Text: 1 Timothy 1:11-17
Title: "Grace in ministry"
Time: 10/18/2026; 10/22/2026
Place: NBBC; ACCC Convention

Introduction: Charles Bridges was an Evangelical Anglican priest who pastored in England in the 19th century. His commentary on Psalm 119 and on Proverbs are two of his works still valued today. He is best known for his work on pastoral theology titled, *The Christian Ministry*, which he published in 1844. Bridges was fifty years old in that year, and he had been the vicar of the small town of Old Newton in Suffolk for just over twenty years.

In his first chapter, Bridges writes, with what seems to be a trembling pen, about "The Divine Origin and Institution of the Christian Ministry." He insightfully describes the weighty responsibility of the Christian ministry this way:

"Nor can we wonder to see 'the chiefest of the Apostles' unable to express his overwhelming sense of his responsibility—'Who is sufficient for these things?' Who, whether man or angel, 'is sufficient' to open 'the wisdom of God in a mystery'—to speak what in its full extent is 'unspeakable'—to make known that which 'passeth knowledge'—to bear the fearful weight of the care of souls? Who hath skill and strength proportionate? Who has a mind and temper to direct and sustain so vast a work? If our Great Master had not himself answered these appalling questions by his promise—'My grace is sufficient for thee'; and if the experience of faith did not demonstrably prove, that 'our sufficiency is of God'; who, with an enlightened apprehension, could enter upon such an awful service; or if entered, continue in it?"

I can remember sitting in a pastoral theology class at the Bible Institute of Ohio in Columbus under the teaching of Graydon Cox. Pastor Cox served the Lord as the head of the

Ohio Bible Mission and the Institute's President, and he was a good friend of my pastor, John Ashbrook, so I was especially interested when my teacher mentioned that he had asked Pastor Ashbrook whether he ever felt like quitting the ministry. Pastor Ashbrook's reply was "only on Mondays."

Faithful Christians feel the weight of Christian ministry. This weight is borne by every Christian servant, not merely by pastors. Romans 12:3-8 speaks to every believer these words: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."

Illustration: My wife and I had the privilege of praying with a dear sister last week who serves the Lord as a Christian school teacher. Her typical expressions of joy seemed unusually suppressed as we had dinner together. She explained that the previous day had been a difficult one with her fifth graders. She loves her class, as her burdened prayers for them later demonstrated, but it seems the more she loves the less she is loved by some of these young ones. Her Christian ministry is similar to Paul's in Corinth, who nevertheless promised this difficult church: "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved" (2 Cor. 12:15).

Paul could make this selfless commitment, even "very gladly," because he was the recipient of the Lord's sufficient

grace in ministry. He wrote this passage of encouragement to his young pastor friend, Timothy, to remind him about what this grace in ministry entails (1 Tim. 1:18-19). What we read about here is the reason Paul was able to spend and be spent very gladly. It is the only way you and I can do the same. I want us to notice three things he says about this grace in ministry.

I. Grace in ministry is a gospel trust given us by Christ (vv. 11-12).

Illustration: The public trust is an important concept in our nation's founding documents. It is in protection of the public trust that Article VI requires an oath of allegiance to the US Constitution for those holding public office. The text says, "The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."

Application: To be entrusted by the public with public office is to become responsible for the public trust. Paul speaks of an even more solemn trust that we as believers bare. Paul mentions that God entrusted him with the gospel (v. 11). The phrase, *which was committed to my trust*, is literally, *which I was entrusted with*, and the *I* in this phrase is emphatic in the original language. Paul is saying with great marvel that he is one with whom the gospel has been entrusted.

We can understand Paul's emphasis. How is it that I could be entrusted with the gospel? This gospel is the good news that saves sinners. It is the gospel that is the foundation of sound doctrine (v. 10). This sound doctrine includes the importance of teaching the ethical use of the law (vv. 5-10), while avoiding speculations and allegorizing (vv. 3-4).

Antinomian neglect of God's law in the lives of believers is not according to the gospel that has been entrusted to us. We are not saved by keeping the law, but as God's saved people we need His law to produce in us charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned (v. 5). May our delight be in the law of the Lord to this end, meditating on it day and night (Ps. 1:2).

It is this powerful, saving, life-changing, world-reaching, eternity-securing message that was entrusted to Paul. It is literally the good news of the glory of the blessed God (ESV), the faithful saying worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinner (v. 6). Are you one of those sinners He came into the world to save? Do you believe the gospel of the glory of the blessed God? To reject the gospel in unbelief is to reject the glory of the blessed God. We all begin there – "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The gospel says we sinners can be saved by the glory of the blessed God through faith in the sacrifice of His Son for our sins.

This is the trust of Christian ministry. It is a trust that should produce great thankfulness and sense of privilege in our hearts (v. 12). It is a trust that comes from the one who strengthens us to be counted faithful to our trust. The public has little power to provide the holder of public office strength to be faithful to the public trust. But Christ Jesus our Lord not only trusts us with gospel ministry, He also strengthens us to be faithful in it. He has put us in this weighty ministry well equipped to carry it.

When Paul says "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord," he uses an idiom he does not normally use elsewhere to communicate this idea. Here he says, "I have grace for Christ Jesus our Lord." It means Paul is thankful for his calling, but it means also that even his thankfulness comes from the grace of God. And so grace in ministry is a trust competently given us by Christ. Have we willingly accepted this gift of grace by faith?

