

1 Timothy 1:12-20

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[0 : 00] I'll turn, if you will, to 1 Timothy chapter 1, verses 12 to 20. 1 Timothy chapter 1, which is on page 991.

In a court of law, exhibit A is the chief piece of evidence that's brought by the prosecution, just brought their case. And what you've got in this letter of 1 Timothy is a prosecution. Paul, the apostle, has got a case against the church at Ephesus, and he's bringing his charge against the church at Ephesus.

He's charging them with the cry, you've departed from the gospel. And they are in danger of allowing the gospel to strip through their fingers. And it's a very, very serious situation to be in this church. He's accusing them of, in his statement verse 11, having departed from the gospel of the glory of the blessed God.

And that's a very serious situation to be in. And what he does now is he presents himself as exhibit A. He's giving his own testimony. And he's doing that in support of his case against the church at Ephesus, against the rogue elders in Ephesus that he'd warned against.

Do you remember Acts chapter 20? He'd been there for a number of years, and he's leaving Ephesus, and he says to them, listen, when I go, from amongst yourselves will rise up leaders who are going to lead the church off the rails.

[1 : 46] And so this whole series, this whole book of 1 Timothy is all about how do you keep a church on the gospel rails? When is a church no longer a church?

And the answer to that is when it's lost the gospel of the Lord Jesus. There are lots and lots of churches that call themselves churches, but actually they aren't churches any longer.

The gospel of the Lord Jesus has been removed. But how do you prevent that from happening? You can go to any part of the UK, you can go to any part of the world for that matter, and you will find loads of places that have got signed outside the door which says church.

But lots of them are churches that Jesus Christ would no longer recognize. Churches cross the rails. Churches. They start well. And Paul writes this letter to Timothy to know how we might keep a church on track.

And he puts himself into the argument. He says, I'm living proof of what the gospel of the Lord Jesus does. He presents himself as exhibit A. And I want you to see three things.

[2 : 57] I want you to see echoes from his past. I want you to see an exhibit for the future. And I want you to see an exhortation for the present. Echoes from the past.

An exhibit for the future. Exhortation for the present. So echoes from the past. So you know that, as you go to a bunny park, kids, and you go to that, the fire deck, there's that little bit which crosses in, and you're in there and you can shout, shout at you, and it echoes back at you.

Do you know that place in Hanwell? And we all know there's tunnels like that, aren't there? There's bridges where you go through and you shout, and you can hear an echo.

And there's a little bit in the car park out there, actually. You can go and shout in the car park. And bizarrely, there's a bit of an echo. But there are those times out there where you're in a tunnel and you shout, and you can hear the echo really coming back and forth, bouncing off the walls.

Depends on the acoustics. In fact, if you come to our chapel in Drayton Green tonight, and we take the car park over the wall and you shout, the sound bounces all over the place. And it can go on for quite a long time.

[4 : 06] Well, in Powell's case, the echo has gone on for 20 or 30 years. By the time you write Cicillia to Timothy, he's been a Christian for 25 years. But you can still hear the echoes of what people used to say about him.

It's there in verse 13. Can you see? Blasphemer, persecutor, violent man. If you go back to Acts chapter 9, in the day when the Apostle Paul became a Christian, in verse 13 of Acts chapter 9, there's a man called Ananias.

And he's asked if he'd like to go and sponsor the Apostle Paul. To be a kind of guardian for him. And he says, Ananias says, Lord, I've heard from many about this man.

How much evil he's done to your saints at Jerusalem. And how he's authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name. And then, in verse 9 of Acts 26, verse 26 of Acts 9, when he had come to Jerusalem, that's the Apostle Paul, he attempted to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him.

They were terrified of him, because they did not believe that he was a disciple, because he was a violent, persecutor, blasphemer. Or you go to Galatians 1.22, and Paul says, I was still unknown in persons of the churches in Judea, that are in Christ.

[5 : 25] They were only hearing it said, he who once used to persecute us, is now preaching the faith, that he once tried to destroy. And they glorified God because of me.

But not everybody glorified God because of the Apostle Paul. And all his life, and all his ministry, were the subject of a whisper and campaign. And that is very, very hard to cope with, isn't it?

