

1 Timothy Chapter 1 (vv.12-20)

The apparent digression of vv.12-17 illustrates the power of the gospel to change lives. It is the case of Paul himself, a former fanatical legalist, that best illustrates the *mercy* (v.13) and *grace* (v.14) of the 'glorious gospel of the blessed God' – something the preaching of the law could never produce. *Fee: In sheer wonder at the grace lavished upon him, Paul puts himself forward as 'Exhibit A' of such grace for all sinners.*

The Salvation of the Servant [vv.12-16]

v.12: The gospel was entrusted to Paul as a precious stewardship (1 Corinthians 9.17) for which he had a *constant* and *persistent* attitude of thanksgiving. It was Christ Jesus who had chosen and equipped Paul for such a 'ministry' (service). He had been 'enabled', literally 'clothed with (spiritual) strength or power'. God never gives us a work to do without giving the necessary power to do it (2 Timothy 4.17). In addition, Paul was astonished at the divine grace which reckoned him, at the time of his conversion, 'trustworthy' of such responsibility (cf. v.11). The basic requirement of spiritual stewardship is faithfulness (1 Corinthians 4.2). **v.13:** To show the surpassing greatness of divine grace, Paul refers to his character as an unconverted legalist. Before his conversion he was a 'blasphemer' which literally means 'to speak injuriously'. Such contemptuous speech can be directed *manward* or *Godward* (Acts 6.11). Polycarp's final words clearly equated denial of Christ as blasphemy. Certainly, Saul of Tarsus repudiated the messianic claims of Christ and sought to force Christians to do the same (Acts 26.11). Saul also 'persecuted' the saints, vigorously pursuing them, as hunting an animal, that they might be put to death (Acts 22.4). Both his blasphemy and persecution were rooted in his character as a violent ('injurious') individual. He was a brutal aggressor who found satisfaction in insulting and humiliating Christians. This was nothing short of the same treatment *Christ* (Luke 18.32) and even *Paul* himself experienced at Philippi (1 Thessalonians 2.2). But, Paul was 'mercied'! There is a great contrast between what he *deserved* and what he *received*. He became the undeserving object of divine, pitying love – and that on the basis of 'ignorance'. The OT makes clear distinction between sins arising out of *ignorance* (Leviticus 4.2) and sins committed presumptuously (Numbers 15.30). He had lived his life in the realm of 'unbelief' as to the deity of Jesus of Nazareth. Though ignorance was no excuse and did not mitigate his guilt, Paul was not a hardened apostate, i.e. knowing the gospel was true and rebelling against it. Rather he acted in blind prejudice, mistakenly thinking he was doing God service (Acts 26.9; Romans 10.2). This *ignorance* was the ground on which divine mercy was displayed, and when faced with the truth, he believed (cf. Acts 26.19). We are reminded of the serious condition of a person who rejects the truth of the gospel revealed by the Spirit (Hebrews 6.4-6; 10.26-27). **v.14:** And yet, the underserving favour of God towards him was 'extraordinarily abundant' like an overflowing river bursting its banks. It removed him from the *sphere* of 'unbelief' to the sphere of 'Christ Jesus' – a sphere characterised by 'faith' (contrast 'unbelief') and 'love' (contrast 'injurious'). 'Faith' and 'love' were the resultant blessings and visible effects produced by the *flood of grace*. Grace overflowed and faith and love sprang up. A person should be transformed by the gospel he has received and/or preaches. *Stott: Grace flooded with faith a heart previously filled with unbelief and flooded with love a heart previously polluted with hatred.* 'Christ Jesus' specifies the personal source from which faith and love spring.

v.15: Paul is keen to show Timothy that his salvation is a *pattern* in kind for others. Thus, he presents the first of *five* faithful sayings found in the pastoral epistles. There is a faithful saying for: *sinners* (1.15), *shepherds* (3.1), *servants* (4.9), *sufferers* (2 Timothy 2.11) and *saints* (Titus 3.8). The statement literally reads: 'faithful the word' and could be one of several expressions which were well-known and quoted in Christian circles. This is a statement worthy of full confidence and trust, in contrast to the speculations of the false teachers. 'All acceptance' means to be *approved* and *welcomed* without reservation or doubt by *all* – for the gospel applies to all! There can be no rational reason for its rejection. The glorious truth is that 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'. *Christ Jesus* emphasises the exalted one who humbled Himself. He 'came' (suggesting His pre-existence) into the 'world', i.e. the habitation of humanity, to provide complete deliverance for 'sinners'. The **law** could only *condemn*, having 'stopped' every mouth and declared the world 'guilty' before God (Romans 3.19), but **Christ** came to provide *clearance* and *cleansing* from the guilt and stain of sin. And indeed, out of a sense of deep unworthiness, Paul declares *himself* to be the 'chief', or 'first in rank' (the foremost) of sinners. This is clearly no boast, but rather the establishment of a high bar which all can pass under! The godliest of saints are often most conscious of their own failures (cf. 1 Corinthians 15.9; Ephesians 3.8). *The air in a room seems to be clear, but when it is penetrated by the sunlight it is seen to be full of dust and other impurities: and so as men draw nearer to God, and are penetrated by the light of God, they see more clearly their own infirmities, and begin to feel for sin something of the hatred which God feels for it.* And the 'chief of sinners' was not steeped in *idolatry* or *immorality*, but religion! **v.16:** Continuing the thought of v.13, Paul gives a second reason why he received mercy from the Lord. It was in Paul 'as chief', i.e. the eminent and representative example of a sinner that Christ would 'demonstrate' His untiring 'longsuffering' in bringing him to salvation. Longsuffering applies to *people* not *circumstances*. It is loosely

defined as 'the ability not to lose patience when people are foolish, not to grow irritable when they seem unteachable' (Barclay). The attitude of Christ to a stubborn Pharisee knew no limitation (hence the use of the word 'all'), just as the patient restraint of God extended to 969 years in the wicked days of Noah (1 Peter 3.20), and to almost 2000 years today! The work of Christ in the life of Paul stands as a 'pattern' (*prototype model* or *outline sketch*) of how Christ will act in the lives of others including the future conversion of the remnant of Israel (Romans 11.26). He was an illustration of superlative grace. The saved are those who believe 'on' Christ (*epi*, faith resting **on** Him as a sure foundation) and are consequently brought *unto* the sphere of 'eternal life'.

