

**1st Timothy 1: 12; “The Grace of Enablement”, Sermon # 4 in the series –
“To Honor God in the Church”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
March 9th, 2014, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

Whenever you and I think of the word “grace” we should think of God’s unmerited favor which is shown to us on the basis of Christ’s finished work of perfect righteousness and His sacrificial death. This is what our being justified, or declared righteous, in the sight of God is all about. But what we may not so easily see is that God’s grace is His enablement as well. This grace of enablement relates to your sanctification; your becoming holy and useful to God in service to Him, by the grace which Christ supplies. Our Christian life is not simply that we stand justified in the righteousness of Christ, as great a gift as that is. What we need to understand is that when God calls us into relationship with Himself He has a purpose and a work for us to do; a ministry which He would have us fulfill. And the ministry of each and every Christian to Christ, and to His people in your church and outside of it, is something which requires His enablement. It requires your receiving wisdom to see what you should do and how you should do it. And it requires Christ’s strength to enter into this work of service to Christ; to strive and to persevere in the things that you would do for Him, so that you would see them accomplished to His glory.

This was especially true of the ministry of an Apostle like the Apostle Paul. It was Christ who has laid the foundation of His Church, and He is building His Church by His own direction and supervision from heaven. In the assigned responsibilities of building His Church He also appointed the Apostles to begin the actual building within the ecclesiastical organization of the Church. Christ gave to His Apostles enabling grace, in a very special and distinctive sense, to give directions to Church concerning all that she should do for Him. In order to fulfill their ministry and exercise their office, these Apostles were given spiritual gifts to spiritually build. Listen to 1 Corinthians 3: 10 – “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it.” “But let each one take heed how he builds on it.” “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” You see here that whatever is built for Christ with your life and work must all be built upon the foundation of what Jesus Christ has done. But you can also see here that Paul Himself was given enabling grace to be faithful in the work of the ministry specifically given to him. He says, “According the grace that was given to me, I laid a foundation and another is building on it...” This is what I want to speak to you about this afternoon in relation to every believer. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who gives enabling grace to be faithful in the work of the ministry; both pastors and people. In looking at Paul’s words here, we will see what Christ Jesus did for Paul to enable him to be a faithful minister. And through these words we will also see what Christ will do for us to enable us to be faithful to serve Him on the basis of His mighty grace working in our hearts and lives. Christ gave enabling grace to the Apostle Paul in the following 3 ways:

1st – Christ Jesus gave Paul the grace of conversion.

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.” No one can faithfully minister to Christ unless they have been converted to Christ. Many people in our day do not believe that this is so. They believe that conversion to Christ is optional or unnecessary to ministry. They see religion as something they engage in rather than the salvation that God has brought to them. In the Apostle Paul’s case he was confronted by Christ Himself; the Living Risen Lord. Before he was converted, he wasn’t speaking of what He could do for Christ. He was speaking of what he thought he had to do against Christ. In Acts 26: 9 he says, “Indeed I myself thought that I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” In Philippians 3: 12, Paul speaks of pressing on that

he may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus laid hold of him for. Salvation begins with Christ laying hold of us. We think it is we who are seeking Him, but His purpose towards us begins far before our first seeking of Him. Turn with me over to Galatians 1, verse 11. “But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.” “For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” “For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.” “And I was advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood...” You can see how Paul, before he was converted and when his name was still Saul, was very zealous. But it was not zeal to minister for Christ, but rather he was zealous for the traditions of his fathers; men who were very religious, but they may have not understood the saving grace of God at all. They were probably very religious men, but unsaved, unconverted men. Paul was zealous, but it was a self-righteous zeal for the law; thinking that He was ministering and serving God by promoting outward morality and an outward keeping of the commandments of God. Actually, he was fighting against God’s righteousness, fighting against the idea that he had to have Christ to be saved from his sins.

Then he describes his conversion. “When it pleased God,” the God who separated him from his mother’s womb and called him through His grace; when it pleased the true and living God to reveal His Son in him that he might preach Him among the Gentiles, he did not consult with flesh and blood; he did not consult with his former Pharisaic friends about whether he should listen to this heavenly vision. He believed it and he acted upon it. He received Christ and His righteousness by faith, and he was saved. God had planned these good things before Paul was even born into the world; what kind of ministry that he would have. Paul’s birth, his ministry, and his future usefulness to Christ, to preach Him among the Gentiles and to be an Apostle to them; all this was integrally linked to his call, and to his being converted. He didn’t go to a Seminary (although he was taught by Gamaliel). He didn’t consult with flesh and blood as to whether he would undertake the ministry (although he did communicate privately to the other apostles the gospel that he preached). It was the grace of God that brought about his conversion to Christ, and he was enabled to go forward to fulfill his ministry which had been assigned to him by the Lord.

