

Christ Came to Save Sinners

3 Qualities of a True Christian

1 Timothy 1:12-17

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Introduction

Is there any power in your personal testimony? We've all heard powerful stories about people who lived remarkably sinful lives before they came to Christ. My story is boring. I wonder: Do I need to have a dramatic story to tell? Can I really be sure I'm saved if I feel like I haven't experienced anything extraordinary? Is there any power in my personal testimony?

Consider Timothy, a young man who had grown up with the Scriptures since childhood, who had the faithful examples of his family, his mother and grandmother. We would probably consider him a basic Christian kid with a boring Christian testimony. As a leader in the church, would he be discouraged because he didn't live through an exciting conversion experience?

Context

In this section of Scripture, Paul is going to give his testimony. His story is spectacular. The context is that Paul has been talking to Timothy about false teachers. He stops to look at his own life, and how Timothy can look to him as a true teacher in the faith. He is not proud, but has a humble confidence in Christ's work in his life. Paul's testimony is that of a true Christian.



1. The Grace of God

The first quality of a true Christian is the grace of God:

*I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the **grace** of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 1:12-14)*

Paul begins his testimony by thanking Jesus for strength and the call to serve him, but he pauses to take a look back at his past. He lists that he used to be a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. He's talking about his life before he met Christ. Paul was Jewish — he had Hebrew ancestry and he was actually of the tribe of Benjamin. He was educated, taught by a teacher named in Gamaliel, according to the strict manner of the Old Testament law. He was zealous for God, and some called him a religious extremist. He was so hardcore that he took pleasure in persecuting Christians. He wanted to put them in prison. To Paul, Christians were blasphemers. When Jesus came and claimed to be the Son of God, this was outrageous. It was insulting. It was incendiary. There was a church leader named Stephen, and Paul was there to stone him. Paul wanted to murder Christians, but God showed him mercy. Paul would have an encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, and his life would be changed. He would see that he acted ignorantly and in unbelief, and he would find faith and love in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul would call this the grace of God. I find it appropriate to center on God's grace and see it as all-encompassing of Paul's personal testimony. Because while mercy means Paul was spared from judgment, the grace of God gives more in terms of being blessed by God. Paul says that God's grace overflows — it was super-abundant grace from God. The false teacher, and the false Christian, knows nothing of this. They are prideful, self-absorbed, and self-righteous. They think they can earn their salvation by works. But this is how Paul perceives his life — he's swimming in a sea of undeserved mercies, overflowing blessings, and super-abundant grace.



Remember

So, will you remember the grace of God? I want to break down what it means to actively remember the grace of God, because when we're angry with someone, or when we've been wronged, or when we've been hurt – we don't think about the past. We think about the present situation. You can remember God's words — how you were dead in your sins but God brought you to life, how the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant serves as an example to us. You can remember God's works — Christ's work on the cross, and the Lord's continual work in your life. And you can remember God's Witness — another name for the Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps us remember that we are children of God and tells us that God's word is true. The grace of God forgives others, even when you've been wronged. The grace of God shows mercy to others, even if you are in the right. The grace of God is loving towards others even though it might hurt. True Christians remember and reflect the grace of God.

2. The Gospel of Salvation

The second quality of a true Christian is the gospel of salvation:

*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.
(1 Timothy 1:15)*

After examining his past, Paul presents to us the gospel. The gospel means the good news, and the good news is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The fact that this is a trustworthy saying and deserving of full acceptance indicates that this is some sort of creed or confession of faith. It's an accurate summary of what Christians believe, and it's filled with so much if you take a second to unpack it. Paul says Christ Jesus instead of Jesus Christ, placing a priority on him being Lord, Messiah, God. He calls the Christ by his name, Jesus, indicating that he is a real man, a real person. Christ Jesus came into the world means that he took the initiative. The author of life entered into the story. And he came to save sinners. This is our condition: We are under condemnation – we are sinners who need to be saved. The true Christian knows this, but the false teachers know this, too. So look at what Paul does — he personalizes it. He says that he is the foremost sinner. I don't think Paul is speaking with some sort of backwards, false humility — because he just confessed that he was previously a persecutor of the church. Paul

knows his plight – he knows himself and he knows his sins. He knows that he cannot save himself. So by confessing his state, and clinging to Christ, he rests in the gospel of salvation.

Rest

So, will you rest in the gospel? Resting in the gospel means to live in the space of knowing you are a sinner and knowing you have a Savior. We don't want to swerve too far into thinking we are sinners and forgetting that we have a Savior. And we also don't want to swerve too far into thinking we have a Savior and forgetting about our sin. I think for most of us, if you already confess to be a Christian, you might find yourself uncomfortable with actually resting in the gospel. Let me tell you a story. I was drinking juice and I spilled it. I'm a messy person and I just made a mess on a rug in the kitchen. I thought that I should do something before I get in trouble. I tried to hide it. I thought about flipping the rug over, but that would make a scene. I tried to clean it using water. I tried using soap. But the stain would not come out of the rug. I started feeling anxious. Finally, I decided to just confess and get help with the rug. The funny thing is that this did not happen to me when I was a child – this happened several weeks ago! It's still hard for me to admit when I've made a mistake and that I need help. When we make messes in our lives, when our sin spills over, we need to find rest in the Gospel. We can try to hide it, we can try to fix it – but the stain will remain. God will not get mad at you. You can go to him and find rest in the Gospel. For sure, we need to repent from our sins – we should definitely grow, learn from our mistakes, and not keep committing the same sins over and over again. But our Scripture today says that you can rest. Knowing you are a sinner, and knowing you have a Savior.



