

# 1 Timothy 1:17

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well I want to speak to you from verse 17. To the king of the ages. Immortal, invisible, the only God. The honour and glory forever and ever.

A great God. Now in this passage that I read here you'll see that there's a great change. That is the change isn't it that he describes in verse 13. Formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent.

That's the first great, a great change in the apostle's life. He was a blasphemer and a persecutor of Jesus. And he became well the greatest preacher and the greatest Christian thinker of all the ages. Then we see a great saying don't we in verse 15. This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Paul says of whom I am the foremost.

And then you come to a great God. Verse 17. Verse 17 is the technical word is a doxology. It's an outburst of praise.

[ 1 : 11 ] He's been looking back at me to his own life. This is what I was like before I was a Christian. This is what characterised me. And yet there was a great change and I've come to know a great saviour, the Lord Jesus.

And he bursts into praise. He cries out with joy and gratitude to the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. And that's striking because normally doxologies come at the end of an argument.

Come at the end of a service. But here it doesn't come at the end. It comes at the end of a tiny section. But it's as if Paul can't keep it in. If you turn to just a few pages on, chapter 6 and verse 15 and 16, you'll find that he does it again.

In fact, there is quite a common thing for the Apostle Paul that just coming in the middle of an argument, do you see what he says? He says, And he wants to praise him.

Going from the sublime to the ridiculous, it's the exact opposite of the legendary Jack Horner. You know little Jack Horner who was put in a corner? And it seems he's pulled a fast one.

[ 2 : 46 ] Little Jack Horner is put in a corner. And as a result of what he's done, he puts in his thumb and he pulls out a plum and says, What a good boy am I.

It's very interesting, isn't it, that there's no testimony in the New Testament which says that. What a good boy am I. I mention it not just to say something stupid. But I think sometimes outsiders, in their mind, think that's what we're saying.

When we give our testimony. When we praise God, they actually think we're saying, what a good boy am I. And there is a great deal of self-satisfaction in our praise.

And that's what the outsider often thinks of us, isn't it? And they might not be wholly wrong. But let's say straight away this afternoon, that is not how the New Testament people gave praise and glory.

They didn't say, to me be the glory, great things I have done. They didn't say, I'm marvellous, I'm wonderful. They said, to God be the glory. Great things he has done, so loved he the world that he gave us his son.

[ 3 : 50 ] So far from being like Jack Horner. Well look at the end of verse 15. Paul says, this thing is trustworthy in it, it is only a full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Do you notice it's the present tense there. It's not the perfect tense, or the past tense. He says, I am the foremost. It's the very opposite of self-congratulation.

He realises, doesn't he, that he's still a long way off from the moral purity and the greatness and the holiness of God. So this testimony of the Apostle is this.

What a great God is God. God is glorious. And we have very little idea of how glorious God is. And the Apostle came to an understanding of how glorious is, and the universal church is always having to rediscover this.

Only when the church rediscovers how great and how glorious God is, our outside is drawn in. So what we have in this old paragraph is a genuine experience of somebody who knows God.

[ 4 : 56 ] And then we have explained for us, those of us who have a defective understanding of Christian conversion. Now, just see with me here, the knowledge of God that Paul speaks of here is something for heart and for head.

That's what Christ brought to mankind. And that knowledge of God is more important than any of the fruits of the knowledge of God. So you can see in this paragraph, there's some fruits of what accompanies knowing God.

What follows on from knowing God. So verse 12, Paul is one who's been called to serve God. And serving God is an unspeakable privilege. Yet it's not so important as knowing God.

Faith and love, in verse 14. They are wonderful things. The love of a Christian for the world and for his neighbour. It's a wonderful thing.

But it's a secondary thing to the love that is kindled in his heart by the knowledge of God.

Augustine's most famous quotation is this. You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.

[ 6 : 00 ] That is what we were made for. That's what you were made for. You were made to know and to glorify God. That's the point of life.

If you miss this knowledge of God, Paul explains to you, you'll find yourself living in the Greek gap. Living a life which may have great pleasures in it, but is hollow and is unreal.

And though it has many joys, will it be empty. I think that's one of the things we see in the world, isn't it? We have so much wealth. We have so much for which we're thankful for. And yet, without God, every human being is aware there's a tremendous gap and vacuum.

And so people try to fill it. They try to fill it with work and family. Good things. But they won't fill the gap. Nobody and nothing can fill that gap. And Paul gave it by the mercy of God to a knowledge of God.

