

Chief of Sinners



Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope; Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. 1 Timothy 1:1-2, 15b.

I finally found a mistake in the Bible. Just as the infallibility of the Scriptures was becoming increasingly well known to me-- I found something wrong. I found that the great Apostle, Paul, bestowed on himself the title of Chief of Sinners. That cannot be true for I am chief of sinners!

WHAT DID PAUL MEAN? WHAT DO I MEAN?

From additional Scripture reading, we see that Paul is speaking of times prior to his finding the grace of our LORD:

According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. 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. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:11-17.

Paul had been an ignorant sinner. When he came to the Truth, he found mercy through Christ. That is what Paul meant.

How about me? Why am I chief of sinners? How dare I compare myself with Paul?

One day I was conversing with a pastor who at the time did not know me well. I was seeking guidance about a matter of Christian conduct. In the process of the conversation I told him that I was the worst sinner that had ever darkened his church's door. He of course had no idea if I meant I was a bank robber, murderer, drug dealer, or worse. My sin: I was a believer, a Christian, a creature made new in Christ, but one who was as though he were dead.

Would you say that a godless life is expected of the ungodly? Is it so strange for someone such as Paul, who had spoken against Christ, to be chief of sinners? A Christian on the other hand, who knows the grace of God and Salvation through Jesus Christ, has no excuse to live a godless life. I had no excuse.

MY DAYS IN SIN

I was so lucky to be born into a family with a Christian mother and father. The knowledge of salvation and the ways of God were fed to me from a silver spoon. I was a bright boy who absorbed what I heard at Sunday school, church, youth programs, Sunday evening worship, Wednesday prayer meetings, special programs, and evening devotions. By the day I left for college I had a sound Christian background and love for my Savior.

By the time I graduated from college, I didn't go to church much. In fact, through my twenties, thirties, and forties, I did nothing for God. I still had head knowledge, I still believed, and- I don't know if this makes sense- did love the LORD. I was not witnessing to others about things of the LORD, I did not shine by example, and I showed nothing of the hope that was in me. Can anything be worse? Can one sin more than that?

PRAYER AND PERSEVERANCE

My parents never lost their faith. They are the ones that dedicated me to the LORD as a child. They prayed for me daily all my life, including the years of my twenties, thirties, and forties. Dad nurtured my interest in the scientific and spoke with me for years about the evidence supporting biblical creation.¹ I suppose everyone has his or her "thing," and this interested me. I still did believe the ways of the LORD, after all.

Continued prayer and effort on behalf of my parents resulted in an eventual change. Something "clicked" in my head that said, "Hey, God made everything, He set the rules, the rules haven't changed- this is exciting. I have to tell everybody!"

I am now doing what I should have been doing 30 years ago. I don't know if witnessing is supposed to be fun, but it really is, in an exciting way. I am praying daily for opportunities, and God is responding. I ask for guidance as I witness, and God is responding to that, too.

I put God on a shelf. He patiently waited. Oh, how much I missed out on the past 30 years!

LESSONS FROM PAUL TO TIMOTHY

I have had subsequent conversations with the pastor I mentioned previously. I explained to him that when I told him I was the worst sinner to darken his church's door, I meant that I was a Christian doing nothing for God. I don't know how there can be worse sin. The pastor mentioned Paul's words from 1 Timothy. I figure I am worse than Paul. At least his greatest sins were as a non-believer.

Believer, I hope you don't sink as far as I had sunk. It is so wonderful to live for Him. Read Paul's letters to Timothy and enjoy your walk with God.

From Paul: Here are my directions: Pray much for others; plead for God's mercy upon them; give thanks for all he is going to do for them. 1 Timothy 2:1 LVB.

It is a true saying that if a man wants to be a pastor he has a good ambition. For a pastor must be a good man whose life cannot be spoken against. He must have only one wife, and he must be hard working and thoughtful, orderly, and full of good deeds. He must enjoy having guests in his home, and must be a good Bible teacher. 1 Timothy 3:1-2 LVB.

Be sure to use the abilities God has given you through his prophets when the elders of the church laid their hands upon your head. Put these abilities to work; throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone may notice your improvement and progress. Keep a close watch on all you do and think. Stay true to what is right and God will bless you and use you to help others. 1 Timothy 4:14-16 LVB.

This being so, I want to remind you to stir into flame the strength and boldness that is in you, that entered into you when I laid my hands upon your head and blessed you. For the Holy Spirit, God's gift,

does not want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, and to love them and enjoy being with them. If you will stir up this inner power, you will never be afraid to tell others about our Lord, or to let them know that I am your friend even though I am here in jail for Christ's sake. You will be ready to suffer with me for the Lord, for he will give you strength in suffering. 2 Tim. 1:6-8 LVB.

Be strong with the strength Christ Jesus gives you. For you must teach others those things you and many others have heard me speak about. Teach these great truths to trustworthy men who will, in turn, pass them on to others. Work hard so God can say to you, ``Well done.`` Be a good workman, one who does not need to be ashamed when God examines your work. Know what his Word says and means. 2 Timothy 2:1-2, 15 LVB.

You may as well know this too that in the last days it is going to be very difficult to be a Christian. For people will love only themselves and their money; they will be proud and boastful, sneering at God, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful to them, and thoroughly bad. 2 Timothy 3:1-2 LVB.

The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. It is God's way of making us well prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

I solemnly urge you before God and before Christ Jesus--who will some day judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom-- to preach the Word of God urgently at all times, whenever you get the chance, in season and out, when it is convenient and when it is not. Correct and rebuke your people when they need it, encourage them to do right, and all the time be feeding them patiently with God's Word. May the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Farewell, Paul. 2 Timothy 4:1-2, 22 LVB.

If you do not have a relationship with Paul's LORD, and want to be saved from your sins (no matter how bad), pray: "Dear Father in Heaven, I know I am a sinner. I am truly sorry for my sins. I repent and ask that you will forgive me. I accept Jesus as my Savior. From this day forward I will strive to live for Him. Dear LORD Jesus, please come into my heart. Amen."

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¹For information on biblical creation: www.AnswersInGenesis.org