

## The True Minister

### 1 Timothy 1:12-17

April 28, 2019

#### Introduction

The letter opened with Paul calling on Timothy to defend the faith and confront the false teacher (vv.1-11). Now Paul defines the true minister (vv.12-17). Paul appeals to his own commission and conversion as an example of God's grace and mercy and love. Paul wants Timothy to know that in spite of the critics who may question Timothy's maturity or ability that God can use him in the ministry. Paul draws on his own testimony to provide a sharp contrast between himself and the false teachers. Paul was once Saul. He describes himself as a former blasphemer and insolent man. He was bent on persecuting the saints and yet God in Christ changed him. How does one go from murderer to missionary? In this short section Paul tells us what God did (v. 12;14-15); when God did it (v.13) and why God did it (vv.16-17). What did God do? He selected Paul and saved Paul—and when did God do it—when Paul was Saul—violent, insolent (injurious); a blasphemer and persecutor of Christians. Why in the world did God save Paul? I am sure we could come up with a lengthy list—lots of reasons—but Paul offers this explanation; to provide a pattern; an example—that God was willing to demonstrate His amazing love and exercise His amazing grace on the worst sinner!

Paul has already condemned false teachers who teach false doctrine (v.3); fabricate fables (v.4); generate disputes (v.4) and pervert the Law of Moses (v.7). Paul insists that Timothy promote sound doctrine and then offers his own testimony as an illustration of the lawful use of the Law. What is God willing to do for lost sinners? God is willing to save the lost sinner. In verse 15 we find the first of what Paul refers to as “faithful sayings” that are worthy to be believed and embraced by all (see 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8). Paul points to himself like a vibrant stain-glassed window where all the colors of mercy and grace and love come alive! Sinners can be saved! Even false teachers or misguided teachers can be put back on the glorious gospel track. Paul wants to offer Timothy guidance, encouragement and dare I say—inspiration!

#### We Are Placed In Service By The Lord Jesus (vv.12-14)

*1 Timothy 1:12–14 (NKJV) 12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry,*

Paul offers himself as one who has been enabled by grace to serve effectively as Christ's servant (the word *ministry* in verse 12 translates the Greek word *diakonia*—*a servant*). Paul's calling and credentials (v.1) and service are given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ. (v.12). Paul was not a self-appointed leader even though critics were quick to make that claim. Paul was placed in service and ministry by the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul did not participate in ministry as a logical career path or by taking a personality assessment test. The word translated *enabled* (*endunamoosani*) means to strengthen by imparting power—in this case it is the power of God in Christ Jesus. **This power is not self-generated.** This is not something artificial, superficial, emotional or personal (in the sense of self-generated). Paul uses this same term in Philipians

## The True Minister

### 1 Timothy 1:12-17

April 28, 2019

4:13 where he writes; “I can do all things through Christ who *strengthens* (same word) me.” Jesus placed Paul in the ministry and strengthened (enabled) Paul for ministry. **The self-appointed minister is doomed to failure. The minister Jesus selects and empowers can expect sufficient enabling, strength and power.**

Can self-appointed ministers accomplish some good things? Perhaps. But the true minister must have a keen sense of calling and enabling by the Lord Jesus Himself. The Lord Jesus placed Paul in service. The expression “*because He counted me faithful*” or “judged me faithful” translates the Greek word *hegesato*—which means carefully considered—a word that is used less in the judicial—or sense of judgment—but rather relationship—Paul does not think he has earned God’s favor by being a sincere sinner or misguided sinner—but that even this call and commission was due to God’s grace (see Life Application Bible Commentary; p. 30). Paul does not rationalize or glorify his rebellion and disobedience to God. Paul is placed in ministry by Jesus. Paul’s purpose is established sovereignly by God (**He counted me faithful**).

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

Some might think that Paul is self-serving in his description as faithful. Paul quickly reminds everyone there is not much difference between himself and the false teachers. Paul makes clear that he himself is a former blasphemer. This a strong word. Coming from an observant Jew who elsewhere describes himself to the Law as blameless (Philippians 3:6). “*Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*”

Can we exaggerate or sensationalize or glorify our sinful past? We can. Can we be honest about our past? I think so. But only to glorify God and point to His amazing grace. The New Testament paints a horrific picture of Paul prior to his conversion. We first find Saul holding the coats of an infuriated mob. They are stoning Stephen. Stephen was defending the gospel and declaring the truth to the religious leaders. Saul gave approval to Stephen’s death (see Acts 8:1). “Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison” (Acts 8:3). “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest (2) and asked letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1-2). Paul himself said—“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women” (Acts 22:4). “And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities (Acts 26:11). “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9 NIV). “I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it” (Galatians 1:13).

