

First Timothy: The Household of God

Undeserving Sinners United and Sustained by Unfathomable Mercy

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UNDESERVING SINNERS UNITED AND SUSTAINED BY UNFATHOMABLE MERCY 1 Timothy 1:3-20

If you have His Word, and I hope you do, I invite you to open with me to 1 Timothy 1 and go ahead and keep your worship guide out and turn over to the page that has notes on it. It will lead us through our time together in the Word tonight. I've got a lot of ground to cover, and I mentioned last week, I want to honor your time. So...especially those who are serving during this worship gathering; so, we're going to dive right in to the top.

Two Reminders from Last Week We want our worship to be God-centered.

I know that we had pretty full crowds last week, but I know that some of you were still out of town, not yet adjusted back totally to the routine that comes with school around here. So, for those of you who may have missed last week, I want to give you a couple reminders from last Sunday as they relate to 1 Timothy, which we started looking at last week, but also as they relate to some of the transitions and adjustments in our worship gatherings that you see in your worship guide.

Last week, we talked about two things. One, we talked about how we want our worship to be God-centered; we want to be intentional about glorifying God. When we gather together to meet with Him, we want every word, every thing we do to be intentionally aimed toward that end. So, that's the only ultimate, all-consuming motivation behind why we're doing some things different in our worship gathering, because we want to be even more God-centered.

Essential components of our worship...

We talked last week about essential components in our worship that I've got listed there that you've seen already, first and foremost, being adoration. The reality that when we gather together, the supreme reason for us gathering together is to express love to God, delight in God, all-satisfying desire for God, adoring Him, praising Him. That we want the first and greatest commandment...to love God with all your heart and soul and mind...we want that to be central in what we do when we gather together as the assembly of His people.

Adoration then leads us to confession. When we see His greatness, and we confess our need for Him, Scripture calls us, when we gather together as the body, to corporate confession of our sin before God in prayer, our need for Him, and then to be reminded of His grace and His mercy toward us, what we're calling Scriptural assurance of pardon that comes from the gospel, leading us to confess salvation and baptism. We had about four people baptized this morning. One of them we wanted to share the testimony from Kai and just the picture of God's grace in his life that was just a unique picture this morning, along with three others

who were baptized. Confessing our sin and prayer, our salvation in baptism which, let me encourage you if you are a follower of Christ and you have not been baptized, I encourage you to be baptized as soon as possible.

So, all of that then leading to instruction where we hear God's Word spoken. I pray God's Word is spoken clearly through myself or any other pastor or elder who would teach during this time; that this time right now in our worship gathering, would never be filled with trite thoughts from man, but always with eternal truth from God. That then leads us to the table, communion, where we gather with one another and as the body of Christ, remind ourselves that we have identified with Christ in His life and His death and His resurrection, that we have life in His death. We remind ourselves of that every single week when we gather together.

Then, leading us to intercession where we come before God on behalf of each other before we scatter from this place to express our dependence on Him, our desperation for Him, our desire for His glory to be made known in our lives, to pray for each other. That's what intercession is, to pray for each other, for needs in this city, for needs around the world, to have time in our worship gathering for that, then, prepares us to scatter to fulfill the Great Commission. We want to make disciples of all nations. We gather together for worship as God's people, and then we scatter apart because we want God's worship known among all peoples.

Central characteristics of our worship...

So, those are essential elements in our worship that we walked through last week, and we talked about how central in all of those things are these four facets: Divine revelation. We want the Word of God to saturate and permeate and prompt everything we do in our worship. The Spirit guides our worship through His Word. We want the Word, like it has tonight, to prompt us to praise in Psalm 145. We want the Word to lead us in confession. We want the Word to remind us of God's grace toward us. We want teaching, preaching to be filled with God's Word; praying to be filled with God's Word. Worship, we talked about last week, is a rhythm of revelation and response. God reveals Himself, and we respond with our lives. So, divine revelation.

Then, community participation. Us praying and singing together. The reality is that no believer in this room is intended to be a spectator in worship; that every believer in this room is intended to be active in worship. That we are a community gathered together, led even not just by one person or a couple of people where all the attention is, but by a multiplicity of people. That's why we're involving different elders and pastors and deacons in helping lead us in worship in these different ways of community participation.