And he glories in God. There's three things I think he glories here. I think he glories in the sovereignty of God. And the grace of God and the patience of God. First of all, the sovereignty of God. That comes out very clearly, doesn't it, in verse 17.

[ 7 : 08 ] The king of the ages. Paul glories in the sovereign God. This God in Christ has chosen him mercifully through his perfect patience. It stands out.

It's there in verse 17. It's there in verse 17. To the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever.

It's there in chapter 6 and verse 15. Which he will display at the proper time. He is the blessed and only sovereign, the king of kings and lord of lords. Now the sovereignty of God is one of the greatest, if not the greatest truth in the Old and New Testament.

And the Bible makes a very clear distinction between God and human beings in this regard. When human beings and sovereignty are put together, you get a very difficult situation.

Because human beings, men and women, we cannot bear being given sovereignty without misusing it. I mean absolute sovereignty. Can you remember that person at school who was given tremendous authority, who was made the head of something?

[ 8 : 17 ] And they became a tyrant. How impossible. Even our friends become. When they're given absolute authority in school. It often happens when people are promoted. When we praise democracy and our democratic way of life in the West, it's actually a backhanded compliment.

Because the whole essence of democracy is we can't trust anybody. To have complete sovereignty. And we'll see that that power is spread amongst everybody.

Democracy testifies to the fact that we're not trustworthy. Man and sovereignty don't go well together. It's very hard to handle power. In contrast, God has absolute power.

And the Old and New Testament glory in the fact that God does whatever he pleases. He does exactly as he pleases. And we are happy for us that he does. That's so. The Bible writers say God dominates all things of all men.

That he disposes all things of all men in history and creation. And so when Job. Do you remember that great story of Job? He's in hospital. He's covered in boils.

[ 9 : 25 ] And he's visited by his three friends. Who are unfortunately theologians. And they get completely confused. And they make things worse for Job. And Job himself began to say some very foolish things.

And at the end of the book of Job. God speaks about himself to Job. And right at the end of the book. In the last book. In the last chapter of Job.

Do you remember what he says? Let me read it to you. In the last chapter of Job. In Psalm 42 verses 1 to 3. Job 42 he says. Then Job answered the Lord and said.

I know that you can do all things. And that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand. Things too wonderful for me.

Which I did not know. He says please forgive me for being such a fool. I didn't understand. I didn't realize that you God are the sovereign God.

[ 10 : 21 ] And for Job that was the beginning of sanity. And so it is for many of us. Isn't it? Now this sovereign God of the Old and the New Testament. Is not always evident is he when you read the newspaper.

Yet the believers of the Old Testament. They had never any doubt. That whatever happened to Israel. And whatever happened in the world around them. It showed that God was sovereign. Let me read to you again from Psalm 99.

Verses 1 to 5. It says the Lord reigns. Let the people tremble. God sits enthroned upon the cherubim. Let the earth quake. The Lord is great in Zion.

He is exalted over all the peoples. Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he. The king in his might loves justice. You've established equity. You've executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

Exalt the Lord our God. Worship at his footstool. Holy is he. Isn't that interesting? Sheer naked power. Never interests the psalmist.

[ 11 : 23 ] God is sovereign. But as he sings of the sovereignty of God. Of the Lord who lays bare his arm. The Lord who can do what he wants with his world. Yet what is so remarkable to the psalmist.

Is that the sovereignty of God is always linked with his holiness. That he is morally perfect. That he is other. He is not contaminated. So that when God acts.

And he uses that sovereign power. He always acts rightly. What a contrast to you and I. If God is sovereign. What is the most difficult matter. That God has to deal with in the universe.

We think that there is nothing. That we cannot control. And there is nothing that we can't conquer. And make useful to mankind. And yet we cannot. We can't control ourselves.

Can we? We can. Put a man on the moon. But I can't stop losing my temper. With my children. Can I? We can do. Extraordinary things.

[ 12 : 26 ] And yet we can't control our lips. We have extraordinary technical power. We might be able to control the universe. But the Bible is very clear. That the greatest problem. The most intractable evil.

Is found in the human heart. To subdue my heart. To turn its hatred. And enmity into love. To turn my perversity. Into something lovely. For that to happen.

That needs. Well it needs the power of God. Let's read. Just how it happened to the Apostle Paul. Turn with me if you will. Into Galatians chapter 1. Galatians chapter 1.

