

Saul of Tarsus

I Timothy 1:

- 12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;
- 13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.
- 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.
- 15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.
- 16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.
- 17 Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Preliminary Reading: Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1-31; 22:1-21; 26:1-23; I Cor 9:1,16; 15:8-10; II Cor 11:22-33; Gal 1:11-24; Eph 3:1-8; Phil 3:4-7; II Tim 1:9-11.

Introduction:

1. Saul's conversion near Damascus was important enough to be recorded three times (Acts 9; 22; 26).
2. Here is the grace of God magnified – the greatest enemy of Christ becomes His greatest servant!
3. We are told more details about Saul and his conversion than nearly all others combined. It is rich!
4. The conversion of Saul is a pattern for all of us – no sinner is beyond the mercy or reach of God.
5. We had a parable last week of God's mercy to repenting rebels (Luke 15); today we have a real story.
6. There is no reason for any sinner to hesitate in running to Jesus Christ, for Saul shows us His mercy.
7. We must glorify God for grace to Saul; we must live to glorify God's grace by our lives (Gal 1:24).

I Timothy 1:11

- A. Paul boldly preached the glorious gospel of the blessed God that had been committed to him, which caused consternation or praise by those who knew him earlier (Acts 9:21; Gal 1:24).
- B. Is the God of heaven, God Almighty of Abraham, Jehovah of Moses, a blessed God to you?
- C. Is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of salvation for great sinners, glorious to you?
- D. Do you rejoice that you know that gospel, as Paul at preaching it (Psalm 89:15; Rom 10:15)?
- E. The gospel of Jesus Christ has been committed to us to defend and support (I Timothy 3:15).

I Timothy 1:12

- A. He personally thanked the Lord Jesus Christ for counting him worthy of the ministry (1:12).
- B. Yet Paul's performance in ignorance or in truth was by the pure grace of God (I Cor 15:10).
- C. Consider well that he who had blasphemed the name of Jesus Christ now thanked Him well.
- D. We understand the Lord to have measured Paul faithful by the light he had been given then.
 1. The grammatical construction has God measuring faithfulness before Saul's conversion!
 2. King Asa had a perfect heart in ignorant, incomplete obedience, so Saul (I Kings 15:14).
 3. With the light Saul of Tarsus had, he served God with great zeal (Acts 23:1; II Tim 1:3).
 4. Every man's worship is imperfect to some degree, but God measures the heart intent.
 5. This does not allow for willful or presumptuous disobedience against the word of God.
- E. Are you thankful this morning for what Christ Jesus our Lord has done to you and for you?
- F. Saul was born in Tarsus, Cilicia; we call that part of the world Turkey (Acts 21:39; 22:3).
 1. A descendant from Benjamin, he was likely named after King Saul (Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5).
 2. He was born a Roman citizen, and he was a tentmaker professionally (Acts 18:3; 21:39).
 3. He took on his Roman name, Paul, after he began preaching to Gentiles (Acts 13:5-12).
 4. He was trained strictly in Jewish tradition in Jerusalem under Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3).
 5. He was a Pharisee, son of a Pharisee, and exceeding zealous Jew (Acts 23:6; Gal 1:14).
 6. The great defender of Jewish tradition would write Galatians and Hebrews to destroy it!

I Timothy 1:13

- A. Saul obtained mercy from God, for his past life of antichristian zeal was in ignorance (1:13).
- B. Much like elect Israel for which he prayed, Paul had been ignorant of Jesus (Romans 10:1-5).
- C. He was a blasphemer, not of God, but of Jesus, for he did not recognize Him as the Messiah.
 - 1. He testified to King Agrippa that he thought to do many things against Jesus (Acts 26:9).
 - 2. The Lord Jesus had questioned his personal persecution on the Damascus road (Acts 9:4).
 - 3. Not only did he blaspheme himself, but he forced believers to blaspheme (Acts 26:11).
 - 4. Jesus of Nazareth was a stumblingblock to Saul until God opened his eyes (I Cor 1:23).
- D. He was a persecutor, in doing all that he could to resist the conversion of men (Acts 9:4).
 - 1. He was not just an ordinary persecutor, but rather a very fanatical one (Acts 26:11).
 - 2. Beyond measure he persecuted and wasted the church (Gal 1:13; Phil 3:6; I Cor 15:9).
- E. He was injurious, for his persecution was not mere words, but violence (Acts 8:3; 26:10).
 - 1. He consented to kill Stephen and was an accomplice in his murder (Ac 7:58; 8:1; 22:20).
 - 2. He likely debated against him, missing all the clear signs of his divine mission (Acts 6:9).
 - 3. He was a leader in the persecution at Jerusalem and made havoc of the church (Ac 8:1-3).
 - 4. He was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Christ (Acts 9:1).
 - 5. Regardless of sex, he intended to capture believers in Damascus for prison (Acts 9:2).
 - 6. He beat them in every synagogue for believing on the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 22:19).
 - 7. He not only imprisoned believers, but pursued them to death (Acts 9:1,21; 22:4; 26:10).
- F. The faithfulness mentioned in 1:12 was due to his ignorance and unbelief of Jesus Christ.
- G. The Lord sometimes gives the gift of the ministry to rebellious men (Psalm 68:18; Acts 9:5).

