

2013_09_15 Pentecost 17 | Sermon (Ascension Batavia) 1 Timothy 1:5-17
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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Testing God's Saving Grace in Action

1 Timothy 1:5-17

INI

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The form of sound teaching which the Holy Spirit would lay on your head and heart comes from an Apostle named Paul writing to a pastor named Timothy ...

1 Timothy 1:5–17 ⁵ Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, ⁶ from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, ⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm. ⁸ But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, ¹⁰ for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹ according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust. ¹² And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, ¹³ although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. ¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. ¹⁶ However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. ¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Let us PRAY: Oh Holy Spirit, reveal Your sound doctrine not only to our head but also to our heart that we may reach the goal of faith and love and so be led by You into everlasting life. Amen.

In Jesus name, dear fellow redeemed,

There's only so much they can squeeze into three years. Three years was the length of my seminary stay at Immanuel in Eau Claire where I studied to be a pastor. One thing I

couldn't get in the class room is much real life ministry experience. There were times I struggled, and still do, to make the connection between theology and practice.

However, I've found that, in my mind, I sometimes separate the two. It's as if these things live in two separate worlds. There's this heavenly world where we learn about certain facts of salvation and passages from the Bible; we memorize, we recite; we get confirmed. Then there's another, more earthly world where we actually live. Where and how do these things come together? As I would at times wonder in seminary – how does this or that teaching work in people's lives? What does it look like when God's saving grace goes into action?

Paul is laying the groundwork for Timothy's ministry. The goal is to bridge the gap from seminary to real life. God asserts truths in the form of holy words – “sound doctrine” – written by inspiration of His Spirit. He then executes His grace from our ears to our heart to the fruits of our Christian faith. We read this final step in verse 5, as the ESV translates – “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” The goal of all of God's holy writings are to bridge this gap from theory to practice. To take this sound doctrine through your ears, into your head and touch your heart. To bring forth an active love that flows from a genuine faith. We're here today to test this process. We're here to put God's Word into use, to test this saving grace in action.

1. God has designed a theory – the Law declares me chief of sinners, and the gospel declares God's grace to cover all my sins.
2. He has given us a prototype to test this – Paul's example
3. He has put this saving grace into action – my experience

1. He has designed a theory – the Law declares me chief of sinners, and the gospel declares God's grace to cover all my sins.

It all begins with a theory. Before we put something to the test, we need an assertion. So Paul begins this letter, charging Timothy: “Teach no other doctrine.” The theoretical design for saving grace has been built by God and scripted in the teachings of the Bible. God has laid down specific instructions for how His holy design of saving grace should be implemented. He speaks in terms of Law which declares me chief of sinners and Gospel which declares God's sufficient grace to cover all my sins.

v.8 the law is good if one uses it lawfully.

To properly test this theory of Law and Gospel, we must first know how God intended us to use these teachings. To use the law in any other way than God intended is lawlessness. It is empty talk. These “teachers of the law” which Paul singles out, are lacking both sound instruction and understanding in these matters. Yet they claim to be experts.

God’s law serves a specific purpose and design. It was not made to tell you to do better, try harder. It was not made for any other purpose than to measure God’s standard of righteousness and enact consequences if we should come up short in any way. The law was not made for a righteous person. It measures the unrighteous – the lawless, insubordinate, ungodly, the sinner, the unholy and profane, the murderer, the fornicator, sodomite, kidnapper, the liar, the perjurer.

If the law is mishandled, the gospel too will be mishandled. If I am not a sinner, than Christ did not come for me. Only with a sound understanding of law and gospel we can now rightly see God’s grace in action. The theory we will test today has been made clear. We assert the design of law and gospel: the Law declares me chief of sinners, and the gospel declares God’s grace to cover all my sins.

2. He has given us a prototype to test this – Paul’s example

Is it only a theory? Is this saving grace reserved only on the pages of Scripture as a few facts and memory passages?

God wants you to see this in action. He wants to take you from the design room to the real world. One way He does this is with examples in Scripture. Here we have what you might consider a prototype.

A prototype is basically a model. It is a working example of some product or theory being put into practice; something that can be tested. That word: *prototype* is made up of two Greek words: *protos* + *typos*. It just so happens that these two Greek words occur in our text, both in verse 16. “That in me *protos* – first – Jesus Christ might show all patience, as a *typos* – a pattern, a model – to those who are going to believe.” Paul is a prototype – lit., a first pattern – for God’s saving grace in action.

“Formerly,” Paul says, he was a blasphemer. We read more about Paul’s former lifestyle in the book of Acts. Paul first appears in Acts chapter 7 with a different name – Saul, the Pharisee. He appears on the scene where a street mob is dragging an innocent man out of the city to be murdered. This mob includes the religious leaders of Israel, a Jewish crowd, and this man Saul. The target of their hostility is a Christian named Stephen.

They hate this man. They cite him for speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God. This Stephen is saying that Jesus of Nazareth whom they have crucified is their Savior. He calls them stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! In essence, he calls them, the leaders of God's nation, sinners. The law is accusing so that they are cut to the heart. They stampede him. They carry him out of the city. They execute him by smashing stones against him. All because he spoke the truth. And Saul stands by, he watches, he keeps their coats as this gang drags Stephen out of the city and stones him to death. As it is written, "Saul was consenting to his death."

