

# Thanking Christ For Salvation & Service

The apostle Paul was the most significant apostle in the early church. In his youth he was a highly educated Pharisee with impeccable credentials, greatly respected in Judaism, while at the same time a persecutor of Christians. The early Christians were afraid of him because he was killing them. Then God changed his life.

The first time that Paul is mentioned in the New Testament is in Acts 7:54-60. At that point in his life, his name was Saul.

We are told he was just a young man. We are also told that Saul was watching a believer named Stephen being stoned to death. Acts 8:1 tells us that Saul gave hearty approval to the stoning of Stephen.

What followed proved to be a blessing, for great persecution of the early believers began. Acts 8:3 says,

*But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.*  
Acts 8:3 (NASB)

It was a blessing because it caused believers to scatter and share Christ wherever they went.

In Acts 9:1-2 we learn that Saul hated the early believers so much that he had obtained permission from the high priest to hunt down believers in the city of Damascus. Acts 9:1-2 states,

*Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Acts 9:1-2 (NASB)*

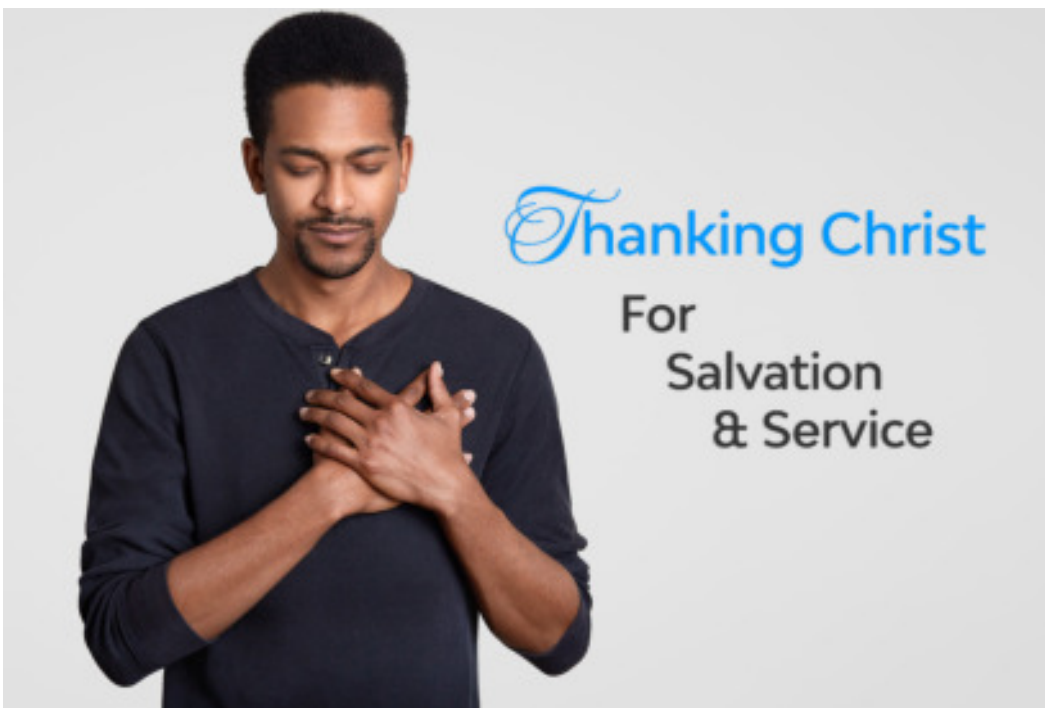
Then verse 3 describes what happened to him while he was

traveling to Damascus. We are told,

*As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard*

*a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Acts 9:3-9a (NASB)*

It is important to notice that what happened to Saul was unexpected. Saul was not traveling to Damascus to learn more



about Christ. He was not a seeker. He did not want to believe in Jesus. According to Philippians 3:4-6, Paul was not worried that he was going to hell. In fact, the passage reveals that Paul thought he was more than a good man. He was a Pharisee with impeccable credentials. Listen to what he thought about himself before he became a believer in Jesus Christ.

... although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. Philippians 3:4-6 (NASB)

Then in Galatians 1:13-16, we learn this about Paul. He said,

For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles ... Galatians 1:13-16 (NASB)

Paul was a very impressive Pharisee before he was saved.

Those who claim that God did not choose men and women before the foundation of the world to be saved have a serious problem with these events described in the books of Acts, Galatians, and Philippians. Paul hated Christians. He wanted to kill them. He wanted to eliminate these people. He thought he was a good man. He thought he was going to heaven. He was defending Judaism. Saul did not choose to believe in Christ. Instead, Jesus chased him down and changed his life!