Now I would like to assert to you this afternoon that it is the same with us in a lesser, but just as real way. In order to serve God we must be converted to God. We should never attempt to put the cart of service before the horse of conversion to Christ. Conversion must go before service and ministry so that our motives will be right, and so we will have grace to truly glorify God. “We preach not ourselves, but Christ”. We are saved to serve God and not serving to be saved. Real and true ministry is only initiated by being converted to Christ by His rich and powerful grace. If grace has not changed your heart, you will not be able to glorify God in the way that He desires, or in the way that He deserves. But if you will begin by believing in the gospel, that Christ has lived a perfect life of obedience to God on behalf of sinners; if you will believe that you, yes even you, have many sins to be forgiven of, and a heart that needs to be changed and regenerated to love and serve God, then whatever ministry that you undertake that is in accordance with His word, He will most certainly bless it.

2ndly – Christ Jesus enabled Paul in that He gave Paul the grace of commission.

I mean by this that Paul was privileged to have his ministry verbally defined for him by a clear voice from heaven. Turn with me over to Acts 9, and I will read you verses 15-20. “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel.’” “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s

sake.” “And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ “Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.” “So when he had received food, he was strengthened.” “Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.” “Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” Paul had divine enablement given to him even in his first commission. He had a great revelation given to him of what God’s purpose was for him to do, in laboring for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom. He was a chosen vessel, a chosen instrument of Christ, to bear His name before the Gentiles and kings and children of Israel. By the human instrumentality of Ananias going to him to speak these words and confirm these truths to him, to lay his hands on him and thus set him apart to God’s powerfully working through him, he was enabled to go forward to minister, even though he had never been formally trained for it. Even though he had just a few hours before been a persecutor, and an aggressor and a violent man, he was now the Lord’s servant.

Look also over at Acts Chapter 22, verse 6. “Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me.” “And I fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ “So I answered, ‘Who are you Lord?’ “And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ “And those who were with me saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.” “So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ Now we know that this was an extraordinary call because of this direct verbal revelation given to Paul. We may not and must not expect such a thing to happen to ourselves. Our commission is to receive and revel in what has already been written down for us in this Bible. There are things, however, we are appointed to do, as well. God reveals Himself in what He has commanded us to do in His word. And having given us His word, He then expects that we will understand that He will providentially lead us into opportunities of service. We must pray for these opportunities by asking Christ in prayer, even as Paul did: “Lord, what would you have me to do?” And then we must look outside of ourselves for tangible ways to serve Him; in our family, in our church, and in relation to people all around us. We will come to know His will for us in particular as we look carefully and closely at the Scriptures, and as we pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us into useful service. The way to know God’s leading and His will concerning what He would have you to do for Him, as a young person or older person, is first of all to abide in the commands and promises of the Bible, knowing that these will speak to you concerning the perceptive will of God to you. Then as you begin to think about helping others, God will bring to your attention, by His Spirit working in your mind and heart, what specifically you can do for Him. And He will enable you to do it, by giving you the wisdom and strength that you will need to go about to do it. Learn to do God’s will in relation to others in the local church of which you are a part.

Look at Colossians 4, verse 7. “Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me.” “I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.” “They will make known to you all things which are happening here.” “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus.” “These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me.” “Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” “For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.” Now let each of us who

considers themselves a Christian understand, that it is your holy responsibility and it should be your holy desire to “tell the news” about what your pastor or other godly men in your church are involved in, in trying to promote the kingdom of God and the gospel. This is not gossip, it is supporting the ministry; it is your learning to carefully observe your pastor, and the other members working together with him in the church, that you might learn what they are doing for Christ, so that you might intelligently pray for them, and encourage and comfort their hearts. It is also important that you see that Christian people around you in the church of which you are a part, and even in other churches of like-mind, need to know what the Lord is doing in your life and in life of your church. Will you be able to convey such information discreetly and thoughtfully so that others can also pray and help in the Lord’s work? Will you pray for other Christians around you that they might be able to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.? Do you have a zeal for prayer? Will you labor fervently in prayer that God might come and do great things in our midst, in terms of promoting the truth of Christ’s grace and the truth of His word? God alone, can enable you to do this.

3rd – Christ Jesus enabled Paul by giving him the grace of confession.

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” “And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” You can see here that Paul was able to confess openly and frankly what he used to be like. He was not proud of it, but he was confessing that he would always be amazed at the mercy which had been shown to him.” “He confessed that once he was unbelieving, that Jesus could be the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel, the Son of God. He confessed that he was an insolent, aggressive, violent persecutor because he was ignorant of God’s plan, God’s grace, and God’s love. He confessed how thankful, eternally thankful he was, that the Lord Jesus had enabled him to have a ministry; to be called to be an apostle, where his testimony, his letters, and his deeds in preaching the gospel would forever be recorded as an example to all who would believe. We must learn to express ourselves in this holy way; bearing witness in testimony to His grace. Christ Jesus enables the most timid believer to go forth to testify to His grace; the grace which commissions them to serve Christ in accordance with His word; the grace which gives them strength to confess with Paul – “By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God which was with me.” “Therefore whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.” (1st Corinthians 15: 10) Will you not believe and confess that you must have the powerful grace of Jesus Christ to serve our God and minister unto Him, in relation to others around you? Those who are able to see their great need of Christ’s grace, and apply to Him for it, will not be disappointed. They will find the greatest fulfillment of their lives because they will find and prove to themselves that the power to minister comes not from themselves but from Christ. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be seen to be of God and not of us.” (2 Corinthians 4: 7) Can you confess to everyone around you that this is true in your Christian life?