



“Biography” Grace or shipwreck?

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wis
on February 18, 2024

12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, 13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and

an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. 16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 18 This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

*Paul the apostle was coming to the end of his road. These two letters... 1 and 2 Timothy, to his young protégé would be his last. As he wrote these words from a jail cell... knowing he would soon close out his life, I have no doubt that his thoughts would have wandered back over the years of his life and perhaps wondered what his legacy would be... *how would his biography read?*

Like all of us, Paul's life could have gone in a different direction. The Lord knows he was certainly heading in a different direction when God intervened and usurped his plans. The upheaval of a life barreling down the road to a certain end. Now as the book of Paul's life was coming to an end, what does he see behind him?

1:12

Pastors around the world hold this verse close to their hearts. Paul made this statement in relation to himself, but so many pastors that have followed have embraced it as their own, including the pastor that stands before you this morning.

*For those who aspire to the ministry, it is crucial that God's plans for you in this is ultimately all that matters. He supplies any and all ability, gifting, or talent for that which He has planned for you. It is He and He alone that equips you. Not just to get you there but to keep you there. A mistake here will be expensive. If God wants you and you plant your feet against that mission, you will never be at peace... always an itch you cannot reach. On the other hand, if you step into the breach and are *not* supposed to be there, it will not go well with you, nor will you see any significant success. There will always be a rub, always without joy.

God does all the heavy lifting, and yet we do indeed play a part to play in this. Our part is to be faithful. But ultimately, what does that mean? Certainly, faithfulness has in it the innate idea of consistency and endurance. It does not mean you shine for a day or just a while...it means you hang in there always and continually. It doesn't mean you are perfect. I am proof of that. It means you *endure*. You have to be a survivor.

Paul also says God "put him" in the ministry. We are familiar with the idea of being "called" to the ministry. But one must remember Matthew 22:14, a passage that tells us that "*many are called, but few are chosen.*" That can only mean that there are far more folks called into ministry than there are those who ultimately step up and are found faithful to be actually placed into ministry!

We must realize then that there is more to this thing than simply being pulled or having a desire. God "put" Paul into the ministry. Lord knows he wasn't looking for it! Certainly I personally wasn't planning this either! But God opens the doors...He sets things into motion and makes things happen.

Paul could have no doubt found his way into a fine religious institutional position on his own. He could have relied upon his education, experience and his bloodline, for he certainly had it. But he didn't move in such a manner. And it wouldn't have mattered anyway. Because achieving a "ministerial position" and actually being put in one by Jesus Christ are two very different things.

The fruit that emanates forth from your service generally is a dead giveaway as to how you got there! In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote that he was what he was, not by his education and heritage, but "by the grace of God." Any pastor worth his salt knows the same about himself!

So the bottom line is this: Unless God puts you into ministry, you are wasting your time. Psalms 127:1 says "*Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it...*" And secondly, if you are being called, you will never be whole until you step up in faithfulness and allow Him to do what He wants to do as it relates to you.

1:13

How many of us would respond to the last verse with statements like "*ya...but I'm out for sure...because you don't understand the life I have lived. You don't know what I've done.*" Really? Let's take a look. In Acts 7...at the martyrdom of Stephan, we read: "*Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."*"

Acts 8:1 "Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

Acts 9:1-2 "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

Then, after such an early iconic life, Paul...found and chosen by God, was "put into" the ministry! God's choice! Not Paul's! Make no mistake, this is how God works. You can't out-sin the call of God any more than you can out-sin the cross of salvation.

This verse however should also have the effect of making us take pause. For Paul...in those days before God met him on the road to Damascus, sincerely thought he was “in the right” through all of his actions against Christians, but he was, in fact, “way off.” He was so sure of himself, yet in truth, he was actually fighting against God!

