

## 1 Timothy 1:12-20 – “Fight the Good Fight”

---

Have a look around. It’s amazing that there are not two of the very same person. Each person is unique. And God uses people in unique ways. In other words, God doesn’t have a set type of person where He says, this is what a minister of the gospel must look like. It doesn’t matter your pedigree, personality, or proclivity, God is not limited by your limitations. And we see that clearly in our passage today.

In our study last Sunday, Paul ended with speaking about the glorious gospel that was committed to his trust. This letter is about defending this gospel and making sure this truth is being lived out in the church. Again, the key verse of this book is **1 Timothy 3:15**, *“...I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”*

### Summary Statement:

Paul shares in this passage how this gospel transformed his life and called him to proclaim this glorious gospel. It would provide great encouragement for Timothy to see that God can work through once enemies of God and turn them around by His supernatural work to accomplish great things for Him.

### 1. Paul’s Transformation – 1:12-17

**1:12 - *And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry,***

The moment Paul begins to reflect on the glorious gospel, he begins to be filled with thanks to Jesus. He’s seen what the gospel has produced in his own life. It’s something that the law was never able to do.

Now notice something, Paul does not think this great calling into the ministry was a result of his great pedigree, personality or proclivity, rather it was the Lord that ***enabled*** him and called him.

- The Lord doesn’t call the equipped, He equips the called.

***because He counted me faithful***... This isn’t speaking of the Lord knowing that Paul would be inherently faithful or trustworthy. This is rather speaking of the fact that the Lord made Paul faithful by saving Him and transforming him into an agent of the gospel. Because of what the Lord did in Paul he would be faithful.

- Not skill or knowledge but faithfulness is the first qualification for a minister of Christ. **1 Corinthians 4:2**, *"Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."* (Hiebert)

So because of the life changing power of the glorious gospel, Paul became a new person, a different person, and was put **into the ministry**.

- This word ministry is the Greek word *diakonia*, by which we get our English word 'deacon'. It simply speaks of service.
- I like that, because we can sometimes elevate this title of minister or revere the minister to the point where it goes to their head. And the ministry is all about being a servant and not expecting to be served.

We also read here that it was the Lord who put Paul into the ministry. It's important that we do what we do because the Lord has called us to do it. Some have taken it among themselves to put themselves into the ministry, and they've only hurt themselves and others because it was done apart from the Lord's calling.

And some have done this with selfish ambition. But again, it's about serving.

Now this calling and enabling is especially wonderful when you consider the kind of person Paul was prior to his salvation in Christ.

**1:13 - *although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.***

Paul was a **blasphemer**. What does he mean by that? It means he slandered and spoke against God. Though Paul grew up being disciplined in Judaism, he spoke against God by denying Christ. That was blasphemous.

He showed this blasphemy by persecuting Christians – followers of Christ. He tried to destroy the Church. You can read about his former way of life in Acts 9:1-22; 22:1-21; 26:9-18).

- **Acts 26:10–11**, *"This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. <sup>11</sup> And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities."*

Paul thought he was doing God a favour, but he was a bad guy. He says he was ***an insolent man***. This means he was violently arrogant. He was filled with pride and spoke insultingly to others. He was a schoolyard bully.

This is not the guy you would see in action and think, *‘You know, this guy could really do some good things for God. He would be such a blessing to others.’* Believers were probably saying, *‘God be a blessing to us and take this guy out!’*

But this is where the turnaround happened. Paul was met with the mercy of God. He deserved to be taken out, but God had other plans that were based in His mercy and grace.

Paul came to know that the only reason things turned around as they did was because of God’s grace. He knew the things he did were done ***ignorantly***.

- Now we often times like to say that ignorance is bliss. It’s been a motto of mine for some time, especially in my marriage. *Honey, I didn’t know...* But ignorance does not remove guilt. Paul wasn’t forgiven just because he was ignorant. But it’s in ignorance that we can recognize our wrong and see our need for forgiveness.
- “Jesus recognized this principle when He prayed on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Their ignorance did not save them, nor did Christ’s prayer save them; but the combination of the two postponed God’s judgment, giving them an opportunity to be saved.”<sup>1</sup>

Though Paul was a blasphemer, persecutor, and an insolent man (which show an increasing degree of harshness) he was shown ***grace, faith, and love...***

***1:14 - And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.***

God’s grace is truly amazing. Paul deserved the wrath of God, but in God’s mercy he was spared. But not only was he spared, in God’s grace he was given the blessing of becoming an apostle and minister of God.

