this. Just listen.

In 1 Corinthians 15, we've mentioned this verse already, but listen to it again. V. 10, "But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain." Listen, Paul has an idea in his mind that grace is vain unless it produces something. And he says grace isn't vain, and the way you can know it's not vain is because of this. He says, "On the contrary..." It wasn't vain. "On the contrary, it was effectual. I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I but the grace of God that is with me." You see what he's saying about grace? Grace causes him to run harder, to work harder, to advance beyond others. He doesn't see this as somehow grace can be defined as just unmerited favor unless you say that that favor has some kind of powerful effect in your life.

Unmerited favor? Yes! Absolutely! It is that, but what sort of favor, brethren, do we want? Do we want powerless favor? Do we want that which doesn't do anything? Do we want a favor that has no expression? Do we want favor that doesn't accomplish anything? I don't want that. Brethren, you know as well as I do, prayer meeting after prayer meeting after prayer meeting, what are we asking for? God, help us! Help! What's that? Do we want His favor? Yes. But not a favor that's indistinct; undiscernible, ambiguous, that nobody can define or see or measure. That isn't what we want, is it? Aren't we praying that God would give us such responses that when His grace comes it would be great grace and there would be power? Demonstrations of power and the Spirit? (incomplete thought) That's what I want. Is that not what you want? We want that. We want that.

Do we want favor that's without energy? Favor that's without strength? Without change? Without force? Look, grace manifests itself in demonstrations of power. It always does. We can

say that we're saved by grace through faith, but the evidence of God's grace is that there's a demonstration of power. Scripture over and over ties these two things together. Listen to this. 2 Corinthians 12:9 You remember, Paul has a thorn in the flesh; a messenger of Satan. And what does he say? He asks three times for it to be removed and the Lord came back and said this: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." You see that? Power. Paul, I'm going to give you grace. And if you want to know a synonymous way of saying that: power.

2 Timothy 2:1 "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Or this that goes right back to "my great grace fall upon us." "And then with great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all." Paul said that God's grace came to him by the working of God's power. Is that not what we want to see?

Look, many imagine themselves to be recipients of grace. Oh yes, by grace, I've been saved. Listen, if that grace doesn't turn your life upside down, it isn't God's grace. Why? Because there's always a demonstration of power there. That's why Paul could look at somebody and say you need to examine yourselves. If you're yet trapped in your sin, there's a problem. Examine yourselves. You can't be saved. Don't be deceived. You see, brethren, when it talks about tearing out the eyeball and chopping off the hand, or you don't go enter the kingdom - that isn't works. What that's saying is that grace gives an individual power to be radical in the fight for sin. That's what it's all about. It's power. And we say, oh, I'm saved by grace. But your life isn't changed? You're not a new creation? You're still the old, dead thing? Going along in the old dead ways? Following the old dead path? The course of the world? And following the prince of the power of the air? Look, you may convince people around you, but it's going to be very unconvincing in that day. The only kind of Christianity that holds any weight in Scripture is that where there is power.

Paul talked about it. Paul talked about his preaching. He talked about the kind of preaching that raised people from the dead. He talked about preaching that Gospel, and that there was a demonstration of the Spirit and power. That's what we want in the preaching. That's what we want in the praying. That's what we want in the evangelization. That's what we want in the church life Craig was talking about.

What do you think it takes to take an old, dead, unforgiving, hard-hearted, stiff-necked wretch and make them able to forgive one another and bear up one another's burdens? That doesn't happen by man made means. That happens by the power of God. That's the kind of grace we need. We need grace that turns people's lives upside down. Isn't that what we want? Not where we have to get out the magnifying glass, and look at everybody like, well, are they saved? We barely see any fruit. That's not what we want. We don't want, well, they come to church once in awhile and they walk through the back door ten minutes late, and well, they don't give. That's not it. Great grace fell upon the early church. There was power. They went to pray and the place shook. What do you think brings that? It's power. That ought to be the desire. That ought to be what we want.