It's on page 972. Galatians chapter 1. And I love the calmness of this description. Verse 13.

Galatians 1. For you were feared of my former life in Judaism.

Paul says. How I persecuted the church of God violently. And tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism. Beyond many of my own age. Among my people. So extremely zealous was I for the tradition of my fathers.

[ 13 : 23 ] But when he would set me apart. Before I was called. Before I was born. And called me by his grace. Was pleased to reveal his son to me. In order that I might preach among the Gentiles.

I did not immediately consult with anyone. It's wonderful. There's a calmness to that description. It's rather like the miracles of the gospel. So simple and uncomplicated. It's as if God with just a word.

Set him free. Paul says. I was going against the truth. For all I was worth. But when he would set me apart. Before I was born. And chose to reveal Christ. Well that was the end of the old way.

And the beginning of the new. In Paul's case. It was particularly dramatic. It's not always like that. But the reality is the same. Now when we talk about God's sovereignty.

This kingship. People begin to get a little bit restless. You might be listening. Thinking. Well. God gives us. No freedom. And no responsibility.

[14:20] And I want to say that's not true. God respects our humanity. Indeed the biblical doctrine of God's sovereignty. Does not imagine for a moment. That God treats you like a robot.

The Bible assumes that we are given our humanity. Is fully recognised by God. We are made in his image. Apart from sin and the fall. We have real freedom.

Yet even though we use that freedom against God all our lives. Yet his will is done. When everybody rose up against Jesus of Nazareth. Romans, Gentiles, everyone.

And they did their absolute worst. So at the cross of Calvary. You see the worst crime in human history. God causes that in his sovereignty. To be the most wonderful demonstration of his redeeming love.

It's so hard for us to fathom. You go back to the 1950s. When the anti-Christian men drove out every single Chinese follower out of China.

[15:20] They tried to obliterate every mark of the Christian church in China. Men used their freedom. And they used it against God.

And they deliberately blasphemed the cause of Christ. And what's the result of that? The result of that is that the fastest growing church in the world today is in China. It's far bigger and far greater and more vigorous than it's ever been.

And what's the great hallmark of the Chinese church? Well it's led by Chinese people. Not by British missionaries. That's God's sovereignty isn't it? God knew that his church could never be a real church in China.

As long as it was led by foreigners. And the only way for the foreigners to go was for the enemies of Christ to drive them out. That is sovereignty. There's many ways that the Bible teaches God's sovereignty.

Well it's by prophecy. The prophet did foretell in his own generation. But he also foretold the truth. And how impossible it is to tell the future. To forecast the general election.

[16:26] The financial markets. To predict the football season. To try and look into the future is a mug's game. Only God can do it. And God looks into the future. And he can tell what will happen hundreds of years into the future.

And he can do that because God is sovereign. So Paul in this conversion marvels at the sovereignty of God. And many marvels at the grace of God. Look at verse 14. And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

It's like a great wave. A wave that knocked him over. I'm going back to Wales this afternoon. I'm hoping to get to Rosilly Bay. I'm hoping to get in the sea this week. It's a great thing.

To get in the sea in South Wales. It's beautiful water. Do it when you're down there. And you know what it's like, isn't it? When you hit it. When a big wave hits you. And you don't know where you are. You don't know which direction you get in.

You don't even know whether your shorts are on or not. And you're knocked over. And this wave of the grace of God comes. And it knocks away all the hatred. And it leaves in its place love.

[17:29] Knocks away all the unbelief. And it leaves in its place faith. And to whom did this happen? Well verse 13. It happened to a blasphemer, a persecutor and an insolent opponent.

That is the grace of God. The grace of God is that God is pleased to bring enemies to himself. When you read Mark's Gospel. You come to chapter 2.

And Jesus chooses Levi. And I always wonder of that story. Jesus going to the four disciples he's already chosen. To Andrew, to Peter, to James and to John. And he sits them down and he says. Gentlemen. I've got to talk to you about the fifth man who's going to join us. I've decided to choose Levi. And their faces drop. And after Jesus leaves the room.

They have a hurried discussion. And they go and see Jesus. And they say. Master Lord. If you're going to do that. We're going to have to quit. Because Levi will ruin your cause.

[18:24] You don't want anything to do with him. You probably don't understand. But let me fill you in what kind of man he's like. He rips off family. There are people in prison because of Levi. Because he.

