Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Personal Testimony of God's Saving Grace
Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:12-17
Code: 54-6

Looking together at the Word of God, I want to invite you to open your Bible to 1 Timothy chapter 1...1 Timothy chapter 1. The setting for the message this morning is found in verses 12 through 17...1 Timothy 1:12 through 17. I'd like to read that text so that you'll have it in mind as we look at it. "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who hath enabled me in that He counted me faithful putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious, but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am first. Nevertheless for this cause I obtained mercy that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them who should here after believe on Him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

In the midst of that marvelous text there is a faithful saying. I want you to notice it for a moment. Verse 15 says, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Five times in the pastoral epistles and nowhere else the little phrase "this is a faithful saying" appears. There's little doubt what it indicates. It indicates a familiar recognized statement or saying that had already developed in the early church. It isn't something that Paul is saying for the first time, but something he is quoting that he knew everyone knew as a trustworthy saying. It seems as though in the time of the writing of 1 Timothy which was after Paul's first imprisonment, there had already developed a fairly well articulated theology. There were some creeds and some hymns and some faithful sayings, some trustworthy sayings that were really a summary of some great truth.

There are five of them, as I said, in the pastoral epistles. Two of those five have added to them the second statement "worthy" or "valued to be accepted." Worthy of all acceptance, just as an emphasis. They are summaries of very key important doctrines which should be believed, should be affirmed, should be accepted, worthy to be believed, worthy to be approved. And the summary statement here is a no-doubt familiar statement to the people to whom Timothy ministers as well as Timothy which acts as a condensed articulation of the gospel. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Every word is chosen carefully. The church had summarized the gospel in this one brief statement, a statement worthy of belief, a statement trustworthy beyond question.

Christ Jesus, the order is Paul's favorite order as he writes the pastoral epistles. He prefers Christ Jesus to Jesus Christ, using Jesus Christ six times and Christ Jesus 25 times. And I think that may be a reflection of his own conversion experience. It was the glorified Christ, the exalted Christ, the reigning Christ that he met on the Damascus Road before he knew it was also Jesus of Nazareth. Whereas the other New Testament writers who were His disciples who knew Him first as Jesus and then came to know that He was the Messiah prefer Jesus Christ. Paul seems to prefer Christ Jesus.

Bound up in those two terms is all that He is. He is the anointed King, He is the one who came to redeem. He is the one who became the earthly Jesus in His incarnation. Also the statement says He came into the world. That statement is a very important statement. It does not say He came into existence. It does not say He came into being. It does not say He was created. It does not say He was made. It implies not only His incarnation but His preexistence. He came into the world. He was somewhere else and He came into the world, the preincarnate Christ. This particular choice of terms sounds very much like John. And if you are to go carefully through the gospel of John, you will hear John repeatedly speak of the fact that Christ came into the world. In John 1:9 He was the true light, lighting every man who came into the world. In chapter 3 of John's gospel in verse 19, "Light is come into the world," a favorite choice of terms for John. You trace it all the way through chapter 16, chapter 18. And Paul here uses that same almost Johannine perception to speak of the one who was preincarnate, who preexisted...God the second person in glory who came into the world in the form of man as none other than Jesus Christ to be the anointed King, the anointed Monarch, the Christ.

Now notice also that it says He came into the world. The world, of course, has to do with our sphere of existence, the Earth, but more than that it speaks of the...of not just the Earth as a geographical entity but the world of men, the world of mankind, the world of humanity, the human race, blind and lost and condemned and damned to hell, hostile to God, engulfed in fallenness and evil as John again says in 1 John 5:19, "The whole world lies in the lap of the wicked one." It is that world to which He came, the world of sinners, the realm of unbelief and hostility toward God, the world of darkness. God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, says John 3:17, but that the world through Him might be saved. He came to redeem this fallen human race. In John's gospel also, chapter 12 verse 46, "I am come a light into the world that whosoever believes on Me should not abide in darkness. If any man hear My words and believe not, I judge him not for I came not to judge the world but to save the world." The world, the human realm He came to save.

You'll notice also that it very specifically says that, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save," to rescue is the implication. To deliver out of darkness and death into life. "You shall call His name Jesus," it says in Matthew 1:21, "for He shall save His people from their sins." Luke 19:10 records the words of our Lord Himself, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." The term "save" means to deliver from death and darkness and sin and hell and judgment. And who did He come to save but sinners, a term the Jews loved to use in reference to Gentiles. In Galatians 2:15 it is so expressed. But the Lord used it in reference not only to Gentiles but to Jews and

everybody and the word hamartolosappears 47 times in the New Testament. It is a very repeated characterization of man. Man is a sinner. That notes his irreligious violation of God's law as a way of existence. He is not just one who sins, he is a sinner by nature and thus we hear the echo of the Publican in the temple beating his breast in Luke 18 crying, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner," and save me is the cry of his heart.

