

1 Timothy

#2 - 1 TIMOTHY 1:12-20



OVERVIEW – 1 TIMOTHY 1:12-20

After reminding Timothy of his earlier charge to remain in Ephesus, and God's good purposes of the law in contrast to the would-be false teachers, Paul turns to share the personal the impact of God's grace on him and God's purpose behind his calling to serve Christ Jesus¹ our Lord: testifying to his saving grace to sinners.

God's grace to sinners in Christ Jesus (vv 12-17)

These verses give us great insight into how Paul considered his pre-conversion self and God's actions towards him. Paul gives thanks to 'Christ Jesus our Lord' for having 'considered [him] trustworthy' to appoint him to serve as his apostle (v 12; cf. 1:1). It seems King Jesus saw in Paul a trustworthiness, or diligence and reliability of character, even in his former life of actively persecuting Christians (it would certainly have required great zeal, however ignorant and rebellious, to carry out that kind of work). However, lest we think Paul is boasting here, he goes on to emphasise God's mercy and his unworthiness. King Jesus is the one who 'has given [Paul] strength' (v 12). 'Ministry is enervating, particularly when opposition arises.'² Paul was once a 'blasphemer,' the most serious of sins which rejects, and therefore cuts a person off from, God's forgiveness (v 13; cf. Mark 3:28-30). He once violently persecuted followers of Jesus, before he was confronted by the risen Lord on his way to Damascus (Acts 8:1; 9:1-31). Were it not for the mercy of King Jesus, Paul would have remained in 'ignorance and unbelief' (there is such thing as misplaced zeal, however motivated!). The grace and mercy Paul earlier wished upon Timothy (1:2) he himself had received in abundance, 'along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus' (v 14). God's grace and mercy to us gives birth to faith and love in us to the glory of King Jesus our Lord!

Paul wanted to assure Timothy of certain anchorpoints to his salvation and calling as a leader in God's church – in the form of 'trustworthy' statements (cf. 3:1; 4:8-9). The first in this letter concerns the gospel message: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (v 15). A wonderful summary of the gospel! God meets rebellious sinners not simply with law (or, rules), but with saving grace through Christ (cf. vv 7-11). Yet, Paul expresses not just the global reach of the gospel but its personal impact on his own life ('of whom I am the worst'). Paul declares boldly that the grounds for his conversion and calling were nothing less than an exercise of the mercy and 'immense patience' of King Jesus (cf. e.g., Exodus 34:6; Psalm 103:8). His conversion and calling are an example and therefore an encouragement to us who would subsequently believe the gospel and 'receive eternal life' (v 16). No matter how great our sin, God's grace, mercy and patience overflow in abundance through Jesus. We therefore rightly echo Paul's praise and adoration of our glorious and eternal King (v 17)!

Resources to persevere in the battle of ministry (vv 18-20)

Some commands and reminders bear repeating to encourage and spur on Timothy (and us) in service to our Lord, including the charge to counter false teaching (v 18; cf. vv 3-5; 4:14). This included 'holding on to faith and a good conscience,' both good gifts from God which contribute to a joyful, meaningful and productive life in service to our Lord (v 19). It stands to reason, therefore, that when a person turns away from such good gifts, they are in danger of making a 'shipwreck' of the faith (NB: not so much their faith is in view here, but *the* faith i.e., 'the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God,' v 11; cf. 6:21). When the New Testament mentions 'handing a person over to Satan' it is unclear precisely how this was done (v 20; cf. 1 Corinthians 5). Jesus himself spoke about disciplining persistently rebellious members of the congregation (Matthew 18:15-20). If such a person persisted against the council of congregational leaders – and indeed the congregation itself, Jesus says they were to be treated like 'a pagan or a tax collector' (Matthew 18:17). However, 'he did not mean we should condemn them (that is the pharisaic method), but that we should pray for them and preach the gospel to them, for that is how he treated all outsiders.'³ The goal was and is always their salvation (1 Corinthians 5:5; c.f. 2 Corinthians 7:10-13). Whether 'Hymenaeus and Alexander' persisted in their rebellion to the end is unclear (much less whether we ought to consider them 'true believers' at all – the Lord knows!). 'Paul himself was a blasphemer, though he acted in ignorance and unbelief; but they are apparently becoming blasphemers in knowledge and defiance.'⁴ So their example of rebellion also serves as a reminder to us that God's good path of holding to the gospel, trusting in the King who came to save sinners and pursuing faith and a good conscience, serve to assure us of our salvation and strengthen us in service to our glorious Lord.

¹ The title *Christ* comes from Greek (Christos, Χριστός) meaning 'king' or 'anointed one.' *Jesus* is his personal name.

² Robert W. Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Pillar New Testament Commentary), 120-121.

³ Philip D Jensen, *1 & 2 Timothy For You*, 52.

⁴ Jensen, *1 & 2 Timothy For You*, 52.

GETTING STARTED

1. Can you recall any significant watershed moments in your life? How did your life change as a result?

INTO THE TEXT

Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17

2. What are the reasons Paul is thankful to Christ (or King) Jesus? List them.
3. Why do you think Paul recounts what he was like before his conversion and calling to be an apostle?
4. How can Paul say he considered himself 'the worst' of sinners?
5. How did King Jesus respond to Paul in his 'ignorance and unbelief'?
6. What did King Jesus enter the world to save sinners *from*? (see Matthew 1:21-23; Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:10)

Read 1 Timothy 1:18-20

7. What is the 'command' of which Paul reminds Timothy? (see 1:3-5)
8. Why do you think recalling prophecies about Timothy earlier in his life would serve to help him 'fight the battle well' in the present and for the future?
9. According to these verses, what are the ingredients to successfully shipwrecking *the* faith?

TAKEAWAY

10. How has the mercy and grace of King Jesus been displayed in your life? Take a few minutes to reflect quietly and share with others in the group. In prayer, give thanks to God for his mercy and grace shown to you in these specific ways.