

# 1 Timothy 1:12-16

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[ 0 : 00 ] I do turn in that word to 1 Timothy 1. 1 Timothy 1. I'm away this week. I'm taking a conference in Northern Ireland for ministers.

So next Sunday, I need a break from my own voice, let alone you need a break from it. So next Sunday, Brian Maiden, who's one of my favorite preachers. He's a minister in Kendall. He's going to come and preach for us, which should be good. 1 Timothy 1. So I love this passage. It's a passage about kind of great things. It's a passage about a great change. Can you see that? Look at verses 13.

Formerly, I was a blasphemer and a persecutor and an insolent opponent. He became the greatest preacher, the greatest Christian thinker of the ages.

[ 1 : 00 ] And then in verse 15, there's a great saying. That Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners. And then in verse 17, which is what I want to speak on tonight, you see a great God.

A great God. It's a doxology. That means an outburst of praise. He's looking back to what had happened to him. He used to be a persecutor.

He used to be a blasphemer. He used to be a bitter opponent. But he was changed. And he cries out with joy and with gratitude.

Look at verse 17. To the king of the ages. Immortal. Never dying. Invisible. The only God. Be honor and glory forever and ever.

Now it's striking because usually the doxologies, they come at the end. But this doesn't come at the end, does it? It comes at the end of a tiny section.

[ 1 : 59 ] But it's as if Paul can't control himself. You see another one. Just look at chapter 6 and verses 15 to 16. There's another one there, isn't there? Which he will display at the proper time.

He who is the blessed, the only sovereign, the king of kings and the lord of lords. Who alone has immortality. Who dwells in unapproachable light. Whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion.

Amen. Amen. But it's a very common thing for the apostle Paul, as he's speaking, to burst out in praise.

To say at the end, this is what God has done for him. This is what God has done to him. And so he praises God. It's quite interesting, isn't it?

I think that one of the big issues we face is that people, if I can put them out there, think that we in here think that we're better than others.

[ 3 : 01 ] It's one of the problems with Christianity, isn't it? They think that, let's turn the phone off if we can. Otherwise I'm going to lose the plot in a minute, all right? Or you can bring it to me. I'll try and help you with it.

But they think, don't they, that we think as Christians that we're better than others. Like the legendary Jack Horner, isn't it?

Who sat in a corner and pulled out his thumb and pulled out a plum and said, what a good boy am I. They think that's what we sing every Sunday, pretty much.

But there's nothing like that, is there, in New Testament Christianity. You don't find that anywhere in the New Testament. When we praise God, we're not saying, what a good boy or a good girl am I. But we need to say straight away, that isn't how the New Testament sees it. We don't sing, to me be the glory, great things I have done, do we? It is to God be the glory, great things he has done.

[ 4 : 02 ] And so, you can see that just in this passage. Look at verse 15. Paul speaks in the present tense there. He says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I'm the foremost.

He doesn't say, I used to be the foremost, of whom I'm the first foremost. It's the opposite of self-congratulation. He realizes, even the great apostle Paul, that he's far away from a kind of moral

superiority.

So, the testimony of the apostle is, what a great God is God. God is glorious. We have little idea how glorious God is. But the apostle came to an understanding of how glorious God is.

And we, as Christians, are always needing just to rediscover that. And it's only when we rediscover how glorious God is, that then outsiders begin to be drawn in.

So, I think what you have in this paragraph is the genuine experience of a man who's come to know God. And then it's explained to us, so that we don't have a defective understanding of who this God is.

[ 5 : 13 ] And what conversion is. Because what you see here is that the knowledge of God is something for our heads and for our hearts. And that is what Jesus Christ has brought to human beings.

And so, this knowledge of God is more important than even the fruits of the knowledge of God. So, look with me just at verse 12.

It says there, I thank him who's given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service. So, in verse 12, he's called to serve God, the apostle.

And serving God is an unspeakable privilege. And yet, serving God is not as important as knowing God. Look at verse 14.

You see there that the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith of love that is in Christ Jesus.

[ 6 : 10 ] These are wonderful things. The love of a Christian for the world and for other people. It's a great thing to be able to serve God.

But that is a secondary thing to knowing God. Augustine's famous quote, You have made us for us yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.

And that is what we're made for. That is why you exist. You exist so that you would know God and glorify him and enjoy him. That is the point of life.