So, here in eight Greek words you have a marvelous summation of all that the gospel can say. And would we take the time we could cover so much depth from just those eight Greek words, enough to say Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The very purpose that God had in mind was redemption of sinners. And isn't it a wonderful thing to be able as Paul does in this passage to celebrate the saving work of God, the saving grace of God? Verse 12 begins with thanks and verse 17 ends the passage with a doxology of praise. The whole passage is offered as praise to God for salvation in Jesus Christ.

I remember as a boy being fascinated with the saving power of Christ, reading stories like the story of Afra Connor(??) who was the vicious savage, a Hottentot from a place in South Africa called Mimaqualand(?). And Afra Connor was someone that everybody feared. His men came along with him and hardened vicious attacks on people without feeling, resulted in death and devastation everywhere he went. And the governor of Cape Town put a price on his head to be given to someone who brought him in dead or alive. They were the terror of South Africa until a missionary came by the name of Robert Moffit(?) and Robert Moffit said that God had called him to the Hottentots and everybody warned him not to go. They said Afra Connor will use your skull for a drinking up. But feeling the call of God and knowing the power of the gospel, he went to the Hottentots and as God would have it the very first person who gave his life to Jesus Christ was Afra Connor and by saving grace he became an effective and useful tool in the advance of the Kingdom of God. A marvelous miracle of grace.

And I remember reading about Billy Sunday, a drunken base ball player who was walking down the street one day in Chicago with a lot of his teammates. And there was someone preaching on a corner and they were all mocking the one who was preaching. And something that he said touched the cords of the heart of Billy Sunday and he dismissed his friends and embraced Jesus Christ and became a great evangelist...great transformation.

I was reading the other day about Ty Cobb who at the end of his life gave his heart to Jesus Christ. And he said, "I came to Christ in the bottom of the ninth, I could only have wished that it was in the top of the first."

God has the ability to transform lives. Stories of the power of the grace of God to transform a life are to all of us fascinating. And in my own ministry I have experienced first hand or second hand amazing stories of God's saving power, drunks and drug addicts and murderers and mass murderers,

adulterers and thieves and fornicators and homosexuals and recently people with AIDS coming out of unbelievable life styles. I remember baptizing right in this spot a leader of the Hell's Angels, the last time he had been in a church prior to the time he was baptized was when he rode his motorcycle down the main aisle of a church, threw a rope around the pastor and dragged him out the back. And he was in jail for murdering someone. And it was second degree so he had been released and come to Jesus Christ.

And I remember corresponding with that little lady on Death Row in North Carolina who killed her own family and came to know Jesus Christ in jail. And listened to our radio program all the time and wrote me all the time to have some help with her spiritual growth. And even when they took her life, which was a just thing to do, she went right into the arms of Jesus Christ.

I know stories of so many people. And you know what's more amazing? I have even seen God transform morally upright self- righteous Pharisaic zealous respectable legalistic sinners. Is that unbelievable? I have seen the grace of God do miracle after miracle. I open the Word of God and I am thrilled at the biblical account of the transforming grace of God, I read about a demon-possessed maniac of Gadara who was delivered by the grace of Jesus Christ and is sitting worshiping Christ clothed and in his right mind. And I read about Matthew, a despised tax collector, called by grace to pen the glorious gospel of Matthew. And all the disciples and women and people from the crowds whom He taught and healed and won to Himself. And I remember the story of blind Bartimaeus and his friend, also blind, who were healed and brought by the grace of Christ to salvation. And the man born blind and the adulteress woman at the well, and the leper who returned to say thanks and the sinner who beat on his breast, and Zacchaeus of whom it was said, "This day is salvation come to this house." And I remember the transformation of the centurion who saw that it was the Son of God and the thief who was hanging on the cross and the Jews at Jerusalem when Peter preached and Cornelius and the eunuch and the Philippian jailer and Lydia and all those others and I remember the people of Ephesus who under the preaching of the gospel took out all their occult idols and all their magical books and burned them in front of the whole city because the grace of Jesus Christ had transformed them all.

