

The Marks Of True Ministry

Colossians 1:23-29

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We have a lengthy passage tonight. I want to read it all, and then we'll go back verse by verse through this passage. Beginning in verse 23, Paul says, "If ye continue in the faith,"—and some would translate that, 'since you continue in the faith,'—"grounded and settled, and be not moved away,"—here's a key word about our topic tonight—"from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;"—there's our theme—"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: 25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; 26 Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: 27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: 28 Whom we preach,"—so we preach Christ—"warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect,"—which means mature or complete—"in Christ Jesus: 29 Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily."

Years ago I heard about a Pentagon official who had a sign on his desk in the Pentagon that said, "The secrecy of my job does not permit me to know what I'm doing." When I saw that I thought a lot of pastors or ministers could have a sign on their desk that said, "The sacredness of my job does not permit me to know what I'm doing." Believe it or not, there's a lot of pastors that don't know what they're to be doing. There are all these different fads of philosophies of ministry that come floating through the church, and I think it's important that we have a biblical philosophy of ministry. We don't really need to question or wonder, "What does a minister to be or to do?" What a minister is to be and to do is given to us in the Bible. It's that simple. What the Bible says a minister is to be, a minister is to be; what the Bible says a minister is to do, a minister is to do. We don't just kind of change our philosophy of ministry to try to identify with our culture, we actually have a biblical ministry that supersedes culture and cultural trends.

I want to talk to you tonight from this text about the ministry. The ministry is mentioned in verse 23, ". . . I Paul am made a minister," and again in verse 25, look at it with me, "Whereof I am made a minister." The word "minister" means servant. It literally means servant or slave. We get this idea that the minister is above the others in the church and he's to be kind of venerated and looked up to, and I can understand that, but the minister is to be underneath the church serving and washing feet. Remember Jesus washed the disciples feet? He said, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet," speaking to His disciples, "ye also ought to wash one another's feet."

The word "minister" literally means slave or servant. It's used for what was called under-rowers. In the Roman ships they had those slaves. Do you remember the Ben-Hur movie, if

you don't know from the Bible, just think Ben-Hur movie, right? They were below kind of, and they were slaves rowing in the galley. They were rowing the ships. That's where that word "servant" comes from. It literally means under-rowers, so we're servants of the church. I'm a minister, you're a minister, we're all ministers. It doesn't mean that we're to be just set apart and looked up to, but we're to be humble and serving other people.

Sometimes people will want to go into ministry because they think that you can have a cushy, comfortable life, you only work one hour a week on Sunday morning, and you can goof off the rest of the week. Nothing could be further from the truth. Remember the word "ministry" means servant. Keep that in mind.

Notice that Paul said, "Whereof I am made a minister," twice, verse 23 and 25. I have become more convinced than ever before that God makes ministers. When I am thinking of ministers there, I'm thinking of the word "pastor," "elder," "bishop," "overseer." Those terms are all used for the same office. There are two offices in the church, and only two offices. I wasn't planning on going there, but it's coming to my mind right now and I'm going to get in big trouble with some. Those two offices are pastors, or elders, and deacons. I do believe that they are for men. I don't say that because I don't like women—I'm married to one. I have three daughters, I have a bunch of granddaughters. Notice I said a bunch, I don't know how many. I think four or five (my wife will tell me after church), and I have sisters. So, I'm not anti-women. But pastors are to be men, "If a man desire the office of a bishop," an overseer, elder, "he desireth a good work." He must be, " . . . the husband of one wife," and it describes him.

I don't believe that women should be or could be pastors, biblically speaking, if we want to have a biblical ministry, nor should they be deacons in the church. Some say that there's an official office of deaconesses in the church but no mention of them as being official office or qualifications in the church. We do have women that serve in the church. Women are then servants, they're deaconesses, and the word is used in the New Testament. But there are only two offices—that of a pastor and that of a deacon. Pastors are also known as elders, bishops, or overseers.

The word "deacon," by the way, means one who stirs up dust. It means that he moves around so fast as he's serving. Those are those who practically serve in the church. They roll up their sleeves, and they're servants to the church. What a glorious calling that is. In 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, those two pastoral epistles, we have qualifications for those two offices which should all be met when anyone is fulfilling that office. Again, that's not my plan to go there tonight, but I wanted to mention that. Anyway, Paul was a minister of Jesus Christ.