Next, reverent affection. That this...every week for this time at 6:00, that this would be an assembly of people and when we gather together you could sense...there's a palpable sense...of reverence and awe for the God whom we gather to meet with in worship. That nothing about what happens at 6:00 on Sunday night in this room would be routine or rote because we all will be filled with the reverent awe before God. A people who are eager to express affection before God; that it would be evident on our faces and our hands and our demeanor and our singing and our shouting and our praying and our hearing from God; that there's a reverent affection that just infiltrates all that we do.

All of that leading to just dedicated attention to the praise of God, that we would come early and come expectant and come eager, more eager than we would for a football game, for example. There's something great that we gather together for, something eternal that we gather together for every single Sunday that is so distinct and different from everything else

we do all week long. When we, as the people of God, join with the heavenly assembly and saints throughout all the ages to give glory and honor and praise to the God who is a consuming fire and merciful Savior. To listen to His Word; that's an awesome thing that we do week by week by week.

That's just a summary of what we talked about a good bit last week. So, let me encourage you if you want to dive in deeper, want to know a little bit more behind why we're making some adjustments in our worship gathering...I don't usually recommend my sermons; I think they're good sleeping material, but if you want a little more background on why we're doing some of these adjustments, then you might want to listen to last week where we unpacked all of those things that I just ran through.

We want our community to be gospel-formed.

So, we talked last week about, one, we want our worship to be God-centered. Then, second, we want our community to be gospel-formed, which really leads us into the book of 1 Timothy. This letter from Paul, a missionary, to Timothy, a young pastor of a struggling church. The whole point of this letter is to tell Timothy and the church at Ephesus how the gospel forms the church. In fact, you go to 1 Timothy 3:15, and I encouraged people to underline it last week. If it's not underlined in your Bible, let me encourage you to underline it. This kind of the focus statement of the entire book. This is why Paul writes this letter. 1 Timothy 3:15, he says: *"I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay [here it is], you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."*

The whole point of the book is to show how the church ought to behave, how the gospel transforms the church's behavior. If you were to ask the question, "What is the church really even supposed to look like? What is the church supposed to look like?" If you were to ask that question, one of the clearest answers in all of the Bible to find an answer to that question, would be the book of 1 Timothy. So, what I want us to do is I want us to read the first chapter tonight. We looked at the first two verses last week so we're going to read those again, and then just continue on in the rest of this chapter. I want you to see what Paul decided to start off with. This letter to Timothy, a young pastor of a struggling church facing all kinds of different challenges, there are all kinds of things that Paul could have started out with, but I want you to see what was at the top of his list; what was first and foremost on his mind and his heart when he was writing a letter to the young pastor of a struggling church. He writes this, verse one:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

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

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Two Realities for This Week

This is huge. What Paul just said to start off this letter is huge. Not just for the church at Ephesus 2,000 years ago, but what he just said is huge for The Church at Brook Hills tonight. I want to show you two realities for this week, particularly in light of some things going on in our faith family that this chapter addresses.

So, the first reality pertains to these adjustments in our worship gathering. So, I want you to think about something with me. Over the last week, I've heard just many, many different positive things, very encouraging things, about some of the adjustments we're making in our worship gathering. It's been really encouraging to hear people responding to even greater intentionality in our worship. So, I've been very, very encouraged.

At the same time, I know, as I've been thinking about it, that in our church culture over the last 20 or 30 years, as we've been making some adjustments in our worship gatherings, I've been reminded that in our church culture over the last 20 or 30 years, there have been mega battles and mega wars fought in different churches over worship style and songs and worship, right? I'm guessing some of you have seen that. So, if you are new to the church or newly a Christian, just forgive us while we reminisce about some things that have not gone so well in the church over the last 20, 30 years.

There have been churches that have split over worship style. There have been churches that have divided over worship style. So, you've got this service with this worship style, and this service with this worship style, and this service with this worship style. You've got different

groups in the church that are divided over their preferences in worship style, and it's been interesting to see...saddening to see...the destructive affect of debates about worship style and worship songs on the unity of the church. I think one of the main reasons why this has been so destructive...I'm not talking Brook Hills here; I'm talking just bigger picture...why this has been destructive is because over that 20, 30 year span in the church, we began looking to worship styles and worship songs to do what only the gospel is intended to do.