And so, I understand the spirit of the Apostle Paul. And I understand it because of my own conversion, when he says, "I thank Christ Jesus." And when he says, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Is that not so?

But the most remarkable conversion of all, if we could categorize them in order of significance, the most remarkable conversion of all to me is the conversion of the Apostle Paul. And I think that's what he's trying to say to us in this passage when he says, "of whom I am chief, or protos, first, foremost." His testimony here is that God can save the world's worst sinner. That's right. That's his testimony and a marvelous testimony it is.

You know, he was so thrilled with his testimony that he repeated it over and over again. Luke wrote it in chapter 9. Paul repeated it in chapter 9 of Acts, Paul repeated it in his testimony in Acts 22, he repeated it again in Acts 26, he repeats it in Galatians 1 and 2, he repeats in Philippians 3, and now he repeats it again in 1 Timothy chapter 1. It is because it was always to him a marvelous amazing reality that Jesus Christ saved him. There was always a certain sense of almost disbelief in the midst of his unwavering faith that this could even happen. And so did he celebrate the grace of God since he saw himself as the supreme example of that grace.

Now is this a digression in 1 Timothy? Is this a digression out of the order of what Paul is writing to young Timothy? I don't think so. The whole purpose of this epistle is to charge Timothy with the task of leading the church at Ephesus and the surrounding churches to reject false teachers who are preaching a false gospel. And so what he is saying in his testimony here is "I am a true teacher who has been touched by the true gospel and who has taught the true gospel," and so he's setting himself up as a testimony to the truth and to the power of the truth. Furthermore, he just mentioned in verse 11 the gospel of the blessed God and now he goes on to give a testimony to that gospel. Not only that, from verses 3 down through verse 10 he mentioned the false teaching of the false teachers and now he would like to postulate the true gospel. Not only that, in verses 8, 9 and 10 he talks about their misunderstanding of the law, thinking that the law is gospel and you don't need grace. And here he shows a proper understanding of the law which is to understand sin and realize the desperate need for grace.

It fits. This is no digression. This is no digression at all. In contrast to false teachers, Paul presents himself as a true teacher. In contrast to the impotence of the false gospel, he presents the power of a true gospel. In contrast to the proud self-righteous men who think they can attain salvation through the law, Paul presents himself as a humble defiled base sinner who must fall on the grace and mercy of God. In contrast to those who if followed would lead people away from the saving plan of God into empty talk and unsound doctrine and shipwrecked faith and corruption and lies and envy and strife and arguments and evil and blaspheming and ungodliness that damns men forever, Paul if followed will lead men to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which if believed will lead them, says verse 16, to life everlasting. It fits...it fits. And so this is Paul's testimony to the grace of God. And it's a testimony that Timothy needs to pass on to the people in that church so they can see the power of the true gospel, as over against the impotence of the false gospel being articulated by the false teachers.

As he gives this testimony, he celebrates the significance of God's grace. And he presents six tributes to grace...six elements of grace to which he offers tribute. First, the source of grace, then the need for grace, the power of grace, the extent of grace, the purpose of grace and finally the response of grace. And we'll look at those as we go.

Now let me start with a definition. What is grace? If we're going to discuss all of these features of grace we ought to know what it is. I'm going to give you a lengthy definition, don't write it down, just listen to it. And if you want to get it in detail buy the tape. Okay? Listen now. Grace...this is grace...God's loving forgiveness, exemption from judgment and promise of temporal and eternal blessing given to guilty and condemned sinners freely without any worthiness on their part and based on nothing they have done or failed to do. That's grace. God's loving forgiveness, exemption from judgment, promise of temporal and eternal blessing given to the guilty and condemned sinner freely by God without any worthiness on their part and based on nothing they have done or failed to do. It is God's free and undeserved and unearned forgiveness and favor. And Paul cries out of the blessedness of grace, it is not cold, logical, analytical terms that he uses to be dissected, it is the out flow of a praising passionate heart.

But let's see the elements of grace as he does this. First is the source of grace. Look at verse 12. He is thankful, he says, to Christ Jesus our Lord. Why does he direct his thanks there? Because therein is the source of grace. Over in verse 14, "And the grace of our Lord," and again it comes from Him. Verse 17, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God." And so he sees grace coming from Christ and God. And again this is another one of Paul's ways to put together Christ and God in equal essence. But his point here is that the source of grace is God and Christ. The verse literally begins in the Greek, "Grateful I am...grateful I am." The emphasis on the gratitude. And it is in the sense that he is saying I am continually grateful, continually grateful to Christ Jesus, the Messiah, the earthly Son of God with heavenly glory, our Lord, always emphasizing the lordship of Christ, and the our brings Timothy in and affirms the conversion also of Timothy. I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord.