Later in Acts 22:6-16, Paul shared more of his conversation when he was speaking to a crowd of Jews. He did again in Acts 26:9-23. If we look at verses 9-18 in this chapter we discover the instructions that were given to Paul by Christ. Paul wrote these words,

So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile

to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. "And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'" Acts 26:9-18 (NASB)

The word that I would use to describe Paul's conversion is amazing. It is clear that his conversion was not his idea. Paul did not choose to believe in Jesus. Later Paul wrote that those who become believers, became believers because God chose them for salvation. Ephesians 1:4 says that God chose believers before the foundation of the world. That included Paul and it includes those of us who are believers. The message of Scripture is that he believed in Christ because God chose him, called him (Romans 8:29), and Ephesians 2:8-9 says God gave him the faith to believe. Paul wrote this later in Ephesians 2:8-9,

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB)

When Paul wrote these words, he finally understood that religious works did not save him. In fact, what he was doing would have sent him to hell. Works do not save people. Christ gave him the faith as a gift. He was saved, not because he was a good man, but because Christ wanted him to become a believer and an apostle. Other passages that teach that God gives us faith are Acts 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:1.

This brings us to our study in 1 Timothy 1:12-17. Our study is about the apostle Paul. He is writing a letter to Timothy, who is a pastor in the city of Ephesus. He has just warned Timothy to stop false teachers from teaching in the church. Now Paul explodes in thankfulness for Christ for several things. In the process, he affirms that Christ came into the world to save sinners. Then Paul concludes with a benediction to God the Father.

**CHRIST SAVES & EMPOWERS FOR MINISTRY.** Verse 12 records Paul's first praise to Christ. He said,

*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service . . . 1 Timothy 1:12 (NASB)*

The Greek word that Paul used for "thank" is *charis*. This Greek word occurs first in the sentence. That is, he literally said, "Thankfulness have I." Now Paul did not normally use the word *charis* when he expressed thankfulness in his other letters. He used another word. On this occasion he selected the word *charis* which also means "grace." It appears that Paul used *charis* to cause the reader to also think about what the grace of God had done for him and for us. Then he mentioned three things for which he was thankful. He thanked Christ Jesus for strengthening him, considering him to be faithful, and putting him into service.

*Thankful Christ Strengthened Him.* The word "strengthened" has the meaning of "to make someone able" or "to enable." That is, Christ Jesus had enabled him to do two things. First, to live the Christian life (2 Corinthians 9:8), and, secondly, to fulfill the service given to him. Notice that Paul did not emphasize his ministry. He emphasized that Christ had enabled him to live as a believer and to do the ministry assigned to him. Romans 5:2 says that we are living this grace.

God gives a believer a responsibility. By grace God enables that believer to do it. Christ never deserts us unless we disqualify ourselves by sinning. That is how we are to understand Philippians 4:13 which says,

*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13 (NASB)*

Another important passage to remember is Philippians 2:12-13. In verse 12 believers are told to work out their salvation and verse 13 says that it is actually God who helps us. So, Christ Jesus helps us live the Christian life and helps us do the ministry. That is Paul's message. Christ Jesus strengthens us. In 2 Timothy 4:17 Paul wrote this,

*But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. 2 Timothy 4:17 (NASB)*

That is, Christ Jesus gave him the strength he needed to be righteous and to do the ministry.

*Thankful Christ Considered Him Trustworthy.* The second thing that Paul thanked Christ Jesus was that Christ considered Paul to be faithful. The word "faithful" does not refer to faith but to "trustworthy." Now someone might think Paul was saying that Christ thought he was a trustworthy servant. But when we read other statements that Paul made about himself, we learn that is not what Paul was saying. Let's look at two important passages.

The first one is 1 Corinthians 4:1-2. Paul wrote,

*Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 (NASB)*

The word that Paul used here for "trustworthy" is the same word that is translated as "faithful" in our verse in 1 Timothy 1:12. Paul's point was that a servant of Christ is to be found faithful or trustworthy.

The second passage is 1 Corinthians 7:25. This verse adds that a servant of the Lord is made trustworthy by Christ.

*Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. 1 Corinthians 7:25 (NASB)*

So Paul's point was that a servant of God is to strive to be faithful; but it is by the grace of Christ Jesus that he was made trustworthy. That is why he was considered trustworthy. Paul was not praising himself. If Paul was praising himself, then how could he thank Christ? Where is the grace of Christ? How could he thank Christ for something he had earned?

*Thankful Christ Put Him Into Service.* Next, Paul thanked Christ Jesus for putting him into service. Here Paul was referring to both his salvation and his apostleship. We have already learned that Paul did not want to become a Christian. He did not want to serve Christ as an apostle either. It was Christ's idea to make him a believer and an apostle. Everything happened on the same unknown day, in the same location on the road to Damascus, and at the same moment in time. At one moment in time by the grace of Christ Jesus, Paul was saved, put into service, strengthened, and made trustworthy. It all happened on that lonely road to Damascus. Paul did not earn any of this. It was all by the grace of Christ Jesus. So, Paul thanked Him.

**CHRIST SHOWS MERCY.** This becomes even clearer in verse 13. Paul wrote,

*... even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. 1 Timothy 1:13a (NASB)*

Paul described himself with three words: blasphemer, persecutor, and violent aggressor. We have already learned from Acts 26:11 that he tried to force the early believers to blaspheme Christ. If he did that, then surely he had also blasphemed Christ. We can only imagine the loud rants against Christ that he must have displayed. He was also a persecutor of the church and violent aggressor. He reminded the believers in Corinth, Galatia, and Philippi that he used to persecute the church (1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6).