Now, there are four marks in this text that I can pull out. There are more that I could pull out, but I want to have four marks of a true minister. Now, to be faithful to the text, which is what a minister is supposed to do, he's talking about pastors. He's talking about preachers, one of those that are called to preach the Word. But the application is apropos for all believers that we, too, should be having these same marks or these same qualities in our life.

Again, before I give you these four marks of true ministry, why is this section in Colossians? From verses 23-29, the end of the chapter, Paul is speaking autobiographically. Paul is actually talking about himself and his ministry. He's not telling the pastors in Colossae what to do, he's just describing himself. The reason is because false teachers had come into the church at Colossae attacking the gospel that Paul was preaching. They were telling them that Christ is not sufficient. Paul wants them to know, "I am called to preach Christ. I was made a minister of Christ, and that I am an apostle of Christ." When you find Paul in the New Testament epistles defending himself, he's doing that normally because there are false teachers who are attacking him in order to attack his message. The entire book of 2 Corinthians is Paul's autobiography of ministry, and he does that because he's trying to show that he is the true minister of Jesus Christ, not a false teacher as the false teachers were claiming that he is.

In Colossians, the theme, remember, is the preeminence of Christ, so Paul talks about his ministry and shows that Christ is to be preeminent in our ministry. In verse 23, when he mentions the gospel, it kind of starts Paul in this direction. When he mentions the gospel, ". . . which ye have heard, and which was preached," verse 23, and it was a universal gospel, "to every creature," Paul says, "Well, I was made a minister to preach this gospel," and then he doesn't stop until he gets down to verse 29.

Here are the marks of true ministry, and it's foundational and basic but very important and essential. Write them down. The first is that a minister shares or preaches the gospel of Christ. A true minister shares or preaches the gospel of Christ. Go back with me to verse 23, when he says, the middle of verse 23, ". . . the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached,"—it was declared—"to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister." In the context, Paul's saying, "I'm made a minister of the gospel, so I preached the gospel, everyone heard it, and I was made to be a preacher of the gospel."

The word "gospel" means good news, right? You've heard me say it before—not good views, this is not man's ideas, this is good news. That's why we're to proclaim the news. What is the news? That Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for our sins. Read 1 Corinthians 15. Paul says, "This is the gospel, ' . . . Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried . . . according to the scriptures.'" Why? So that we know He really died, so that we know He really rose from the dead, and that Christ rose from the dead according to the Scriptures. So, a very simple presentation of the gospel is that Christ died for us on the cross and that Jesus was buried and three days later He rose again from the dead.

Why is that good news? It's good news because we're sinners, that's the bad news, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no, not one." You say, "That's good news?" No. It's good news because, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." You can't understand or appreciate the good news unless you understand the bad news.

I hear guys preach quite often trying to preach the gospel, trying to give a gospel appeal, and

trying to give a gospel invitation, but they haven't told them why they need the gospel. They haven't explained that we're all sinners, that we've fallen short, that the wages of sin is death, the soul that sins shall surely die, and that we're separated from God. We must see our sin and our need of a Savior in order to understand that this is good news. It's good news! I don't have to die in my sins. I don't have to go to hell. I don't have to be separated from God. I can be forgiven. I can have eternal life. I can go to heaven when I die. You can't appreciate the good news until you have the bad news.

Paul was a preacher of the gospel. Oh, would to God that more pastors . . . I wish every preacher/pastor/pulpit in America was preaching the gospel, not a social message, not psychology, not philosophy, not giving a TED pep talk, but preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ—just heralding Christ who died, Christ who rose, Christ who can forgive our sins. What a transformation would take place in our nation if all ministers were preaching the gospel. Christianity is Christ, so the good news is about Jesus Christ. It's not about a creed. It's not about a ceremony. Christianity is Christ. The gospel was heard, look at verse 23, because it was preached. There is no substitute for the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The greatest need in the world today is for the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You may think that's over simplistic and absurd, but I'm convinced that it's true. The greatest need in the world today is to preach the gospel. Yes, let's do social action; yes, let's take care of the people who are needy, but if they die in their sins and go to hell for all eternity, what good is it? Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel." Make disciples. " . . . baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Evangelism and discipleship, it's so very important.

In Romans 10:15, I could give you a whole bunch of verses, Paul said, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel." I think that we should have a barefoot Sunday service sometime. All of us should come barefoot to remind us that we have beautiful feet, that wherever we go, we take the good news of Jesus Christ. We preach to the unsaved, and we know there's no substitute for that. It's part of the Great Commission.

