

**Our Lesson from Paul's Conversion**  
**Sermon on 1 Timothy 1: 12 - 17**  
**Weekend of January 29, 2006**  
**Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI**  
**Pastor Karl Walther**

The Apostle Paul once wrote: *The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Paul knew personally how true that was—and through him: so do we! Amen.

God's Word for our special consideration today is First Timothy, chapter one, verses twelve through seventeen. Here the Apostle Paul writes, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.*

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

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

**Introduction: Biographies Are Instructive for Us**

Dear fellow converts to Christ:

People love a good story, don't they? People love a good story—especially ones involving other people. How else to explain the popularity of something like the Biography Channel, right? And how else would we explain that the t.v. news is dominated by human interest stories and a human interest perspective?

In fact, I'll admit it sort of frustrates me sometimes. I mean: it's hard to get just plain news these days—because broadcasts usually feature one person's story or one person's reactions, no matter the multitude of other things that are going on around him at the time. And his or her story may or may not apply to me.

God's Word also very regularly tells the story of people. However, when Scripture does so, the stories always apply in some way to me and to you. That's why God tells them. I mean: either the stories warn and threaten my old sinful nature, or they instruct and comfort the new Christian nature that lives within me.

I guess that's why the Christian Church, over the centuries, developed a whole series of "feast days"—in which it commemorates especially the lives of the apostles and other people from the New Testament Scriptures. And one such festival takes place this week: The Festival of the Conversion of the Apostle Paul—a minor festival we're celebrating today.

**Theme: Our Lesson from Paul's Conversion**

Now, as I said, the Lord records for us the conversion of the Apostle Paul because it has application to us. It's a warning to our old sinful nature. And most of all, it's a comfort to – and instruction for – the new Christian nature that lives within us.

## **Part One: Each of Us Is the Worst of Sinners**

In this morning's featured lesson from the Book of Acts, you and I heard the account of the conversion of the Apostle Paul. In this morning's Word from God in the sermon text, the Apostle Paul comments upon that – thirty years after the fact – for the sake of his young fellow pastor Timothy, and for our sakes also.

Among other things, you noticed he said: *I was once a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and a violent man*—literally, something like: *the worst of insulters*. Now think of it: those are dreadfully bad characteristics! *Blasphemy*, which is a matter of robbing God of the glory due to him—that's as bad a thing as you can do to God. *Persecution*—that's as bad a thing as you can do to the body of others. And *insulting*—that's as bad a thing as you can do to the heart of others.

And it's a life like that which caused Paul to say: *I am the worst of sinners*. Literally, that reads: *I am the first of sinners*—essentially the “first”, the “worst”, and the “chief” of sinners. And I think it's probably good to note that Paul didn't just consider himself the first, worst, and chief of sinners because he knew his sins better than those of others. No, as he said, and as he makes a point of later: his sins seriously were really bad.

So, how does that apply to us? How do we compare? Well honestly, most of us probably haven't actively opposed the top truths of God's Word, as Paul did. Most of us probably haven't hunted down and killed Christians, as Paul did.

Of course, hasn't our sinful nature done exactly those things? And doesn't God see not only what we do, but also what we think? From that perspective, each one of us can say, “I am the worst of sinners.”

I mean, what kind of rebellion against God does it take for us to say or even to think, “I don't like this part of God's Word; I don't like what God is saying here”? And admit it! Every one of us has done that. ...What kind of rebellion against God does it take for us to say or even to think, “I get so angry at that person that I could just punch him”—punch somebody God knit together, punch somebody for whom Christ Jesus bled? ...What kind of rebellion against God is it for us to judge and insult any fellow Christian? And admit it! We have all done that.

No wonder I am the chief of sinners! And you are the first and worst, as well.

## **Part Two: Christ Came to Save Each One of Us**

But: *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord* – oh, and this is God's Word to us today! – *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength* – says the Apostle Paul – *that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service*. And how was it that God could consider this blasphemer and persecutor *faithful*? It was only through the faithfulness of his Savior, Jesus Christ!

So, Paul goes on: *Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent (ly insulting) man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief*. Those who don't act in ignorance, like Pharaoh or Judas, those who have literally seen God's mercy and yet reject it again and again—these, of course, have made themselves impossible to be touched by God's mercy.

As for Paul, though: *The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly* – sounds like his baptism ... – *along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus*.

And then that beautiful expression of the gospel message: *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst.* The sole and whole purpose for which Jesus came was on a rescue mission—to save Paul and you and me!

*But for that very reason I was shown mercy* – and it’s precisely for this reason that God records for us Paul’s biography – *so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.*

Do you see what that’s saying?

If Paul, who daydreamed about and dreamt up ways to insult God’s Christian people—if that Paul received God’s grace and mercy through Christ Jesus, then so do you! Then every wicked, perverted thought you’ve ever had, even the meanest, most evil ones—Christ also was sentenced for those.

If Paul, who himself hunted down and actually murdered God’s Christian people—if that Paul had God’s Holy Spirit poured out abundantly upon him, then so do you! Then every hurtful thing you’ve ever done, even those that still harm others the worst—Christ also went through hell for those.

And if Paul, who dared to dedicate his life against God—if that Paul received God’s mercy and grace by way of Jesus Christ, then so do you! Then even your witchcraft is forgiven. Then even your idolatry is forgiven. Then even the bored apathy of your stone-cold sinful nature is forgiven. Christ died for you.

### **Part Three: We Now Render All Honor to Christ**

Isn’t that magnificent?! Isn’t it almost beyond belief—except that it’s so true, and so true for you?!

No wonder Paul breaks into a doxology of lofty praise to such a very great God! *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Let’s consider that a little more carefully.... *Now to the King* – can’t you just see him: enormous and tall on his heavenly throne? – *eternal* – without end, without any beginning! – *immortal* – not subject to any ruin and also omnipotent! – *invisible* – yet present everywhere! – *the only wise God* – there’s not a thing he doesn’t know, and also best how to please us! – to that King *be honor and glory for ever and ever.*

Our sentiments exactly, right?! So, how are we going to render him honor and glory for ever and ever? Well, it starts now, as we pay perfect attention to his Word. It starts with the next hymn and continues until our last hymn – and then we hum hymns to him in paradise! – as we loudly and tunefully sing his praise. It starts here as we walk out these doors with joy in our hearts and a smile on our faces.

But it’s not just here and it doesn’t end here. ...We render him honor and glory for ever and ever when we wake up cheerfully on Monday and when we are thankful for another day to serve him. ...We render God glory and honor for ever and ever when we go about our tasks: our cooking and cleaning, or our reading and studying, or our working and laboring, or our helping and comforting—we render him honor and glory forever when we go about our tasks, convinced that’s what Christ wants us to do. ...And we render God glory and honor for ever and ever when we realize our one great task the rest of our lives (apart from remaining in his grace by way of his Word) is to bring others into God’s grace by speaking to them regarding Christ their Savior—and paying others to do so, too.

## **Conclusion: Paul's Biography Is Our Own**

It's a good story, isn't it? The conversion of the Apostle Paul is a good story because it is true and fascinating. It is a great story because it's your story and mine, as well.

Each of us is the worst of sinners!—like Paul. Christ came to save each one of us!—as he did for Paul. We now render all honor to Christ!—as did Paul.

And then the conclusion of your biography, your life's story, is the same as the conclusion to Paul's biography, Paul's life's story. You both receive paradise through Jesus Christ! Amen.

The Apostle Paul once wrote: *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.* Paul knew personally how true that was—and through him: so do we! Amen.