- The hymn says it well: “Grace, grace, God’s grace. Grace that is greater than all our sin.”
- Paul doesn’t just say this grace is wonderful, he says it’s exceedingly abundant, meaning he couldn’t really find the words to express how great God’s grace really is.

<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 212). Victor Books.

- He uses the Greek prefix, *hyper*, where we would use the word ‘hyper’.  
e.g. That child is active. No, he’s hyperactive.  
That person is sensitive. No, they’re hypersensitive.  
It adds a little more weight to the term being used.  
This is what Paul often did in his writings when he wanted to go beyond what the word meant.
- He sees that this grace he received was more than he could have ever imagined.

And this grace was accompanied with ***faith and love***. Paul went from being violent and harsh to being a person filled with faith in Jesus and walking in His love. That’s an amazing display of gospel power.

- There are those that may claim to know God, but the proof of a changed life will be revealed by their faith and love.

***1:15 - This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.***

This is a unique phrase in the N.T. used only in the Pastoral Epistles; and it’s used 5 times (1 Tim 1:15, 3:1, 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11; Titus 3:8). If you ever hear something that is a faithful saying coming from the Apostle Paul, it means it’s time to perk up and take note.

And Paul says this saying is ***worthy of all acceptance***. In other words, receive this. If you have not taken this truth in, it’s time to do so, because it’s worthy of your acceptance.

So, what is this faithful saying? ***Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners***... Now some of you may be thinking, ‘*Yea, and that guy over there sure better be thankful! They’re a real piece of work.*’ But hold on, this is talking about you!!

Think about what your salvation required. Jesus had to come to this world as one of us (eeeww!). That’s amazing enough. He came into a sin ridden world, stained by fallen humanity. His own creation in rebellion to Him. We wouldn’t have wanted to touch that with a 10-foot cosmic pole. Yet He came as one of us to reveal the heart of God.

And He came to save sinners. Isn’t it funny how people try to clean themselves up so as to be saved? Jesus didn’t come to rescue those who were putting on a show of righteousness, He came to save those who were sinking in sin.

- **Luke 15:2**, *"And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them.""* Amen to that!

So, if you're going to come to Christ, you need to realize you are a sinner in need of saving. You can't come to Christ any other way. He's not the final piece of the puzzle – He's the beginning, middle and end. It's all about Him!

And Paul was grateful for this reality because he saw his need.

***of whom I am chief***... Again, it seems to be that the older Paul got, the more he grew in humility. I think that's the way it should be. The older I get the more I realize the less I know. Though I've grown in accumulated knowledge, the more I recognize I'm a lot further from arriving than I did when I was younger. You know when you've met some young people who think they're all that, you call them a know-it-all. It's not a compliment. It's usually more arrogance than understanding. And you hope that as they get older, they'll learn that there's still lot's more to learn. And they'll grow into humility.

- The bible speaks a lot about the humility we are to have as believers (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:5-6).

So here's Paul exemplifying that humility. And it's something he's grown in.

Notice the progression Paul made in speaking of his life:

- **1 Corinthians 15:9**, *"For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."*
- **Ephesians 3:8**, *"To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,"*
- And now in the later part of his life he sees himself as the ***chief of sinners***... This is not because Paul sinned more the older he got, it's because as he grew in the Lord, he understood how great and holy God is, and how far from that he is. He progressively saw himself as less and less next to the greatness of God. He recognized the necessity of the mercy of God. And the more you understand the greatness of God's mercy, the more you'll have a proper view of yourself and the more you live a life of praise to God.

**1:16 - *However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.***

Here's what Paul kept coming back to. He was able to stand before God, and be a minister of this glorious gospel simply because of the mercy of God. This is why Paul included this important attribute of God in his greeting for the first time.

And Paul understood that he was on display as an example of the patience and longsuffering of God. People could look at Paul and say, *‘Wow, if that guy can be saved, then there’s hope for me!’*

- Maybe you feel like either your past won’t allow you to be used of the Lord in a significant way, or that your past disqualifies you from being saved. Well, there is hope! God is in the business of taking broken down, shattered sinners, and making them brand new. If He can save a guy like Paul, and use a guy like Paul to proclaim His name, then there’s hope for you.

With all this acknowledgment of the goodness and grace of God, Paul can’t help but praise Him...