The Song of the Saint [v.17]

v.17: The digression closes with a *doxology* (ascription of praise). This is the first of *three* doxologies in the pastoral epistles (cf. 6.16; 2 Timothy 4.18). Glory is ascribed to the **King of the ages** for God is eternal, beyond the touch and influence of time, and the sovereign controller of every age. Divine purpose consummated the ages at Calvary in the sense that all previous ages led *up* to it, and all subsequent ages will look *back* to it (Hebrews 9.26). God is **immortal**, more often translated 'incorruptible', the word literally meaning 'apart from decay' (Romans 1.23). The same word is used of the bodies of the saints in resurrection (1 Corinthians 15.52) and their heavenly inheritance (1 Peter 1.4). God is **invisible**, though His power and divine attributes are visible in creation (Romans 1.20), and He is fully expressed in the Person of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 1.15). He is the **only** (wise) **God**. Early manuscripts omit the word 'wise' (but cf. Romans 16.27). He *alone* is God, thus Paul is affirming the *uniqueness* of His being – He has no rivals (John 5.44; 17.3).

A meditation of the mercy, grace and essential attributes of God cause Paul to ascribe 'honour' and 'glory' to Him 'for ever and ever' – unto *the ages of the ages* – an infinite future stretching endlessly onward. 'Honour' has the basic thought of price, worth or value (Matthew 27.9). Here, Paul is recognising the infinite worth (honour) and acknowledging the excellency of character (glory) which belong to God.

The Summons of the Son [vv.18-20]

v.18: The closing paragraph of the chapter returns to the 'charge' given to Timothy to rebuke the false teachers in Ephesus (cf. vv.3, 5) and teach 'sound doctrine'. The word 'commit' refers to entrusting something of value (like a *treasure*) to the care of another. Timothy had been passed the great responsibility of the deposit of sound doctrine, which, in turn, he was to pass on to others (2 Timothy 2.2). This confidence in Timothy was no accident, neither misplaced (cp, v.12) for he had been marked out for such responsibility by 'prophecies' (cf. 4.14). NT prophets both communicated the *word* (1 Corinthians 14.29-30) and *will* of God (Acts 11.28) in a day when the canon of Scripture was not complete. Clearly, Timothy was identified for special duty by the Holy Spirit speaking through prophetic utterances (cf. Acts 13.2-4). Paul may be referring to a time prior to his initial call (cf. Acts 16.1-3) or a subsequent occasion which directed Timothy to remain at Ephesus (cp. Acts 21.8-11). This charge includes engaging in a life-time campaign of 'warfare', contending against the false teachers to promote 'sound doctrine'. This is no short, sharp struggle, but a protracted crusade which is 'good' (noble) in character, i.e. admirable or attractive (*kalos*). Soldiers of Christ do not serve grudgingly; they are not slaves of duty but servants of joy! The remembrance of such prophecies would strengthen Timothy. **v.19:** His accomplishment of a successful campaign required *two* strategies: having 'faith' and 'a good conscience'. Paul may have *objective* faith in view, i.e. the body of Christian doctrine. But, given the use of 'faith' in this chapter (cf. 1.5) it is more likely personal, *subjective* trust in God is the thought. Timothy must continue to exercise total confidence in God and His word resulting in a 'good conscience' devoid of any offence. *Allen: Conscious of a divine standard through believing the word of God, the Christian so acts in conformity with this that no accusing voice is raised within his moral being to point to fault or default. It is possible for a believer to maintain mental and verbal assent to the word of God and yet be living in hidden sin.* Such a person would have a 'bad' conscience. These false teachers had violently 'pushed away' (rejected) a *good* conscience, casting off its voice and willfully rebelling against the word of God. As such they 'ended up on the rocks of spiritual disaster' (Allen). They had 'pulled up their moral anchor and caused their lives to be tossed by the winds and waves of heresy' (Gromacki). The translation could read 'concerning *their* faith' in which case they had deliberately ceased to believe what they once held and made 'shipwreck' of their own faith (spiritual disaster). **v.20:** *Hymenaeus* and *Alexander* appear to be the prominent representatives of the false teachers. Unlike *Alexander*, *Hymenaeus* is not a common name and may be identified with the *Hymenaeus* of 2 Timothy 2.17-18. Paul had already acted in his capacity as apostle by 'delivering' (to 'hand over') these men 'unto Satan' (cp. 1 Corinthians 5.5, 13). This is another way of saying that Paul had excommunicated these men from the sphere of assembly fellowship to the realm of the world where Satan exercises rule. Such a person is removed from the place of divine protection and exposed to the inevitable consequences of such sin and even, potentially, physical harm (cf. 'destruction of the flesh', 1 Corinthians 5.5). Such disciplinary action is *educational* and *corrective*. These men must 'learn' not to 'blaspheme', i.e. speak contemptuously of the truth (and, by extension, its Author). The purpose of apostolic or church discipline is ever with the correction and ultimate restoration of such individuals in view.