Notice the gospel is mentioned in verse 23 as being for everyone, " . . . which was preached to every creature which is under heaven," every person. It's probably likely that Paul's speaking here in hyperbole, the Bible uses figures of speech, and that the entire world had not heard the gospel at that time, but perhaps he's speaking Roman world. What he is trying to convey is the truth of Scripture that the gospel is for every human being in the world.

Again, the little children's song pops into my mind, "Jesus Loves The Little Children." We sing, Red and yellow, black and white; They are precious in His sight; Jesus loves the little children of the world. The gospel is for red, yellow, black and white; they are precious in His sight. Do you know this gospel is to go to every kindred nation, tribe, and tongue in the whole world? It's not just for the United States, not just for California, not just for the Western world. It's for every man, woman, boy, girl, child in the entire world—every tribe, every nation, every kindred, every tongue. She needs to go to the deepest, darkest jungles of Africa. It needs to go to the

greatest city centers in America. Amen? This is our commission as the church, to preach the gospel. A true minister is faithful to preach the gospel. It's so important. Vance Havner said, "The gospel is not a secret to be hoarded but a story to be heralded. Too many Christians are stuffing themselves with gospel blessing while millions have never had a taste." I love that.

Here's the second characteristic of true ministry, it suffers for the cause of Christ. So, it shares the gospel of Christ, and a true minister is willing to suffer for the cause of Christ, verse 24. Look at it with me. Paul says, "I Paul am made a minister;" and he was a man who was full of joy, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you." You have reference to suffering and joy in the same verse. Even though he suffered for Christ and for the church, he did it joyfully and thankfully and willingly. He says, ". . . and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." Paul was suffering for the sake of the church, but he was rejoicing in his suffering.

Remember in Acts 16 Paul and Silas were arrested and thrown into prison and were in stocks? It was midnight, and they were whipped and beaten, falsely accused and arrested. It says, "Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." Amen? I would've been sulking, complaining, and griping saying, "Thanks a lot, God. Why am I serving You if You let this happen to me?" But they were rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His sake. When the early disciples were persecuted elsewhere in the book of Acts, they were beaten, they were let go, and they went out rejoicing that they were worthy to suffer for His name's sake. They were rejoicing in their suffering.

Notice that Paul rejoiced for two reasons. He rejoiced because he was suffering for the church, verse 24, ". . . for you . . . the church," which is His body. Jesus gave His life to create the church, to redeem the church. We should give our lives in service and suffer for Him in the church. We should love, serve, and be willing to suffer for the church.

Again, sadly, a lot of Christians take the church for granted. When I say "church," I'm thinking of the local church, the individual churches. They take it for granted. They don't really commit to serving and building up and edifying and working for the health and strength of the church. If Jesus died for the church, do you think we should have a nonchalant, take it or leave it, attitude toward the church? This is why when the Covid shutdown came and people stopped going to church, it was absolutely tragic. Then, people stayed home and watched the church online. I know in some cases it was necessary, but that's not church. Church is provoking one another to love and good works. It's forgiving one another, loving one another, building one another up, and encouraging one another in the Lord. So, we should take the church seriously. We should be committed to the local church. You can be a Christian without the church, but you can't be a good one. We need one another. We need the fellowship of the body of Christ.

I read a poem years ago that I've always loved. The author's name is Timothy Dwight. He said,

I love thy church, O God!

Her walls before thee stand,
Dear as the apple of thine eye,
And graven on thy hand.
For her my tears shall fall,
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be given
Till toils and cares shall end.
I love that.

If you're a Christian, you should be a part of a local church, and you should be committed to be willing to suffer, if need be, for the sake of that church. Paul also suffered, as I said, for Christ when suffering for His church.

Verse 24 says, “. . . and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.” It's clear to anyone that knows their Bible that Paul is not saying that Christ's atoning sacrifice was insufficient and that we have to suffer to make up for our salvation. That's not what he's saying. The book of Colossians itself sets forth the sufficiency of Christ. Amen? We are complete in Him, and even all through the book of the New Testament of Hebrews, it talks about His finished work and how He completed our salvation. So, it's not saying that we suffer in order to save ourselves kind of with Christ, or we add to Christ's affliction, it's just saying that we are so identified with Christ that the world who hates Christ cannot persecute Him any longer so they persecute us, His representatives, and we thus suffer with Him.