Why does Paul self-describe as a former blasphemer? What is a blasphemer? It is a person who uses all means available to make Christians renounce their faith, Christ and the gospel and

## The True Minister

### 1 Timothy 1:12-17

April 28, 2019

subject them to persecution. No observant Jew would intentionally speak evil of God or slander God but Paul realized his vicious attack on the person of Jesus and the saints was an actual attack against the true and living God of his fathers. Paul sees himself in the light of God's law. Paul broke the first half of the decalogue and the broke the last half of the decalogue. The word *insolent* means violent aggressor (*hybristes—only here and Romans 1:30 where the word is translated “despiteful”*). The word suggests someone who is bloated—with pride, who heaps insults on others or who engages in shameful acts or spiteful injuries. Paul demonstrates his humility by his admission of guilt prior to his conversion and transformation. Paul was not a Jewish apostate who rejected the teachings of the Pharisees or the Law of Moses; Paul was a Jew doing what every zealous Jew could do to earn his salvation. **By his own admission he was lost and damned.**

Paul's claim of ignorance is not a claim of innocence. Paul's claim of ignorance may lessen but does not eliminate guilt. Paul admits he did not believe or understand the true identity and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was honestly trying to defend and protect his religion and worldview. Paul's claim to ignorance did not exonerate Paul or lessen the pain or heartache he generated for scores of families. Like all sinners Paul needed a Savior. “His willing repentance when confronted by Christ (cf. Romans 7:9; Philippians 3:8-9) is evidence that he did not understand the ramifications of his actions. He truly thought he was doing God a service (Acts 26:9)(see *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*; p. 1779).

But his memories of blasphemy, injury and persecution did not paralyze and overwhelm him. Clearly memories of sin and rebellion can haunt the saint.

What is the answer when the saint remains perpetually broken over past sins?  
Look what Paul does!

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

We are given massive doses of grace and faith and love in Christ Jesus. This is our medicine. This is the cure for our sinful condition. This is the cure for our guilty past. This is the cure for our ongoing failures. This is not grace or faith or love absent Christ. This is grace and faith and love in Christ Jesus. Grace and faith and love turned Saul into Paul.

The words are not abstract but find concrete expression in the gospel. These are the things that motivate Paul in ministry. The true minister is motivated by grace. Saving grace. Serving grace. Sufficient grace. The grace that is in Jesus is saving grace (Ephesians 2:5). We stand in grace (Romans 5:2). John wrote “Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). What does that mean? There is an endless supply. We are elected by grace and strengthened by grace and we grow in grace. Simply put grace is God's loving forgiveness by

## **The True Minister**

### **1 Timothy 1:12-17**

**April 28, 2019**

which God grants salvation apart from any personal merit on the part of those He saves (see Romans 3:24; Galatians 1:6). Paul crams in this single sentence all the elements of salvation: grace with faith. Faith includes a voluntary and sincere change of mind by the sinner—that causes the sinner to turn away from sin and turn to the Savior (that is repentance). Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6) and we are justified by faith (Romans 5:1). Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 writes; “remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father”.

How does one experience this wondrous transformation from murderer to missionary? From sinner to saint? Religion? Law? No, Jesus. Grace. Faith with love. Paul later commands Timothy; (6:12) “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses”.

The love found in Jesus is made perfect in His sacrifice. Jesus sums up love in the word sacrifice. Blood. Innocent. Shed. Applied. Salvation is always by grace and faith. Salvation is always by blood. Always a person. Faith in Jesus is believing everything the Father has said about Jesus and all that Jesus has said about Himself. Faith is that grace which brings us into vital union with the living Lord of Heaven. When Paul speaks of his labor of love he is speaking of his hard work and labor to please God. Paul’s love for Jesus Christ and for lost sinners constrained him to work (2 Corinthians 5:14) and faith in Jesus empowered him for the task (Ephesians 1:9). The grace of God worked in his life enabling him to serve God (see Hebrews 12:28).

### **We Are Pardoned As A Pattern For Future Saints (vv.15-16)**

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

There are three more faithful sayings in Paul’s letters to Timothy (see 3:1; 4:9; and later 2 Timothy 2:11). The expression seems to be a summary of key doctrines—well known sayings by the early Saints known by the churches and accepted by all without dispute. Paul’s self-designation as ‘chief’ literally translates the word ‘ranked first’. Does this mean Paul believes he is the worst sinner who ever lived? I don’t think so. The point seems to be a reference to the Jews and God’s salvation to the Jewish nation. I suspect Paul is hinting that his conversion is a type and picture of what is in store for Israel as a whole—as a people and nation. The Lord Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Jews first. The nations or the Gentiles second. Paul speaks of himself as “one born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:8)—in the sense of a premature birth or what William MacDonald calls “born again prior to the rebirth of his people Israel. Just as he was saved by a direct revelation from heaven and apart from human instrumentality, so perhaps in this same way the Jewish remnant will be saved during the

## The True Minister

### 1 Timothy 1:12-17

April 28, 2019

Tribulation Period. This interpretation seems to be borne out by the words ‘first’ and ‘pattern’ in verse 16” (see William MacDonald *Believer’s Bible Commentary* p. 2079).

