

1 Timothy 1:12-20 — Jesus Changes Lives.

February 12, 2017

Good morning. Welcome to CrossWinds. We are in the third week of our study of the book of 1 Timothy. Last week, we looked at the first 11 verses of the book. We learned why Paul wrote this letter to Timothy. Timothy was a young pastor that interned under Paul for 14 years. Timothy was now pastoring the church in the city of Ephesus. This was a church Paul had planted a few years before.

Ephesus was a tough congregation to pastor. As the book of Acts tells us, it consisted of former Satanists, and former worshipers of a fertility goddess named Artemis as well as some converted Jews. These guys didn't even know the basics of church. Every time Timothy opened the book of Leviticus about animal sacrifice, the Satanists felt church was right up their alley. Timothy had to tell them that animal sacrifice was not what they thought. Every time Timothy went to the Song of Solomon, all the former Artemis fertility worshipers were interested but it wasn't what they thought. Since there wasn't anybody with a background in Christ, there was a lot of basic discipleship to do. That was a rough church to pastor.

The other problem is that it was a mega church with thousands of people. If you think your job is stressful, try Timothy's job on for size. The amount of people that wanted to meet with him each week when it came to counseling and trying to work through their life issues was tremendous. This was a tough church.

The chief problem that Paul was concerned about was not the people of the church or the problems they face. Paul's main concern was with the church

elders. We had elders gone wild. After Paul left town, some of the elders began intentionally drifting away from Jesus in their teaching. They were encouraging others in the church to follow in their footsteps and move to what they thought were bigger and better things than Christ.

Personally, I don't believe they were outright rejecting Jesus lock-stock-and-barrel. If they completely rejected Jesus, they wouldn't even have been in the church. What we know for sure is they were diminishing Jesus in their teaching. They were making little of Jesus and trying to move beyond him. Last week we saw some of the ways they were trying to move beyond Jesus.

For example, some of the elders were into teaching the latest religious myths instead of Jesus. Ephesus was a highly cultured city with a huge library and a book publishing industry. Instead of keeping their eyes fixed on Jesus in church, the Ephesians were turning the church into a book club where they focused on the popular religious books of the day, books that had nothing to do with Jesus. Paul didn't like that one bit. When anyone walks away from Jesus, they walk away from the only way to know God. Wasting time in spiritual speculation and guess work leads to hell.

While this may sound like a problem of the past, the truth is many Christians fall into the same error. They get caught up in books of spiritual speculation instead of Jesus.

Examples today include books like [The Four Blood Moons](#), [Heaven is for Real](#) or [The Bible Code](#). These are some of the books that fit into this category. These are books that can lead people to be more interested in spiritual

speculation than Jesus. Paul's point was simply this. Nobody became a Christian and had his or her life changed by reading The Shack. Nobody developed Christian maturity by reading The DaVinci Code in his or her Life Group. Paul's point was the only way someone is born again is by turning to Jesus. The only way we develop Christian maturity is by walking with Jesus. Taking our eyes off Jesus or becoming distracted by religious myths are dead-end roads. Only Jesus can change your life. Don't take our eyes off him.

In addition, we saw that another way people took their eyes off Jesus in Ephesus was a misuse of the Old Testament laws. In Ephesus, the young Christians were looking at the Old Testament like it was a ladder to climb up to God and save themselves by behaving their way into God's favor when in reality the laws in the Old Testament are not there to make us feel good. They exist to make us feel bad. They exist to show us our sin. *They are not a ladder up which we climb to God, they are a mirror which shows us how far short we fall from God.*

What was happening is some of the nutty leaders were taking people away from focusing on Jesus and God's grace to us through him. In place of Jesus, they were telling people to behave their way into knowing God, which never works.

This morning, Paul continues talking about why it is so important that we don't take our eyes off Jesus. Paul will move from talking about the danger of talking about false teachers taking our eyes off Jesus to an autobiographical

moment where he talks about how only Jesus can change your life. Let's jump into the text.

1. All good things in Paul's life came as a gracious gift from Jesus.

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... 1 Timothy 1:12–13 (ESV)

Paul began by telling us who he was before Jesus got ahold of him. We looked at this a last week. Paul described himself as a blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent.