Write down Philippians 3:10 where Paul said, “That I may know him,”—that is, Christ—“and the power of his resurrection,”—and then he used this phrase—“and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” Now, synonymous in the Bible of knowing Christ is being identified with Him in a world that Jesus said, “If they hate Me, they're going to hate you. If they reject Me, they're going to reject you.” Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me,” right? So, if you give your life to Jesus Christ, not everyone is going to be happy or like that. You're going to run into opposition.

Flip with me real quick to 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. Rather than relate this to you, I want you to see it. I'm thinking in terms of suffering for Christ in the ministry of Christ. Notice what Paul says. Again, he was defending himself against false teachers who said he was not a true minister. How did Paul prove the truth of his ministry? He didn't take out his clergy card, he took off his shirt and showed his scars. Verse 23, “Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. 24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. 25 Thrice was I

beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;”—you get the drift that Paul had perils?

Verse 27, “In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. 28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” Welcome to the ministry. This is what Paul says is evidence of a true ministry.

Go back with me to Colossians 1. Let me give you the third mark of a true minister: 1) shares the gospel of Christ; 2) suffers for the cause of Christ; here’s 3) is a steward of the mysteries of Christ, verses 25-28. He says, “Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation,”—that word “dispensation” is the word stewardship—“of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;”—that, again, is the ministry of preaching the Word—“Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: 27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: 28 Whom we preach,”—that is, Christ—“warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect,”—or mature—“in Christ Jesus.”

This probably should be a whole separate study, but let me try to race through it as best I can without getting bogged down. What does he mean by, “I’m a good steward of the mysteries of Christ?” Paul’s ministry was a stewardship, verse 25, “Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you.” That term “dispensation” means house rules. We get our word “economy” from it. It means that he was a steward. It’s denoting careful stewardship. What is a steward? One who cares for the interests or property of another. It speaks of a responsibility and a privilege. A steward owned nothing—listen to me very carefully—but he was entrusted with everything. If I’m a wealthy individual, I have a trusted steward. I give him access to all my wealth, and I say, “Manage it for me. Take care of it for me. Invest it for me. Use it for me.” They had all these resources entrusted to them. What a great privilege and responsibility. Amen?

Every one of us as Christians has been given a stewardship—God has given us His Word, His Spirit, His gospel message. We are to use it to further the Kingdom of God to strengthen the church. When we stand before Christ on Judgment Day—as Christians, we will stand before the Bema Seat—we will give an account to our master, Jesus Christ, for what we did with that which He entrusted to us. That’s a sobering thought. “I gave you My Word, what did you do with it?” “I underlined verses in red; I highlighted them in yellow.” Wow! Groovy doovy. Isn’t that awesome. “Did you share the gospel?” “No.”

Remember the story of the parable of the talents? The one man had the talents that he buried into the earth, and when the Lord came back he said, “Here’s Your talent.” “Why didn’t you put it into the bank that it could gain interest, thou wicked servant?” The others invested the talents

and increased it, and he just buried it in the ground. A lot of Christians are burying their talent and not using it faithfully for the glory of God and for the good of the church. When they get to heaven, they're going to be embarrassed and saddened that they didn't use what God gave them for His glory.

A stewardship is the picture of a pastor. I believe that as a pastor, if God makes me a minister, and only God can do that, that He's entrusted His Word to me to be faithful to preach it. You, as a Christian, are given God's Word. You know, the more you learn about the Bible, the more responsible you are to tell it to others, to share it with others, to pass it on.

Notice what Paul said, verse 25, “. . . to fulfil the word of God,” so that means he had to be faithful to preach it, and he must not compromise the Word of God that he preached. What you want to hear when you die from the Lord is, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” I'm convinced that there's nothing more important than hearing those words when we die. All of life should be influenced by that, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

What are you doing with your life? What are you doing with your time? What are you doing with your talents, all that God has entrusted to you? Are you using it for the good of others and for His glory to build the church?

Now, I'm going to have to just rip through them, but look at this. Let me break down five facts about Paul's faithfully preaching as a steward. First, it revealed the mystery, verses 26-27. When he speaks of the mystery, “Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.” Mystery is something that cannot be known apart from revelation, and God has chosen to reveal it—something that was not known in the Old Testament but is now known to us today. In the New Testament there's the mystery of the incarnation, 1 Timothy 3:16; there's the mystery of Israel's blindness, Romans 11:25; there's the mystery of iniquity, 2 Thessalonians 2:7; there's the mystery of Jew and Gentile being one in the church, Ephesians 3:3-6; and then the mystery of the rapture, 1 Corinthians 15:51, “Behold, I shew you a mystery.” These are all truths not taught in the Old Testament but are revealed by God to us in the New Testament and made known unto us by His apostles in His Word and revealed to us by His Holy Spirit in the pages of Scripture. Paul's preaching revealed these mysteries.