And so, if you miss knowledge of God that Paul is explaining, you will never be able to fill that gap. You will never be able to fill that hollowness.

That emptiness that there is in our city. It's one of the things that's so tangible in London, isn't it?

We have so much wealth, for which we're thankful for. And yet, without God, there is a tremendous vacuum.

[ 7 : 12 ] And a tremendous gap. And so, what people try to do is they fill it with all sorts of substitutes. But nobody and nothing can fill that gap. And so, Paul came, by the mercy of God, to know God.

And he glories in God. And so, we see three things that he glories in. First of all, the sovereignty of God. And then, the grace of God. And then, the patience of God.

The sovereignty of God. It comes out really clearly, doesn't it, in verse 17. To the king of the ages. Paul glories in the sovereignty of God.

This God in Jesus Christ has chosen him mercifully. And his patience stands out. It's there as well, in verse 17.

Now, the sovereignty of God, his lordship, his kingship, is, I think, probably one of, if not one of the greatest themes in the Old Testament and the New Testament. And the Bible makes it really clear that there's a clear distinction between God and human beings.

[ 8 : 20 ] And so, with man, with human beings, when human beings and sovereignty are put together, you get a very difficult situation, don't you? Because human beings cannot bear to be given sovereignty without misusing it.

I mean absolute sovereignty. Do you remember that person at school? Who was given the job of head boy, or was given chief prefect, or was made of the head of something?

How impossible they became. It often happens when people are promoted, doesn't it? We praise ourselves in the West for a democratic way of life.

But it's also, as well, isn't it, a curious, backhanded way of saying we can't trust anybody. And nobody can have complete sovereignty.

And so we see that power is spread around amongst everybody. Democracy testifies that we are not trustworthy. Human beings and sovereignty don't go well together.

[ 9 : 23 ] It's very hard to handle power. But in contrast to that, God has absolute power. In the Old Testament and the New Testament, the writers glory in the fact that God does exactly as he

pleases.

The Bible writers say that God dominates all things and all people. And that he disposes of all things and all people in history and creation.

And so come with me to Job, Job 42. Come with me to Job 42. Job is in hospital. He's covered in boils. And he's got three friends. And unfortunately, each one's a theologian.

And they get completely confused. And they make things much, much worse for Job. And they say some very, very foolish things.

But at the end of the book of Job, God speaks about himself to Job. And listen to God's testimony and then Job's response. Job 42, verse 1.

[10:26] And 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.

Hear and I will speak. I will question you. And you make it known to me. He's saying, isn't he, please forgive me.

Please forgive me for being such a fool. I didn't understand. I now realize that you, Lord, are the sovereign God. And for Job, that is the beginning of sanity.

As it is for many people today. Of course, the sovereignty of God in the Old Testament and the New Testament is not always apparent when you look at the news on the internet. It's not always evident when you read it in the newspapers.

[11:30] And yet, in the Old Testament, the believers never had any doubt that what happened to the people of Israel and whatever happened in the world around them, God was sovereign.

So let me read to you from Psalm 99, verses 1 to 5. Listen to this carefully. The Lord reigns. Let the peoples tremble. He sits enthroned upon the cherubim. Let the earthquake.

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 by itself. God is sovereign. But even as he sings of the sovereignty of God, the God who lays bare his arm, the God who can do what he wants with his will, it's remarkable.

[12:39] I don't know whether you picked it up. The psalmist says twice there, he links it with his holiness. Holy is he. And so when God does what he pleases, when God acts in power, he does so righteously.

And that's such a contrast to us. As if God is sovereign, what is the most difficult matter God has to deal with in the universe? We think as human beings, don't we really?

There's nothing we can't control. There's nothing that we can't make useful to humankind. There's nothing that we can't fix. But we cannot control ourselves.

We cannot control ourselves. The poison within. And so we see, don't we, in the world in which you live, extraordinary technical power.

And yet a complete inability to control themselves. And we might be able to control the universe.

But the Bible is really realistic, as we saw this morning. The Bible is very clear that the greatest problem, the most intractable evil, is found in the human heart.

[13:51] To subdue my heart. And turn its enmity and its hatred into love. To turn my perversity into something lovely, well, that needs the power of God.

So let's go again. Let's go to Galatians chapter one. And let's read how that happened to the Apostle Paul. Let me read it to you if you don't want to turn there. Galatians chapter one. I love the calmness of this description.