There are fathers who have to leave their children because of Levi. Because he rips them off. Well I don't know how they come to terms with it. But it's a lovely illustration of grace. Isn't it? God choosing not a good guy.

But somebody who was hated. And rightly so. And it's so important to get this clear. That when God laid his hand on me. And he laid his hand on you. That was a great risk to the future of the Christian church.

To choose you to be a Christian. Was certainly to dirty the water. And if you know your own heart. You will know that you are more likely to let Jesus down.

Than to do the cause good. Sovereign grace is where it all starts. God takes that which is unworthy. And he purposes to change us. And make us into something.

[ 19 : 21 ] Which he is pleased with. That's sovereign grace. And what a glorious thing it is. Let me read to you. Acts. 9 verse 26.

When Paul had come to Jerusalem. And he attempts to. Join the disciples. And when he came to Jerusalem. He attempted to join the disciples. And they were afraid of him. For they did not believe that he was a disciple.

They did not believe that he was a disciple. They all said with one voice. Didn't they? No, no. This man isn't for real. There is no way we are going to believe.

That this man. Who was an insolent persecutor. And an opponent of the gospel. Is now on our side. It's so hard to believe. Isn't it? In sovereign grace. And what I think wonderfully this says to us.

Is this. When we believe in sovereign grace. We will go after the most unlikely converts. It's interesting that these great phrases. Remain in our culture. Even if our culture is so far away from the gospel.

[ 20 : 22 ] There but for the grace of God. Go I. People use that language. Don't they? Even if they're not Christians. And we see people who are not Christians. Not found.

They say this truth. But for the grace of God. I should have gone too. But we must say that. Praise God for his sovereignty. Praise God for his grace. But what's the last word in verse 16?

What is it? Patience. Patience. That is the very nature of God. I don't know what you think of God. I don't know what comes into your mind when you think of God. Let me read to you how God discloses himself in the book of Exodus. Moses says there. He says the Lord passed before him and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious.

Slow to anger. And abounding in steadfast love. Keeping steadfast love for thousands. Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

[ 21 : 19 ] But who will by no means clear the guilty. Visiting the iniquity of the fathers of the children. And the children's children of the third and fourth generation. Moses quickly bowed his head towards the earth and worshipped.

Now two of my children are here this morning, this afternoon. You might meet them afterwards. If you said, oh, your children are lovely, aren't they? They're a little bit slow. That wouldn't be a compliment, would it?

If you said to my children, oh, he's a lovely little boy, that Noah, but he's very slow. That wouldn't be a kind thing to say. But God says he is slow. God says himself, he is slow.

When we say to someone that they're slow, we mean that they're backward or they're unresponsive. It's a strange thing for God to say, isn't it? That he is slow. But he is slow in one regard only, and that is slow to anger.

It's very foolish, indeed, to presume on God's patience. But how thankful we are that he is slow to punish. These three things that I've spoken to you about today is patience, his grace, and his sovereignty.

[ 22 : 26 ] They're closely related. They are wonderful things, and yet I have to say that when we think on them, they often make us feel uncomfortable because they put us securely in our place.

Imagine you've trained as a teacher. You're on your first day teaching in your new class. The head teacher takes you from the staff room, and you walk down a long corridor.

And he walks you to your classroom that is to be yours for the coming year. And just before the head teacher, she opens the door, and she says, I want to tell you, you're going to need a lot of patience with this lot.

Your heart would start to sink. God looks upon us. He sends his son Jesus Christ into the world. And it's as though the heavenly angels realize that God is going to need an awful lot of patience

with this lot.

He's going to need actually infinite patience, and infinite grace, and infinite power to make anything of us. But because he's willing to do so, two things happen. Can you see what happens?

[ 23 : 26 ] Verse 12. Verse 1 Timothy 1. The first thing that happens is that the believer thanks him. And so that's the first response.

I thank him. Will you thank him this lunchtime? That must characterize us as Christians, that we are thankful to God. And the second thing is the believer comes to trust in him.

Verse 16. But I receive mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who are to believe in him for eternal life.

So let it be an example to you this lunchtime. To put your trust in Jesus Christ and in his grace and in his patience and in his sovereign power.

And in his mercy too. That you may come to experience eternal life. That is the privilege of every Christian. To the king of the king of the ages, the mortal, invisible, the only God, the honour and glory forever and ever.

[ 24 : 27 ] Amen. Let's pray.