



Sunday School Lesson for January 1, 2006.  
Released on December 28, 2005.

### **"Rely on God's Strength"**

Printed Text: **1 Timothy 1:12-20.**

Devotional Reading: **Romans 16:17-27.**

Background Scripture: **1 Timothy 1.**

Time: A.D. 62

Place: Macedonia

#### **1 Timothy 1:12-20**

**12. And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;**

**13. Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.**

**14. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.**

**15. 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.**

**16. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.**

**17. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

**18. This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;**

**19. Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck:**

**20. Of whom is Hymeneus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.**

## **TODAY'S AIM**

**Facts:** to examine Paul's personal testimony in regard to his ministry as he encouraged Timothy to pursue his.

**Principle:** to affirm that it is a great honor to serve the Lord.

**Application:** to encourage believers to be thankful for whatever ministry gifts the Lord has given.

## **How to Say It**

EPHESUS. *Ef-uh-sus.*

HYMENEUS. *Hi-meh-nee-us.*

LYSTRA. *Liss-truh.*

## **Introduction**

Paul looked back to the time before he knew Christ, the time when he was a persecutor of the followers of Jesus. We would all be surprised to find that someone who spoke out vociferously against Christians had become a leader in Christian service.

Paul did not see his situation as unique. He saw his life as an example of the kind of love that God bestows. God became a man and as a man gave His life to save sinners. There were no saints to save; only Jesus' death for us changes us from sinners to saints.

Paul wrote about these great truths as a prelude to his charges to young Timothy. Paul was a mentor for the young leader. First Timothy is a personal letter to Timothy, instructing and advising him how to be a leader and a leader to other leaders in Ephesus.

Timothy's leadership would have to be based on God-dependence, not self-reliance. He would have to be faithful and remember that his work was to be God's instrument in the church.

## **Lesson Background**

In the previous four lessons, we have studied God's marvelous plan for meeting humanity's desperate need. God met that need by sending His Son. The radical change Jesus makes in a person's life prepares him or her for service. Jesus becomes the great change agent. His presence in a person's life decisively alters one's eternal destiny. And the more a person walks by faith, the more the Lord is able to use him or her. This was the apostle Paul's experience. Paul wrote letters to his son in the faith, Timothy, to encourage him to walk the same path.

Some suggest that Timothy was converted during Paul's first missionary trip to Asia Minor (modern Turkey). This trip included a visit to Timothy's hometown of Lystra (see Acts 14:8-20). The examples of Paul's life and preaching undoubtedly made an indelible impression on Timothy. These examples, coupled with the godly role models of Timothy's mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15), most likely are what led to his conversion to Christ. Timothy then became a coworker in Paul's evangelistic enterprise. When Paul revisited the churches he had established, he recruited Timothy as a traveling companion.

The letter of 1 Timothy was written sometime after Paul's first imprisonment. The date was likely between A.D. 62 and 65. The letter was written to reinforce certain instructions that Paul had given to Timothy after leaving him in Ephesus.

## **Paul Received Mercy (1 Timothy 1:12-14)**

### **1. Why did Paul need to emphasize that God's enablement made his ministry possible (1 Timothy 1:12)?**

Humility acknowledges that effective *ministry* is not accomplished by one's own efforts. Rather, effective ministry is through God's enablement (Acts 26:22; Philippians 4:13). There is a power beyond human ability.

Paul had been specially called (Acts 9:15; 22:14-21; 26:16-20). He was literally called during an appearance of the risen Christ.

### **2. What did Paul mean when he said that God counted him faithful?**

The Lord counted him faithful for the work; not that the faithfulness was a foreseen quality which became the ground of his call to office, but that he counted him faithful because he made him so, for he speaks of himself as "one who hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful" (1 Cor. 7:25). Faithfulness must be the pre-eminent quality of the steward of God (1 Cor. 4:2).

*The Pulpit Commentary: 1 Timothy.* (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.).