Why? Because he knows He is the source of grace. He is the source of grace. The law was given by Moses, John 1:17 says, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. I suppose at least ten times in the epistles of the New Testament it says "grace and...grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." God is the source of grace. Romans 3:24 says we are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Do you remember Paul's testimony in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 9? "For I am the least of the Apostles, I am not fit to be called an Apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am and His grace which was bestowed on me was not in vain but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God which was with me." In Ephesians chapter 3 verse 8, "Unto me," he says, "who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given." I am what I am by the grace of God even though I'm nothing, I am not fit to be an Apostle. I am the least of all saints. I am the chief of sinners. Always he sees himself that way and it's always connected to his blasphemous slanderous Christ-hating Christian persecuting background. And he knows that if he has received salvation, it is all of grace...all of grace.

So we could say then that even in verse 12 there are four features of grace that come to him from the source. First is electing grace...electing grace. In Acts 9:15, again in Acts 22:14 when he gives his testimony, in Acts 26:16 when he repeats his testimony, in all those places it is very clear that the Lord says "I have chosen you to make you an Apostle." Paul had a tremendous sense of being chosen by God, called by God, separated unto the gospel of God. Not only in terms of ministry but in terms of his election to salvation. He was chosen. There isn't a greater illustration of electing grace than the Apostle Paul. He is on his way to Damascus, Acts 9, to kill Christians. He is stopped dead in his tracks. He is redeemed and he is called to the apostlate all by the sovereign intervention of Christ Himself. So we could say he's thankful for electing grace. Everything starts there. He was chosen for salvation. That was God's divine and glorious purpose. It was the grace of God that brought salvation.

Secondly, he is also grateful for enabling grace. Not only electing grace but enabling grace. It says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me," literally, who has given me strength. He not only elected me to salvation, but gave me the strength I needed to live out that salvation. It wouldn't be enough to have electing grace without enabling grace, we'd get lost again. Not only do we experience the grace of salvation but the enabling grace to walk in that salvation and to continue in the faith. In the end of this epistle, chapter...the end of the second epistle rather, chapter 4 verse 17 of 2 Timothy, he says, "The Lord stood with me and strengthened me that by me the preaching might be fully known." And this is how he lived his whole life, in the strength of the Lord. "I can do all things," Philippians 4:13, "through Christ who strengthens me." "Be strong in the Lord and the power of His might," Ephesians 6:10. So he's looking back here, the form that he uses indicates he's looking...using the Aorist...to a specific moment when the power first came and continues to come throughout all his ministry. And it's wonderful to know that we are not only elect by grace but we are enabled by grace and that's why Paul writes in Romans 5 and says "This grace in which we stand." We didn't just receive grace to be saved and grace departed, we received grace and now we live in grace. And it is the grace of God that infuses the strength of God to enable us to live the Christian life.

Thirdly, he is thankful for entrusting grace...entrusting grace. He says, "In that He counted me trustworthy, or faithful." He is very very amazed that the Lord counted him trustworthy enough to deposit in his life the salvation that God gave him and the truth that God brought to him. And he is one committed to faithfulness. He says it is required in stewards above all things, 1 Corinthians 4:1 and 2, that a man be found faithful. And he says, in effect, it amazes me that He counted me to be trustworthy. Now did the Savior look around and say, "Hey, there's a trustworthy guy, boy, there's a guy I can trust?" No. It was grace that made him trustworthy.

Let me show you something. First Corinthians 7:25, very interesting statement, in his discussion about marriage and singleness and virgins and all that he covers in 1 Corinthians 7, he drops a

wonderful little thought in here about how he viewed himself. Verse 25...

He says I want to speak concerning virgins but I can't quote the Lord, I have no commandment of the Lord. That is Jesus didn't say anything that was written down that I can look to so I'm going to give you my own inspired judgment by the direction of the Holy Spirit and I'm giving it...listen to this...as one that has obtained mercy from the Lord to be trustworthy. Did you get that? The only reason that we are trustworthy with the stewardship of the gospel and the stewardship of divine truth and the stewardship of ministry is because the Lord gives us the trustworthiness. That's a gift of grace, electing grace, enabling grace, entrusting grace and then employing grace. He put him in his service, verse 12, putting me in to the diakonia, a word for lowly service. He appointed me to lowly service. Colossians 1:23 and 25 says, "He made me a minister...He made me a minister, He made me a servant." He put me into His lowly humble service. And you can tell by that term that he's not bragging about his wonderful trustworthiness, his great faithfulness. He's not seeking honor for himself.

