

"Because Paul"

Text: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

May each one of you fully recognize the great guilt and shame of your own person sin, but then may you also fully appreciate and embrace this simple, divine truth: **"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."** Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Human beings have a quirky habit of comparing themselves to others. Quirky, because the comparisons we draw are almost never either fair or consistent. If we feel the need to elevate ourselves, or we want to build ourselves up, we compare ourselves to the negative aspects of others, with the inevitable result that we tend to stack up rather well. We see terrible things in others, which makes us feel better about ourselves. Superior even. On the other hand (and probably more common among Christians) in times of doubt we compare ourselves to the positive attributes we see in others, especially fellow Christians, and we come away feeling miserable and inadequate.

Who here, for example, hasn't looked at the gifts and talents that God has given to others and come away feeling inadequate, even useless, by comparison? This is neither right nor fair, of course. God did not give everyone every gift, but he gave everyone some. On the other hand, who here hasn't seen the rampant debauchery openly flaunted by the godless and come away feeling better about themselves? This too is routinely misguided – for the most part because Christianity doesn't work that way. Admittance to God's heaven is not based on "better." It's binary – pass/fail, perfect/imperfect. Only that which is perfect will ever be admitted into God's heaven. The Bible is God's own explanation of the one way that that necessary perfection can be our personal possession, and by God's grace that mystery has been revealed to you. Sinful human beings cannot earn their passage by doing or by being good or better. That perfection was earned by another, Jesus Christ, and credited freely to us through faith alone in him.

Still, knowing this as we do, we continue to compare. God knows this about us, and as part of his amazing and limitless mercy and goodness he has provided us with appropriate and accurate comparisons or "measuring sticks" in his Word. Our text for this morning is one such. That text is found in the first chapter of Paul's First Letter to Timothy:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 1:12-17** *I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷ To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

This is God's Word. As such, we acknowledge that it is pure and certain. No harm can come from truly understanding, believing and following what we are here taught. To this end we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth! Amen."**

You are, no doubt, very familiar with the man who wrote the words of our text by inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul was and remains arguably the greatest missionary who ever lived. The number of souls rescued from eternal torment by God the Holy Spirit through Paul's ministry simply cannot be calculated. Not only did he help to establish Christian congregations throughout the civilized world of his day, those converts went on to share the message of life with innumerable souls in the generations that followed. His writings are still at work, for the Holy Spirit has been using the Epistles of Paul to convert and save for almost 2000 years.

In all of this, Paul consistently gave credit where credit is always due – to God alone, who provided the opportunities, desire, ability, stamina, and above all the divine power that accomplished such great things. Paul recognized that he was just a clay vessel carrying a divine treasure, but that by God's grace he represented a good example for others to follow. It was for that reason alone that Paul humbly encouraged others to compare themselves to him and to follow his example: **Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.** ^{ESV} (Philippians 3:17) In Thessalonica, Paul and his fellow workers' refusal of the salary to which they were entitled was also an intentional example or comparison for others: **It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.** ¹⁰ **For even when we were with you, we**

would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.^{ESV} (2 Thessalonians 3:9-10)

God obviously knows all about our tendency to compare ourselves to others, as well as the power of examples, both good and bad. In fact it was through this same Apostle Paul that the Holy Spirit informed us that the whole of Jewish recorded history was intended to be just that – negative examples to which we are to compare our own thoughts and actions: **Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." ⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.**^{ESV}(1 Corinthians 10:6-11)

Yet knowing the power of examples and especially the need for good examples, and given all that we know about this great, devoted man of God, where does Paul go in our text? What sort of comparison does he draw? He identifies himself as a man who was **“a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent”** and as **“the foremost”** of all sinners. With all of the uniquely commendable things that Paul did, why did he go here? Why point out the negative in what you and I regard as a veritable sea of positive?

Before we answer that, since you and I today might be tempted to downplay or trivialize Paul indictment, it's important we fully understand exactly what Paul was saying of himself; important that we grasp the severity of his self-incrimination. He identified himself first as **“a blasphemer.”** To *blaspheme* is to act or speak in a way that disparages or disrespects God. Far from trivial, it was a capital offence to the Jews: **Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.**^{ESV}(Leviticus. 24:16) Paul next identified himself as a **“persecutor.”** As bad as blasphemy is, a persecutor is even worse. Not only did Paul blaspheme, he actively worked to oppose God's will, which is for sinful human beings to come to know their Savior and to be saved. To *blaspheme* is to destroy your own relationship with God. To *persecute* is to seek to prevent or destroy also the relationship of others with their

God. Paul's final attribute was that of an **“insolent opponent.”** The word *insolent* in English today means *“audaciously rude or disrespectful; impertinent or impudent; presumptuous and insulting in manner or speech; arrogant.”* As such, it doesn't quite do justice to the Greek word that Paul used, which adds the elements of *violence* and *aggression*.

