

# Grateful For God's Grace

By Mark Jarvinen

Paul's first letter to Timothy, was written to encourage his young protégé to stand strong against a group of false teachers who were seeking to undermine the church in Ephesus, which Paul had planted earlier and which Timothy was now serving as pastor. We might expect Paul to assert his apostolic authority over these false teachers by advancing his own character, while questioning theirs. But that's not the tactic Paul chose to take. **Make no mistake, Paul never would have agreed with the content of the false teachers' doctrine. However, on the issue of character, Paul was careful not to toot his own horn. He wanted to make it clear that by nature, he was no better than they were.** As a servant of Christ, Paul refrained from pointing out their personal flaws as a way to make himself look better by comparison. In fact, he took pains to emphasize that he had his flaws too, and that the ground is level at the foot of the cross, where all sinners must go to find forgiveness.

In today's text, from **I Timothy 1:12-17**, in order to reinforce the qualities of a true minister of the gospel for Timothy's benefit, Paul gives his own testimony – thanking God for His mercy and grace manifested in his own life. There is much for us to learn today from this passage. Listen as I read it in Jesus name:

***<sup>12</sup> I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. <sup>13</sup> Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. <sup>14</sup> The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full***

***acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. <sup>16</sup> But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. <sup>17</sup> Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (I Timothy 1:12-17)***

***Paul was grateful for God's Grace in being ...***

- I. APPOINTED BY CHRIST AS A SERVANT (1:12-14).**
  - II. SAVED BY CHRIST AS AN EXAMPLE (1:15-16).**
  - III. SET APART BY CHRIST AS A WORSHIPER (1:17).**
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***Paul was grateful for God's Grace in being ...***

- I. APPOINTED BY CHRIST AS A SERVANT (1:12-14).**

With gratitude, Paul spells out for Timothy that he did not make himself a minister of the gospel. Paul did not choose the ministry because he thought it would be a good profession or because someone had pulled him aside one day and told him he would be good at it. In my college days during the Vietnam era, I remember meeting a minister at a youth camp who told me he had entered the ministry to avoid the draft. I was speechless. Having two uncles who were ordained pastors, I knew you were supposed to be called into ministry. Paul's clear understanding was that he was ***APPOINTED BY CHRIST TO SERVE.***

Let's look at some additional facts from the text that further establish the idea that Paul was appointed to serve.

- ***Christ Jesus "empowered" Paul.***

The text reads, ***“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength,....”*** The word in Greek (endunamoo) carries the idea of being enabled with a strength that was not already there. In ***Philippians 4:13***, for example, Paul writes, ***“I can do all things (not in my own strength or ability, but) through Christ who strengthens me.”***

- This is not about trying to stir up power within oneself from one’s own resources, talents, or abilities.
- This is not merely talking about ministry successes in order to self-validate one’s ministry.
- This is not trying to “shout power” into one’s preaching, as some pastors seem prone to do. I once heard an illustration about a pastor who had written a note to himself in the margin of his sermon manuscript, ***“argument is weak here, speak louder”***.

Paul’s point here is simply that Christ is the one who put him into ministry, therefore Christ is the one who empowers him to fulfill his ministry.

\* **The significant thought here** for all of us who serve the Lord is that ***“he whom God calls to serve, He also empowers to serve.”*** *This has been a liberating thought for me over the years as one who, in my youth, doubted my gifts for ministry. Fortunately, it’s not about the attributes I bring or don’t bring to the table, but Christ working through me.*

*I attended seminary in Pasadena with a man who had a **stuttering problem**. We had a preaching class together and he struggled mightily to deliver a sermon. Yet, he felt called by God to the pastorate. I’ll never forget the standing ovation he received from the class when he delivered a passionate, well articulated sermon during the final week of the semester.*

As Jesus said to his disciples in ***John 15:16*** –

***“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.”***

- **Christ Considered Paul Trustworthy** –

Notice in the text that Paul is thankful **“that He considered me faithful” (v. 12)**. As we see in **v. 13** of the text, the idea that Christ could consider Paul faithful in itself was a miracle of God’s grace given his past life.

Note the three things **v. 13** tells us about Paul’s past:

- **He was a blasphemer** – Paul had insulted, reviled, and cursed the name of Christ.
- **He was a persecutor** - Paul sought to stamp out Christianity wherever he could find it.
- **He was a violent man** – Paul inflicted pain on Christians, and moreover seemed to enjoy it, going to the limits of sadistic brutality (Barclay).

It is no wonder then, that Paul was overwhelmed with gratitude that Christ had given him grace in considering him faithful to serve. Think about it! Given Paul’s past, the fact that he was forgiven was wonder enough. But then to think that Christ would actually trust him with the precious gospel is grace upon grace. As **v. 14** says, **“The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, (or ‘super-abundantly’ in NT Greek) along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”** As super-abundant grace was poured out on Paul, faith and love were also stirred up within him.