It makes one wonder about ourselves, doesn't it? I wonder in what ways and issues we think we are so right about but in fact we are also actually fighting against God? How do we know? Well, if we are in the wrong, I believe God will do what he did to Paul. He'll knock you down and set you straight. I have certainly seen Him do it plenty of times!

1:14

Paul realizes that the grace of God is not just a reality, but it is “exceedingly abundant.” In time, any individual that truly walks with Christ will come to understand this profound truth for himself or herself. Paul not only received mercy...meaning he didn't receive what he deserved for his actions, but he received God's grace like a tidal wave. Instead of punishment, He was flooded with God's forgiveness, love, and often His blessings. He was “rewarded” despite himself! Again, this is the way God works. He can erase your past and rewrite your future.

Once again...what is our part to play in this? Our role is to accept His grace! Which in fact can often be harder than taking the punishment. That's a weird thing, but it's true for many of us. We would, in fact, find it easier if He would just punish us than embrace us with forgiving arms! It's human nature. We often find it hard to accept His forgiveness ...His mercy ...when we come to really understand our guilt. And often, we are like children and don't want any help ...we just want to do it ourselves. Then He comes along and pours out His “exceedingly abundant grace” which, if genuinely understood, can knock us to our knees...

1:15

“faithful” (gr) means “assuredly true.” Paul tells us that this fact he is giving is to be accepted by ALL. What fact? The truth that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” All of them. Even the Calvinists. Indeed he came to save only one “genre” of people...he came to save only sinners! So that's your one and only prerequisite. If you're a sinner, Jesus came for you. If you are 'broken' and you know it, then Jesus is for you.

Note that with that information, suddenly there are new stark realities. One of which is that...in light of his singlehanded redemption, any attempt to “clean ourselves up” prior to salvation is not only unnecessary but if you could manage it...(and you won't unless Jesus died for nothing,) you actually would only succeed in putting yourself out of the running! Yet ironically, it is this very issue that keeps so many of us from so great a salvation! Because we must actually realize and admit that we ARE sinners and NEED to be rescued! And that is just too much for a lot of folks that think they are ok people or worse, that they can handle it on their own!

Paul ends this verse with the declaration that he believes himself to be the “chief of sinners” in a field that apparently includes all of humanity. While I am sure of the genuineness of Paul's heart, I'm also sure there are many people who would argue that they personally would give him a run for that title.

1:16

“*in me first*”; Paul saw himself as a live, walking-talking example of God's loving grace. He considered himself the “pattern” ...the “example” of how God can save a person...even such a spiteful sinner as he was. Paul knew that if God could and would save *him* and pour out His grace upon *him*, that the same would be true for anyone who would receive Christ. No one thereafter could claim they were too evil...too sinful to be redeemed. No

doubt, it is for this reason that back in Acts 9:15, Jesus refers to Paul as a “chosen vessel.” If God saved Paul, He can and will save *anyone*...

This is what separates Christianity from all other religions. Man wants very badly to adhere to the idea that he can do something to earn God’s approval. That he can meditate enough, work hard enough, discipline himself adequately or light enough candles to get right with God. But God says you can’t. Not ever. Not under any circumstances. For our God is perfect and demands perfection to be in His presence.

The only perfection you and I will ever achieve, is that which covers us in His credit. Christ as our stand-in...our proxy...our “ringer” in the courts of heaven. When we are born again, Jesus stands in your place at judgment. The perfect redeemer. His perfection is then credited to your account. You are then perfect because He is perfect!