I was reading this week about the Spartans and some of the things about their battles. And Plutarch tells that when a Spartan won a victory in the games, his reward was that he might stand beside his king in battle. In fact, the victory for a Spartan in his games gave him the privilege of standing in front of his king in the battle to protect his king. And it went on to say there was a story of a Spartan wrestler at the Olympic Games, he was offered a considerable bribe if he would abandon the struggle. And he refused. Finally after a great effort he won the victory and someone said to him, "Well, Spartan, what have you got out of the costly victory you have won?" And he answered, "I have won the privilege of standing in front of my king in battle." I kind of have the feeling that that was the spirit of Paul whose joy was to say, "I bear in my body the marks intended for Jesus Christ," who cried out, "I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings, I want to even be conformable to His death."

No, Paul is not exalting himself here. He is talking about the incredible electing, the incredible enabling, the incredible entrusting and employing grace of God that not only saved him and strengthened him and made him worthy to hold the trust of his salvation, but allowed him to serve with humility and blessing. So when you think of grace you don't think of some very limited thing. That's why 2 Corinthians 9:8 says, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that you will have all sufficiency in all things and be able to abound unto every good work." Grace goes way beyond just the saving act. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 he said, "My grace is sufficient for you," for everything.

So, he speaks then of the source of grace as being God, the source of grace in its fullness for all of Christian life and ministry. And then the need for grace...the need for grace. In verse 13 the need is very clear, before his conversion he was a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious. The grace of God is so vivid in his mind because of what he used to be of what he was. He persecuted the church

of God and wasted it, he says in Galatians 1:13. Because of what he was his need was profound. A great sinner has to be given great grace, to be chosen, to be empowered, to be trusted, to be appointed to serve Christ, to be made an Apostle is one thing, to have that done to someone who used to be a blasphemer, persecutor and injurious is quite something else.

What does it mean a blasphemer? One who slanders God. One who overtly openly slanders God, speaks evil of God. In Acts 26:11 he says, "I punished them...meaning Christians...often and compelled them to blaspheme." He was not only a blasphemer himself but wanted everybody else to blaspheme God, to blaspheme Christ. His attack was directly against Christ. That's why three times in the book of Acts it says, "Jesus said, Why persecutest thou Me?" Not the church, but Me. He was anti-God in that sense, he was anti-Christ, he was a blasphemer of the first order. And therefore he violated the first half of the Ten Commandments. All those that speak of a person's proper attitude toward God he violated, he shattered the first table of the law. He also shattered the second table of the law as the next two words indicate. He was a persecutor, relentless, maniacal pursuit to do harm to Christians. He wasted the church. Acts 8:3, Acts 9:1 pictures him making havoc of the church, breathing out threatenings and slaughter, binding people up, men and women, going into houses and dragging them out, throwing them in prison. He was a mass murderer. He was a ferocious aggressive evil persecutor of the church. And the last word is a very interesting word, translated injurious it really means the idea of a wanton aggressor, an aggressor with no thought for human kindness. Some have translated that word a bully. It is the idea of a violent aggressive person whose violence and contempt causes him to mistreat and hurt other people simply for the sake of the hurt. It isn't that he has some pure cause in mind. He gets glee out of watching people be humiliated and suffer and even die. He relishes that. It is a characteristically pagan sin indicated in...the same word is used in Romans 1:30, it is also the word used in Luke 18:32 to speak of what the crowd and what the Jewish leaders did to Jesus when they plucked His beard and spit in His face and punched Him and slapped Him just for the sheer sport of it. I suppose one way we could translate it would be sadism. He had personal glee and fulfillment out of watching people suffer pain even unto death. And when Ananias was told by the Lord to meet him in Acts chapter 9, it says Ananias said, "I have heard how much evil he has done." And when the early church was supposed to receive him, they were scared, they were frightened.

Now this was the need for grace. This is a desperate sinner. This is a mass murderer, a violent persecuting God- hating, Christ-rejecting sinner of the worst possible imagination. So great was the need for grace.

You say, "Well why does Paul bother to recite this?" Because it's very helpful to remember the pit from which you were dug, right? It has a lot to do with keeping your perspective, maintaining your humility and your heart of gratitude if you can go back over some of those things.