### **3. In what ways was Paul a blasphemer, a persecutor, and harmful to others (v. 13)?**

Paul felt the unexpected kindness of God in his changed life. He freely admitted that prior to meeting the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, he was a blasphemer and a persecutor. He also admitted that he had harmed others.

Paul was a persecutor. The task he zealously pursued before seeing the risen Christ was arresting followers of Jesus from among the Jews (cf. Acts 9:1-2). Paul wanted to rid the land of Jewish followers of Jesus, who he believed was a false messiah.

Paul also harmed others, actually causing injury and not just arresting people. He was an accomplice to the stoning of Stephen (cf. Acts 7:58). The ones stoning Stephen threw their outer garments at the feet of Paul (referred to in that passage

as Saul, his Hebrew name), showing that they were carrying out the execution with his full as-sent and support.

One would not expect God to choose someone like Paul, but he said that his life of injuring the followers of Jesus was led in ignorance. If he had known the truth-that Jesus is Lord-he would have served Him and not persecuted Him. God, in His mercy, reversed the ignorance of Paul and gave him a new career-making new followers of Jesus throughout the world.

#### **4. Why do you think that God chooses to use human agents to accomplish His purposes when we are so prone to be weak and wrong?**

God obviously possesses the power and wisdom to do all of His work alone or through angels. Yet, He consistently enlists humans! He works in and through people who submit to His will. He also works through people who reject His will (one example is Pharaoh).

Our obedience demonstrates whose side we're on. Paul came to know exactly how God operates in us. "Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me. Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:8-10).

#### **5. What is the difference between mercy and grace (v. 14)?**

Not only did God have mercy on Paul, forgiving him for his blasphemy and injurious persecution, but He also showed grace. Mercy is often said to be not getting what one deserves while grace is getting what one does not deserve. That is true as far as it goes, but grace more strongly emphasizes God's lavish bestowal of unmerited good. Paul could look back on his life, changed from persecutor to preacher, and say that God had given him abundantly more than he deserved or expected.

Paul wanted Timothy to realize this, for knowing Paul as a leader and a servant of Jesus, Timothy might have thought of him as having earned his position. When we see people in places of leadership, we often think of the things they did to earn their place. Perhaps years of study and years of experience go into any person who is a leader.

Yet Paul wanted Timothy to see the other side of leadership. The leadership that lasts is given by God. It is grace.

Paul recognized God's faith and love in his life. Faith is used here in the sense of faithfulness. God had been faithful with Paul and loving through his whole life.

#### **Christ Came to Save (1 Timothy 1:15-17)**

#### **6. How can we describe God's love and grace in terms that unbelievers will understand?**

The apostle Paul had experienced such a transformation of conviction and commitment that he delighted in giving his personal testimony to anyone who would listen. Most of us long to be effective in evangelism. Paul's example can be instructive.

To Timothy and other believers, Paul used vocabulary and arguments familiar to God-fearing people. But his witness to pagan soldiers, Greek philosophers, and hostile Hebrews involved language suited to their frames of reference (examples: Acts 17:16-34; 22:1-21). We too have opportunities and obligations to share the gospel with a wide variety of individuals and groups. Religious terminology can be modified for the situation without compromising the truth.

One good tactic is to tell our own life story-our personal experience of God's grace and Christ's love, the account of our connection with divine forgiveness and spiritual peace.

### **7. What truths are contained in the saying that Jesus came into the world to save sinners (v. 15)?**

*A faithful saying* means that what Paul is about to relay is true and can be believed by everyone. That goes for us too!

Paul said that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. A great deal of truth is wrapped up in this statement.

First, Jesus came into the world. We were brought into this world by being born. We did not choose to exist; God chose to create us. With Jesus it is different. He wanted to come into this world. He chose to be born as a man.

Second, Jesus came into this world for the purpose of saving sinners. Paul did not mean that Jesus had no other purpose in living. He did not come only to die for us; He also came to teach us. Yet the great, overarching purpose of Jesus' incarnation was to purchase our salvation. The cross and the resurrection are the ultimate expression of what Jesus is about. The cross cleanses sinners from sin, bringing forgiveness and a relationship with God. The resurrection defeated death, guaranteeing us a place in the world to come.