If Paul had walked into a recruitment agency in Jerusalem, and had said to the agent, I want to work for the church, they would have said, we don't think you've got the right CV. Because on his CV it would have said, blasphemer, persecutor, violent man.

No, no, those are the qualifications, that we're looking for to work in the church. And it was still being said about him. He'd been a Christian for 20 or 30 years, and people were still dredging up his past, still whispering about him.

Now I don't know about you, I don't know whether you've ever been the subject of a whispering campaign. But in one sense, every Christian is. Every Christian finds himself or herself in that situation.

[6 : 36] For one thing in the Bible, the devil is described as the accuser of the Christian. The devil loves, doesn't he, to dredge up your past, and point the finger at us all.

I love this quote, that when the devil reminds you of his past, of your past, make sure you remind him of his future. But the devil is always wanting to remind us of our past, doesn't he?

He doesn't always appear with a cloven hooves and a forked tail and horns sticking out of the top of his head. The devil usually comes in disguise. Sometimes he appears as an angel of light, Paul says.

Sometimes he appears in a pulpit behind a lectern like this through false features. And sometimes he comes to us through our nearest and dearest, our closest friends. And often they don't realize what they're doing, a careless word.

And you know and I know that a casual comment can have a devastating effect. It's happened to me again and again, and I'm sure it's happened to you. It's not that people mean anything by it, but sometimes you get two or three people saying something to you one after the other and it can paralyze you, can't it?

[7 : 49] It happens to all of us. The devil will come in subtle ways where we least expect to find him and he points his finger and he accuses us.

Now how do you handle that? How did Paul answer the whispering campaign? How did Paul answer the echoes from his past? Well notice what he doesn't do there.

He doesn't try to justify himself. He doesn't become self-defensive. Look at what he does in verse 12. He says, He says, I thank him who has given me strength. Christ Jesus, our Lord, because he judged me faithful upon me to his service.

Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent, but I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord overflowed from me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Do you remember what the hymn writer says? We sang it earlier. When Satan tempts me to despair and he tells me of the guilt within, what do I do?

[8 : 53] Upward I look and see him there, the Lord Jesus, who made an end of all my sin. This is a great truth in the Bible that the devil can never tell me anything about myself which the Lord Jesus doesn't know already.

Just remember that. When the devil dredges up things even from your subconscious, from your long and distant past, and when the devil comes and has a go at you, he's not telling you anything about yourself that Jesus doesn't already know.

And it is all atone for. It is all covered by the blood of his cross. And his love which brought him to the cross covered over a multitude of sins, past, present, and future.

You realise that, don't you? The sins of my past are forgotten, but what about the sins of today and tomorrow? When all your sins in the future, when Jesus died, were forgiven.

He didn't even exist when Jesus died on the cross. But he died there to atone. For all your sins, past, and present, and future, it is all covered by his atoning sacrifice on the cross.

[10:15] And those are our protection from the devil comes from. When he comes as a go of us, when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt of the end, I don't become more prickly and self-defensive.

I don't have to justify myself. Up what I learn. I see him there. Who made an end of all my sin. And do you know this? How the devil always oversteps himself.

I love the way Paul talks in verse 12. Particularly, he reminds us of our past, doesn't he? The devil reminds us of our past because he wants to paralyze us in the present.

That is the difference, is there, between the work of the devil and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, doesn't he? But when the Holy Spirit convicts of our sin, he always, always points us to the Lord Jesus at the same time.

The Holy Spirit never shows us our sin just to demoralize us or discourage us. The Holy Spirit always shows us our sin and points us to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus, at the same time.

[11:23] The devil will show you your sin, but he'll turn you in on himself. He'll demoralize you and discourage you, but he always oversteps the mark. You notice it has quite the opposite effect on the Apostle Paul, doesn't he?

Far from discouraging him, it greatly encourages him. The devil comes and says, Paul, you are a blasphemer, you persecutor, you vile man.

How can you call yourself a Christian? And the devil says, thank God. And Paul says, thank God. In fact, Paul says, thank you, Satan, for reminding me how much I owe to Jesus Christ.

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointed me to his service. Though formerly I was blasphemed, and persecuted, and an insolent and violent man.

He is filled with gratitude for what Jesus has done. Not only has he saved me, but he's made me one of his servants. He's trusted me of all people.

[12:32] Me who used to persecute the church, who used to persecute the gospel, now I share it with others. The persecutor has become the preacher.