That leads us to the power of grace. The power of grace was expressed because the need was so great. In Romans 5:20 Paul knew exactly what he was saying when he said, "Where sin abounded grace did super abound." He was living proof. And he says at the end of verse 13, "But I was mercied...I was mercied, I was a doer of outrage, but I was mercied, I was smeared with mercy. I was treated with compassion in my wretchedness." And he could say with the hymn writer, "And from my smitten heart with tears, two wonders I confess, the wonders of His glorious love and my own worthlessness." But I was mercied, he says.

What is mercy? Mercy has to do with misery. Grace has to do with guilt. Grace takes away the guilt, mercy takes away the misery that accompanies the guilt. The undeserved relief of misery that comes with saving grace came to Paul and I was mercied, he says.

How so? How could such a wretched vile rotten sinner be mercied? Because, he says, "I did it ignorantly in unbelief, I didn't know what I was doing." He's not an apostate who knew exactly what he was doing and did it anyway. He's not someone who like the Pharisees had come to fully hear the Word of Christ, fully understand the power of Christ, saw all His miracles, heard all His teaching and concluded that He was out of the pit and He was devilish. He was no apostate. He was no rejecter of full light. He was not like those in Hebrews chapter 6 who were enlightened and tasted the heavenly gift and saw the powers of the age to come and partook of the energy and power of the Spirit of God and turned their back on that and walked away and thus were unredeemable. He is not an apostate. He is not one who knew everything and turned his back on it. Not at all. He didn't know what he did. And he's borrowing this concept, by the way, from his own Jewish background. If you were to read Leviticus 22:14 you would read about unwitting sins, sins that people do and they don't really realize what they've done. And if you were to go, and you ought to do this some time, read Numbers 15 and as it describes the Day of Atonement it says that the Day of Atonement provides an atonement for the sins of people who sin without knowledge, who sin ignorantly. But those who sin deliberately willfully, cold-blooded, arrogantly are beyond the atonement because they have no repentance. Someone who sins and repents understands what they've done and comes in repentance and confession and faith. They were covered in Israel by the atonement on the Day of Atonement. But those cold-blooded arrogant sinners with no confession and no repentance, their sin was not taken care of.

And it's the same here. Jesus dying on the cross looked out at a crowd that screamed for His blood, a crowd that wanted Him dead, a crowd that put Him on a cross and He said, "Father, forgive them," and the reason was, "for they...they don't know what they're doing, they don't fully understand." The sin is theirs and they've committed the sin and it's a vile heinous sin, but they really didn't understand what they were doing. And Peter affirms that in Acts 3:14 to 17 as he preaches and he says, "I know you did it ignorantly in unbelief." And that's the distinction here. It isn't that he was not guilty for his sin of persecution, he was a vile wretched sinner. He says he's the worst sinner of all sinners. But he is a forgivable sinner if when he sees the truth he turns from his sin to righteousness. You

understand? It's the sinner who doesn't turn that's unforgivable.

And what does he say in Acts 26:19? "When I saw Christ on the Damascus Road," he says, "I was not disobedient to that heavenly vision." When I saw the truth I believed it, I saw my sin. Remember Romans 7? I thought I was alive, here I was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, perfect as concerning the law, circumcised, he goes all through that in Philippians 3, and all of those things but when I saw the law of God in its reality I died, he says, I was devastated. I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

Could we say that he had a redeemable heart because he was not an apostate, he was not a cold-blooded arrogant willful deliberate sinner against full light? When he saw the truth, he believed the truth. And the power of grace is this, beloved, that it doesn't matter how wretched the sinner is, grace is powerful enough to transform the sinner if the sinner sees the sin as sin and believes the gospel. That's the issue. The power of grace to bring mercy to a willing heart, willing to do what is right and believe the truth.

What about the measure of grace? That's the power of grace to transform, to bring mercy to such a wretched heart. What power to transform that. But what's the measure? Verse 14, "And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant." It super abounded. You got a lot of sin, you got a lot of grace to cover that sin. And here we find the use of the term grace, which is central to the passage, and though it only appears here it permeates the whole of Paul's gratitude. Abounding sin gives way to super abounding grace, above the expected measure. Paul loves to add the word huper, super we call it, hyper, transliterated. He loves to add that on front of words. And if you go through the New Testament you'll find about a half a dozen places where he invents a word by adding hyper in the front of it, super abounding here, exceedingly abundant. And so, he gives us the insight into the surpassing measure of grace. The Bible says God is able to make all grace abound, all grace, electing grace, enabling grace, entrusting grace, employing grace, all can abound, exceedingly abundant.