1:17

Paul “gets it.” Do we? How do we know he truly grasped this deep doctrinal concepts of rebirth, redemption and renewal? We know by the worship and praise that emanated from both his lips and his life, the same as it has with all genuine followers of Christ which have subsequently passed through this life. God’s grace flowed not only *to* him, and *for* him, but also *from* him! No one had to ask Paul to give God praise! No one had to poke him to serve Jesus and live out the radical faith that is Jesus. No one had to encourage him to fellowship with other believers or to share his faith. No one had to brow beat him to obey and commune with the Master! It seems that nothing could stop him from these things! He clearly understood what had taken place, and the magnitude of such an event. But again, *do we?*

Why the struggle? Why the battle in us?...the reluctance to get up and move? Perhaps it is simply because we don’t understand what the cross was all about. Perhaps it is because we have frankly never experienced it. Maybe we are just like ‘old Paul.’ We erroneously think we have it all religiously “sewn up” and now we’re good church people and somehow deserve eternal life and God’s blessing. But you don’t. None of us. And we never will. Without Him stepping into the gap, we’re lost. Romans 8:16 tells us how we know where we stand: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Is that what the mingling manifest of your spirit and the Holy Spirit says to the world around you?

1:18-20

Understanding all of this is crucial to your eternity. It is not an easy thing to internalize, and it can then be even harder to *externalize*. Paul says it is all a war! Such a stark picture in light of our modern church today that overtly operates so differently! Regretfully, the greater church so often operates like a social club these days! Not a fighting battalion!

Yet scripture often makes such a comparison, calling us forth to battle:

1 Peter 2: there is a war against your soul.

Jude 3 tells us we must "contend for our faith." We have to fight for it!

Philippians chapter 1; we must fight for the gospel.

1 Timothy 6 Paul says we "fight the good fight."

In 2 Timothy, Paul says at the end of his life that he had "fought the good fight."

He said there also that we are “soldiers”...*that we have to endure hardship like good soldiers.*” We are told in the New Testament that we have weapons to fight with! Weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left. This is a very different faith life than is commonly being presented out there this morning.

Few passages in scripture are as vivid as these that correctly call us to the reality of what faces us as Christians, and what is expected of us in time of spiritual war. And gang, whether we acknowledge it or not, this is war. Paul gives us our weapons to fight this spiritual warfare we endure: faith and a clear conscience. In battle, a soldier can die if he gets distracted! He will not survive if he has divided loyalties. In both physical and spiritual warfare, the price may very well be death.

“concerning faith have made ship wreck”; Finally, this is where we find ourselves if we fail to get the message. There is no doubt that every true believer can think of someone right now who started on the journey of faith but today they are indeed “shipwrecked.” They crashed. They’re gone. We must never think we are ‘different’...that it can’t happen to us.

We must note here that Paul too could easily recall someone who started down this road only to crash and burn. Moreover, he at times throughout scripture felt compelled to name names, because rarely if ever do such folks go quietly or solo. These two guys undoubtedly were two of the individuals that Paul was warning Timothy to be wary of. Please note that he was not speaking about outsiders or those who did not know the truth. These guys were **there**. They were part of the ministry. They saw the manifest hand of God in their midst and especially in the midst of Paul...*and yet still...*

Why would he be so stark and cold by calling these guys out by name? Because Paul’s first obligation and concern was to the true flock. To those who remained in the church and secure in the pure Biblical doctrine that they had been taught. No doubt Paul did not do this except through painful resignation. He had no pleasure in naming these guys! For it was Paul’s desire, along with Christ Himself, that **“all men might be saved”** and continue in the forward walk of Christianity.

But the reality is that *all men* are not going to be saved. In fact, Jesus Himself said his “way is narrow and few will find it.” The fact is, there will be those who do not survive this war. There will be casualties! We know many of them. Paul was simply doing what Christ Himself does; and that is to confirm an individual’s choice and desire concerning spiritual things.

These two guys had evidently chosen the world over Christ, and therefore chose all of its consequences. They at some point believed in their heads but never surrendered their heart and lives, proving such because they left with both in their possession. Paul acknowledges their decision, and “gives them up” as they wished. I reluctantly do the same. And when necessary, I too will name names. Paul would have never done so with these guys...no matter their shortcomings...had they expressed a desire to continue the fight. Had they really understood God’s “exceedingly abundant grace...” But they did not...