And brethren, think with me here. Look, we've got people that are deceived because there's no demonstration of power in their life. There's no demonstration of transformation. But on the other hand, just remember this: Just because you suffer more greatly in this church than

others do - you say why am I made to bear this when other people aren't - that is no evidence that you are graceless. Scripture's very plain. (incomplete thought) Think of the Apostle Paul. Jesus said to him, when he asked that that thorn be taken away, He specifically said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." Do you know His power flows through us when we're not strong. We think of it the other way around. We want to feel strong. But you know what, so often, it's when we feel weak and we know we're weak and we're desperate with God. But He makes His power flow through weakness.

And you know there in Romans 5, he says we stand in grace. It's like we stand in the realm of grace. And you know what he says there? He takes us down this path and he says that, "we rejoice in our sufferings." See, this is standing in grace. "We rejoice in our sufferings." Why? What happens? Well, because they produce endurance. What's that? What's endurance? Endurance is what you call it when you suffer longer without complaining. You have more endurance.

You know how it is. You suffer. You complain. Greater endurance is you don't complain as fast. Greater endurance - you don't seek a way out of the suffering that's sinful. You don't seek a way out that's going to dishonor God.

Now, we're never told to suffer if there's a way out. But you only want to take the way out if it's a righteous way out. (incomplete thought) But how does that work? That's the power of God. You see, suffering, oh, we all know it. Christians for 2,000 years know it. Our greatest growth; our greatest refining has always been when we're in the fire. And how does that work? Power. Because think about this: You take a lost man and you put him under suffering, and it doesn't make him more enduring. It doesn't produce character. What's character? That's the proven worth. And then what follows out of that? Hope. Why is there hope? Because when we suffer, we look and see: I didn't give way. I endured. Somehow, God held me up. And I continued going. I continued trusting Christ. And I see that there was a proven quality and a proven worth that was worked in me. How does that happen? How does suffering produce that? Because God is doing something that man can't do. And that doesn't happen in the lost man. You put a lost man under suffering, he will curse God. You put a man under suffering, he will seek all manner of unlawful ways to escape that suffering. It's supernatural. It's power. Power. Our greatest advantages and our greatest purifyings have always occurred in the fire. And there's no other way to explain that than the power of God. So Christian, don't believe yourself graceless simply because God calls you to suffer more. In fact, you may find in the end, you have to remember, there's actually kind of a tying together. This momentary light affliction is working for me this eternal weight of glory. The one works the other. Power.

I just say this in ending. Power excites me. I want it. Paul - he didn't want to define grace without it. He saw it. Something had happened to him. It was to me. He saw grace to me. It was the powerful working of God that was behind it. I get excited about power. Why? For one reason: Power makes things happen. I get those great big locomotives - for some reason, they like to park right out my bedroom window, and they rumble over there. But that rumbling! There's power. Sometimes there's four engines over there. (incomplete thought) I've counted before. It's like 100 - that thing may be a mile long or more, and every one of those cars is full of rock or something. Can you imagine the weight in there? Power. Power moves things. Power accomplishes things. Power, brethren, power! In the Scripture, what does it do? It turns the

world upside down. Power. The power of God - He can create everything that there is out of nothing. Power. Red Seas divide. Power. Power is what it takes to transform. Power is what transforms hard hearts.