Third, the people Jesus came to save are sinners. We all need to believe this. A hopeless world needs to be told this good news over and over. We are the only vehicles through whom it will hear this message.

Earlier, Paul exclaimed "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16). Our challenge is to see non-Christians as those needing salvation rather than as our enemies. We need to let them know that Jesus is the answer to the sinner's problem (John 3:17).

Paul said that of all sinners, he regarded himself as the chief. This statement shocks our sensibilities. How could the great Paul, missionary and apostle par excellence, be the chief sinner? Paul knew that his career, if God had left it unchecked, would have resulted in the deaths of many believers. Thinking himself a saint, Paul had been a great sinner, killing and imprisoning people he now knew and loved. Worst of all, Paul had persecuted Jesus Himself, the King of heaven (Acts 9:4,5). Truly Paul could say that God had been merciful to him!

### **8. How was Paul a pattern of God's mercy on display to those who would hear the gospel (v. 16)?**

The conversion of a man like Paul should be an encouragement. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Hebrews 7:25).

Paul knew that God had chosen him for special reasons. Paul's position in the early church was very prominent. God could have used one of the twelve disciples, but He chose instead to use a vicious persecutor.

Paul knew exactly why God did this. In communicating the message of the Cross, who could be a better example than one who had been a terrible sinner? People hearing Paul's story would have to know that if God could forgive a man like Paul, He could forgive anyone.

Paul called his example a pattern. The pattern of the Cross is of people moving from being God's enemies to being His loved ones. Paul was a great enemy of the early church. By persecuting Jesus' followers, Paul was persecuting Jesus Himself (again, Acts 9:4,5). But God turns enemies into friends, even into leaders.

Paul made it clear what the promise of the Cross is. Those who put their trust in the Cross believe to the point of life everlasting. This refers not only to the length of the life God gives us but even more to the quality of that life. We do not merely have our present life extended to eternity; we receive the kind of life that is everlasting. This is spiritual life, which begins now and grows into Christlikeness until we appear before Him fully transformed.

### **9. Have you given up on a family member or friend who seems to be hopeless? Why?**

We must remember that no person is hopeless. When a person is fighting the hardest may be when he or she is closest to surrendering to Christ, as in Paul's case. Jesus had chided Saul, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:5,6). So don't give up easily! Don't underestimate the work of the Holy Spirit and the power of the gospel.

Christians may be reluctant to share their faith because of the fear of failure in dealing with people like Paul. Remember, God has not called us to be successful, but to be obedient. We are simply seed sowers. It is God who does the harvesting. Only He can convert (see 1 Corinthians 3:6, 7). So don't be afraid of failure. When you share your faith in love, inevitably there will be a harvest.

Paul was saved by grace, not only for his own sake but for the sake of others. He is an example of God's love, grace, power, and long-suffering (2 Peter 3:15). Where would we be were it not for God's great patience? God doesn't give up on us easily. Nor should we give up easily when working to win people to Christ.

### **10. How does Paul's praise for God in verse 17 fit into this section?**

Such an expression of praise is inevitable from one who realizes that he or she is a sinner saved by grace.

Who could resist praising a God who turns enemies into loved ones? Paul referred to God as King. God is bringing His kingdom about. He is the true Ruler of this universe.

Paul described God the King as "eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God." The God who decided to become a man and save sinners like Paul cannot be questioned. He exists forever and is immortal, incapable of death. He is also invisible, a fact that causes many not to believe in Him; yet He is the only one who is

truly wise. His ways are far beyond our questioning. None can compare to Him. The Cross leads us to see this very truth about God.

He is our creator, our redeemer; we are the objects of His grace. He and He alone deserves the worship of our lips and hearts (Psalms 95:3-6; 96:1-9).

### **Timothy Has a Charge (1 Timothy 1:18-20)**

#### **11. How was the analogy of Timothy waging war related to the call to ministry (vs. 18,19)?**

Paul charges *Timothy* to proceed in the task entrusted to him. That encouragement comes from the fact that there have been *prophecies* made concerning him and his call to ministry and service in the kingdom.

