

Overflowing Grace for a blasphemer, oppressor and insolent

1 Timothy 1:12-17

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Pastor Francis Bezzam

12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, 13 though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. 17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

We are in this series with called “Conducting ourselves in the household of God”.

In the previous passage we looked at last week, Paul talked about the law of God. Paul says the law is good if one uses it lawfully. And Paul lists those things that are unlawful in the sight of God. The law is laid out for lawbreakers. Through the law comes the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20). The law also brings wrath (Romans 4:15). So the law informs us about the standard of God, but can the law save you from the wrath and judgment of God? Only the Gospel of grace can. And some people desiring to be teachers of the law were leading people into vain discussions, unprofitable talk for the Christian life. They did not know what reverses their condemned state. And Paul’s main concern when he addresses Timothy is to tell him what sound doctrine is and what is a deviation from the true Gospel. However, instead of writing more on the false teaching in this passage, Paul takes a turn. Paul becomes very personal. Paul writes about this own former life. Paul says he himself used to be a lawbreaker. Paul thought he had been following the law of God but his zeal turned him into a violent zealot. So, Paul writes his resume. Let’s look at verses 12 through 14.

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Paul uses three key words to describe himself before he knew Jesus Christ as his Lord. He lists them in verse 13 – he was *blasphemous*, he was a *persecutor*, and he was *arrogant*.

The word *blasphemous* means dishonoring God. In Paul's case he was speaking abusive and threatening words against the followers of Jesus.

Paul says he was also a *persecutor* – Acts 9 verse 1 tells us that Paul was “*breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord*”.

He was also an *insolent* man. The word Paul uses to describe himself is *hubris*. Hubris is being excessively overbearing.

In Acts 26, Paul gives his testimony about this past “*I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth.* ¹⁰ *And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.* ¹¹ *And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities*”.

Paul's path of blasphemy, persecution and insolence began with him being convinced in himself that Jesus was just a so-called dead Savior. Prior to becoming a follower of Jesus Christ, Paul's life could be summed in one word – *unbelief*. Paul was steeped in unbelief. Because of his unbelief, Paul was ignorant of who Jesus truly was.

In his ignorant unbelief, Paul opposed the name of Jesus and persecuted his followers. He describes in Acts chapter 26.

We see at least three things he did:

1. Paul intentionally put followers of Jesus in prison. This is unusual because Paul was not a government official or a religious authority figure. He was an educated layman who took upon himself to become a religious activist. He took permission from the authorities to lock people up. And the religious authorities were happy to oblige because they wanted to suppress the name of Jesus as well.
2. Paul not only locked up people, he also voted for their death penalty. How he did this was to impose, force and coerce to blaspheme God in order to punish them. Once they were accused of a blasphemy charge, they could face the death penalty in those days. The punishment for blasphemy was death by stoning.
3. Thirdly, Paul did not limit his violent outburst and streak in Jerusalem only. He wanted to persecute people even outside his territory. Such was his zeal. In verse 11, Paul says he did in his “*raging fury*”. He was a mad man, a very angry man to put out Christians in his day.

One thing he did not know, however, was that by persecuting the followers of Jesus, he was persecuting Jesus himself. And until one day Christ showed his terrifying power. Jesus himself who said to Paul, “Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4). Jesus literally threw him down from his self-glory and pride to a place of repentant humility.

Paul's repentance was so radical that he not only abandoned his former opposition to the name of Jesus. He could have remained neutral but he did not. Paul became one of the greatest promoters of Jesus. So much that he wrote thirteen letters in the New Testament.

J.I Packer writes about repentance this way, Repentance "signifies going back on what one was doing before, and renouncing the misbehavior by which one's life or one's relationship was being harmed. In the Bible, repentance is a theological term, pointing to an abandonment of those courses of action in which one defied God by embracing what he dislikes and forbids. Repentance [thus] means altering one's habits of thought, one's attitudes, outlook, policy, direction, and behavior, just as fully as is needed to get one's life out of the wrong shape and into the right one. Repentance is in truth a spiritual revolution".

Saul the blasphemer, Saul the persecutor, Saul the insolent opponent, Saul the ignorant unbeliever received grace and was forgiven by the Lord Jesus Christ.

But wait, something does not sound right.

Blasphemers, oppressors and persecutors shouldn't get forgiven just like that. Haters don't get forgiven just like that. How is this possible?

The answer is found in verses 15 and 16.

15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

Paul knew that God was a Righteous and Holy God. What Paul did not know was that the same God is also a God of grace. How? The judgment and wrath that Paul deserved was absorbed by The Righteous One, Jesus Christ. Paul could not understand this before.

You see Jesus came into this world for people like Paul. Jesus came into this world for *sinners* not *self-righteous*. Paul was very righteous according to the standards of the law. But the law could not make him right. But here Paul says he is the chief of sinners. That is how he received mercy.

Paul says that he is a recipient of at least five things from Jesus:

1. Verse 12 – Paul received strength. He received divine favor from Jesus. Jesus found him faithful after he received grace.
2. Verse 13 – Paul received mercy. Not because he was ignorant in unbelief but because God is merciful.
3. Verse 14 - Paul received massive grace. The way he writes in verse 14 is this “*the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ overflowed for me*”. Have you seen or been to the Niagara Falls? Massive water keeps flowing and flowing. It never stops. Paul saying that he experienced a kind of grace that pales in comparison with any other favor in this world.
4. Lastly, in verse 16, Paul says he received mercy for this reason. That God would display the longsuffering-ness in Jesus Christ. Again, this is a very radical statement for Paul to say. Why? Because any Jew would know the character of God as he describes in verse 16. We see it as perfect patience. This is really one of the characteristics of God described all throughout the Bible. *16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.*
 - a. Exodus 34:6, Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 86:15, Psalm 145:8, Nahum 1:3 are some places where you see the character of God. He is slow to anger. God is a longsuffering God.
 - b. Paul received mercy and patience so that he could be a witness to others. You see God must work in you first in order for Him to work through you.

In light of God’s overflowing grace, how does Paul respond?

Verses 12 and 17.

12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord.

17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

With Thankfulness, giving honor and glory to God.

Giving Honor and Glory to God is our Goal. Not vain discussions, not myths not endless genealogies.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Overflowing Grace.** 1 Timothy 1:12-17

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. How does Paul describe himself prior to his conversion? What change did others notice in Paul after his conversion? Acts 9:20-22, Galatians 1:23

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. What characteristic of God does Paul highlight in changing him? Verse 16. Go around and share.
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: Paul confessed that he was "*a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent*". Is there anything you can identify in your soul that needs to change?
5. Is there anything you want to share that you are thankful for and desire to give God honor and glory?