**What unites us in the church is not style of worship or songs in worship;
what unites us in the church is salvation through the gospel.**

This is reality number one, key reality. What unites us in the church is not style of worship or songs in worship; what unites us in the church is salvation through the gospel. Christ unites His people, not songs or styles. Those things are different among different people. Those things divide, but it's salvation together in Christ through the gospel that unites the church. That's what Paul, in 1 Timothy 1, is saying. So, he's not addressing worship style or worship songs here, but he is addressing a church that is facing potential deception and division, and so what he says is we need to start with what matters most and what matters most is the gospel.

The takeaway, as I was thinking about that this week...and again, this is not, this is no...please don't hear this like a reaction that there's just been tons of negative e-mails, anything like that. Like I said, it's been encouraging, but I've just been reminded that for 2,000 years, ever since the first century, the adversary has been at work in the church trying to distract and divide according to the things that don't matter most and getting the focus off that which does matter most.

So, I want to simply encourage us tonight. Now, five years from now, ten years from now, if the Lord hasn't come back and any of us are still here 100 years from now, never to look to styles, songs, preferences, tastes. "I like this; I don't like that." Never to look to those things to be things that unite, but to always look to the gospel as that which unites. Because when we, in the church as a whole, when we get focused on styles and songs and preferences and tastes, "I like this or I don't like that," the danger is we begin to, especially in worship, begin to undercut the very gospel that unites us together in worship, for worship. So, that's first truth that I want to just make sure is out there for us for a long time to come. What's most important, what matters most, is the gospel. That leads then to the second reality, which is similar to it.

The last couple of weeks have been challenging in some ways for our faith family. On a personal level, the last couple of weeks have been challenging for me. Two weeks ago our Next Generation Disciple-Making Pastor, Scott, resigned to go back to Atlanta to carry out ministry there. Scott's been responsible for leading an area of our church where we have not done well in the past, particularly among students and teenagers. I've had time with parents, even over the last week, where they've expressed just deep hurt over how we've not done well in that area. Though I am grateful for and confident in leaders who are still here in that area, it was tough news to hear the pastor who oversees this important area of our church is leaving. Then, if you didn't get here early tonight, you may have missed the news that Jim Watkins, our worship pastor, is also resigning to focus on things in his personal relationship with Christ and his family. Jim's just a great friend to me and a great leader in this body over the last five years that I've been here and really, for a long time before that in this church.

Now, it's not all been discouraging news. We've had encouraging news in the middle with Dennis Blythe, who is going to serve as our Executive Pastor. He's getting settled with his family here in Birmingham, so I'm very thankful for him and looking forward to introducing him to you, but I look at a whirlwind when it comes to some key leaders in our church over the past couple of weeks, and I am so thankful that God has led us to 1 Timothy at this time. A letter, written to a struggling church, meaning not falling apart but facing difficulties and challenges, a letter written to a struggling church with a young pastor. Is that not the kindness of God?

**What sustains us in the church is not a certain pastor or a certain program;
what sustains us as the church is perseverance in the gospel.**

Months ago, I was praying, thinking through where do we need to be in August, and the Lord would lead us to 1 Timothy, not knowing any of this stuff that would happen. Not just to 1 Timothy, but this week to 1 Timothy 1 to remind us in one sense, yes, in our worship gatherings. Remember, this is what is most important, the gospel, that unites us, but then even further than that, to remind us of a second reality that what sustains us as the church is not a certain pastor or a certain program; what sustains us as the church is perseverance in the gospel. To know tonight, Church at Brook Hills, pastors will come and pastors will go. Programs will thrive and programs will falter, and there's hurt and there's struggle that comes with all that, but above and beyond all of these things, the only necessary thing to sustain the church is perseverance in the gospel, and that's Paul's whole point in this first chapter.

He's saying, "Timothy, you're a young pastor. Ephesus, you have challenges all around you as a church. David, you're a young pastor. Church at Brook Hills, you have challenges all around you as a church." The first thing you need to hear over and above everything else is this: persevere in the gospel, and he says it in a few different ways. Let me show it to you.

We guard the gospel.

First, he says guard the gospel. Paul says we must guard the gospel. This is fascinating! Of all the things that Paul might have started to address at the very top of this letter...I mean, this is a city...Ephesus is filled with pagan immorality and idolatry everywhere. Pressure is everywhere outside the church. Then, there are different things in the church. The need for more prayer...more prayer in the church. Focusing on some problems with leaders in the church, and then, how to care for one another in the church and how to take better care of each other. How to address materialism in our lives in the church.