Paul's point is simply this! He did not deserve anything! In fact, he deserved hell as he walked that lonely Damascus road before he saw the light from heaven.

**CHRIST'S GRACE INCLUDES FAITH & LOVE.** Then Paul explains why he was put into service. In verse 14, Paul explained.

*Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 1:13b-14 (NASB)*

Paul tells us why all of this happened to him. He says that he was shown mercy because he acted ignorantly in unbelief. When Paul says he acted ignorantly, he was not saying that because he did not understand who Christ was that he deserved salvation and his apostleship. His point was that he did not commit the unpardonable sin. He never came into full knowledge of Christ and rejected Him. That is, Paul was never an apostate. He was never an apostate because God the Father had chosen him from the foundation of the world to be saved.

So why was Paul shown mercy? Paul tells us. He was shown mercy because of the grace of Christ. Mercy flows from abundant grace!! Grace is described in Romans 11:6 as something we cannot earn.

*But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. Romans 11:6 (NASB)*

The ultimate definition of God's grace is the free display of His loving forgiveness upon believing sinners, because Christ died and was resurrected for our sins. From this abundant grace flows mercy. Grace is not like a slow leak from a water faucet. It is like the water gushing from a fire hydrant fully open. From grace gushes mercy. Mercy is defined as compassion on the undeserving who are in desperate need. This results in peace with God and freedom from guilt.

So, why did this happen to Paul? Ultimately, it is because of the grace of God (Ephesians 1:7). The grace of the Lord results in a sinner having faith and love. This is unbelievable news. Our faith in Christ will grow because of God's grace. Our love for each other will grow because of God's grace. That is why

the apostle John wrote this,

**We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. 1 John 3:14 (NASB)**

Faith and love are distinguishing characteristics of believers.

**CHRIST CAME TO SAVE SINNERS.** Then Paul makes a statement that is now famous. He said,

**It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. 1 Timothy 1:15 (NASB)**

Paul will make five such statements in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. This is the first one. It is a powerful statement. We have already talked about the word “trustworthy.” It comes from the same Greek word that is translated as “faithful” in verse 12. Paul is saying that we can depend upon the statement he is about to make. So he adds, “Deserving full acceptance.” The Greek word for “acceptance” means “to believe something is true.” If we put it all together, Paul said that Christ came into the world to save sinners. Trust it. The second person of the trinity became flesh in order to die and be resurrected to save sinners.

There are several quotes from some early church fathers that I would like to read. The first is from Augustine who wrote these words about this verse,

There was no reason for Christ the Lord to come, except to save sinners. Eliminate diseases, eliminate wounds, and there is no call for medicine. If a great doctor has come down from heaven, a great invalid must have been lying very sick throughout the whole wide world. This invalid is the whole human race.<sup>1</sup>

His point is that Christ died for a sick world. Charles H. Spurgeon said,

The late venerable and godly Dr. Archibald Alexander of Princeton had been a preacher of Christ for sixty years and a professor of

divinity for forty. On his deathbed he was heard to say to a friend, “All my theology is reduced to this narrow compass - Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.”<sup>2</sup>

He was correct. The sum-total of our faith is that Christ came to save sinners. That is the foundational principle of the faith. If Christ did not die for sinners, we should stop meeting. As Paul said, we are fools.

Paul said that he was the chief of sinners. People wonder how to understand his comment. I like John Chrysostom’s statement. He said,

It is no humility to think that you are a sinner when you really are a sinner. But whenever one is conscious of having done many great deeds but does not imagine that he is something great in himself, that is true humility. When a man is like Paul and can say, “I have nothing on my conscience,” and then can add, “But I am not justified by this,” and can say again, “Christ Jesus came to save sinners of whom I am the chief,” that is true humility. That man is truly humble who does exalted deeds but, in his own mind, sees himself as lowly.<sup>3</sup>

Paul was a very humble man. That was the work of Christ.

**CHRIST’S PERFECT PATIENCE REVEALED.** Finally, Paul tells us why he was saved.

**Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. 1 Timothy 1:16 (NASB)**

He was saved and we are saved for the glory of God. Romans 3:25 states that salvation reveals God’s righteousness. Then this verse adds that salvation also reveals Christ’s perfect patience with us. He is waiting and calling sinners to believe in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

**BENEDICTION.** Then Paul concludes with a benediction,

**Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be**

2. Roy B. Zuck. The Speaker’s Quote Book. Kregel Publishing, 1997. p. 332.

3. John Chrysostom. On the Incomprehensible Nature of God. 5.6.40

1. Augustine. Sermons 175.1. 30.

honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:16 (NASB)

Paul glorifies God. He is so thankful for all that Christ Jesus did for him that he exploded in praise. God poured out grace and mercy on him because Christ came down from heaven to save sinners.

There are believers who wish they had a dramatic conversion like the one Paul experienced. But the truth is that every conversion is dramatic because each time God pours out grace and mercy upon a sinner instead of sending them to hell. In the process He gives them faith and love which grow and grow. That will be the proof of one's salvation.