And notice what else he says, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. Now this grace is in Christ Jesus. You're not going to get grace anywhere else, is that right? You're not going to get saving grace anywhere besides in Christ Jesus, apart from believing in Him and receiving Him, there's no saving grace. But notice what he says, "Saving grace is not only abundant in and of itself...this is marvelous thought...you not only receive an abundant exceedingly abundant saving grace but along with it comes faith and love." Literally you could read it this way, "And the grace of our Lord was super abundant in the company of faith and love which are also in Christ Jesus." They're together.

What is that saying? That's saying this that when saving grace comes, with it comes faith. What does that mean? When God saved you, God granted you the grace to trust Him. And even your faith in Him is a gift. "For by grace are you saved through faith that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God."

God brings grace to cover your sin and He brings with it faith to believe God and He brings with it love to love God and love to love others. I mean, it's a whole package, folks. Here you are a naked destitute useless condemned vile sinner without hope, without anything in the world, and when God by electing grace moves in to redeem you and responds to your willing heart, therein does He bring grace that super abounds beyond all your sin and even beyond that He brings you the capacity to trust God and the capacity to love God and love others. And that's the package that comes with saving grace. Isn't that marvelous? That's why when you go through the New Testament, I wish we had time, over and over and over again faith and love are linked with salvation. Faith and love...I mean, just for example, one epistle Ephesians 1:15, and this is one out of many, Ephesians 1:15, "I also after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints." Chapter 3 verse 17, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith that you being rooted and grounded in love." Chapter 6 of the same epistle, verse 23, "Peace to the brethren and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." In 1 Timothy, right where we are, verse 5, "The end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith without hypocrisy." Chapter 2 verse 15 of 1 Timothy, "She shall be saved in child bearing if they continue in faith and love and holiness with sobriety."

Faith and love are linked so often because the package that comes with salvation includes trusting God as a gift. God enables us to trust Him and loving Him and loving others also as a gift. That's why Colossians 1:23 says you're saved if you continue in faith because faith is part of the salvation package and you can tell a true Christian by their continuing faith.

Secondly, you can tell a true Christian by their continuing love. Is that not so? If you say you're a believer but you don't love God and love His people, 1 John says you're not telling the truth. So grace is so abundant you not only get super abounding grace but in the package you get love and faith also. That's the measure of God's grace.

What's the purpose of it? What's the purpose of grace? Is that something also for which to rejoice? Let's move in to verse 15 again. "This is a trustworthy saying and certainly worthy of everyone's acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am protos, first," literally worst, I am the worst sinner in the world. You say, "Now wait a minute, Paul, you've got a bad self-image. You're not going to make it in the ministry, you've got to get your act together, calm down a little bit, you're a nice guy." No, I'm the worst sinner in the world. Do you say, "Oh, he's just...that's just sort of spiritual talk?" No, he really believed that. He really believed he was the world's worst sinner. In chapter 15 of verse...chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians verse 9, "I am the least of the Apostles, I am not fit to be called an Apostle...here's the reason...I persecuted the church of God." I read you earlier that one and Ephesians 3:8, "I am less than the least of all saints." He believed it. Why? Because it was...it was probably true. I don't see the Holy Spirit editorializing here and saying, "Don't believe this, this is just Paul exaggerating." I think he said he was the worst because he probably was the worst and nobody argued with it, not even God. I mean, how bad can you be but be a mass

murderer of people who love Jesus Christ? From a human viewpoint, he was wretched, he was a blasphemer of God and Christ, he was a killer of Christians and he did it for the sheer joy of watching people suffer. Now that's a perverted mind. And when he says "I am the first," and uses the emphatic pronoun and the word first, he means it...he means it. He was a wretched vile sinner of massive proportions. He said I persecuted this way, that is Christianity, unto the death, binding and delivering both men and women into prison. And specifically his persecution and his crimes were committed against Jesus Christ, that's why the Lord said, "Why are you persecuting Me?"

That was a healthy self-view for Paul because it was accurate. And that's the basis of the purpose of his salvation. Look at verse 16, "Nevertheless, for this cause I obtained mercy." What cause? Because I was so wretched a sinner, because I was so rotten and so vile...now listen to this...because I was the worst sinner alive, I received mercy. Well what is...why that? Why does God save the worst sinner? Here it comes, "In order that in me first or me foremost Jesus Christ might show forth all...what?...long suffering or patience."