There's all kinds of things that we're going to see Paul address in this letter, but the first thing he says, amidst all the things he could have addressed, the first thing he says is verse three: make sure people aren't teaching different doctrine. He says, "*Remain at Ephesus so you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.*" That was it; Paul said, first and foremost, this is what's most important. Make sure the gospel is right in the church, because if you lose here, you lose everything. You win here, it will affect everything. So, make sure you've got the gospel right.

The problem was there were people, elders even, in the church who were leading him away from the gospel. So, Paul begins to talk about how not to use God's law. What I want to show you is what he points out there, and how that applies to us today; how not to use God's law, how not to use God's Word. First, Paul says we must not add to the law's demands. When Paul says in verse four that there were teachers who were devoting themselves to myths and endless genealogies, he's talking about how some people were

taking extra-biblical writings, meaning writings in addition to the Old Testament...taking genealogies, for example, in the Old Testament and coming up with stories about different people in those genealogies in addition to what Scripture had and, in the process, coming up with the things that the church needed to be doing, what Christians needed to be doing, that were based on extra-biblical writings, adding to the law's demands.

We'll see in 1 Timothy 4 that some of these teachers were forbidding people to marry, saying you should not marry. Then, others were saying you should not eat certain foods that God had never said do not eat. So, they were adding to the law's demands on one hand, and then on another hand, maybe even more serious, Paul says we must not think that the law saves, because these teachers, along with others in the first century, were teaching that, in obeying the law, whether it's Old Testament or extra laws, that you could earn the favor of God. Don't miss this brothers and sisters. This has been going on since the first century, and it persists in the twenty-first century, the idea that man's work can earn God's favor.

It was threatening the church, the idea that in doing certain things, following certain rules, obeying certain laws, you can be made right with God and the affect of all of it? This was producing arrogance and ignorance among those who teach. That's what verse seven says. They were *"desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they were saying or the things about which they make confident assertions."*

They're making confident assertions about things they don't understand. That's a dangerous combination, arrogance and ignorance. All of that was leading to confusion and deception among those who hear. Confusion...Paul talks about speculation and vain discussion, meaningless conversation, and ultimately deception. A bunch of people who were thinking that whether in following Old Testament law or these extra laws, that they were earning favor before God, that in doing those things that they might be saved. That's deception.

Now, it's important for us to realize that there is no one, that I know of, who is teaching that you need to...that you don't need to marry, or you don't eat certain foods. Although, as a side note, we have had people over the last five years who have been teaching things very similar to that in the church. We, as elders, have addressed those with the seriousness that they require, but it may not look exactly like this. It may even not be as outright as this, but I do want us to realize, and I want us to be careful, yes, as members of this church, but maybe even more importantly, for everybody who is in any teaching role in this church, there is a constant temptation for teachers in the church to begin to add to God's law, saying, "So, you need to do this and this and this and this." Or begin to imply that in doing certain things, you earn the favor of God. We must guard against that, avoid that at all costs.

Well how do we use God's law then? Well, let me show you. The purpose of God's law is all over Scripture...three-fold and mainly in Paul. First, God's law is intended to show us God's restraint of sin. What I mean by that is God's law helps us to recognize the boundaries between good and evil so that we might avoid evil. You think about it. This is a case about any law.

You think about speed limit. Speed limit signs are there, why? Because there's reckless drivers on the road, and they need to be restrained. That's what a speed limit law is there for, to restrain sin, to say, "Okay, you go over this line, this speed, you're driving dangerously." So, in a very real sense, the law is written for lawbreakers. That's exactly what Paul said in verse eight and nine. He says we use the law lawfully, knowing that *"the law is not laid down for the just [in verse nine], but for the lawless and disobedient, for the*

ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane." He goes on to list all of these different, specific sins, which is interesting. If you look deeply in there, what you realize is he just recounts how we break the Ten Commandments. He talks about injuring fathers and mothers, murdering, sexual immorality, lying. So, what the law does is it identifies sin. It helps us to understand what is sin.

Paul says in Romans 7: *"I would not know what coveting was unless the law had said do not covet."* Once the law said that, I realized what coveting was. So, the law is good; the law of God is good in the sense that God uses it to restrain us from evil. The problem is, though, we continually disobey the law. The law draws the line, but we cross it, don't we?