I don’t disagree with MacDonald’s insight. But I don’t see any reason to restrict the insight to the salvation of the Jewish people. Does Paul’s conversion mean something to the non-Jew as well? Paul was a violent man. A murderer (by his own admission). Whatever Paul used to be all that changed on the road to Damascus. All that changed when he met the risen Savior Jesus. The change took place not because he changed his ways or kept the Law. All that changed by grace and faith and love in Christ Jesus. **Paul offers his own experience as proof that the gospel was for sinners (v.15) rather than for those who claim to keep the law.**

*16However, 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.*

Why in the world should anyone believe in Jesus Christ? Paul argues because the gospel is true. Jesus saves sinners. Paul’s conversion had the effect of prompting others to believe that what happened to Paul could happen to them. Paul considers his salvation a pattern (example) of what God is willing to do for lost sinners—with a view—towards Israel.

Do you mean if I believe I will see a light, and hear a voice? No. But we are saved by grace through faith in spite of our sins because of His love. Warren Wiersbe writes; “The people of Israel will be saved one day in the future as Paul was saved on the Damascus road: they will see Christ, repent, believe, and be changed” (*Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines* p. 621).

Paul contrasts his own testimony with the promises of the false teachers who appeal to the law. Think of the true gospel in contrast to the empty promises of false doctrine. Paul’s testimony is repeated six times in the New Testament (see Acts 9:22-26; Galatians 1:2; Philippians 3:1-14).

Paul points to a gospel that saves sinners! Paul goes on record as the poster child of God’s mercy and patience. Paul is living breathing proof that no matter how self-righteous, wicked, disgusting, terrifying, perverse, evil, misguided a person might be—God is merciful and long-suffering. In what sense? Paul is referencing God’s patience with people. The word *pattern* is interesting in the original language. Countries that mint coins will produce a pattern that serves as the shape, and content for future issues. In the printing trade a pattern meant “the first proof”. Paul claims to be a kind of first proof for future converts. For those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Believe in Jesus. Believe in Jesus and be changed by grace, faith and love. Receive everlasting life. Not temporary life. Not probationary life. Paul obtained mercy. Is that mercy available to me? God was patient Paul. Has God been patient with me? God is patient to all who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

How do we obtain this salvation?

**The True Minister**  
**1 Timothy 1:12-17**  
**April 28, 2019**

**We Are Praising The Savior Now And Forever (v.17)**

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

In the ancient world it was not unusual for people to praise their gods by providing a list of titles or attributes. What does God's call to the ministry produce? A profound expression of gratitude to God for His faithfulness! How can we sing of the mercies of the Lord forever?

Paul praises the Lord for what He has done! The verse belongs in the category of what theologians call a doxology. We are hard pressed to know if Paul sings to Jesus or God or Jesus as God! Jesus is the King eternal and immortal and for the time being invisible. In this context some Bible teachers think the term is a reference to the invisible God—in all His fullness, in wisdom and honor and glory—eternal and uninterrupted. The very fact that Paul refuses to distinguish which person of the Godhead is being referenced strongly argues that all persons in the Godhead retain all the attributes of God. The doxology is not simply a teaching tool so that we are aware of the attributes of God but also a mental and emotional and spiritual outpouring of worship and praise and joy! These words magnify the Lord. Eternal, immortal, invisible, wisdom, honor glory forever. “Trust in Him at all times” (Psalm 42:8). Is it possible to give God too much praise? The Bible says put on the garment of praise. Cast off the garment of despair (Isaiah 61:3). Augustine wrote; “Man's chief work is the praise of God.” Francis Shaeffer used to tell his students; “One day all Christians will join in a doxology and sing God's praises with perfection. But even today, individually and corporately, we are not only to sing the doxology, but to be the doxology.”

The expression “who alone is wise” might have appeared intolerant to the Greek pagans in Ephesus. The ancients had little problems with people who claimed a superior god among inferior gods. Ancient and modern polytheists would often get into arguments about who's god is greater.

**Conclusion**

Paul was placed in ministry.

Paul was empowered in the ministry that he was placed.

Paul was pardoned for ministry so that he might serve as a pattern for future ministry.

Paul then praises God.

This is the true minister.

## **The True Minister**

**1 Timothy 1:12-17**

**April 28, 2019**

Paul will challenge and remind Timothy that this same Jesus who placed Paul in ministry placed Timothy in ministry. This same Jesus who pardoned Paul pardoned Timothy. This same Jesus who empowered Paul empowered Timothy. And so we praise Jesus.

Where is your place in ministry? Who is your power for ministry? What is your testimony in ministry? Does it include pardon? Will it include praise?