Secondly, Paul's preaching was centered in Christ, verse 28, “Whom we preach,” which is Christ. Every pastor worth his salt preaches Christ and Him crucified. Thirdly, Paul's preaching contained warning, verse 28, “. . . warning every man,” this is admonition. This is the negative—warning unbelievers, warning believers. Fourthly, it contained teaching, “. . . and teaching every man in all wisdom,” which is putting practical instruction into application. Fifthly, his preaching had purpose, “. . . that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus,” which means the purpose of the preaching of Christ and of His Word faithfully is to bring to maturity God's people.

The minister's number one job is the maturing of the saints, not entertaining the saints but

maturing the saints. It happens with revelation, with proclamation, with admonition or warning, with instruction, which is doctrinal teaching—what we believe, how we should behave, there's doctrine and duty—and then with purpose, transformation, “ . . . that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”

In Ephesians 4 Paul says that God has given pastor-teachers, “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry.” The idea that you pay the pastor to do the work of the church is unbiblical. The pastor is to teach the people the Word of God so that they will mature and they do the ministry, they do the work of the church, not that the pastor doesn't serve, but his job is to mature the saints for every member to be a minister and do the work of ministry.

Let me give you the fourth and last point on the mark of true ministry, that is, a true minister strives in the power of Christ. I could've spent much more time on each one of these points, but look at verse 29. He says, “Whereunto,” this is kind of a fancy “wherefore.” Instead of wherefore it's whereunto. This is the wrap-up kind of application to Paul's autobiographical description of his ministry. “Whereunto,”—this idea of preaching, warning, teaching, and doing it to perfect every man in Christ Jesus. The purpose is that, “I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.”

Here's the secret of successful ministry. First, “labour,” verse 29, “I also labour.” The word stressed is physical, mental, and wearisome toil. It means laboring to the point of exhaustion. That's why I laughed about the idea a pastor only works one hour a week. Paul says, “I labor to the point of being totally, completely, utterly exhausted.” In 1Corinthians 15:58 Paul says, “ . . . be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord,” so steadfast and unmovable laboring.

Secondly, Paul uses the word “striving,” verse 29. If you feel so led, underline the words “labour” and “striving.” The word “striving” means to agonize. It is used of athletes who run a race and they are agonizing. Have you ever seen an athlete run a long-distance race? His face looks like he's in so much pain. I know people say there's great joy in running, I don't know why. Every time I hear the word “exercise,” I sit down until the thought goes away. I saw this race that was one mile, a one-mile race. There were girls running the race, and it was amazing how they ran that one mile. It was just amazing. They were agōnizomai, is the Greek word. They were agonizing.

Another agonizing thing is boxing and wrestling. I've never boxed formally, but I remember when my little boy, Jared, was growing up I got boxing gloves when he was four, five, or six. We were just playing with boxing gloves. Then, he got to seven, eight, nine, or ten. Then he got eleven and just hit me one time real hard. I threw the gloves off and said, “That's it! We don't do this anymore.” Man, that's exhausting! Boxing's insane! Or, that hexagon cage fighting stuff, it's just insane! Wrestling is insane. I remember when I was a little boy we used to wrestle outside in the grass. We'd each get each other in a headlock and sit there for two hours breathing on each other. We thought that was fun? Sweating, wrestling, but you're just utterly exhausted and spent. That's the word agōnizomai, striving or lifting weights or whatever it might

be. This is a picture of what it means to do the Lord's work, but don't forget to remember, verse 24, that you do it with joy.

D.L. Moody, the famous American evangelist was said to come home so tired that often he would just say for his prayers before bed, "I'm tired. Good night, Lord," and he would fall into bed. How marvelous it is to serve the Lord to the point of ag ôï× omai or exhaustion.

Notice Paul says, verse 29, it was all, " . . . according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." That word "working" we get our word energy from, so though he labors, though he strives, he's being energized and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This isn't fleshly labor, this isn't fleshly energy, it's the power and the energy of God the Holy Spirit who enables us and strengthens us to do what God has called us to do. Know this, whatever God has called you to be or do or entrusted you with, God gives you the strength, the power, and the ability to do what He wants you to do, so don't be afraid. God's enabling power is available for whatever ministry or calling He's given for you.

Write down 1 Corinthians 15:10. Paul says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Amen? Let's pray.