The charge includes Timothy's participation in "a good warfare." It is not a warfare against flesh and blood (see Ephesians 6:12). It is a good warfare because it is against sin and Satan and because Timothy is in the Lord's army. So he is to stand up against false teachers and not be intimidated by their arrogance and rebellious spirit.

We twenty-first-century Christians are engaged in this same kind of spiritual warfare. We dare not be pacifists in this regard.

Paul depends on Timothy not to abandon either his *faith* or his *good conscience*. When *some* forsook *faith*, their consciences were left without any guidelines. As a result, their faith was wrecked like a ship that runs up on rocks because it has no rudder. We do well to heed Paul's admonition to Timothy: We must hold on to the Christian faith, because in so doing we will have an enlightened conscience. Then we won't blaspheme or contradict God and end up in apostasy (Hebrews 11:6). That is the danger these false teachers are in.

#### **12. How can the postmodern emphasis on tolerance shipwreck faith and disarm the church? What do we do to avoid this?**

A postmodern culture's devotion to tolerance leads people to close their ears to blasphemy and close their eyes to sinful behavior. Centuries ago, God told at least three churches that this kind of tolerance was very displeasing to Him (see 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; Revelation 2:14-16, 20-23).

Tolerance of false teaching or immorality will poison Christians, disable the church, and disgrace our holy God. Tolerance in this sense is a disservice to the unrepentant as well. In John 4 we see Jesus accepting the woman at the well, but also unveiling her sinful lifestyle and false religious belief. That distinction is still important.

#### **13. How did Hymenaeus and Alexander fail (v. 20)?**

Paul brought up the example of Hymenaeus and Alexander as a warning to Timothy. Those who lose their loyalty to God and reject their conscience become shipwrecked in their faith. Paul believed better things of Timothy, but still the

warning is valid. Every soldier for Jesus must be loyal to God and follow the conscience God gives.

These two men consciences are seared (1 Timothy 4:2). They have sold out to *Satan*. Perhaps Paul had tried to teach these two men personally, so the sting of their apostasy (abandonment of one's religious faith) hits him hard.

We learn of the necessity of church discipline in this verse. The church needs to be on guard against these kinds of bad apples: doctrinal defection (see Romans 16:17, 18; 1 Timothy 6:3, 4; and Titus 1:10-16); moral defection (see 1 Corinthians 5); and divisiveness (again, Romans 16:17, 28; plus Titus 3:10).

These two propagators of false teaching needed to be dealt with. How many times has a church's witness in a community been nullified because it tolerated sin? Even so, the motivation for biblical discipline is to restore the errant person (2 Timothy 4:2; Corinthians 2:5-11).

When done properly, many times the object of discipline is brought to repentance and restored. Restoration may be in view here as Paul expresses his desire that Hymeneus and Alexander "learn not to blaspheme."

## **Conclusion**

### **Gratitude and Service**

Today's lesson should make each of us grateful for the grace of God that forgave us our sins. Our challenge is to translate that gratitude into a life of useful service. Paul's example and our own experience should teach us that we can trust God for He able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask" (Ephesians 3:20).

Sadly, many would be willing to serve in leadership roles if such roles entailed no responsibility. But then that would not be leadership! The implementation of God's plan depends on leaders remembering that God never asks us to do anything that He will not enable us to do. Paul recognized his personal inability to carry out the task God had set before him. But he also recognized, as should we, that God uses the weak things of the world to demonstrate His power so that we have no basis to glory. As a result, it is God who is glorified (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

### **Thought to Remember**

"The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1).

### **Prayer**

Forgive us, Father, for those times when we have relied on our own feeble resources rather than depending on You. On this first day of a new year, help us as we endeavor to walk by faith, trusting You to give us victory in every circumstance. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.



## **Anticipating Next Week's Lesson**

Praying is a vital part of the Christian life. Christian leaders should set the example. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-15 as you prepare for a lesson that examines various aspects of prayer.

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Have a blessed New Year !