So Galatians chapter one, verses 13 to 16. It says, For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently, and I tried to destroy it.

I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age, among my own people. So extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my father. But when he, who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone.

It's wonderful, isn't it? That calmness. It's rather like the miracles of Jesus, that in the Gospels are so extraordinary, and yet so simple and uncomplicated.

[15:05] That God, with just a word, describes the grip of evil that it had on him, and sets him free. Paul is saying, I was going against the truth for all it was worth, but when he who had set me apart from before I was born, chose to reveal Christ to me, well, that was the end of the old way, and the beginning of the new way.

And in Paul's case, it was radically dramatic, wasn't it? It isn't that dramatic for you and I. But the reality, in the end, is the same. And so when we talk about God's sovereignty, God's kingship, some people begin to get a little bit restless.

You might think the preacher is suggesting, God gives us no freedom and no responsibility. And I want to say that is 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 you have been given your humanity, and that is fully recognized by God. We are made in his image. And apart from sin and the fall, we have a real freedom.

And yet, even though we use that freedom against God all of our lives, yet his will is done. So the great example of that is at the cross, isn't it?

[16:33] When everyone rose up against Jesus of Nazareth, Romans, Gentiles, everyone, they did their absolute worst at the cross of Calvary. The worst crime in history, God chooses and causes that in his sovereignty, that becomes the most wonderful demonstration of his redeeming love.

love that is impossible for you and I to fathom. You see it in the history of the church. So you go back to 1951 in China, and missionaries are violently, and anti-Christian men drive out every single Christian foreigner out of China.

And they sought, in the most possible way, to obliterate every mark of the Christian church in China. Men, governments, used their freedom, and they used it against God.

They deliberately, on purpose, blasphemed the cause of Christ. And yet, 70 years on, the church in China is far bigger, it is far greater, it is far more vigorous than it ever has been.

One difference is that it's now led by Chinese people. And that is God's sovereignty, isn't it? God knew that his church in China could never be a real church while it was led by foreigners.

[18:08] And the only way for the foreigners to go was for the enemies of Christ to drive them out. That is sovereignty. There are many ways that the Bible teaches God's sovereignty.

In the realms of prophecy. The prophet did foretell, speak the words of God to his own generation. But he also foretold, foretold, didn't he, what was to come.

And how impossible it is to tell the future, isn't it? So what are things going to be like in London? What will, how will people go back to the office or not?

The honest answer is this, you don't know. And neither does anyone else. What will happen in the financial markets? Will there be enough petrol on Monday afternoon?

Who will win the Premier League? All those predicting the future. It's a mug scheme, isn't it? It's impossible for us to know. Only God can do that.

[19:06] God looks into the future and he can tell what will happen hundreds of years from now. And he can do that because God is sovereign. So what he goes on to say is Paul in his conversion, he marvels and he praises God because God is sovereign.

And then he marvels at the grace of God. Look at verse 14. And the grace of the Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

It's like a great wave, isn't it? The wave knocked him over. I don't know if you've ever been out when the sea is really rough and there's a monster wave that comes and it knocks you over.

If you're surfing, you lose your surfboard. You don't know which direction you're in. Your shorts are around your knees. You don't know where you are, do you? And this wave has just knocked you.

You don't know which direction and then another one comes and you're over again. And what's happened in verse 14 is the wave of the grace of God comes and it knocks out all the hatred and it leaves in its place love.

[20:15] and it knocks away all the unbelief and it leaves in its place faith. And whom did this happen? Well, it happened in verse 13 to one who formerly was a blasphemer, a persecutor and an insolent opponent.

And that is the grace of God. And the grace of God means God is pleased to bring his enemies to himself. If you read Mark's gospel you come to chapter 2 and Levi it's a great story. And Levi is chosen to become a disciple. I often wonder at that story the four disciples that are already chosen Peter and Andrew and James and John and Jesus sits them down and says I want to tell you what the fifth man who I'm going to ask to be my next disciple. And I've decided to choose Levi. And their faces drop. And after a hurried discussion they might go and say Jesus and say Master Lord we have to say if you're going to do that if you're going to bring him in this tax collector we will have to quit. It will ruin the cause. We can't have anything to do with him. And you probably you don't understand who he is. Could we just fill you in?  
[ 21 : 39 ] Have you seen his CV? Well I don't know how they came to terms with it. But it's a lovely illustration of grace isn't it? God chooses not a good guy but someone who had every right to be hated.