Blasphemy means irreverence toward what is sacred. There are some things that are sacred. They should be treated with respect. For instance, you don't spray paint profanity on anybody's parking lot but it is especially bad to spray paint profanity on the church parking lot. That is in violation of something sacred. That is what Paul was. He was a blasphemous person. He described himself as a man with little respect toward the true God. He was one bad dude.

Persecutor means somebody who participates in a systematic hunting down of people either for their pain or death. That was Paul. When Stephen died, the first Christian martyr in the book of Acts, Paul was holding everybody's jackets so they could get a good throw of a rock with their pitching arm to hit him in the head. Paul was approving of Stephen's death and even cheering as he writhed in agony in his blood on the street. I like to think of Paul as an exterminator. We hire an exterminator to get rid of all the cockroaches, not just some of the cockroaches. Paul's life goal was to exterminate Christians. He wanted to eliminate every last one. His life goal was to systematically hunt down and eliminate every Christian like they were bugs. In Acts 9, Paul was on his way

to Damascus to arrest more Christians. Damascus was 150 miles away from Jerusalem. If you are traveling 150 miles just so you can find and kill more Christians, you are a serious Christian exterminator. That was Paul.

Paul also calls himself **insolent**. That means boldly disrespectful. He didn't care what people thought. He didn't care how he treated people. He was completely disrespectful. That was Paul.

In spite of Paul's dark identity, look at what God did in his life.

First, God appointed him to his service. On the road to Damascus the risen Christ appeared to Paul, knocked him on his backside and appointed him to be an apostle. Paul didn't deserve any of this, especially given his background.

Second, Paul couldn't get over that God judged him faithful. When we read that, the first thing we might think is Paul was boasting that he was better than others because he was more faithful than others. Paul was not boasting. It is the exact opposite. Paul was completely humbled that after he was such a blasphemous, insolent persecutor that God would save him through Jesus and entrust him with the awesome responsibility of carrying the good news of Jesus to the gentiles. Paul was in awe of God's grace.

Third, he thanked Jesus Christ who gave him the strength to carry out his responsibility every day. All of his work for Jesus was not carried out with his own strength but was carried out by the strength Jesus provided him.

Now let's summarize this and look at Paul's testimony. His former life was as an over-the-top hard-core criminal against Jesus. Jesus chose him. Jesus saved him. Jesus transformed him. Jesus then entrusted him with a huge

responsibility to tell people what God did for them on the cross. Jesus then gave him the strength to carry out his day-to-day life as an apostle. Without question Paul owed every good thing in his life to one person. That one person is Jesus. For Paul, it was inconceivable to take his eyes off Jesus. Every good thing Paul had in his life came from Jesus. Jesus changed his life. How could he ever drift away?

The same is true for us. Every good thing we have in our lives comes from Jesus. Some of you grew up in a Christian home. Others of you came to Christ later in life. Like Paul, look at the mess your life was in before you came to Jesus. Look at how God reached into your life and saved you. Look at the ministry he entrusted to you. For some of you that is working with troubled teenagers. For others of you it is sharing the gospel with children at AWANA. For others of you it is helping to lead in worship on Sunday morning. The list could go on and on.

If you have lived for Christ for any length of time, you know that it is Jesus who sustains us every day. Just as the transformation in Paul's life came exclusively from Jesus, the transformation in our lives also comes exclusively from Jesus. Jesus is the one that changed our lives. Don't drift away from him.

2. God extends saving grace to those ignorant of Jesus, not those intentionally walking away from Jesus.

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 1:13–14 (ESV)

Then Paul said something very strange. Paul received mercy because he acted ignorantly in unbelief. One of the reasons God showed mercy to Paul when he was a persecutor of Christians was because Paul was ignorant to Jesus' true

identity. Why did Paul want them to know he received incredible mercy from God when he was ignorant of Jesus?

Remember what we learned last week. The situation is some elders in the church were intentionally walking away from Jesus. They were not ignorant of who Jesus is and what Jesus did for them — after all, they were church elders. In full knowledge of what Jesus did for them and after witnessing miracles and changed lives in Ephesus, they were walking away from Jesus. Paul said, “Please understand that God showed incredible mercy in my life when I was *ignorant of Jesus*, not when I was *intentionally walking away from Jesus*.”

Look what the Bible says about intentionally walking away from Christ.

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? Hebrews 10:28–29 (ESV)

This is a warning to those who walk away from Jesus or who drift away from Jesus. God does show incredible saving mercy to people but Paul reminded us it is to those who are ignorant of him not those who are consciously rejecting him. Only Jesus changes lives. Don't take your eyes off him.

Today, if you see yourself like Paul before he came to Christ, if you know you are a hard-hearted, bitter and angry person, if you wish you were a person known for your faith and love in God, Paul would tell you where it all begins. Fix your eyes on Jesus. He is the one who changes our lives.

Paul's autobiography is all about Jesus. He was changed from a persecuting nut case to a church leader all by mercy and grace from Jesus. The

only way Paul has the strength to live the Christian life and the only way we will have the strength to live the Christian life is by relying on Jesus. The reason God showed so much mercy to Paul is because he was ignorant of Jesus, not because he intentionally walked away from Jesus. Everything in the Christian life is about Jesus. Whatever we do, let us never take our eyes off him.

3. Nobody is beyond the grace of 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. 1 Timothy 1:15–16 (ESV)

The phrase “this is a trustworthy saying” appears five times in the Bible and only in the letters Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus. Apparently these trustworthy sayings were bumper sticker slogans used in the early church to help articulate basic Christian beliefs toward the end of Paul’s life. I like this one. It is short, tight, memorable and important. Here is the trustworthy saying:

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Let’s break it apart. Jesus Christ came into the world. First, this means Jesus isn’t part of the world but the Bible tells us Jesus existed before the world began because Jesus created the entire universe. Next, Jesus came into the world by fusing himself forever with a human body in Mary’s womb. The reason he came into the world was to save sinners. Jesus came to save us. This reminds us we are in need of saving from our sin because we cannot save ourselves.

The last part of the saying is interesting. It says, “of whom I am the foremost” or of whom I am the worst. Why is it important that we see ourselves

as the worst of sinners? The self-help gurus would tell us this is terrible and would ruin our precious self-image. Why should we see ourselves as the worst of sinners?

One of the greatest gifts God can give you is conviction of sin. When we see our sin for what it is, when we begin to comprehend the darkness and wickedness of our sin, we will be broken in our hearts and see ourselves as the worst of sinners, not just people with a few flaws needing a little improvement. It is when we see ourselves as the worst of sinners and we are undone that we will finally stop relying on ourselves and we will run to Jesus and trust him fully, realizing he is our only hope to save us from the eternal punishment we deserve and he is the only hope to change our lives.

If you see yourself as basically good, if you see yourself as better than most, you will not cling with both hands on Jesus. You will keep one hand on Jesus and one hand on your own goodness. This is why this is such a trustworthy saying.

Look at your heart. Look at the complete mess you of your life. Feel it. Weep over it, then run to Jesus. He came to save sinners. Jesus is in the business of changing lives. Don't take your eyes off him.

Why did God save such a sinful man as Paul? It was to provide us hope. If God can take as great sinner like Paul, who was an exterminator of Christians that spent his time hunting down and overseeing the execution of believers, and transform him into one of the great leaders of the church, there is hope for you and me. No matter what we have done or how you have lived, when we run to

Jesus and give him our lives, he can take even the most messed up, hopeless people in the world and do incredible good through their lives.

This morning, I need to ask you, have you drifted from Jesus? Do you see yourself as a basically good person in need of a little touch up or do you see yourself as the worst of sinners in need of a savior? That determines if you have both hands on Jesus or one hand on Jesus and another on yourself because you have started to drift away. My friends, some of us need to repent of drifting from Jesus and taking our eyes off him.

No matter who you are, no matter what you have done, you are not beyond the grace of God offered to us in Jesus. What separates us from God is not the size of our sin but the rejection of our savior.

4. A life saved by Jesus can't help but worship.

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

Paul couldn't help himself after talking about how kind God has been to him through Jesus. He burst out in worship. When we think of what we were before Jesus, and what we are now because of Jesus, how can we not worship too?

If you remember the first week of our study, you will remember that Ephesus was home of the temple of Artemis. It was huge. Worship of Artemis dominated the city. She was a fertility goddess that had a huge influence on the women of the city. I love Paul's worship because almost all of his words of worship to the true God of the universe were the opposite of Artemis. This was a little stick-in-the-eye worship to Jesus that insulted Artemis.