Put all of this together and you have quite an indictment. Paul identified himself as a violent and arrogant man who not only spoke and acted disrespectfully toward God but dedicated himself to preventing the salvation of other human beings.

It is, again, critically important that we spell all of this out for several reasons. First, to understand that Paul was neither downplaying nor overstating the facts. To downplay our own sin and guilt before God is the height of foolishness. God knows the full extent of our sin. He is neither fooled nor mollified by the sinner's attempt to soften the reality of what it is we have done. Second, it is important to understand that Paul was in no way trying to overstate the severity of his sin, which is actually an insufferable form of bragging. *“Oh I feel so guilty because I only exercised six days this past week and I usually get in a good hour every single day.”* Paul was not, in other words, in any way overstating his own belief that he truly was the **“foremost sinner”** – the chief of all sinners. The very worst.

You and I might be tempted to say that of ourselves, but we wouldn't really mean it. Not really. We can always come up with someone who is worse: Hitler, Stalin, Ted Bundy... someone. Paul isn't playing that sort of game here. When he says **“foremost”** he means just that.

Why is that so important? Because it is the key to unlocking God the Holy Spirit's intended message in our text, and we will all be much the poorer if we are robbed of that amazing message.

Having established himself as the very worst sinner, Paul goes on to include even himself in the list of sinners Christ Jesus came into the world to save. His message is that even he, Paul, was shown mercy. The message then for all those who would follow, all those who would read Paul's words: *“Because Paul, also me.”* Because Paul was shown mercy, I will be shown mercy. Because Paul was forgiven, I am forgiven. Because God saw fit to use Paul in his service, God will also use me in his service. Paul communicated exactly that to each of us in our text when he said, **“But I received**

mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”

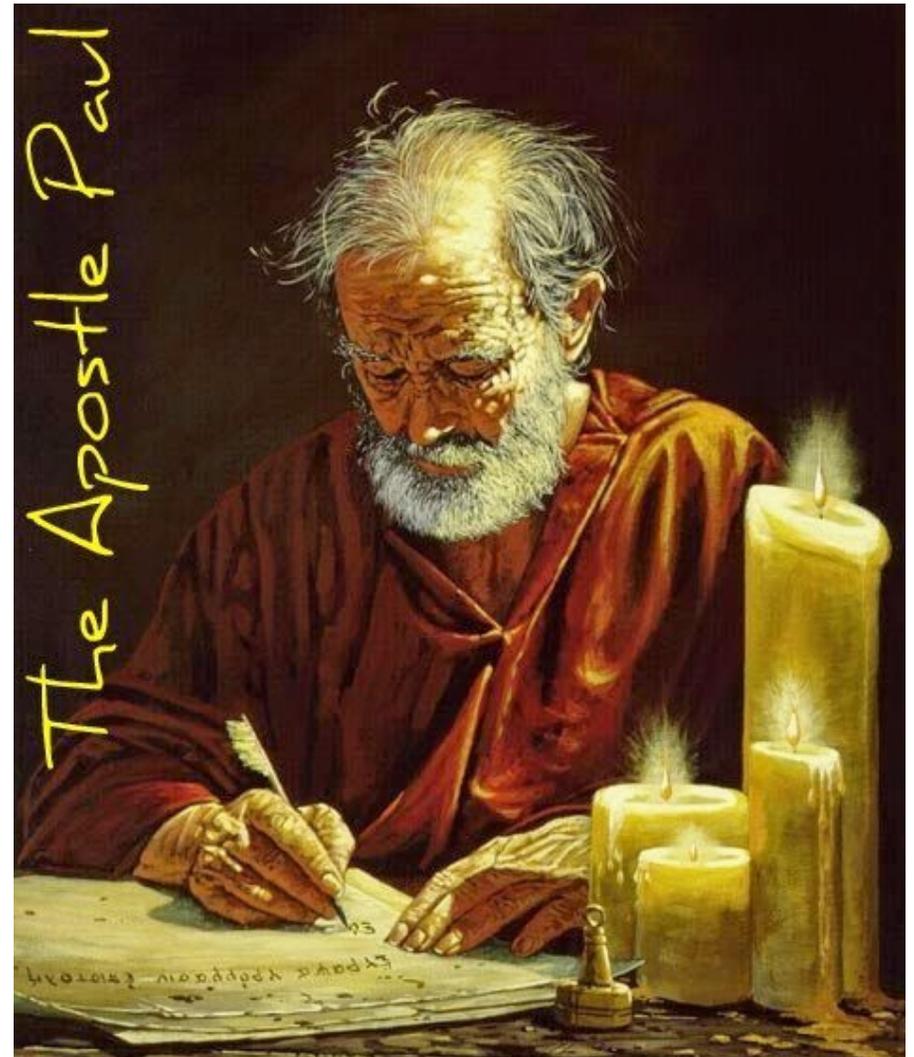
You can see then how the power of these words stems from their honest and reality. If Paul was really not the foremost sinner, then we would naturally place ourselves beneath him and rob ourselves of the peace and assurance here offered. If Paul did not place himself at the very bottom, we would find room under him and regard ourselves as those who are just too sinful to love, just too guilty to save, just too ungodly to be claimed as his children. On the other hand, when we see Paul place himself at rock bottom, then because Paul, also then me. Then we too can lay hold on God’s promise of forgiveness and reconciliation – not because we are more worthy or deserving, but because we are then most certainly included in the list of sinners that our Savior came to save. Also for us, then, ***“the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”*** Since I am a sinner, Christ Jesus came into the world to save me.

This is not just wishful thinking. It is divine reality and truth as God himself has established it. In the words of our text: ***“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.”*** Because Paul, also you and me, and because also you and me, we wholeheartedly join him in the final verse of our text: ***To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.***

ESV **Ezekiel 34:11-16** "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

ESV **Luke 15:1-10** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ ¶ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. ⁸ "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

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The 13th Sunday after Pentecost – September 4, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 748 (Stanzas 1-4) (Brown Hymnal)

"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Ezekiel 34:11-16) Our all-knowing God certainly is well aware when and how his children suffer. He sees the mistreatment of his people by the ungodly, and he knows when and how we are being treated unfairly. The Lord not only knows, our first lesson assures us that all will be set right on the Day of Judgment. Our life's work is not to eagerly await the Lord's vengeance on unbelievers but to share with them God's message of how they can avoid that terrible punishment.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 2 (Page 30) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 15:1-10) It is often tempting to think in terms of the masses, in terms of large crowds and great numbers of people coming to faith and being rescued from God's divine wrath on the Day of Judgment. In our New Testament Lesson, we are reminded of the value of each individual human soul. This is how we are to carry out the Great Commission we have been given – one precious soul at a time.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 341 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Crown Him with Many Crowns"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Timothy 1:12-17 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Because Paul"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-sermon Hymn – 341 (Stanzas 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Crown Him with Many Crowns"

The Installation of the 2022-2023 Sunday School Teachers

Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 748 (Stanza 5) (Brown Hymnal)

"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, join us for refreshments after the service, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (35) Average (33)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor James Albrecht has returned the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven.

Church Council Notes – All members of the Council were present for the meeting on 8/28. Strong offerings in July reduced our General Fund deficit to -\$1,996. The Financial Inspection Committee has completed their work and found the 2021 financial records to be in good order. The aging water heater in the church is leaking and in need of replacement. All necessary parts to repair the leaks on the church's loader have been purchased. Next meeting date – 9/25.

Regular Sunday Schedule Resumes – We are scheduled to resume our regular (non-summer) service schedule next Sunday, with Sunday school and Bible Class at 9:00am and Sunday worship at 10:00am.

September Events – WCPC in Hecla (13th-15th), CLC Board Meetings (19th-21st), Loeb-Meyer Rehearsal (24th), Loeb-Meyer wedding (25th), Confirmation and Midweek Bible Study resume (28th).

Sunday School and Bible History – This year's Sunday School will be divided into two groups – upper and lower. The upper class will be confirmation students who will be taught Bible History by Gary Miller. The lower class Sunday School teacher will be Hope Meyer.