We're like my kids. The other day, one of them finds a coin on the ground, so he picks it up. He's excited that he found a coin, and he's kind of playing with it. All of a sudden, I see the coin heading toward his mouth, and so I said, "Buddy, no. You don't put the coin in your mouth for a lot of different reasons. We don't put coins in our mouth." So law...law laid down; evil restrained. Evil restrained for a moment. So, two minutes later, "Where's the coin?" He's sucking on it in his mouth. Law laid down; law broken. That's us. That's us. What the law does is the law says, "Here's the line." We say, "Yes, here's the line." So, in a sense, it restrains us but then that's a problem. It's a problem deep within our heart; we disobey the law. All of us, we disobey the law. We sin, which then leads us to the second purpose of God's law, to show God's condemnation of the sinner.

So, here's the deal. Now, when we sin, the law becomes a testimony against us. The law shows us how we have disobeyed. We've not just disobeyed dad who said, "Don't put a coin in your mouth." We've disobeyed an infinitely, holy, righteous Judge who is set to judge our sin perfectly. The law makes it clear that we are guilty before this God. That's hugely important in our salvation, right? This is where the law leads us to Christ because the law leads us to realize that we are guilty before God. We have broken His law. We have dishonored Him. We have rebelled against Him. That's the state of all of our hearts. We are lawbreakers. The law leads us to see that.

At the same time, the law leads us to see Christ is the supreme law keeper. He has perfectly kept the law. We realize we are guilty before a holy God, deserving His condemnation forever and ever and ever. Christ is righteous before God, perfectly accepted before Him forever and ever and ever. So, if we have any hope of being right with God, who do we need? We need Christ. So, the law doesn't save us, the law condemns us and in the process, it leads us to salvation in Christ. Law doesn't save; Christ saves.

Martin Luther said, "The law is a hammer that crushes the self-righteousness of human beings. It shows them their sin, so by the recognition of their sin, they may be humbled, frightened and worn down and so may long for grace, which they find in Christ. The law is our school master to bring us to Christ." That's what happens when we're saved. That's the gospel. We're lawbreakers; He's the law keeper. We need a law keeper to stand on our behalf. It's what He does, and then, once we're hidden in Christ, identified with Him, followers of His, then the law shows us, third, God's will for the saved.

We want to honor Christ as followers of His, so what do we do now? Well, God's law shows us what to do. As we rest in the righteousness of Christ, we're possessed by the Spirit of Christ; we're compelled by the grace of Christ. He leads us from the inside out to walk in His will, and when that happens, this produces responsibility among those who teach. In verse four, Paul talks about stewardship from God, responsibility to guard this gospel. The right preaching of this law leading to the gospel produces love among those who hear. I love verse five: *"The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good*

conscious and a sincere faith." That's what we want. We don't ever want to be a people who are just following a list of rules because it's our duty and our obligation, because that's what we're supposed to do, what we need to do to save our skin for eternity. That is not Christianity.

Instead, the law has led us to see our guilt before God, and the law leads us to see the righteousness of Christ. As we are hiding in Him, resting in Him, the law, instead of becoming a duty, becomes a delight. We walk in Him in obedience to His will, not because we have to, but because we want to, because we've been changed from the inside out.

So, here's the deal. To every person within the sound of my voice, whether you come from a Muslim background, or a Hindu background, or a Jewish background, or a Baptist background, or a Methodist background, a Presbyterian background or a Catholic background, Church of Christ background, whatever your background, atheistic background, know this: there is ingrained in every one of our hearts the law of God. Even if you've never read the Word of God, His law is written on our hearts. We know the difference between good and evil because God has put that there, and we have all transgressed that. We have all sinned against God and there is, at the foundation of every major religion in the world, and it infuses...unfortunately infuses...so much of Christianity in so many ways that says it's the idea that human achievement can make you right before God.

What I want to urge you with everything in me is don't buy it, because salvation cannot come by human achievement. Salvation can only come by divine accomplishment. We cannot earn the favor of God with our work. We need Him to work for us, to be the law keeper where we can't. That's the whole essence of the gospel. You and I have broken the law; He's kept the law. As the perfect law keeper, He has died the death we deserve to die in our sin. He has risen from the grave in victory over sin and death and as a result, when we unite our life in Him, we are reconciled to God, made right with Him forever and ever in Christ. That's the gospel, and so tonight, if you have never trusted in Christ as the law keeper on your behalf, I encourage and urge you to trust in Christ. Then, church, know that for 2,000 years, the adversary has been working in the hearts and minds of Christians in the church to try to pull them away from this glorious gospel. Don't let it happen; guard this gospel with your life.

