

1 Timothy

I. Introduction

A. **1 Timothy 1:12-14** . . . I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, [13] even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; [14] and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.

B. Pray

II. Who is placed into ministry is best determined by God and God's word.

A. There are a variety of reasons people get involved in Christian ministry – be it in the church, in para-church organizations, on TV, the radio, or the Internet, leading Bible Studies, writing Christian books, or creating worship music. Some of those reasons are good. Some are a mixture of good bad reasons. And some reasons are just plain bad.

1. When the reasons are good, the outcome is most likely to be good. But when the reasons are mixed or just plain bad, the outcome is likely to be bad – even if the ministry looks good to most observers.
2. It is best when God puts a person in ministry – as He did with Paul. It is good when the church – prayerfully, thoughtfully, and according to the requirements of God's word – appoints a person to a specific ministry – as the church did with Timothy. However, it rarely turns out good for the church or the person who gets involved in ministry as a means to gain something for him or herself.
3. Yet even when God or the church carefully selects someone for a specific ministry, it still doesn't guarantee it will turn out good. Given that our humanity is always with us, there is always the possibility of moral failure or other ministry damaging sins along the way.
 - a. For example, God chose Jacob, Aaron, Samson, David, Peter, Thomas, James and John – and though much of what they did was good, their failures and sins are written in the scriptures for all to read.
 - b. However, compare that list with examples of those God did not choose and the church did not send – such as the false prophets in Jeremiah and Ezekiel's day, or the misleading and false

teachers of Paul's day, or the pride driven, personal kingdom building, financially enriching, self-ruled teachers and leaders of our day. The harm these have done to God's people has been significant.

4. According to **Acts 9:13-16** and **1 Timothy 1:12**, the apostle Paul was not self-appointed or self-seeking. He was chosen by God and put into ministry by God and the church.
- B. [12] I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service,
1. In vs 11, Paul states that God had **entrusted** him with the gospel message.
 - a. Here in vs 12, Paul says that Jesus Christ strengthened him to do the work required for the ministry God entrusted him with. WHY? Because He saw Paul as faithful, that is, He saw Paul as someone He could trust to do what he was assigned to do.
 - b. Paul states this truth more fully in **Ephesians 3:6-10**, "...to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, [7] of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. [8] To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, [9] and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; [10] so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places."
 2. There is an important truth here for all of us! God not only chose Paul and put him into ministry, but having put Paul into ministry, God strengthened him for the work he had been given to do. Paul further acknowledges God's work of strengthening him in –
 - a. **2 Timothy 4:17**, "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear..."
 - b. Thankfully, those whom God chooses and appoints, He strengthens, and enables, and enlightens, and grants wisdom, and teaches, and leads, and empowers for the work He has given them.

- c. Though we don't know if Paul knew this truth soon after his conversion, we do know God taught him this truth and that Paul became convinced of this truth somewhere along the way.
 - d. We know this because of what Paul wrote in **Philippians 4:12-13**, "I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance **I have learned** the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. [13] I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."
 - e. Though this statement is directly related to Paul's work as God's minister to the Gentiles, it is a truth that we can count on as well. God empowers and strengthens us, not only for the purpose of ministry, but also for living the Christian life.
 - f. Paul was so sure of this truth that he asked God to do this for the believers in Ephesus. **Ephesians 3:14-16**, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be **strengthened** with power through His Spirit **in the inner man.**"
3. We know from the Bible that Paul was put into ministry by both God and the church. But the scriptures were written many years ago. Who puts people into ministry today?
 - a. We do know that churches place people into positions of ministry, but does God still put specific people into specific places of ministry? And if so, is there some way to tell if a pastor or teacher or church leader has been put there by God or if he has worked himself into a position of ministry?
 - b. And is there a way to tell if a church has prayerfully, thoughtfully, and carefully examined a person to see if they fulfill the requirements of God's word before placing them into ministry, or if the church needed the position filled and so looked for someone who seemed gifted or educated or in some other way equipped for the role?
 4. The good news is, there is a way to tell if a person has been put into ministry by God or the careful selection of the church, or if they are in that position for other, not so godly reasons.
 - a. But to discern such a thing requires godly beliefs and values, and some careful investigative work.

- b. For example, you have to believe God's requirements for ministry are important, and that bending or compromising them will most likely lead to unwanted consequences.
 - c. You have to value godliness over a person's natural abilities, or education, or zeal – even if they have the right spiritual gift for the task.
 - d. You have to value the spiritual health of the church over filling a position, or keeping programs alive, or getting people involved so they will continue attending and financially supporting the work of the church.
 - e. You have to believe that if you ask, God will give you the insight and understanding necessary to make such a determination.
 - f. And you have to look carefully, because the devil can disguise himself as an angel of light (**2 Corinthians 11:14**), and there are wolves who come in sheep's clothing (**Matthew 7:15**).
 - (1) Remember what Jesus said of the Pharisees, "You are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (**Matthew 23:27**).
 - (2) In other words, you have to look past the surface to see if there are such things as pride, a desire for recognition, greed, or a need for power that is motivating the person.
 - g. Looking carefully also includes looking past the person in ministry to the people being lead. In other words, we are to inspect the fruit – that is, we are to inspect the sincerity, measurable growth, and the spiritual quality of those who follow or come under the influence of a teacher or preacher or Bible Study leader.
 - h. Jesus told us to do this when He said, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. [16] You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? [17] So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. [18] A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit." (**Matthew 7:15-18**).
5. Over the past 30 years there has been a significant number of priests, pastors, teachers, church leaders, and singers, along with song writers and book writers who have either been removed or have stepped down from ministry for such reasons as sexual immorality

