

PAUL'S CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

I Timothy 1:12-20

II. Paul Related His Christian Experience. 1:12-17.

After stating that the glorious gospel of the blessed God had been committed to him as a trust, Paul proceeded to relate his Christian experience. Every time he thought of being entrusted with the gospel his heart was filled with gratitude. Paul acknowledged his gratitude to the Lord for having imparted strength to him, for having judged him to be trustworthy or reliable and for having appointed him to the apostleship. He was especially grateful because the Lord had considered him trustworthy.

Paul expressed his genuine gratitude for the divine grace which had called him into the ministry and equipped him for his work in spite of his conscious unworthiness and the grievousness of his previous sin. As he recalled his life of ignorant unbelief, hatred and cruelty, he regarded himself as truly unworthy of the salvation which he had received, and still more unworthy of the exalted service to which he had been called as a minister of Christ. He had blasphemed the name of Christ, using stupid and injurious language against Him, and now he had been given the glorious privilege of speaking well of Him. Paul had been a persecutor of the Christians, showing malice and deadly hate toward them. He had been heartless in his treatment of the followers of Christ. He had imprisoned many of them. He had cast his vote to have them put to death with bitter and demonic torture. He had committed all sorts of insulting and outrageous acts against the Christians, even compelling some of them to blaspheme the name of Christ Whom they loved so dearly. In spite of all this, Christ had shown him mercy. His deeds had been committed in ignorance because he had lived in the realm of unbelief. However, his ignorance did not excuse his guilt because his unbelief had been stubborn. The fact that he had thought he was doing God service did not mean that he was.

One reason which Christ had for showing Paul such abundant grace was that he might serve as an outstanding example of one who had been saved and transformed by the marvelous and matchless grace of our wonderful Lord. It was to give encouragement to all to expect similar mercy to be granted to them, no matter how grievous their sins, if they would only believe on Christ as their Saviour. What the Lord had done for him through His gospel He would do for others who would believe on Him. Paul simply believed that Christ saved him to be a pattern for all who would put their trust in the Saviour. If Christ could save a sinner like him, He could save anybody whom Timothy might contact in Ephesus, however bad he might be. In fact, none is too bad for redeeming grace.

Paul could never write without bringing in the grace of our Lord. To him it was no mere abstract concept, but an operative and formulative force dominating both thought and action.

In his confession the Apostle Paul said, "I obtained mercy". Paul was the object of:

1. Emancipating grace.

Until this he had been "a blasphemer, and a persecutor and injurious." Every memory of these actions humbled him. But he said, I did it ignorantly." Who is this that is confessing his ignorance? It is

one of the most brilliant minds of his time, one of the most famous products of the university of Tarsus and one of the most famous pupils of that renowned scholar, Gamaliel of Jerusalem. Ignorance is a word that sounds strangely in relation to such a man. Yes, but there is a realm of knowledge whose doors are barred fast against natural gifts, however eminent, for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Corinthians 2:14).

2. Employing grace.

"He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." Emancipation is never an end in itself, but always a means to an end, always with a view to employment. Salvation is to be followed by service. Counting him trustworthy, the Lord trusted Paul with the blessed ministry of reconciliation. Paul was glad and grateful for an opportunity to serve Him Whom he had injured.

3. Enabling grace.

The Apostle said, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me," or "I have constant gratitude to the One Who endued me with the necessary strength." Paul found the Lord to be sufficient for his every need. God's children should not hesitate to serve Him because of a sense of their insufficiency for "our sufficiency is of God" (II Corinthians 3:5). God never commands His children to do anything without supplying them what they need in order to do what He has commanded.

4. Exceeding grace.

"But the grace of our Lord superabounded with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

Paul never dreamed that he was such a bad man until he became a godlyman. It was not in mock humility or an exaggeration on his part when he placed himself in the first rank of all sinners.

Dr. B. H. Carroll said, "The paragraph 1:12-17, is one of the deepest, broadest, richest and sweetest in the Holy Scriptures." It is an expression of Paul's gratitude to God for a gospel that could save the chief of sinners and give him the privilege and responsibility of preaching it to others, persecutor and blasphemer though he had been.

This fifteenth verse is certainly comprehensive in that it tells us the person who came, the place into which He came, the purpose for which He came and the people for whom He came. It says, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

1. This is a mystery story.

"Christ Jesus came into the world." Notice the order of these words, Christ Jesus. Christ means the Anointed One of God. He was God's Anointed Son and He came from God, with God's blessing resting upon Him. Jesus was His human name.

When Paul wrote, "Christ Jesus came into the world," he implied that Christ existed somewhere before He came here. Christ came from the bosom of the Father where He had been from eternity, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory. In giving Him to us God gave

of His own very substance, life, character and love. Christ left the glory which He had with the Father before the world was and came into the world with saving purpose and power.

Certain great doctrines are set forth in this text which are worthy of acceptance.

(1) The deity of Christ.

Christ is the name which proves His deity. He who was with God, and was God, came into the world He had created and which Satan had corrupted. It was the supernatural Christ who came into the world.

(2) The humanity of Christ.

Jesus is the name which proves His humanity. God though He was, Christ became the man Jesus.

(3) The incarnation of Christ.

In the incarnation God, in Christ, came to be born of the virgin Mary. He took up His residence in a human body and became partaker of human nature. "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us," in order to bridge the gulf between the Holy God and sinful men.

2. This is an adventure story.

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The Master Himself said, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). God's Word tells us that in the fulness of time God sent His Son, born of a virgin, to redeem them that were under the law. Christ laid aside His infinite glory and consented to enter this world through the lowly door of Bethlehem's manger.

3. This is a love story.

Christ came into the world to reveal God to men, to redeem men from sin and to reconcile men to God. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Only an amazing love can account for that. Christ's death on the cross was sacrificial and substitutionary. He came to save sinners from the penalty of sin, the power of sin and the presence of sin. He will save freely, fully and forever all who will put their trust in Him as their Saviour.

4. This is a true story.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance." It was known to be true in the experience of Paul and of Timothy. It has been true in the case of every real believer on Christ since. Those of us who are God's children know that this saying is reliable and worthy of acceptance. Christ Jesus has saved us. There has never been a story of such wide appeal, vast circulation, engrossing interest and compelling power.

III. Paul's Charge To Timothy. 1:18-20.

Paul's soul was thrilled at the remembrance of such grace. An irresistible impulse prompted him to break forth into a doxology, ascribing praise to the Father of mercies for His amazing grace.

While Paul was serving as God's minister in Ephesus, he had led in the exclusion of Hymenaeus and Alexander from the membership of the church. That they were handed over to Satan implies their excommunication from the church. They were put out of the church and were cast back into the heathen world or the realm of Satan in order to get them to face the enormity of their sins. That was the only way in which they could be taught an important lesson. The church withdrew fellowship from them for the protection and welfare of the church and for the purpose of getting them to realize the enormity of their sins and duly repent. The chief purpose of their exclusion was remedial. If the love of Christ was in their hearts, the buffeting by Satan would cause them to see their errors, forsake their sins and prove by their lives that a change had taken place in them. Then, they might be considered for reinstatement to church membership.