The murderer, who was a murderer, has become the missionary. And only the grace of God can do that. How good God is. You see, he does far more than we deserve.

How good it is to be reminded, even by our worst enemy in the devil, he's doing us a favour. He's dredging up our paths. I've told you a story tonight. When I was a student in Cardiff, there was a girl who came to visit me, my friend, and she came in, and my friend said, Leigh, go and hide behind the sofa.

So I hid behind the sofa, and my friend said to Sarah Street, what do you think of Leigh? And I'm sitting right behind her. And she let me, it was 15 minutes of just absolute brutality.

Call yourself a Christian, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And she went out of the room, I kind of crawled out behind the sofa. Well, I should have thanked God at that point. Because it's a great reminder, isn't it, of what we've been saved from.

[13:46] It's a great thing to know that you're saved by grace, isn't it? We become some blase about things. We just take it for granted. We don't appreciate it. As much as we should have, gracious, God has been in Christ to you.

John Bunyan, in his famous work, Pilgrim's Progress, in the work, in Pilgrim's Progress, Great Heart, says to Christians, boys, forgetful greed is the most dangerous of places.

Forgetful greed is the most dangerous of places. Don't allow yourself to forget. That great debt of gratitude that you owe to your Saviour. That is what Paul is talking to you about this morning.

John Newton, who wrote Amazing Grace, on his epitaph, he made sure that this was written, John Newton, Clark, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the mercy of our

Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, and pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had once so long laboured to destroy.

What a great way to be remembered. When John Newton was very old, he lost his memory, really. You wonder whether he was going to suffer from Alzheimer's in a way, but he said right at the end of his life, he says, my memory is gone, but two things I remember.

[15:04] I am a great sinner and Jesus Christ is a great Saviour. Thomas Goodwin, the old puritan, wrote this letter to his son. It's a brilliant letter. When I was threatening to become cold in my ministry, he's a preacher preparing to preach, but you can translate it into your devotion life.

When you become cold, he says, when I was threatening to become cold and I felt Sabbath morning coming and my heart not being filled with amazement at the grace of God, or when I was making ready to dispense the Lord's Supper, do you know what I used to do?

I used to take a turn up and down among the sins of my past life, and I always came down again with a broken and contrite heart ready to preach as it was preached in the beginning of forgiveness of sins.

I don't think, he said, I ever went up to the pulpit but I didn't stop for a moment at the foot of it and take a turn down among the sins of my past years. I don't think I ever planned a sermon and I didn't take a turn around my study table and look back at the sins of my youth and of all my life down to the present.

And many a Sabbath morning when my soul had been cold and dry for lack of prayer during the week a turn up and down in my past life before I went into the pulpit always broke my hard heart and made me close with the gospel for my own soul before I began to preach.

[16:26] You see, that is what is happening here in one simply. Do not think that you can ever grow out of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not think that you will ever get beyond the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You always need to come back to the foot of the cross, don't you? And as Paul hears yet again the things which are being said about him, the whispering campaign, as he hears about the echoes of the past, it doesn't scourge him, it doesn't depress him, it doesn't defeat him on the contrary he is filled with fresh appreciation because of the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

And then he presents himself in the second point, he presents himself as an exhibit for the future in verses 15 and 16. He says, this same verse 15 is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, you can trust me on this one, that Christ Jesus came into the world to his sinners of whom I am fullness. That is not false modesty, that is not kind of super spiritual, pious, talk, oh I am the worst. No, he was the worst. He literally slaughtered men, women and children.

He sort of destroyed the church and he thought he was doing God's will. He was like those people that flew into the Twin Towers in those places, they thought they were doing God's will. He sincerely thought that, he was a violent man, an insult man.

[17:54] He was a persecutor of Christians, he was a murderer and a blasphemer of God. So he's not being super pious, he's not being so humble, he wants us to understand he is presenting himself as a demonstration of what the gospel can do.

And that is the whole point of his testimony here, and it's not hard to understand why you would do that in Ephesus. Remember last week in verses 9 and 10, it shows there, doesn't it, that the people in Ephesus seem to have lost their confidence in the gospel.

And it's not surprising when you look at verses 9 and 10, you get a glimpse of what Ephesus is like. Look at what it says about that. It says, verse 9, I'm describing this, that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and disobedient, the ungodly and sinners, the unholy and profane, those who strike their fathers and mothers, murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, whatever else comes true to some doctrine.

That is Ephesus. That's Elym, isn't it? That's London, anywhere. People say to me, oh, London is such a hard place for gospel work.

Well, I've got news for you. Everywhere is a hard place for gospel work. And it doesn't get any harder than Paul's heart. That's the point.

[19:16] What is happening in Ephesus was that they persuaded themselves that Ephesus was such a hard place. Oh, it's so hard. No one's going to get converted with Ephesus. And they turned in upon themselves.

They beat their truth. They draw up the drawbridge. So instead of evangelizing Ephesus, they're proselytizing themselves. They're trying to convince each other of their positions. They're trying to win Christians over to their genealogy, their interpretation of a myth. That story of the Old Testament, they turned in on themselves, and they were proselytizing, and that is always a terrible thing when that happens.

When Christians are more concerned to win over other Christians to their point of view than they are with winning the loss of Christ. And that is the symptom of terminal decline.

And that's what's happening, that is what is going on in Ephesus. Instead of telling people that they need to share this message, they've withdrawn. And so you and I, we have the message that Eleni needs to hear.

[20 : 26] But do they hear it from us? We preach it, but we preach it to the converted. And we have to say that the people who need to hear it never hear it.

They're out of your shot. I don't say that because you are this morning. I say to you because it's an encouragement because Paul's testimony to us is a great encouragement to get out there.

Where it's so hard, isn't it? And people are so resistant and so rebellious and they are just disinterested. And we say, we just can't reach our neighbors, there's never any interest.

And Paul says, well God's grace touched me and I was like that. And you see, if God can save me, the chief of singers, then there are no hopeless cases, are there?

There are none. There's nowhere he can't reach. Are we persuaded of that? Do you believe it?

Spurgeon has always got some great quotes about these verses.

[21 : 28] This is what he says. He says, if a bridge is strong enough to carry an elephant, it will certainly carry a mouse. And if the greatest sinner who has ever lived has entered heaven by the bridge of the atonement sacrifice of Christ, then no one who has ever lived may say, my sin is beyond forgiveness.

It's a great encouragement for a church that has lost its evangelistic nerve. There's a great encouragement to you and I to be praying and seeking to speak to our neighbors and our colleagues.

And that's the challenge to us this morning. It's good to have a hall, comfortably full on a Sunday morning, but we've got a reaching West London, the impossible people, the people like they won't show any interest in Christianity.

And we can't do it because that is why we're here, that's what we're here for. Not only did the church in Ephesus lost its learning, because that was such a hard place, but there's something else going on.

Isn't it if you look at verses 19 and 20? It wasn't just the situation that they found themselves, but look at verses 19 and 20. Holding faith and a good conscience by rejecting the summer shipwreck of their faith, among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander who I've handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

[22 : 56] Now that is always a kick in the guts when that happens, isn't it? Two gospel men, Hymenaeus and Alexander, they were preachers. Men had been men of faith and of love, but now they've been handed over to Satan.

What does that mean? It's very simple, they've been kicked out of the church. So you are either in the church or you're in the world. And the Bible says Satan is the prince of this world, that's what the Bible calls him, and so if you're not in Christ's kingdom, then you are in his kingdom.

What I think is Hymenaeus took this seriously. There are teachers, aren't there, false teachers who are preaching a false gospel, and they've been handed over to Satan.

I'm sick and tired of reading scandals and some blasphemy that some bishop or church leader has spouted in the news. Hymenaeus and Alexander, they were gospel men once, they were men of faith and love, and Paul said, actually, they've departed from the faith and I've handed them over to Satan.

They are no longer Christian men. They are no longer Christian men. They are no longer Christian leaders who speak for us. Because they no longer hold to the gospel with faith and with a good conscience.

[24 : 15] Now when that happens, of course, that is devastating, isn't it? And it affects the church's credibility when that happens. But what Paul is doing here is saying, don't forget when that happens.

Don't forget when you have defections. Don't forget when your leaders actually end up departing from the faith and embarrassing you in public because they've made shipwreck of the faith and they've departed from the gospel.

Don't forget that the reverse is true also. It'll never get reported in the newspapers, will it? But the reverse is always true. There are blasphemers and persecutions and violent men who become Christians.