3. The Gifts of Belief and Eternal Life

The third quality of a true Christian are the gifts of belief and eternal life:

*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.** (1 Timothy 1:16)*

Paul has a linked chain here that ties God’s purposes together. God’s mercy to Paul displays God’s patience, providing an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. The example is that like Paul, you too can believe in Jesus and receive eternal life. And that’s why I outlined this section as the gifts of belief and eternal life. Belief and eternal life are tied together, and they are both gifts from God. Paul explains in Ephesians 2:8: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” And Paul writes in Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” So both belief and eternal life are gifts from God. The false teacher, and the false Christian, does not have these gifts from God. The true Christian has a personal faith that transforms his life to live in light of eternity.

Receive

So, will you receive the gifts of belief and eternal life? The word receive means to be given, to get, to accept. But it also means to experience, to encounter, to respond. And it’s this receptive heart that I want to hit on. If you have truly experienced God, it will change your life. If you have truly encountered God, it will change you. You will really respond to him. If you take in the truth, you’ll have a personal faith that transforms the way you live. The book *True Worshipers* by Bob Kauflin is about seeking what matters to God. He argues that true worship doesn’t just take place on the stage with music and singing — but in our hearts and displayed in the way that we live. Those who truly worship God will be transformed to want what God wants. This is especially meaningful to me as a musician, because spirituality can be faked. I can close my eyes, raise my hands, and you might think that I am worshipping God — when in reality, my heart might be far from the Lord. True worship takes place in our hearts and plays out in our lives. Real worship starts in secret, and spreads out. I want to give you some encouragement if you’re not feeling strong in your spiritual life. It’s okay to be honest with God. It’s okay to go to

God with your grief. You can bring your sins and sorrows to the Savior. And when the cares of the world are many, you can find comfort in Christ. The gifts of belief and eternal life are delivered to us daily. Let the reality of the resurrection and our heavenly home hit you every time you sleep and wake up. God gives new mercies every morning. Find forgiveness from the past, receive strength for today, and have hope for tomorrow. Receive the gifts of belief and eternal life.

The Gospel

I want us to zoom out for a bit, and go back to that idea of Paul being an example. There's a thought that we might have glossed over. Paul was used as an example to display Jesus' perfect patience. Perfect patience for what? What was Jesus being patient about? Think about Paul's previous life before Christ. Paul could not see his own sin. When Paul persecuted Christians, Jesus took it *personally*. Jesus equated persecuting Christians with persecuting Christ himself. And Jesus took this *patiently*, waiting for the perfect time to save Paul from his sins. If you are not a Christian yet, God has been incredibly patient with you. It is not too late to turn to him. You are not yet too far gone. As a matter of fact, until Christ comes back again, you can never be too far gone to go back to God:

*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should **reach repentance**. (2 Peter 3:9)*

Come to Christ now. Admit that you are a sinner, believe that Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross for your sins. Confess him as the resurrected Lord over your life. You will be adopted into God's family. Follow him here on earth, and follow him into Heaven. Listen carefully: Do not take God's patience and abuse it. Do not treat it childishly. Don't take God's grace for granted. And if you already claim to be a Christian, don't count out those who have not yet responded. Remember God's grace that was kind and patient towards you. Christ has other sheep to bring in. There is more room in the family of God. Keep sharing the Good News. Pray for others.



Big Idea

Our sermon today taught three qualities of a true Christian. The first quality of a true Christian is the grace of God. So, will you remember the grace of God as you forgive and show mercy to others? The second quality of a true Christian is the gospel of salvation. So, will you rest in the gospel by repenting of your sins and returning to Christ? The third quality of a true Christian are the gifts of belief and eternal life. So, will you receive these gifts by displaying your trust and living out a transformed life?

Here is our big idea for today: The true Christian remembers the grace of God, rests in the gospel of salvation, and receives the gifts of belief and eternal life.

Conclusion

Let's go back to the beginning again for our conclusion. I asked you: Is there any power in your personal testimony? We've all heard powerful stories about people who lived remarkably sinful lives before they came to Christ. My story is boring.

The truth is that you do not need to have a dramatic story to tell. From God's side, every story is stunning. Yes, you can really be sure you're saved if you feel like you haven't experienced anything extraordinary. Salvation is not found in your story, but in God's. And there is no inherent power in your personal testimony. The power comes from proclaiming Christ crucified.

Let's look at the last verse in our passage today:

*To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, **be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.** (1 Timothy 1:17)*

Paul goes from his testimony and moves into worship. He goes from retelling the gospel to rejoicing in the gospel. Paul, the man with possibly the most spectacular testimony, didn't even want the spotlight. Instead, he directs our gaze towards God. Timothy, a young man who had grown up with the Scriptures since childhood, who had the faithful examples of his family, his mother and grandmother, a basic Christian kid with a boring Christian testimony — would be encouraged. It wasn't so much about having a spectacular *story*, but a spectacular *Savior*. It's not about *how* you were saved; it's about *who* saved you. It's not so much about your *sins*, but at that you can become a *son* of God.



Even if you don't think your testimony is particularly special, you can still consider it personally sacred. I'm thankful for both the testimonies of prominence like Paul and the seemingly typical like Timothy. The more I think about it, and after studying this passage, maybe I shouldn't be so focused on power, but on praise. God's goal is not powerful testimonies, but praise from every tribe and tongue. From the foremost sinner and to regular people, God works wonders in everyone — if you have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Salvation for the Sinner

Grace that overflows
From Heaven down to earth
Like rain for seeds that flower
To give us second birth
Patient for our rising
Waiting for the dawn
Like children wake from sleeping
And find their Father's arms
Salvation for the sinner
Redemption for the lost
Like sheep who know their Shepherd
We give to God our hearts

References

The ESV Study Bible by Crossway
The Gospel Coalition Bible Commentary on 1 Timothy by Paul Jeon
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