We celebrate the gospel.

Then, that leads to the second; guard the gospel, then celebrate the gospel. So Paul, in verses 12 through 17...next paragraph...he just erupts into personal testimony and just triumphant praise. In the middle of it is one of the most clear, concise, potent pictures of the gospel in all of the Bible. Verse 15, you might underline it. "*The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance* that [here it is, nine words...nine words that are just pregnant with meaning], *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...*"

That's the gospel. "*Christ Jesus just came into the world to save sinners.*" Paul adds, "*Of whom I am foremost.*" This is the gospel. You think about what is summed up in that statement: "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*" This gospel is incarnational, yet undeniable. You say what does that mean? Those are big words.

What is incarnational, yet undeniable? Christ Jesus...hear it...He came into the world not ultimately born; ultimately, He came because He already existed beforehand. The pre-existent, eternal Son of God, second person of the Trinity, there before the foundation of the world. He committed the ultimate act of condescending grace, and He came into the world, put on a robe of human flesh and was born in a barn in Bethlehem as a baby. That's incarnation. He took on a robe of human flesh to live the life, to keep the law on our behalf,

to live the life we could not live, and then, just as we talked about, He died the death we deserved to die. He paid the price for lawbreakers in His death, and then He rose, conquering the grave; the enemy that we could not conquer, sin and death. In that, He made a way for sinners to be saved, and there is no greater wonder in all of history than that.

Paul says, you write this down. It's true, "*trustworthy of deserving full acceptance.*" For the last 2,000 years, that truth has persisted and has been proclaimed to generation after generation after generation. This is no myth; this is no endless genealogy; this is no speculation. This is reality. He came, He died, He rose again to save sinners...incarnational, undeniable, universal, yet personal. He came to save sinners, universal sinners, but which ones? All sinners, all sinners who would accept this reality fully. Paul says, "I am at the top of that list of sinners."

Now, you think about that. That leads Paul to celebrate the grace of God. Paul says, "The grace of God is unconditional." You work your way back up from verse 15, and you see in verse 13, Paul talks about how he used to be a blasphemer, persecutor, insolent, violent opponent of Christ and the church. Do you remember that the guy who is writing these words was the guy who was trying, at one point, to wipe the church off the map? The guy who is writing these words was overseeing the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. He is the one who is organized and overseeing a bunch of men pelting Stephen with stones until he can breathe no more. Then, when the church scatters in fear, it's Paul who is running after them, arresting as many as he can; imprisoning as many as he can; killing as many as he can. Paul is on his way to Damascus to kill Christians when Christ comes to him and transforms his heart and mind. If there was anybody who did not deserve the love of God and salvation, it was Paul. Until we realize there was nothing, nothing in Paul to draw God to Him and salvation. Paul's salvation originated one hundred percent in God, and the same thing is true for you and for me.

Don't buy the self-esteem jargon of misguided Christianity thinking that in doing certain things, we have earned the favor of God. There is nothing in you that drew God to you. There is no condition you or I have met to earn His grace. It's grace because it's unmerited and unconditional. Your salvation is based solely upon the sovereign grace of God. It's unconditional grace and purposeful grace.

Now, in Paul, it certainly changed his life, but look deeper. I want you to look at verse 16; this is great. "Why were you saved, Paul, above all people? Why were you saved?" Paul says, "*I received mercy for this reason, that in me [here's why I received mercy] that in me, as the foremost of sinners, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.*" The purpose of God's grace toward Paul was to demonstrate God's patience toward you.

Did you catch that? The purpose of God's grace toward Paul was to demonstrate God's patience to you, every person in this room. So, if you're here, and you're not a Christian, and you've ever thought, or maybe even thinking at this moment, "God could not...God would not save me. I've fought against Him, opposed Him, rebelled against Him, every facet of my life, and I've enjoyed it. I've wanted nothing to do with Him. God would not save me." Know this: two thousand years ago, God took the chief persecutor of the church and turned him in to the chief missionary in the church, so that 2,000 years later, on this night, you might hear this news. You are not beyond the mercy of God. The reach of His grace is far wider and farther than the depth of your sin. Trust Him; receive His grace, His mercy. Realize God's patience toward you waiting...no matter who you are or what you have

done...these words are worthy of full acceptance. *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,"* even those who think they are the worst.