II. Grace in ministry is mercy given us by Christ (vv. 13-16).

Illustration: Christ Jesus our Lord, who has called us to ministry, delights in showing mercy. While He was eating at the house of a Pharisee named Simon, an uninvited woman appeared. Luke 7:38 tells us that she "stood at [Jesus's] feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment."

Simon found the situation incriminating: "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner" (v. 38). Jesus knew Simon's thoughts, and He knows ours too. Jesus rebuked Simon for his thoughts and explained: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." (v.47). This woman's Christian ministry for Christ that day happened because she had received a gift of mercy. Simon had no such ministry.

Application: The former Pharisee Paul had learned the lesson Jesus tried to teach Simon. He explains in a single word in Greek the truth that made him a Christian minister – I obtained mercy (v. 16). Saul of Tarsus became the Apostle Paul in the same way the harlot of the street became the only worshipper in Simon's house. This is how you and I became ministers of the gospel: we were shown mercy.

The more Paul reflects on what mercy did for him, the more he understood the quantity of grace for ministry available to him. Using the present tense, he still saw himself as the chief of sinners as he wrote (v. 15), the chief one for whom Christ Jesus came into the world to save. Before Paul was a blasphemer. Speaking of his treatment of Christ's church he admits, "I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme" (Acts 26:11). He not only blasphemed; he was not satisfied until he had forced others to do the same.

The same confession speaks of his persecution of believers:

"and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." A young and ambitious Saul of Tarsus held the coats of the executioners of Stephen while consenting to his death (Acts 7:58, 8:1). "He made havoc of the church, entering into every house; and haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3). When he calls his former self injurious, he uses a word that Christ used to describe the suffering awaiting Him, putting the word between being *mocked* and being *spat on* (Luke 18:32). We get our word *hubris* from this word, and it means to *arrogantly rob someone of their human dignity*.

Perhaps worse of all, Saul of Tarsus did this all ignorantly and in unbelief (v. 13). Some commentators see a reference to Numbers 15 here with its recognition of the difference between ignorant sin and presumptuous sin in the laws of Israel. I do not think that is a correct reference point for our interpretation here for a couple of reasons. First, the Numbers passage has to do with discipline among the people of God. Paul here describes instead his lost condition.

Second, ignorance and unbelief never provide an excuse that makes mercy more likely for a sinner. Paul forcibly condemns all sinners as without excuse (Rom. 1:20). Every sinner sins in some form of ignorance and unbelief. If God based salvation on this characteristic of sinners, all would be saved. Instead, we read from Paul himself: "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Ignorance and unbelief do not lessen this guilt, which is the same for all.

I believe that Paul's meaning here is not that his ignorance and unbelief made mercy more likely in his case, but rather more required. Ignorance and unbelief only added wicked sin to the sins of blasphemy, persecution, and mockery, making mercy all the more necessary, not the more likely.

What made mercy likely for Paul is what he mentions in verse 14 – grace. The grace of our Lord can fill a vessel and make it overflow to the point of filling others.

Illustration: 2 Kings 4 gives the account of the wife of a son of the prophets whose husband had died and whose sons were soon to be lost to creditors. Elisha told her to borrow from her neighbors "not a few" empty vessels. Then God worked the miracle that filled all those vessels with oil from the overflowing of a single pot. She sold the oil and paid her debts.

In the same way Jesus has taken the pot of grace and filled his Christian ministers to overflowing with the faith and love that is in Christ Jesus. We have no faith and no love of our own with which to do this weighty work, but God's grace fills us with this special oil, this fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Even to overflowing, we have the faithfulness and love of Jesus Christ in us with which to serve Him. And this is why Paul cannot help but break into a doxology of praise at the end of our passage.

III. Grace in ministry is for the eternal glory and honor of Christ, the King (v. 17; invisible = unseen; cp. 1 Pet. 1:8 and contrast 1 Tim. 6:16, which refers to God the Father).

Illustration: Charles Bridges has a chapter on "The Comforts and Encouragements of the Christian Ministry" in his book. He mentions the encouragement of the salvation of a single soul, the affection many of God's people feel for their pastor, the special blessing we receive engrossed in the ministry of the Word and prayer, and what he reminds us is the "certainty of success" under the unbreakable promise that our "labor is not in vain in the Lord."

And then Bridges looks to eternity for encouragement: "But it is the prospect of eternity, that consummates our hopes and joys. Then indeed will the inspired aphorism be fully illustrated—'He that winneth souls is wise'—when 'they

that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.' 'When the chief shepherd shall appear, they shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.' Our recompense is measured not 'according to' our success, but 'our labor,' and as with our blessed Master, vouchsafed even in the failure of our ministration. And though we be only instruments of the Divine purpose, and the organs of Almighty agency—yet is it as rich and full, as if the glory of the work were our own."

Grace in ministry brings glory and honor to Christ our King, and as the instruments of His Divine purpose and Almighty agency as the recipients of this grace in ministry, we play this blessed role in bringing the answer to Paul's prayer here. Grace for ministry allows us to labor to bring eternal honor and glory to our eternal, immortal, unseen King, whom we love.

Conclusion: And then Paul tells this young preacher friend of his, "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy—war a good warfare." Brothers and sisters, may we war a good warfare with this grace in ministry.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching