

1 TIM 1:12-17—PAUL’S LIFE AND OURS

INTRO: Many years ago Thomas Harris published a book that became very popular entitled *I’m OK, You’re OK*. Even if we haven’t read the book, the title has entered into the popular culture because it really summarizes what most of us tend to think about ourselves and others.

That idea—that we’re all pretty much OK—gets reinforced everyday, particularly here where we live. The Valley is a great place. Look around at your neighbors here today. Not an axe murderer in sight. It’s sort of like Lake Wobegon, where **“all the women and strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average.”**

When we look at some other people in other parts of the world—people like ISIS and the Taliban—we see them doing the most obscene acts of brutality to helpless, innocent people. We don’t do things like that. And we rightly recoil when we see it or read about it. We think, **“I could never cut off someone’s head with a knife,”** and we’re right—as long as we continue to live in peace in a nice place with other nice people pretty much like ourselves.

But don’t kid yourself about what you are capable of. We all have the seeds within us to do the most obscene and brutal acts. But those seeds have never been watered and nurtured—so they haven’t yet germinated. If the circumstances were different, all of us have it within us to do things none of us could imagine as we sit here today.

For example, my dad’s side of the family is from Germany. About 150 or so years ago Germany was known as **“the land of poets and thinkers.”** Then Adolf Hitler and the Nazis came along. There’s a book called *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* that talks about how normal, educated, respectable Germans, people just like us, willingly hunted Jews like animals, tortured them wantonly, and then posed cheerfully for snapshots with their victims.

Lest you think the Germans were somehow different from us, in WWII our own American soldiers in the Pacific Theater sometimes cut off and boiled the heads of dead Japanese soldiers and sent the skulls back to their girlfriends in the States as souvenirs. In one case, a couple of young American soldiers cut off the heads of three Japanese soldiers and stuck them on poles facing the Japanese side of the river. The colonel saw this and said, **“What are you doing? You’re acting like animals.”** One of the soldiers, a young, dirty, probably scared kid, replied, **“That’s right Colonel, we *are* animals. We live like animals, we eat and are treated like animals—what the f*** do you expect?”** All of this could happen because the seeds that all along were in these normal, everyday people had been taken out of the box, planted, watered, and nurtured, until they sprouted, grew, and bore a bitter fruit.

Today’s passage of Scripture, 1 Tim 1:12-17, gives us the example of a person very much like us—the apostle Paul. When Paul was growing up in the city of Tarsus in modern Turkey, he came from a good family, had money, and a great education. He was religious and was trained by the leading rabbi of his day. Probably the last thing he ever thought was that he would grow up to be a mass-murderer. But he did. And then something happened. Jesus Christ got ahold of him and changed him from the inside out.

So let’s look at Paul’s story and see how it applies to us. [READ 1 Tim 1:12-17] In these verses, Paul is giving us the example of his own life. But it is not just an interesting story of a sinner saved by grace, but is an example and paradigm for our own lives, because this passage is telling us:

PROP: Christ transforms our lives from the inside-out.

O/S: As we consider this passage we will see how: (1) *Christ* transforms our lives—we don’t do it ourselves; (2) *Christ transforms* our lives—he doesn’t just do minor tweaking; and (3) *Christ transforms our lives*, because our lives are not just about ourselves.

I. Christ transforms our lives—we don’t do it ourselves.

A. Although this passage gives us the example of Paul’s life, look at how Paul emphasizes that it is all about what Christ has done. v. 12 says [READ]. In v. 13 he tells us he was **“shown mercy.”** That mercy was from Christ. v. 14 talks about **“the grace of our Lord with the faith and love found in Christ.”** In v. 15 Paul points out that **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”** In v. 16 he says, **“I found mercy so that . . . Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him.”** And all this causes Paul to burst into praise to **“the King eternal”** in v. 17 which, in context, I think can only be referring to the eternal nature of Christ.

B. How does Christ transform us? He transforms us by His grace through our faith. As **v. 14** puts it [**READ v. 14**] Paul put it similarly in **Eph 2:8-9** [**READ**]

No situation is too difficult, and no sin is too great or awful for God's grace to redeem and transform us. Paul himself said in **1 Cor 15:9**, **"I am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."** Yet in His grace, Christ took Paul, transformed him from the inside-out, and made him a great apostle. I don't know what you've done in your life, but as Paul said in **v. 14**, God's grace is greater. And he emphasized that again in **Romans 5** where he said, **"where sin abounds, grace abounds much more."**

It is grace that separates Christianity from every other religion in the world. Every other religion in the world says, in essence, **"if you're going to get right with God, it is up to you to work harder, do enough good deeds, make enough sacrifices, and maybe He'll accept you."** But that program is doomed to failure. Why? Why does it take Christ to transform us? Why can't we do it on our own? It's because of who we are; it's because of the nature of sin.

It's not a matter of education or background. This is where Paul's example is so instructive for us. Paul had a great background. He said, **"I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews and a Pharisee"** [**Phil 3:5**]. The Pharisees were the leaders. He was trained under Rabbi Gamaliel, the leading rabbi of his day [**Acts 22:3**]. Paul was rich, powerful, well-educated, and knew the Bible backwards and forwards. He had every possible advantage this life has to offer. Yet what did all that do for him? In **v. 13** he tells us. He became **"a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor."** He was present and assisting in the execution of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. In **Acts 22** he said that he **"persecuted [Christians] to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons."**

Why? Because what was in Paul is the same thing that is in the members of the Taliban, the same thing that was in the Germans and in those American soldiers in the Pacific, and the same thing that is in you and me. The Bible calls it the power of indwelling sin. It is something we are born with, and it will remain in us all of our lives. As **Ephesians 2** tells us, we are **"dead in our trespasses and sins."** **Romans 3** adds, **"There is none righteous, not even one; there is none that understands, there is none that seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, not even one."** That's why, when the circumstances are right and the seeds that were in Paul and are in us are planted, watered, and nurtured, they grow into acts of murder and brutality or, in our own lives right here in the Valley, greed, pride, hatred, self-centeredness, fornication, thievery, and lies.

Yet Christ in His grace and mercy, because He loves us, did for Paul and does for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. As **v. 15** says [**READ**]. Samuel Ngewa, a Kenyan scholar, points out that **"The description of Christ as having come 'into the world' is an indication that he came from somewhere else. His origin is in heaven."** Christ Himself plainly told us that in **John 6:38** when he said, **"I have come down from heaven."** You see, Christ and only Christ lived the life we should have lived—perfectly doing God's will without even one sin. And in God's plan that qualified Him and Him alone to step into our shoes and—on the cross—pay the price for sin that otherwise we would have to pay, but never could.

All we have to do is believe in who Jesus is and what He has done, call out to Him, and take Him into ourselves as our Savior and Lord. Then we too, like Paul, will be saved and transformed. No other religious leaders—not Muhammad, not Buddha—ever claimed to forgive sins or save sinful people. And they couldn't do so even if they had tried, because they were just like us: sinful people with something wrong deep in the core of their being. You can't do it yourself, and no one else can do it for you. It's Christ or nothing. So turn to Him if you haven't already done so, and then follow Him all the days of your life.

Which leads us to the fact that:

II. Christ transforms our lives—He doesn't just do minor tweaking.

A. Look at Paul. He went from being a persecutor to being persecuted. In **vv. 15-16** 2X Paul calls himself the *foremost* or *chief* of sinners—because he led the charge in persecuting the church. But in **Acts 9** Christ told Ananias, **"I will show him [referring to Paul] how much he must suffer for my name's sake."** Later in his life, in **2 Cor 11**, Paul recounted how many times he was imprisoned, beaten, whipped, stoned, and shipwrecked for the sake of Christ. Yet it was all worth it, because Paul had found the one thing that matters more than anything else in the world—the pearl of great price—he had Christ; Christ alone gives us life, eternal life, new life from the inside out.

B. How transformative is Christ? It's the difference between the Old Covenant and the New. On the night before He died, Christ took the cup and said **"this is the NC in my blood."** He inaugurated the NC the next day on the cross. What's the difference between the Old and the New?

<u>Old Covenant</u>	<u>New Covenant</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Under the OC, people had to continually make sacrifices for their sins. 2. The OC did not give eternal life. 3. Under the OC, God’s presence only dwelt in the temple, and the people had to go to the temple to get close to the presence of God. 4. Under the OC, only the priests could enter the temple. 5. Under the OC, the Holy Spirit left the temple, never to return. 6. Under the OC, the people were in bondage to a law which they could never fulfill. 7. Under the OC, the people had hearts of stone. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the NC, Christ has made the one sacrifice that is sufficient to forgive all of His people’s sins forever. 2. In the NC, we are given eternal life. 3. In the NC, those who have Christ <i>are</i> the temple, and God has come to us. 4. In the NC, all Christians <i>are</i> priests in the eyes of God. 5. In the NC, the Holy Spirit has come to live inside all believers, and will never leave us or forsake us. 6. In the NC, Christ has fulfilled the law for us and has written His law on our hearts. 7. In the NC, God has replaced our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh.

Additionally, the Bible tells us that, in Christ, we have been adopted into God’s family, have been given the mind of Christ, and have a direct, personal relationship with God that OC people could only dream about. The difference between not having Christ and having Him is the difference between night and day—He is that transformative, and he *intends to be*. Are we experiencing that in our lives?

C. In Paul’s case, **1 Tim 1:12** tells us that the result of Christ’s saving and transforming him was that Christ **“considered me faithful, putting me into service.”** Think about this: Paul was converted to Christ on the road to Damascus. Then in **Acts 9** it says that Paul spent several days with the disciples, and then he **“began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues.”** Before that time, he had only acted *against* Christ and Christ’s people. So how could he say in **1 Tim 1:12** that Christ **“considered me faithful, putting me into service”**?

I think the answer lies back in **Ephesians 2**. Earlier we read **Eph 2:8-9** regarding how we are saved [READ]. But **Eph 2:10** goes on to say [READ]. IOW, God could consider Paul faithful because God knows the end from the beginning. From the beginning of the world, Paul was saved *for* good works which God had prepared for him to do. And God knew that Paul would do them.

The same is true for every person in this room who is a Christian. God knows your end from your beginning, just as He knows mine. He has saved us for works that He Himself has ordained for us to do from the before the beginning of the world. Our calling as Christians is far grander than most of us think most of the time. If we are faithful and obedient to Christ, even the seemingly little events of our lives can have cosmic significance.

I think that’s also why Paul could say in **v. 13**, **“I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.”** Again, think about it. Paul was one of the most well-educated men of his day, and he know the Bible backwards and forwards. Yet he says, **“I acted ignorantly in unbelief.”** Without receiving the mind of Christ, a new heart, and a new Spirit, we are all ignorant in a fundamental way even if we go to church every week and have memorized the entire Bible. As Keith Green said many years ago, **“Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than going to McDonald’s makes you a hamburger.”** Going to church is a good thing. Hopefully it exposes us to God’s Word and who Christ is. But it takes the work of Christ inside of us to transform us from ignorance, unbelief, and death to understanding, faith, and life. That is transformation of a fundamental kind.

This leads us to the last aspect of the transformation of our lives that Christ brings, which is something that needs to be emphasized:

III. Christ transforms our lives because our lives are not just about ourselves.

Here in the West and especially in the US we live in probably the most individualistic culture and society in the history of the world. It’s all about self-actualization, self-realization, self-fulfillment. Where else could you ever find a magazine called *“Self”*?

If, as we have seen, what Christ does in us is transformative in a fundamental way, if we now have Him inside us—His heart, His mind, His Spirit, His values, His priorities—then by virtue of this, our lives cannot be limited to ourselves. Why not? Because as **v. 15** reminds us, Christ came into the world, not for Himself or His own benefit, but **“to save sinners.”** Samuel Ngewa again says, **“The word here translated ‘sinners’ derives from a verb which means ‘to miss the mark’. The image is of someone shooting at a target, which in this**

case is God's righteousness. The shot goes wide and lands somewhere else. And we all shoot wide. None of us manages to hit the target, that is, to meet the standard of God's righteousness. God's plan of salvation is to bring us back on target. That is the mission on which Jesus Christ came."

In 1 Tim 1:5 Paul told us what the "goal" or "target" or standard of God's righteousness is this:

[READ]. By its very nature, love has to look outside of itself. There needs to be an object of love, which is other people. Jesus said in **Matthew 22** that the entire Bible is summarized in the two commands, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,**" and "**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**" And as **1 John 4:20** tells us, it is how we do the second command, loving our neighbor, that is the proof and test of whether we are really doing the first command, loving God.

The point is that our lives are not just about ourselves. We have not been saved just for ourselves. Because God is Trinity, he is profoundly relational at his core. We have been made in his image. That means we are, by nature, relational beings. Our relational nature is now part of God's plan and design. God transforms us so that we will be his agents leading to the transformation of others.

APPLIC: How do we apply this life in Christ? The practical application of the transformation that Christ brings requires effort on our part. In Christ, we don't work *for* our salvation—he has done all the work to give us salvation—but now we apply and work *out* the implications of the new status and salvation Christ gives us. That's why **Phil 2:12-13** says, "**Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**"

Notice that when we have Christ, He does not leave us on our own. That is why only in Christ can we be radically transformed, because in Christ we have a new heart (according to **Ezek 36:26**); we have a new mind—the mind of Christ (according to **1 Cor 2:16**); we have a new spirit (according to **John 14:17**); we have a new set of values and a new set of priorities. He does *not* remove the power of indwelling sin from us; instead, he gives us a greater power—Himself, through the HS—who is active and working in us, as **Phil 2** just told us. He is the one, working in us, who enables us to think as he thinks and live as He lived.

Regarding how we apply our faith and our life in Christ, let us consider three important areas or aspects of our lives where we can demonstrate the transformation that Christ brings. The three areas I want to consider are patience, prayer, and what I call placement, IOW, what place does Christ have in our life.

First, patience. Verse **16** says **[READ].** When it says that "**Jesus Christ might demonstrate his perfect patience as an example,**" clearly the example is Christ. Christ did not strike down Paul as soon as Paul sinned—and He didn't strike down you or me as soon as we sinned. He was patient with us, both before we came to know Him and since we have known Him. But Christ also was using *Paul* as an example of patience, because in **v. 16** Paul says that "**in me as the foremost Christ might demonstrate his perfect patience.**" Christ was working *through* Paul, just as Christ now works in and through *us*.

How can we show the patience of Christ in our own lives? The orientation of our lives should be other people's welfare and the effect of our actions on others. Remember: we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. For example, do we fly off the handle easily? Do we control our tongue? You all know the prayer, "**Lord, give me patience, and I want it Now!**" I am sorry to say it does not work like that. Instead, God typically uses hardships, suffering, and our weaknesses, faults, and temptations as his instruments to mold us into his image.

Last week we saw that the early church in Acts 4 had a different attitude about their money and their possessions. They started seeing them not simply as their own things for their own benefit, but as tools of ministry God had given them to demonstrate love for their neighbors and to build up the body of Christ. Similarly, patience is engendered when we develop a new attitude toward our circumstances, particularly to our hardships, suffering, weaknesses, faults, and temptations.

When we recognize that everything that happens to us has ultimately come through the hand of God, it will help us to not get so bent out of shape when things do not go according to the way we think they should. If we can see our hardships, suffering, weaknesses, faults, and temptations as God's instruments for maturing us and making us more like Jesus, we will have a more dynamic relationship with God, because we will be more consciously aware of his active presence in our life. That will lead us to be more patient in whatever circumstances we are in. That, in turn, will help us to be more patient with the faults and flaws of others.

Second, consider our prayer life. We all have people in our lives we want to see come to Christ. Keep praying for them. **[KEN BENSON EXAMPLE]** The same is true for us and the people we are praying for. It might take a long time. It may take *decades*. In fact, we may *never* see the result of our prayers, but don't give up. Christ was patient with Paul. He was patient with me. And He was patient with *you*. And because Paul *twice*—in **vv. 15 and 16**—says he is the "foremost" or "chief" of sinners, his argument is that "**if Christ can save me, He can save anybody.**" And I remember thinking at the time: "**If Christ can save Ken Benson, he can save anybody.**" So don't give up.

Third, what place does Christ really have in your life? The transformation of Paul's life is an example of what **Rom 8:29** is all about when it says that the whole point of our lives is to be **“conformed to the image”** of Jesus Christ—IOW, to be just like Him. Which leads me to ask an important question: **Do people see or think of Jesus when they see or think of us?** In my own case, I must confess that the answer basically is “No.” But none of us is a finished project.

We can get serious about Christ beginning today. And the more serious we get about Him—the more we truly see Him, experience Him, the more He truly is first in our lives—the more we will model Him. That's one reason why **v. 17**—a doxology; a praise of Christ—is actually very practical. One person I read suggested that, as you go about your daily routine, think **“Christ is right here with me now.”** It just takes a split second.

Frank Laubach was a well-known missionary in the Philippines and a pioneer in developing literacy programs. Laubach came up with what he called the “Game with Minutes.” He said, **“Try to call Him to mind at least one second of each minute. We do not need to forget other things nor stop our work, but we invite Him to share everything we do or say or think. Try how many minutes of the hour you can remember God at least ONCE each minute; that is to say, bring God to mind at least one second out of every sixty. It is not necessary to remember God every second, for the mind runs along like a rapid stream from one idea to another. Your score will be low at first, but keep trying, for it constantly becomes easier, and after a while is almost automatic.”** You can google Frank Laubach and the “Game with Minutes” and read more about it.

Laubach found that, as Christ was more and more in his mind, Christ began to lead him in ways he had never done before. Laubach's life was transformed. The point is this: If we keep thoughts of Christ—his nature; his glory—in the forefront of our minds as we go through our days, we will grow closer to him and become more like him.

The closer we get to Christ, the closer we will get to others. It's like a wheel: Christ is like the hub and we are like points on the rim. As we all move down the spokes closer to the hub, we all not only get closer to Christ but thereby we get closer to each other. And as we get closer to Christ we will start *feeling* closer to people, *acting* closer to people, and demonstrating the love of Christ for people more and more.

So draw on Christ. What are the areas in your life where you need to start working out the implications of what it means to call Jesus your Lord? Maybe it's your marriage—how do you treat your spouse; maybe it's what you do with your money; maybe it's how you spend your free time; maybe it's how you hold grudges, and you know you need to stop holding them and forgive people—or ask for forgiveness—quickly and without making excuses. I don't know. But remember this: however this transformation works out in your own life, you can *trust* Christ. So think where to begin, draw on His power to do what you need to—and do it.

CONCL: As we take Christ deeper into ourselves, His love, truth, and compassion for people will begin flowing out from our lives in practical ways. It was true in Paul's life and it will be true in ours. We will be transformed from the inside-out. As we experience this, we will be able to see that it is not because of anything in us but all comes from Christ and what He does in and through us. This will cause us to thank and praise Him not only for what He has done in and through us, but for who He is. Then, like Paul in **v. 17**, by God's grace we too will be able to exclaim from our hearts that to God **“be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”**