And it's so important that you and I get this clear that when God laid his hand on you and when he laid his hand on me that was a great risk to the future of the Christian church. to choose you to be a Christian was to dirty the water.

As if you know your own heart like I know my own heart you will know that you are more likely to let Jesus down than to do the cause good. Sovereign grace is what starts it all.

And God takes that which is unworthy and he purposes to change us and to make us into something with which he is pleased. And that is sovereign grace. What a glorious thing that is. Come with me to Acts 9.26 It will keep you awake. Come with me to Acts 9.26 And you find there that the Apostle Paul Acts 9.26 when he came to Jerusalem it's a lovely little line there isn't it he attempted to join the disciples and they well they thought it was absolutely marvelous didn't they they thought it was terrific that the great future apostle was going to come to their church.

[ 23 : 18 ] No look at the second half of the verse and they were all afraid of him for they did not believe that he was a disciple. and neither would you or I have done.

They all said with one voice look out this man is he for real? He's not a disciple. There is no way we're going to believe that this man is now on our side.

Because it's so hard to believe in sovereign grace. And so what I think this passage does teach us this it teaches us that if we are going to believe as a church family in sovereign grace it means we will go after the most unlikely converts.

You'll go after the most unlikely converts. The people in your life the people in your street the people in your class who you think they will never become a Christian if you believe in sovereign grace you will start praying for them.

It's really interesting isn't it? There are certain phrases that have stuck in our culture that we use even today. So sometimes you hear this there but for the grace of God.

[ 24 : 35 ] They use that language even though they're not Christians. And as we see people who live on our street who maybe are in our families who are in our workplace who are in our classrooms as we see people who are not Christians and have not found this truth we have to say tonight don't be there but for the grace of God I should have gone too.

Praise God for his sovereignty. Praise God for his grace. What's that last one in verse 16? It is praise God for his patience.

Let me read to you. You don't have to turn it. Let me read to you. When Moses met with the living God and God descends to meet with Moses.

You know the story. If I can remember what the reference is. Bear with me. In fact I read it earlier didn't I?

In my notes. it's verses 5, 6, 7, and 8 but I couldn't tell you which chapter of Exodus it is. We're getting there.

[ 25 : 55 ] So the Lord, the Lord. It's Exodus 34. It's the Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness.

for thousands. Who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin. So it's just an interesting description isn't it? It comes up a number of times in the Old Testament.

Do you see what God described himself as? God says, doesn't he, he's slow. If I said to your child, after the service, I said, oh she's a lovely little girl isn't she, but she's a little bit slow.

I don't think you'd think that was kind. If I said to you, I really like your son, but he's a bit backward. What a beautiful little fellow, very unresponsive.

That's a really strange thing to say, isn't it? For God to say he is slow, well he's slow only in one regard, isn't he? He's slow to anger. He's patient.

[ 27 : 05 ] It's very foolish indeed. to presume on God's patience. But we are tonight, I hope, very, very thankful that he is slow to punish, slow to anger. And these three things are really closely related, aren't they?

His patience, his grace, and his sovereignty. And they are wonderful, wonderful things. And yet as I've thought about them, in honesty, I think they can make us uncomfortable.

Because they put men and women and boys and girls really in their place. I've used this illustration before. When you finish training as a teacher, you go to school on the first day of the new job.

Your head teacher walks you to your class that is going to be yours for the coming year. And just before the head teacher opens the door, she puts her hand on the handle, and she says, I need to tell you, you're going to need a lot of patience with these lot.

Opens the door and in you go. your heart would start to sink, wouldn't it? And as God looks down upon us and sends his son, Jesus Christ, into the world, it's as if the heavenly angels realize that God is going to need infinite patience and infinite grace and infinite power to make anything of us.

[ 28 : 26 ] But because he's willing to do that, two things happen. Look at verse 12 of 1 Timothy 1. The believer thanks him. And truly that must be our response tonight, to thank him.

And then in verse 16, the believer comes to trust him. That Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him, to trust in him for eternal life.

And so those two responses should mark us this week, isn't it? We should thank him and we should trust him. Put your trust in Jesus Christ and in his grace and in his patience and in his sovereign

power that you might come to experience the eternal life that is the privilege of every Christian.

to the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, the honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen.