

1st Timothy 1: 12; “Thank Christ who Enables You”, A Thanksgiving Sermon
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 20th, 2022,
In the Afternoon Worship Service.

I want to speak to you this afternoon about the great truth that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who gives his saints enabling grace to be faithful in their work of the ministry that He has called them to. In the case of both pastors and people this is true. In looking at Paul’s words here, we will see what Christ Jesus did for him to enable him to be a faithful minister. And through these words we will also see what Christ will do for each of us to enable us to be faithful to serve Him on the basis of His mighty grace working in our hearts and our lives. Christ gave enabling grace to the Apostle Paul in the following 3 ways:

1st of all – Christ Jesus enabled Paul in converting him to Himself.

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.” 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 and the use of your spiritual gift; your becoming holy and useful to God in service to Him, by the grace which Christ supplies.

Your Christian life is not simply that you stand justified in the righteousness of Christ. That is indeed a very great gift of grace. But what you need to understand is that when God calls you into relationship with Himself He has a purpose and a work for you to do; a ministry which He would have you in particular, to 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. That is what Paul is talking about here. 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 Him; 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 the apostle Paul. It was Christ who has laid the foundation of His Church, and now He was building His Church by using Paul. He would give to Paul His own direction and supervision from heaven. In the assigned responsibilities of building His Church Christ appointed the Apostles to begin the actual building of the ecclesiastical organization of the Church.

He gave His Apostles enabling grace, in a very special and distinctive sense. That is, He told them that they should give directions to Church by means of their words and their letters, concerning all that everyone in the church should do for Him. In order to fulfill their ministry and exercise their office, these Apostles were given gifts to spiritually build Christ’s church. Listen to Paul in 1st 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 from these words that Paul Himself was given enabling grace to be faithful in the work of the ministry which was specifically given to him. He says, “According the grace that was given to me, I laid a foundation and another is building on it...” Now, you should understand that 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. But they are wrong about this.

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." But 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 you. We think that we are the ones who are seeking Him. But actually, His purpose towards you in your salvation begins far before your 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, 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 did not understand the saving grace of God at all. They were very religious men, but they unsaved, unconverted men. Paul was zealous in those days before he was converted, but it was a self-righteous zeal for the law. He thought that He was ministering to God and serving Him, by promoting outward morality. He was only really interested in 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 want to say to you that it is the same way with us in a lesser, but just as real way. In order to serve God we must first 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 receiving His enablement.

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.

2nd – Christ Jesus enabled Paul by means of the commission that He gave him.

I mean by this that Paul was privileged to have his ministry verbally defined for him by a clear voice from heaven. These words are found in Acts 9, 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.” Now, I hope you can see that Christ was enabling Paul through the words that He gave to him in this commission. By speaking to him these words, Christ was giving him direct revelation of what His purpose was for him to do. He was to labor for the advancement of His 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, it confirmed these truths to Paul. Ananias laid his hands on him and thus he was set 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 Christ’s calling of Paul was an extraordinary call because of this direct verbal revelation given to him. You and I must not expect such things to happen to ourselves. Our commission is to receive what has already been written down for us in this Bible because it is God’s revealed will to us. There are things, however, we are appointed to do, just as much as Paul was appointed to his work and service. God reveals Himself to us in relation 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. This is our enablement.

And we should also pray for opportunities to serve God by asking our Lord 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.

These promises and commands will speak to your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, concerning what God would have you to do for Him. In a general way they will instruct you of preceptive will. Then as you begin to think about helping others, God will bring to your attention, what specifically you can do for Him. This is usually in connection with the spiritual gift that He has given you. And then as you go about to do His will, He will enable you to do it, by giving you

the wisdom and strength that you will need to see tangible results for your labors. First of all, you can learn to do God's will in relation to others in the local church of which you are a part.

Look at Colossians 4, verses 7-13. "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 as we think about what was going on in those days in the church of Colosse, let each of us take notice of what the Lord would have you to do. It is that you would pray and labor fervently in prayer that others in this church would stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

And further, that it is your holy responsibility, 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 concerning the furtherance of 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, and also join in that good work.

It is also important that you see that Christian people around you in the church of which you are a part, and even those in other like-minded churches, need to know what the Lord is doing in your life and in life of your church. Will you think about how you can convey such information discreetly and thoughtfully so that others can also pray and help in relation to 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? 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 to labor for Him abundantly.

Verses 12-14 – "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 an unbelieving man. He did not believe that Jesus could be the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel, the Son of God.

I wonder if you are able to express yourself in this same holy way; bearing witness in testimony to Christ's grace? Listen to how humbly Paul speaks of himself and his labors in 1st Corinthians 15: 10 – "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." Having heard these things, do you now understand that you must have the powerful grace of Jesus Christ to enable you serve our God and minister unto Him, in relation to others around you? Then seek to know the reality of it in your life.