Then, God's grace leads to God's praise. Paul just is overwhelmed, you see in verse 17, *"To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever, Amen."* So be that, the glory of God is royal and eternal. He is King of the ages, immortal. He never grows tired or weary. He never changes. Decay and death cannot touch Him. He's the King on the throne forever and ever and ever and ever. Royal and eternal, and He's invisible and incomparable. God is beyond the limits of what we can see or imagine and no one, absolutely no one, compares with Him. He's the only God to whom all glory and honor are due forever and ever and ever. So be it.

This is key, Church at Brook Hills. We will go through good times, and we will go through difficult times, but the head of this church, Christ, our God, our Savior, our King, will ever be on His throne, and He will never let His church fail. Never. We may go through ups, and we may go through downs, but our God on high is sovereignly and supremely committed to guiding, leading, protecting, purifying, providing for and ultimately preserving His church forever and ever and ever. That's a rock solid guarantee.

We fight for the gospel.

In light of that, Paul's final exhortation of Timothy is fight for the gospel. We guard the gospel, we celebrate the gospel, and we fight for the gospel. We don't have a lot of time here, but verses 18, 19 and 20, Paul says, *"Wage the good warfare..."* at the end of verse 18. He brings in these two people, Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom we know. We don't know all the details about them, but we know they were teachers in the church at Ephesus, probably, most believe, elders in the church at Ephesus, who had wandered away from the gospel. They began teaching false doctrine. So, Paul says to Timothy, who is an elder-pastor in the church, he says, "You see how they've wandered away. You need to fight for the gospel. Wage war in your own heart, so that you don't do the same."

This is huge for us. It's absolutely huge for every member of this church, every teacher your pastor, elder in this church, all of us. By God's grace, I'm grateful to say there's no pastor I know of...elder in this church...who has wandered away from the teaching of this gospel, but mark it down: no one, including myself, no one is immune to the temptation to wander from this gospel. No elder, no pastor, no deacon, no teacher, no small-group leader, no member is immune from this temptation. So, we must all fight for the gospel in our lives.

Once you see, brothers and sisters, that we are in a war, everyone of us, in our lives, in our marriages, in our families, at work, at school, on campuses, our homes...we're in a war, a battle raging around us, spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms active and warring against your soul, enticing deception, inciting division...the devil and all minions of hell do not want the gospel to resound in and through your life and your marriage and your family and your school, at your work. This battle will look different in each one of our lives, but don't be caught off guard. You're in a war, so fight the good fight. *"Hold on to your faith and a good conscience,"* verse 19. Hold on to the gospel.

One friend of mine once said there's just a little legalist hiding in every single one of us, so fight! Fight the idea on a daily basis that in doing certain things, you are earning favor before God. Rest in the righteousness of Christ. Enjoy, delight in His righteousness and walk in His will, not because it's duty, but because it's desire and delight. In order to do that, there's a battle. Some people think, "Well, I've become a Christian; I'll just coast it out until everything is smooth." This will be a battle. This is the first of multiple times in this book where we'll see Paul say you're in a fight; you're in a battle.

So, fight for this gospel in our lives, and then...then he talks about Hymenaeus and Alexander who have been "handed over to Satan." Based on what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5, as well as what Jesus teaches in Matthew 18, that's almost certainly a reference to the fact that these two men had been excommunicated from the church; cast out of the church. That's a picture of the reality that these men were clearly separated from Christ with the goal that these men would come to Christ.

So, Paul says, "Timothy, that was extreme measure taken because these men were teaching false doctrine, but this gospel is of supreme importance in the church and sometimes there are extreme measures that you need to take to make sure you fight for this gospel, not just in your life, but in the church." So, we fight for the gospel in the church. Whatever we do, we hold onto the gospel because it's the only thing that unites us, and it's the only thing that will sustain us in difficult days.

That leads us to this table, to the reality that what unites us together as a church and what enables us to persevere in difficulties and challenges in each of our lives and in difficulties and challenges that we face in the church, what enables us to persevere is the reality that Christ has given His body and shed His blood. We, through grace alone, by faith alone have been made right with God. Therefore, when difficulties and challenges come, we have nothing to fear because we are hidden with Christ in His life, His death and His resurrection. This is what is all-important, more than anything else; this is most important.

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