And the gospel can transform the greatest blasphemer into a man or woman of faith and love. And Paul says, I am exhibiting.

I am living proof of that. I was once a blasphemer, as everyone knows, but verse 17, I am now a worshiper of God. Verse 17, to the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, the honour and glory forever and ever.

[25 : 22] Amen. So do not lose your confidence in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that finally brings me to my exhortation for now. Verse 18 and 19. This charge I entrust to you, it's a formal thing.

This is serious stuff, Timothy. 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, fight for fight.

What is the battle? The battle for the faith. The battle for the gospel of the Lord Jesus. So it's really one of the Gentile leaders said this, just as Jesus Christ was crucified between two thieves, there are two thieves who will always come and try and rob us of the gospel.

There's legalism on the one hand, and there's license living for ourselves on the other. And the battle for us is always to keep the balance between those two things.

We don't fall into legalism on the one hand, but we don't fall into license of the other. We understand the grace of God which keeps us, and every generation of Christians has to fight this battle.

[26 : 32] Every generation of Christians has to fight this battle. Because to lose that balance of legalism on the one hand and license on the other is to shipwreck your faith.

And we don't have any choice in this because there's a chain of command here. There's a chain of command from Paul to Timothy to us. And the challenge to us this morning and to our church is keep the faith, hold the faith, guard the gospel.

How do you do that? How do you pride it? How do you hold it? By faith and a good conscience and by passing it on to others.

You do not, you cannot preserve the gospel by wrapping it in mothballs. Which is what we tend to do isn't it? So the church becomes like a museum and we bring the gospel out, out of the cabinet at 10.30 in the morning and 6.30 in the evening on Sunday and anybody who wants can come and have a look at it.

And then we shut it up and we put it in works. We put up a sign saying 10.30 at 6 o'clock lost sheep welcome here. We don't preserve the gospel by enshrining it in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

[27 : 53] I believe the Westminster Confession of Faith. It's an expression of what I believe. We must teach it. But you don't preserve the gospel by putting it in a confession of faith or a church constitution or a book of church order.

How do you preserve the gospel? Try preaching it to others. That's what Paul is arguing here. You preserve the gospel, you cherish the gospel as you hand it on.

Let me finish with this story. It's a well-known story. It's a surf club on the northern beaches of Sydney. It's a true story. The surf club was founded in the first half of the 20th century.

and the beach was notorious for currents and when a local boy disappeared in a swimming accident one day, the local people got together and they decided to form a surf club.

They patrolled the beach on weekends and they sort of rescued people who had gone out to the sea. The surf club became very, very successful. Everyone saw the lead and the numbers grew.

[28 : 56] They built a clubhouse. And the club took on a social life. There were dances at the surf club on a Saturday night. And eventually a bigger clubhouse was needed. To fund it, they ran Sausage Sizzles and Bingo on Wednesday night.

And in a short amount of time, the new clubhouse was built. It was a magnificent building. But a funny thing happened. While there was no shortage of helpers for the Bingo and the Beer of Corns

night, and the dances grew in popularity incredibly, they began to struggle to fill the rosters for Beach Patrol.

Lots of people wanted to be part of the club, but not the rest were in part. In fact, eventually they counseled the beach patrols for lack of interest, even though the social life in the club was booming. They realized the problem when a man drowned on the now unpatrolled beach next summer.

They'd forgotten who they were. They'd forgotten who they were supposed to be.

They'd forgotten that they were there to see people saved, to train up more lifesavers, and to support the beach patrol. Well, I wonder, could that ever happen to IPC? Do you think that could happen to a church?

[30 : 09] So that you forget who you are, you forget why we're here. So we enjoy coming, we make friends, we have a great time. But when there are rosters for the beach patrol, tell people and explain why we're here, going to get a bit thin on the ground.

The whole point of 150 is to remind us who we are and what we're here for. To remind us of God's great mission statement. We'll come back to this, but we'll just finish it, chapter 2, verses 3 and 4.

This is good and it is pleasing in the sight of God, our saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. That's God's mission statement.

God's mission statement. He is our saviour, and he desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. And that is God's mission statement for this church and every church.

And that is why Paul is writing this letter to Timothy and to you and me. Let's pray.