1. Artemis was a queen. According to Greek and Roman mythology, she came into existence as the daughter of the gods Zeus and Leto. The true God of the universe is a king, not a queen. He is king of the ages and never came into existence.
2. Artemis' temple took 200 years to build and was in constant need of repair and upkeep. The true God of the universe is not a statue in a temple but is invisible. The true God of the universe is not in need of constant repair but is immortal. That means incorruptible. It means the true God of the universe does not rust. He does not spoil like milk. The same God that completely changed Paul's life 2,000 years ago is still on his throne and he is just as actively changing lives today of people who see themselves as the worst of sinners and who run to Jesus as their only hope and prayer for a changed life.

In the book of Acts, when the church grew in the city of Ephesus and worship of Artemis began to diminish, the sales of Artemis silver souvenir figurines was on the decline. Acts tells us of a silversmith named Demetrius, that wrangled up a crowd of about 20,000 people that filled the theatre in Ephesus and for two hours kept chanting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." He was worried that the worship and glory he felt Artemis deserved was being given to Jesus. His little rally was meant to shout down Jesus and shout up Artemis.

The truth is always told over time. What is left today? Today nobody worships Artemis. Her temple is in ruins. Nobody buys her figurines. Today one in

every three people on the planet worship Jesus.¹ Who is the real God of the universe that changes lives, Artemis or Jesus?

Now that Paul explained why we can't walk away from Jesus, he challenged Timothy, and us, "Now that we know the gospel message, let's make sure we don't lose it."

5. The message of Jesus changing lives is now in our hands.

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you... 1 Timothy 1:18 (ESV)

Just as Paul was entrusted with the message of God's grace and his job was not just to share the good news of Jesus but to make sure he preserved it and defended it so it was not distorted or twisted, in the same way, Paul passed the baton of the gospel to Timothy to carry the good news of Jesus into the next generation.

Today, Timothy is long gone. Who is entrusted in our time to carry the good news of Jesus into our generation and our city? Whose job is it to make sure the message that Jesus still changes the lives of the people that run to him is heard? Whose job it is to make sure we don't drift away from this message in the church? It is our job. We are entrusted to teach the gospel to our friends and our children. Nobody's life will be changed if we don't tell him or her this simple message and the power of being born again.

As Paul closed, he provided Timothy, and us, with some practical wisdom on how to keep the gospel message and not let it be distorted.

¹ http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html

6. Be careful to not tolerate sin in my life because it will twist what you believe about Jesus in my heart.

...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. 1 Timothy 1:18–20 (ESV)

Paul told Timothy, as you are waging this war in Ephesus to get people back to Jesus, as you hold the faith, make sure you watch your life. In particular, don't get in the habit of violating your conscience. Our conscience is a gift from God to help us recognize sin and avoid sin. Three times in 1 and 2 Timothy Paul told Timothy to keep a clear conscience. In the book of Acts, such as in Acts 24:16, Paul said he always took great care to keep a clean conscience. Why is it so important to not get in the habit of violating our conscience?

Sin in our lives will inevitably twist our understanding of Jesus in our hearts. In the Greek, when Paul said, "By rejecting this some have made shipwreck of their faith," what we cannot see in the English, but what is clear in the Greek, is the pronoun "this" is in the singular. It is referring to conscience. Hymenaeus and Alexander were men who got in the habit of sin. They developed a habit of violating their consciences and tolerating sin in their lives. It shipwrecked their understanding of the faith so it became twisted and distorted.

We don't know much about Alexander because that is a common name and he isn't mentioned again. Hymenaeus is a unique name and he was mentioned again in 2 Timothy.

...and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. 2 Timothy 2:17–18 (ESV)

What was Hymenaeus doing? He was teaching the resurrection already took place. That is pretty messed up theology. How did his theology get so strange? He got into the habit of violating his conscience. He knew what was sinful and he kept living in a sinful way. It was the toleration of sin in his life that backfilled into his mind and twisted his faith. Paul had to kick him out of the church, which is what it means to hand people over to Satan.

The big message of these verses is that Jesus changes lives. It is seeing our sin and running to Jesus to save us that saves us. What makes the difference in our lives is not the size of your sin but simply the rejection of our savior. No matter what you have done, run to Jesus today and he will save you and make you into a new person. If he could do it for Paul, he can do it for you. This is the message we must tell people in our community and give to our children.

The practical side for those of us who already know this message and have a changed life is that if we choose to continually violate our consciences, it will eventually twist our faith. If we choose to tolerate instead of repent of the sin in our lives, it will ultimately lead to a distortion of the gospel message in our hearts.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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