**Note this:** *Sometimes people feel so guilt ridden by their past that they assume God could never use them. Paul’s life testifies to us that no matter how shameful our past, God can forgive us and use us.*

*While serving in another state, I met a pastor in the neighboring town who shared with me his past as the victim of physical and sexual abuse and a 10 year addiction to drugs, who was miraculously set free and was being used by God in a remarkable way. **God is not limited by our past, either in what we’ve done or what was done to us.***

And so as we trace Paul's testimony we can understand his gratitude over having been graciously appointed by Christ to serve.

Secondly, Paul was grateful for God's grace in being ...

## II. **SAVED BY CHRIST AS AN EXAMPLE (1:15-16).**

In **v. 15** we are confronted with a ***"trustworthy saying,"*** which is another way of saying ***"a non-negotiable truth."*** This truth is so basic and so compelling that everyone ought to accept it, i.e. that ***"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."*** Here we have a concise statement of why Christ came to the world. Jesus came to planet earth on a rescue mission.

**Who did Christ come to save?** We find the answer earlier in the context of Paul's letter. In **I Timothy 1:9-10**, Paul spells out a list of those Christ came to save -

***"Lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; those who kill their fathers and mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers."***

As we examine this list we can find all 10 of the commandments violated here. Yet, not one of these would be excluded from the gift of salvation if they were led by the Holy Spirit to repent of their sin and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Paul considered himself to be the ***worst*** of the lot because of his past.

**Paul could never forget that he was a forgiven sinner, but neither could he forget what he was capable of in his sin nature.**

This is also the experience of other great men of faith, such as **John Newton**, who, as you may know, was **a slave trader** himself before his conversion to Christ, and was later led to write, in humility and gratitude, the great hymn of the faith – **“Amazing Grace.”** As was true for Paul, the memory of Newton’s sin was what kept him from spiritual pride. Newton regarded his actions as a slave-trader as the lowest a man could sink. In order never to forget his past and to keep the reality of God’s grace alive and fresh in his mind, Newton wrote these words on a plaque that hung on his mantelpiece:

***“Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt and the Lord thy God redeemed thee.”***

He also wrote his own **epitaph** for his grave marker, which reads as follows:

***“John Newton, once an infidel and libertine, a captor of slaves in Africa, was by the mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, pardoned, restored, preserved, and appointed to preach the faith he had so long labored to destroy.”*** (Barclay)

All believers are ministers, or servants, in some sense. The point here is that every minister, whether it be the Apostle Paul or John Newton, or just plain old you and me, has to know deep in our own soul that Jesus came not only to save sinners in general, but to save you and me personally. Furthermore, every servant of Christ must know that our own salvation is an example of God’s mercy for the benefit of those to whom we will one day minister. Paul’s perspective was ***“if God can save me, he can save anyone.”***

***Application:*** *What about those who don’t have the radical, night to day testimony that a Paul or a John Newton had?*

*Speaking personally, when it came to my behavior, I was pretty careful to color inside the lines during my childhood. Even when I reached my teens, I played it pretty close to the vest, at least compared to most of my friends. How would a guy like me ever be useful in ministry without the kind of dramatic testimony Paul had? In what sense could Paul's life story as the "**worst of sinners**" be an example of God's mercy for me?*

*I'm reminded of a **high school classmate** of mine, a student leader, a 3-sport letterman, and a real charmer. He boasted often of his prowess with the ladies. **I remember being somewhat judgmental and self-righteous concerning him.** But as I went on with the Lord, I came to the place in my own heart that I realized I too was by nature sinful and unclean and that "**there but for the grace of God go I.**" Today, in knowing that I'm capable of unspeakable sins myself, I'm left only to marvel at God's grace toward me. I'm undeserving of my salvation but so grateful. This is the attitude that fits me for ministry more than any other and Paul's dependence on the mercy of God so beautifully exemplifies that for all of us.*

Finally, Paul was grateful for God's grace in being ...

### **III. SET APART BY CHRIST AS A WORSHIPER (1:17).**

Notice that our text began in **v. 12** with thanksgiving to Christ the Lord and now ends in **v. 17** with praise to God the King. Here Paul brings his moving testimony to a climax. In a doxology format, which is a formalized statement with creedal content that celebrates the praiseworthy attributes of God, Paul gives glory to Him. In essence, **v. 17** is an expression of Paul's worship, in which he regards God as **King**, or highest ruler, who is **eternal**, operating beyond the limitation of time, who is **immortal**, not subject to death, who is **invisible**, superseding the material world, and who is the **only God**, who exists without equal. This is the awareness of God we are led into by His grace.

## CONCLUSION

Offer praise to God often for your salvation. Whether in prayer or public testimony there is no more fitting response to God for the new life He has granted you through faith in His Son. **A healthy congregation is not a haven for the self-righteous, but is made up of believers who are grateful for God's grace, ever mindful and thankful for their salvation and willing to express that fact in humble and heartfelt praise.** This is the church that pulsates with God's goodness and grace and is vibrant and contagious with the new life made possible through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is how Paul "takes the high ground" in preparing to deal with the particulars of the false teaching present in Ephesus – grateful for God's grace.

**A-men.**