- including adultery, homosexuality, and pedophilia, the abuse and misuse of finances, and the abuse of power.
 - 6. That this is going on within the church and within para-church organizations to this extent is a sad, yet revealing testimony to **who** churches put into leadership, and the kind of people **who** start their own church or Christian organization, and **who** Christians follow and financially support.
- C. [13a] even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor.
1. By his own admission, Paul was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent aggressor – and just one of those would be bad enough.
 - a. In relation to Christianity, a blasphemer is someone who reviles and degrades Christianity and Christians with wicked, crude, derogatory, and defiant language.
 - b. A persecutor is someone who pursues Christians in order to cruelly afflict, injure, punish, or put to death those who have become Christians. And they do this to either deter others from becoming Christians or to eradicate Christianity altogether.
 - c. And a violent aggressor is someone who treats Christians in a contemptuously brutal way with the intent of making them appear inferior and doing them great harm.
 2. Paul gave a fuller description of how evil he was in **Acts 26:9-11**, “So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. [10] And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. [11] And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities (*outside of Israel*).”
 3. There is no question about Paul being an evil, cruel, inhumane person. He intentionally made people suffer who did not agree with his religious beliefs. But he was also honest about his past sins.
 - a. What about you and me? Have you been as honest about your past as Paul is about his? Such honesty helps feed humility.
 - b. And yet, because of God’s grace, Paul’s past, my past, and your past, evil as it may be, does not prevent God from showing us mercy and including us in the redemptive work of Jesus, or

forgiving our sins, or sanctifying us and conforming us to the likeness of His son, Jesus, or putting us into ministry.

4. Therefore, may we eternally praise God for the love, mercy and grace which He has poured out on us in spite of what we deserve.
- D. In **vs 13b**, Paul goes on to acknowledge the mercy shown him in, “Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief;”
1. To act ignorantly is to act without the necessary knowledge needed to do the right thing.
 - a. To be ignorant is to be uninstructed or uninformed or unaware – whether in a general sense or in relation to a single situation.
 - b. Therefore, to act ignorantly in unbelief is to disbelieve what you would believe **IF** you had sufficient information or instruction concerning what you ought to believe.
 2. In other words, Paul’s unbelief and subsequent bad behavior were due to a lack of proper knowledge. He was not willfully rebelling against God. Rather, he was sincerely acting out what he believed was the right course of action toward a group of people who he believed were heretics.
 - a. Was he wrong in what he did? **YES! WHY?** Because ignorance is not an excuse for mistreating your neighbor or setting yourself against God by breaking His laws.
 - b. Jesus addresses this kind of ignorance in **Luke 12:47-48**, “That slave who knows his master's will and does not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, [48] but the one who does not know it, and commits deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few (*which is a show of understanding and mercy by his master*).”
 3. Sometimes our sin is due to ignorance. Sometimes it is a careless lapse in judgement. Sometimes it is a momentarily thoughtless response to a person or situation. And sometimes we willfully and knowingly sin – be it a onetime choice or an ongoing practice.
 - a. Of course, all sin is sin. All sin has to be paid for. All sin is a form of rebellion and hostility against God. And all sin breaks the law of love.
 - b. But the knowingly willful sin, and the willful practice of sin, and the condemnation of sin in others that you yourself continue to commit – these are the sins that show we love self more than God and our neighbor. These are the sins that do the greatest damage to our relationship with God and those around us. And

these are the sins that flow out of selfishness, pride, and self-rule – and in so doing, hinder our prayers and set God against us.

4. Thankfully there is mercy, grace, repentance, and forgiveness. We can confess our sins, repent of our sinful ways, change directions, receive God's forgiveness, and return to loving God and those around us as we ought.
 5. Yet may we never forget that restoring what was needlessly damaged or destroyed by our own doing is only possible **BECAUSE** God's mercy and grace exceeds our willful sinfulness.
- E. Paul affirms this when he says, [14] and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.
1. The abundance of God's grace in relation to our sin is extraordinary, and for that we ought to be exceedingly grateful. But we also ought to be deeply humbled, for the abundance of God's grace is a testimony to the extent of our need.
 2. And yet, after receiving God's grace, let us quickly return to gratitude, because it is God's abundant grace that leads us to Jesus and to the faith and love which come from being taught by and being led by and being a servant of Jesus Christ.

III. Conclusion

- A. To keep today's teaching in context of **1 Timothy 1**, I want to remind you that neither false or bad teaching, nor discussing empty, meaningless, or spiritual unhelpful topics cannot transform us. However, God's grace and the truth of His word can.
- B. Finally, I urge you to care about who is put into positions of ministry, within our church and within the para-church organizations we support.
 1. I urge you to be cautious of which Christians or so-called Christians you listen to, read, follow, and financially support.
 2. And I urge you to see that no matter how evil you have been, God's grace is greater, and if you will enter into His grace and cooperate with His grace, it will transform you – today and throughout eternity.