I Timothy 1:14

- A. Paul described God's grace as exceeding abundant to rescue him from his unbelief (1:14).
- B. Paul's faith and love, exemplary in the history of the N.T., were by God's abundant grace.
- C. He who had been a blaspheming unbeliever now had faith in Christ by God's great grace.
- D. He who had been an injurious persecutor now was full of love for Christ and His people.
- E. Due to the singular verb "is," we know that is God's great grace "which is in Christ Jesus."
- F. How else are faith or love in Christ Jesus in such a way that it can only be one of them?
- G. Faith and love are the gifts of God's grace to His elect, and His grace is in Christ Jesus.
- H. The grace here was by God's purpose in Christ before the world began (II Timothy 1:9-11).
- I. Without the Lord Jesus Christ providing the basis for grace and its gifts, there would be none.
- J. God's demerited favor toward sinners is in Christ (Romans 3:21-26; Eph 1:3-6; Titus 3:4-7).
- K. If it were not for God's exceeding abundant grace, neither Paul nor you would believe at all.

I Timothy 1:15

- A. Paul could declare the faithful saying of Jesus Christ by firsthand experience himself (1:15).
- B. Religion has many sayings, "Hail Mary," "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," "We have Abraham to our father," and "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet."
- C. A faithful saying is one entirely dependable; worthy of all acceptance is its worthiness.
- D. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, as shown both by His life and His death.
 - 1. In His life He ate and drank with sinners, freely forgave them, and loved them (Luke 15).
 - 2. In His death He took their sins upon Himself and laid down His life to redeem them.
 - 3. There is no reason for a person to doubt that Jesus Christ came for a sinner like himself.
- E. Paul thought himself the chief of sinners, for what he had done to the church (I Cor 15:9).

- F. He described himself as “less than the least of all saints,” though an apostle (Ephesians 3:8).
- G. While it may appear as humility to call yourself the “chief of sinners,” this misses Paul’s lesson in this verse that he is the chief of sinners for an example and comfort to believers.
- H. Paul was not merely trying to sound humble or repentant, he was stating an inspired fact.

I Timothy 1:16

- A. There was a reason for Saul’s incredible conversion and ordination to the ministry (1:16).
- B. He obtained mercy because of his ignorant unbelief (1:13), but also for a great example!
- C. Here is a very rare thing – we are told the reason behind God’s election of Saul of Tarsus!
- D. The longsuffering and mercy shown toward Saul by Jesus Christ should encourage you!
- E. If Jesus Christ could endure Saul’s fury and sins against Him, He can and will save you!
- F. Paul is the first, or foremost, example in the New Testament of how far Jesus will go to save!
- G. Those coming after Paul should not be discouraged or defeated by their sins in this light.
- H. You may run to the Lord Jesus Christ to lay hold on eternal life without any fear at all.

I Timothy 1:17

- A. Paul burst forth with an exclamation of glorious praise to God in his private epistle (1:17).
- B. He is known for doing this out of the great love He had for God’s grace (Rom 11:33-36).
- C. What else should all sinners do, but praise the infinitely glorious God for His great grace?
- D. There is but one Jehovah; He deserves honor and glory forever; He saves by Jesus Christ!
- E. He is from everlasting (eternal) to everlasting (immortal), the invisible spirit of the wise God.
- F. His works, of salvation and ordination, were fully known from the beginning (Acts 15:18).

Conclusion:

- 1. Paul did not waste God’s grace that was given to him, and we cannot squander it either (I Cor 15:10).
- 2. He used that grace well to fight a good fight, finish his course, and keep the faith (II Timothy 4:6-7).
- 3. Paul was a great object for the glory of God by his remarkable conversion and zealous life. Is the change in your life a visible demonstration to others of His glorious grace (Gal 1:24; II Cor 5:17)?
- 4. There is every reason for sinners to repent and flee to Jesus Christ: we should forgive them as well.

For Further Study:

- 1. The sermon outline, “[Jesus Loves Losers](#),” which details how and why Jesus saves the lowest of men.
- 2. The sermon outline, “[The Prodigal Son](#),” which covers the three parables of Luke 15 about repenting sinners.
- 3. The sermon outline, “[The Forgiveness of Sins](#),” which details simply seven aspects of forgiveness of sins.
- 4. The separation and calling of Galatians 1:15 is God’s appointment of Saul to the ministry, not his salvation.
 - a. The two nonrestrictive phrases do not limit or define the meaning of the clause around them, and they have no cause-and-effect or other relationship between them. They can be properly ignored reading the sentence.
 - b. The context is Paul’s ordination and instruction by Jesus Christ to preach the gospel (Galatians 1:6-24).
 - c. Paul was “separated” from his mother’s womb to preach the gospel (Romans 1:1; Acts 13:2).
 - d. The separation cannot possibly be human birth, for this would not be unique to Paul or meaningful at all.
 - e. God chose Paul from birth to be a special messenger (Acts 9:15; 13:2; 22:14-15; I Tim 2:7; II Tim 1:11).
 - f. God had chosen other great messengers with similar statements about the womb (Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:15).
 - g. The calling here is not the calling of salvation, but the calling of the ministry (Romans 1:1; I Cor 1:1).
 - h. There is no reason to violate the context and bring in salvation; it does not matter if the words separated and called could be understood relative to eternal life; we rightly divide based on the contextual intent.
 - i. It is a travesty of Bible interpretation to think the verse means this: But when it pleased God, who regenerated me in my mother’s womb like John the Baptist, to reveal His Son in me....”