And thus a great persecution arose with Saul at the lead. It says "Saul made havoc of the church, entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison."

But now something has chanced. He is no longer Saul the object of God's wrath, but rather he is Paul, the object of God's grace. Paul confesses something no righteous Pharisee would ever admit. I am a sinner. Not only that, but he considers himself the worst of sinners. Paul was placing himself in the same category as those he once saw as outcasts – the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the murders, that whole list of characters in verse 9 and 10 for whom the law was given; the worst of the worst. Paul, the chief of sinners.

But God's grace abounded. It abounded on that road to Damascus where Paul came to know this Jesus whom he was persecuting. It abounded as the Lord used his own blood to cover Paul's sins of murder, blasphemy, and persecution. Grace abounded as Saul was given a new name – Paul – and a new calling – Apostle of Jesus Christ. Truly Paul is a prototype – a first pattern – of God's saving grace in action.

3. He has put this into action – my experience

They say, however, that living models are never prototypes. In human beings for example, there are too many variances that cannot be measured. Everyone is different.

For this reason, you might still be thinking – well that was Paul, not me. Have we really tested the limits of the prototype? Perhaps the way Paul was convicted by the law is not the same way you are convicted. Maybe the way the saving grace covered Paul's sins does not seem to cover your sins. After all, Paul writes that he did these things in ignorance. What about me? Have I been so ignorant when I have engaged in what God forbids?

Make yourself the test subject. Bridge that gap from the classroom to the school of experience. Make yourself now the real world test subject of God's saving grace in action.

This requires that we get specific about sin. Paul writes to Timothy to use the law rightly. To fudge the numbers or misuse the design of God's law will not properly test God's assertion of grace; it would leave us malfunctioning and not even knowing salvation or Christ.

Saul was merely standing by when Stephen was stoned. He never picked up a stone. Is our faith merely about going to church – about sitting, listening, making ourselves feel better than those other sinners; and going back to our lives a little better than the next guy?

While preparing this sermon, I tried to think of your experiences. What sins plague you so deeply? What spiritual frustrations do you regularly experience? This actually became quite frustrating for me. I just couldn't do it. Of course, to some degree, I can relate to sins that are common to us all. But to really get down to the bear knuckles of what makes you chief of sinners is impossible for me.

That is because I can only see myself. "The law is but a mirror bright to bring the inbred sin to light." I can only see my own heart in that reflection of the law. I can only see who I've formerly been. And the same goes for you.

Only you can identify where that sin is lurking – the lawlessness, the insubordination, the profanity, the murder and hatred, the fornication and other sexual sins, the lying; Only you can identify those certain things you just can't let go of; the fears you have of what would happen if these things were exposed. Only you can see what you formerly have been – 60 years ago ... 20 years ago ... 5 years ago ... 5 days ago?

What rank would should I give myself on the list of most wanted sinners? top 1,000,000? top 1000? top 100? top 10? Paul says he did these things in ignorance – but what about me? Was I so ignorant?

Well, if your conclusion is that you are #1, then you are using the law lawfully. For that is why God gave it – to search us out; to humble us; to actively convict us of guilt and show us what we deserve. If you're conclusion is that you are #1, then you are in the right place because you are just the lost sheep Christ Jesus came to find. He came to eat and drink with tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners; He came to establish fellowship with you – the one who needs repentance. God knows your sins 60 years ago, 20 years ago, 5

years ago, 5 days ago and He sent Jesus, the shepherd who has left the ninety-nine who think they need no repentance, to find that one who is lost without Him.

“And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant.” Literally it overflowed as a cup running over. “Where sin abounded, grace did abound much more” (Romans 5:20). “This is a faithful saying;” it is worth saying; it is worth believing: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost. You have now become test subject. See how God’s grace has overflowed for you. Drink of that cup that runneth over with His living blood of the new covenant, a blood which cleanses from all sin.

Let’s go back to Luke 7 for a Sabbath meal with Jesus’ abounding grace. He had been invited to join a group of religious teachers for a meal at the house of Simon the Pharisee. A woman approached. But this was no servant. She had a reputation. As Luke puts it, she was, a woman in the city who was a sinner. The Pharisees are appalled that Jesus would allow this woman to approach him, let alone wash his feet. Jesus responds – “You have given me no water for my feet, but this woman has not ceased to express her love and gratitude since she heard I was here. See how much she loves Me? She washes my feet with her tears and wipes them with her hair. Do you see that she believes her sins are forgiven? Among those for whom little is forgiven, there is little love. But among those for whom forgiveness abounds, so also love abounds. Her conscience is clear. There is no hypocrisy because here before her is God’s grace in action – a living Savior who forgives her sins.

The more God exposes sin in our life, the more God’s grace abounds. So we love much. The goal of this exhortation, as it says in verse 5, is love from a pure heart. That pure heart is your heart. You have been cleansed whatever former reputation. Go now and live as if God has taken away your worst sins – for He has. In what ways can you wash your Savior’s feet with your tears? In what ways can you show forth fruits of repentance that glorify the eternal invisible God who alone is wise? The theory of sound doctrine has been asserted and proven. We have seen the prototype in Paul who was saved by grace. And now you’ve tested it in your own life. God’s grace in action has covered all your sins.

We rightly open our mouths to give praise to this gracious Savior: **Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.**