You know why God saved Paul? You say, "To keep him out of hell." No, that was a benefit. You say, "To get him in to heaven." No that was a benefit. You say, "To have him write the epistles." No, He could have anybody do that. "To preach." No, He could have anybody do that. "Well why did He save Paul?" Because God wanted to save the world's worst Christian...the world's worst pagan and make him the world's greatest Christian. God wanted to save the world's worst pagan and make him the world's greatest Christian. Why? To show the power of grace, to put Himself on display. You see, the purpose of salvation is to glorify God, to demonstrate His power and His long suffering.

And isn't that wonderful? Listen to this...if the Lord is so patient and so long suffering, and the word is makrothumiaand it means to be patient with people. If the Lord is so patient with vile blaspheming slanderous persecuting outrageous conduct among the pagans, if He is so patient as to wait for that person as to endure all of those indignities, redeem that person, make that person an Apostle and let him write 13 books of the New Testament who was the worst sinner in the world, then nobody else is beyond His grace, right? That's the whole point. And you know something? You know what this says to Timothy, even those false teachers that are creating such havoc, Timothy, are not beyond salvation if they have done it ignorantly in unbelief.

God's willingness to endure the insults and the blasphemies and the rejection and the sins of men like Paul show how great His grace is, how magnanimous His mercy is. And so Paul says I am a pattern, I am a hupatoposis(?), which means an illustration, a model. I am...I like the word illustration...I am the supreme illustration for everybody who in the future will believe on Him to life everlasting, I am living proof that God can save any sinner. Isn't that wonderful? Somebody would say, "Well He can't save me, I'm too far gone." That's not so...not so. Have you overtly openly outwardly purposely blasphemed God? Have you blasphemed Jesus Christ? Have you systematically murdered Christians and put them in jail? And worse of all the whole time you did it thought you were

righteous? This is bad stuff.

Now I don't want to push the point too far but certainly in Paul's mind he saw himself as the worst of sinner, and there's reason to agree. There may be others in history who would rank right with him, but you can't get any worse than that than to be the outward antagonist of God and Christ and the church. And so saving him then is proof positive that the Lord can save anybody and transform anybody...anybody, and turn them in to an evangelist, an apostle, a missionary, a useful servant.

And that's why we have in verse 17 the response to grace. "Now unto the King eternal," literally the king of the ages. What ages? The Jews had two ages, the past age and the age to come. The supremely sovereign one, immortal, that is imperishable, incorruptible, no death, decay or loss of strength, the invisible one known only by self-revelation for He cannot be seen by eyes nor heard by ears, only when He's self-revealed can He be known. The only God...the only God to Him be honor and glory forever and ever. And then he adds that little Jewish conclusion...Amen. Which means let it be said, let it be said.

You can't really exegete a doxology, you just say it and rejoice in it. Now I trust as you've heard this message you've heard the Spirit of God say to you...if you're a Christian there ought to be a thankful heart. And maybe if you've grown a little cold in that area of your life, you need to reach back and remember what you used to be and you need to remember your sinfulness and understand again the grace of God so that you have a thankful heart and so that you can cry out in a doxology of praise, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." And mean it with all your heart.

And others of you who have never embraced the Lord Jesus Christ at all, be assured of this that no matter what your sin might be, no matter how wretched it might appear to you, you're savable by the grace of God. That's the message here. Even if you've been a false teacher, if you did it ignorantly in unbelief and hearing the truth you desire to respond. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we're reminded of the beautiful words of John Wesley who wrote, "Plenteous grace with Thee is found, grace to cover all my sin, let the healing streams abound and make and keep me pure within." We thank Thee, O God, for Thy great grace in Christ. We thank Thee for what Thou art able and willing to do in the life of a repentant sinner. O what transforming grace. May there be no one in this place who has not known that grace who is not grateful for that grace. Fill our hearts with the doxology of praise.

While your heads are bowed in closing moments of our message. If you have never embraced the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior, if you have not received His saving grace, you are in a dangerous eternally dangerous state and foolishly rejecting the gift of life. Simply and only because you love your sin. Say no to your sin and yes to Jesus Christ, hearing the truth believe it and know

that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...even sinners as bad as you, to transform them in to servants of His own. Right where you sit, if you've never received Christ, open your heart to Him right now, believe and receive Him. If you're a Christian, ask God to forgive you for the lethargy and indifference and fill you with gratitude and remember what you were and what you would be without that grace.

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