**1:17 - *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.***

God was the true Sovereign, **King** and ruler. Caesar may have thought he was the king, but he’ll answer to the true King one day.

He’s **eternal** and **immortal**. He is not a created being. He’s the Creator, without beginning and without end. Always was, always is, and always will be.

He’s **invisible**. Just because we can’t see Him does not mean He’s not real. But the fact that He is beyond the constraints of the physical also assures us that He is at work in ways we don’t always know or understand.

He **alone is wise**. All wisdom comes from Him.

**Be honor and glory forever and ever**. Paul is just so thankful for all that God has done in his life and all that God is to him, that he just can’t help but to praise God and give Him all the glory forever.

- This isn’t the first time Paul has just broken out in spontaneous praise when he begins to talk about the goodness of God (see also 1 Tim 6:16; Rom 11:36; 16:27; Gal 1:5; Eph 3:21; Php 4:20; 2 Tim 4:18).
- If we ever find ourselves in a place where praising God seems difficult, then I would suggest you’ve forgotten just how good God is. Regardless of what you’re going through, He is always deserving of our honor and glory.

## 2. Timothy’s Commission – 1:18-20

**1:18 - *This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare,***

Paul used the same word (charge) as he did in vs. 3, which meant “to give strict orders from a superior officer”. Paul was charging Timothy to fight the good fight. But this wasn’t something being asked of Timothy that was out of his league or out of the blue. This was something that had been prophesied to Timothy previously.

- Now we’re not sure if this was a prophecy of a predictive nature foretelling Timothy of this kind of future ministry or if this was more in the line of an encouraging word for Timothy to continue on this service for the Lord.
- Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 14:3**, *“But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.”* Prophecy does not have to be some foretelling of future events but rather it can be a word that simply builds up an individual.
- So, Paul made this charge confidently in line with what had previously been spoken to him.

***That you may wage the good warfare...*** This is a big part of the reason Paul wrote to Timothy. There was a battle going on, and Timothy had to approach this fight like a soldier approaches battle. It wasn’t going to be a piece of cake, this wasn’t hanging out in Starbucks and chit-chatting with people. This was going to be tough, but he was a soldier in the Lord’s army!

And he had the right tools for the battle:

**1:19 - *having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,***

Timothy needed to press forward in faith. When doubt or condemnation crept in, he should move forward by faith and with faith in the Lord. Paul would include this in the list of armor for the Christian (the shield of faith – Ephesians 6:16).

- It’s apparent that Timothy questioned himself at times and had little faith in himself. And it’s okay to have little faith in ourselves, but we certainly need to have big faith in a big God.

And if He is trusting in the Lord, serving the Lord wholeheartedly, and conducting himself rightly, it will result in a good conscience. This would shut out the accusations or questions that people may have been throwing at him.

Some have rejected this faith and are no longer walking with a good conscience. Paul would later say that they’ve seared their conscience (1 Tim 4:2). This has

not helped them in any way it's only caused shipwreck. They were heading in the right direction when it comes to salvation and eternal life, but they changed course and have crashed upon the rocks.

Paul lists two examples:

**1:20 - *of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.***

Hymenaeus is mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:17-18 where it says he and Philetus have strayed from the truth and overthrown the faith of some.

Alexander may be the same person mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:14 that did great harm to Paul.

These two have been delivered to Satan. Now we can read that and think, this seems pretty harsh. But the reality is, these guys are leading people away from God and into the hands of Satan. This is why Timothy needs to do battle against those who are teaching a false doctrine.

Now handing them over to Satan was not so much to see them destroyed. It was to correct them. It's not punitive but restorative. It's so they'll ***learn not to blaspheme***. How will they learn this? They'll see that moving into the devil's domain is not profitable at all. Following God and His Word is what truly brings life.

Paul never got over the fact that Jesus saved him – and neither should we. The same grace that rescued us now calls us to stand, to fight, and to remain faithful. So, remember what you were, rejoice in what Christ has done, and resolve to fight the good fight of faith.

Points to Ponder:

1. Never outgrow your testimony. Your past doesn't disqualify you, God's grace redefines you.
2. The closer you get to God, the more you see your need for Him. A right view of His mercy and grace produces a life of worship.
3. You are a living display of God's patience and mercy. Do others see Jesus in you?
4. Keep fighting the good fight. Guard your heart and hold to truth, so you won't drift onto the rocks.