

God's Mercy is Greater Than Your Sin

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Introduction: Most of us divide the world into two groups: everyone else and us. So when Paul says in v. 15, "This is..." Our problem is often that while we believe whole-heartedly that v. 15 applies to others, we just don't think it has anything to do with us.

Big Idea: See how great your sin is and you'll realize how great God's mercy is.

I. God's purpose of grace is to turn ignorant sinners into faithful servants (12-14).

A. *Christ's purpose was to make Paul what he was not: a faithful servant, which Paul became through Christ's strength (12).*

1. Paul says that God "regarded" or "considered" him faithful but Paul wasn't.
 - a. God's purpose of grace is not to accept you as you are, but to make you who he wants you to be.
 - i. The falseness of those who say "Jesus accepts you just as you are."
 - ii. What that really means and what many take it to mean are different things.
 - iii. You do not have to clean up your behavior to come to Christ, but Christ changes you in your inner person so that as a result of meeting him your behavior will change.

Illus: Michelangelo said that sculpting was freeing the image from inside the stone. Where we might look at a hunk of stone and see dirt and grooves from the tools use to quarry it, he looked at a hunk of stone and saw an image of David; the dirt and grooves were things that needed to be dealt with, but he saw what it would become. This is what God does with our sin: he sees it and he does not overlook it, but he deals with it and makes you who he wants you to be in Christ.

- b. Those who refuse to recognize their sin can't be saved; not because God is unjust or refuses to save them, but because one must realize they need to be saved in order to be saved.
 - i. Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Mark 2:17)
 - ii. Many are righteous in their own minds (self-righteous) and so don't realize they need Christ's righteousness.

2. Christ's strength accomplishes what you cannot do in your own strength.
 - a. The doctrine of total inability reminds us that we are unable to come to God unless there is a change in our heart.
 - b. What happened to Paul (Acts 9) happens to every believer on a different scale (cf. v.16 – "pattern").

B. *God's mercy was essential because of the depth of Paul's sin and his antagonism against God which stemmed from Paul's ignorance of who Christ really is (13).*

1. Paul was a good person, a religious person, who needed the Lord rather than mere religion.
2. Paul's ignorance does not excuse what he did, nor is that what he is claiming; he is simply saying that this behavior did not exclude him from receiving mercy because he did it in ignorance.

C. *God's mercy is made known through Jesus Christ and demonstrated in the faith and love Jesus Christ shows to sinners (14).*

1. Rom. 5:20b – "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound"
2. The Father's grace is revealed in Jesus Christ.
 - a. Jesus is the true source of faith and love. He grants to the sinner to trust in God and to love God.
 - b. Jesus grants the ability to walk in faith and to show true love to God and others.
3. The importance of "Jesus alone." Many trust in Jesus, but they also trust in something else, their good deeds, their membership in a church, their religion, etc.

- a. Jesus is the only one who can save you because he is the only one who never sinned. This purity and holiness means that he had no sin of his own to atone for and so could stand in your place and mine.
- b. Jesus' divinity allowed him to bear God's wrath.

II. Christ's mission was to bring mercy to undeserving sinners and he waits patiently until the time is right for you to believe in him (15-16).

A. Paul's sin was great, but God's mercy is greater (15a).

1. Three attributes of God are closely bound together: mercy, grace, and patience or longsuffering. Wayne Grudem defines each (Grudem, *ST*, 200).
 - a. God's mercy is God's goodness toward those in misery or distress.
 - b. God's grace is God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.
 - c. God's patience is God's goodness in withholding punishment toward those who sin over a period of time.
2. Each of these aspects can be seen in Paul's life and in our own.
 - a. Paul was in misery and distress though he didn't know it. He was under God's judgment for his sin. We, too, are in misery and distress because of our sin.
 - b. God, through his grace in Jesus Christ transforms Paul and makes him the servant of Christ he would become, though it did not happen overnight. God's grace extends transformation and reconciliation to those in sin through the work of Jesus Christ.
 - c. God was patient with Paul even while Paul was persecuting his people. God was patient with some of you as you ran from him or lived in ignorance of him
3. The entire Christian life is lived because God gives grace continuously (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10; Acts 14:26).
4. Paul realized the magnitude of God's grace because he was able to realize the depths of his sin. Without that, he would never know God's grace.

B. Christ's mission was manifold but his greatest mission was to save sinners (15b).

1. Other aspects of Jesus' mission are true: he did come to model perfect human life, he did come to teach wisdom because he is the wisdom of God (Col. 2:3), and he came to demonstrate love and sacrifice.
2. All of these aspects are true, but Jesus himself outlines his own mission:
 - a. **Mark 10:45** For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.
 - b. In this verse, Paul verifies this under divine inspiration.

C. Paul is an example of Christ's perfect patience and God's great mercy and it shows that your sin is not greater than God's mercy (16).

1. Paul persecuted true believers and in so doing blasphemed God; surely your sin cannot be greater than that.
2. God is patient because he is sovereign and in control of salvation and its outworking. He is not worried, he is not waiting with bated breath, he is working out the lives of his elect until such a time that his Spirit, using his Word, should call them to salvation by granting repentance and faith.

Conclusion: Perhaps for you that day is today. If the Spirit is moving, do not delay, repent of your sins and turn by faith to Jesus Christ, abandoning your hope and trust in everything else.