

Welcome! (1 Timothy 1:15-17)

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*This saying is sure and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost (of whom I am chief KJ). But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1:18, wrote, *the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.* He then continues further in Chapter 2:14, *the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him.* The Bible opens with a picture of the world apart from God because it was in chaos. Then shortly after the completion of God's work of creation in which He brought order out of the chaos, the great problem of humanity surfaced, sin, separation from God. From that point onward, it became a revelation that humanity's greatest need is salvation.

Willful, conscious sin is the root of humanity's difficulty. From the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation, the main thread across the pages of Scripture is the revelation of God's work and that of raising up humankind, saving that which is lost, creating something out of chaos, and saving sinners. The many facts recorded in the Bible are as much facts now as ever because they continue to have the same influence. And they will and do affect us. They will do for us exactly what they accomplished for the apostles and others if we will believe them and receive them. The apostle Paul went to heaven many years ago, but his testimony was not altered by that. A truthful statement is not affected by the lapse of time. He declared that, *Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.* And that is just as true at this moment as it was the very moment he spoke those words.

Here in lies our hope. Here in lies our solution. It is the remedy for the ills of the moment or of a lifetime. We must remember who Paul was. He was human like us. He asked the same questions, *is life really worth living? Is it possible for the law of man and the law of God to be different or in conflict?* Paul asked the questions that belong to all the classes, all the races, all the identities of all the people everywhere. He was considered quite educated in his day. He came from a proper and respectable background. He was well schooled in the lessons of the prophets and in learning the Psalms and the book of Proverbs. By the standards of the world at that time, he was considered to be a high calibre individual. Yet he stands before us as a living witness that Christ came to save sinners, for he declares himself to be the chief of all sinners. How tremendously changed the world we live in today would be if more men and women would permit Christ to work in their hearts as the apostle Paul did when he submitted to the power that was greater than that found in the Sanhedrin.

I invite you to observe first the condition of humanity as Paul speaks of it. He declares they are sinners and that he is the chief of sinners. He was the one who persecuted the church and anyone who publicly admitted that they followed Jesus Christ. Even though he was educated and well respected, Paul who was called, Saul, had given his vote against Stephen. It is without a doubt

that this action haunted Paul as it would any individual who participated to help murder a true child of God. Yet this was only the beginning. Saul was like a wild animal, once having tasted blood, became thirsty and took delight in the slaughter of Christians. He caused great havoc and chaos for the early church, having followers beaten in the synagogue, stoned, made them blaspheme against Jesus and even put to death. Even though Paul at the time of this writing is a Christian, serving Jesus with all his heart, continues to declare that these actions placed him head and shoulders above all other sinners.

You know what is going on in our world today along the same line. Think of those who are guilty of the coarser and grosser sins of life. There is an unprecedented loss of chastity and honesty. Blasphemy and lewd speaking are more and more in evidence. The family home has been severely changed, frequently there isn't a parent at home with the children, so often we hear of children abusing their parents and parents who are afraid of their children. Statistical study suggests that fewer families gather as a family for even one meal a week, and fewer are those who share God's Word or prayer before the meal. There is divisiveness in the body of believers. I believe the instruction of the Bible, God's Word, expressly states that He will by no means hold one guiltless who takes His name in vain. Yet, people are trifling in conversation and conduct with fearful frequency, defying the God of heaven, denying his power, his existence and his dominion over the world and all who live in it.

The Bible, the Spirit of God, the conscience speaks, but many continue to violate liberating standards that are set down in Scripture. Humanity, all men and women are among the chief of sinners when they sin against that which is described as, *the light of the world*, against conscience, and when they deliberately choose the way that is evil.

But, *where is this coming from?* you might ask. *Where or when did things deteriorate, and especially in this generation that we are responsible for?* I believe that this generation took its own step backward in the mid 1950's when the right of life became pleasure first, and this was given the worldly blessing such as in the world of entertainment, such as Sunday night TV with Ed Sullivan. And at the same time the calendar was marked with an "X" when many churches stopped having Sunday evening worship and many youth ministries began to wane. The Christian community continued to falter when stopping opening worship in the schools and the declaration that repeating the Lord's Prayer is offensive: when parents and educators demanded the pastors and lay persons stay out of the classrooms and religious education stopped being part of school instruction. Then there was the approval of laws concerning birth control for children without parental permission including abortion clinics, and the list seems endless. These are not the sins of generations past. These are the sins of my generation and that includes most of you here. And the protest from the church and the worshiping community at best has been mute. It is challenged within many of churches not to speak about these things because it is not popular and does not draw a large crowd. And as we go on, so does our sin. And when we become honest, we must ask, *who is the chief of the sinners? The one who sins and does not know any better or the one who claims God's kingdom in Christ as Saviour, but participates in the sin anyway?*

The story of Saul is one that is the miracle of miracles. He was chosen by sovereign grace to be among the foremost teacher of the Christian faith which he had worked to destroy. I call upon

all of you to pray with deliberation for those who make themselves notorious by their unbelief, scepticism and fidelity. Pray sweetly and effectively for them. We still have available the great artillery of heaven in that we can be effective intercessors. I know of no other way to stem the tide of increasing wickedness, to turn back the infidelity, unbelief and apostasy of the hour. Education and an affluent society and all the other things that are emphasized today will never do. I believe in the accounting of the prophets that is to come, but I also believe that there is time to prepare for the Kingdom.

When speaking of the human condition, we must hasten to remember the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ. You will recall when He was dying on the cross, He took with him one of the sinners, the dying thief who entered into the Kingdom with Christ that very hour. Soon after we see the great apostle Paul who declared that he was the chief of sinners, brought to his knees saying in Acts 9:6, *Lord, what will you have me do?* He was on fire for Christ. He wanted to turn his life over to Jesus. Surely as the Word declares, *He is rich in mercy, yet He is great in power, but his greatness is revealed in his grace.* Ephesians 1:7, *In whole we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.*

It makes no difference who it is, the atrocious criminal, the one who feels themselves to be as black as Satan, or even the one who has lived a good life outwardly, God delights to show forth his love, his forgiveness, his transforming power by saving all who will come unto him. In our lesson Paul says the Lord saved him, *for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.* (1 Timothy 1:60).

Paul is an illustration of what God can do. He can meet your need. Respective of who you are, the long-suffering, the forgiveness, the transforming power of the Lord Jesus can be repeated in your life. I invite you to honestly and sincerely read your Bible, look upon Jesus Christ in his life, his death upon the cross, his resurrection, and his present intercession for your soul. You can become like the apostle Paul in obtaining the glorious salvation which is in Jesus Christ. I offer to you the beautiful words of Hebrews 7:25, *He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.* Our Lord offers salvation for sinners. Hear his voice as he says to you, *welcome home.* Amen