Power radically changes men from proud, boastful, arrogant, self-worshiping little gods into what? Men and women who are humbled, see their sin, cry out to Christ, find their only hope there. Their pride is laid low before the cross. That's what power does. Man can't do that. We can't produce that. We can't break hard hearts. We can't break our children's hearts. They can be ever so little. They can be this big. They want to fight. You try to change that. We all try to change that. We can't change that. It takes power to change that. We want power. Power's what causes people to grow into the likeness of Christ. Power is what's behind you suffering and growing more and more like Christ. That's what it is and that's what we need and that's what we must have. Power. Power. Power. It's power that takes a man or a woman and those old works of the flesh - you know what they are. Just what I was talking about. Jealousy and envy and hatred and bitterness and strife and fornication and adultery and drunkenness and all the things - we know about them. They gripped us. We were in the grips of them. How do we cleanse away all those defilements of body and mind? How does that happen? Power. It takes power to break sin. Dominion. That's how Paul talks about sin. Dominion. It seeks to reign in the mortal body. How do you confront that? Power. It's the power of the Spirit. By the Spirit, we put to death. This is the grace of God. We don't want the cheap thing. We don't want the imitation. We don't want that.

We want to come into our prayer meetings and we ask for help. What is it we want? We want grace. Yes, unmerited favor. But what kind of favor do you want? I don't want the favor that's going to leave our neighborhood unchanged. I don't want the kind of favor that is going to leave these young ladies unchanged that come to the crisis pregnancy center. I don't want the kind of preaching that leaves prisoners unchanged at the prisons and jails. I don't want the kind of favor that leaves women at the Grace House unchanged, or the kind of favor that leaves all of us within these walls unchanged. Through the preaching of the Word and the ministry to one another, bearing up one another's burdens, and using our spiritual gifts upon one another. That's the cheap; that's the imitation. That's the man-made. We shouldn't be surprised when man-made religion can't produce the real thing. But we ought to be surprised and not content if we're actually observing that which is of God and not seeing something radical. Because that's what God's power does. That's what He's always promised be for His people. Power. Power. This cheap talk of grace that doesn't change anything; doesn't turn the world upside down; doesn't radically recreate. It just leaves sinners sinners. Barely discernible. I mean, that's what man can do. Man has the ability to make people religious. Man has the ability to become religious and wear around some veneer of hypocrisy and self-righteousness and religion. Man can do that. But man doesn't have the power that we need. We need the grace of God that comes through Jesus Christ, that is undeserved and unmerited. Yes. But reveals itself in mighty demonstrations.

Self-reflections of an inspired man. He saw grace, and it was according to God's power that was at work. Don't let us be content with anything less than that. Oh, you know what? Paul may set a pace that would make some of us uncomfortable, but I think if we had him in our

midst, his expectation of the power of God; his expectation that in weakness, God would show Himself mighty; I think that would encourage us all. The faith of this man.

Father, we pray that You would help us to imitate Paul; to feel who this man was; to feel his humility, his faith, his expectation, his confidence. Lord, we pray... We just pray, Lord, help us to imitate him as he imitates Christ. Power. Father, it's You who makes the true churches of God stand apart from the dead church. It's You who makes the living stand apart from the dead. It's You who gives life. It's You who energizes the very workings of the church. How are we able to gather together and stir up one another to love and good works where those who are called to be pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Or we come together and we live together and above all these things, love. How is it that we are to forgive one another and abide with one another and stir up one another, encourage one another, exhort one another? How is it that we're able to do this and produce and see produced the very fruit of the Spirit in people that we know come from all manner of wickedness and darkness. How? How? Lord, this is supernatural. What we see in Scripture; what we view in the workings of the church - Father, it's supernatural. It's something that You do. A Christianity without You, Lord, we know this - Christianity starts and it progresses only in as much as You are in it and involved with it. We pray for the real thing. Father, give us the real Christianity. We thank You for everything You have given to us. We thank You for all the life and reality that we've experienced. Lord, You know. You know that early church. Great power. Great grace. And You know how those terms line up with what's happening in our church today. Father, we can say this, that if we're experiencing the same great grace and great power that they experienced, then Lord, our lips are sealed. But Lord, if we're falling short of receiving what they received in the measure of grace and power, then Father, could we not ask You based on what they received to remember us as well? And to give us more? Lord, give us the wings of eagles that we may soar spiritually; that we may run and not be weary; that we may go forward in the power and the grace of our God. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.