

Obtaining Mercy
(I Timothy 1:12-17)
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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. **Introduction:**

I've titled today's message, "Obtaining Mercy." Today, we will be considering just 6 verses found in I Timothy, chapter 1. And in this brief passage Paul, in reference to his own salvation, uses the same phrase twice, saying "...*I obtained mercy*..." This statement is likewise the testimony of all true believers as our passage today teaches. So, let's examine together just what this means, to "obtain mercy." First let's read through our text, I Tim. 1, verses 12-17, and I'll make a few comments as we go.

II. **I Timothy 1:12-17 with commentary:** Leading into vs. 12, Paul had been speaking of the sound doctrine of the Gospel that he had been entrusted with. And with that we pick up as he continues, beginning in verse 12, writing,

- A. **Verse 12:** "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;" In thanking the Lord, Paul is acknowledging that it is solely due unto Christ that he was "counted" or deemed to be faithful, having been made so by grace and actually "put" by Christ into the ministry. This is clearly evident as he continues now in verse 13 describing himself as one who wasn't asking for or seeking such and was totally without merit as he describes himself as one
- B. **Verse 13:** "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious:..." Here, Paul explains how he spoke evil of Christ, His followers, and His doctrine, being a blasphemer. But not only that, he acted against them by persecuting them which called on His name. Furthermore, he was injurious as he used force and violence towards them and their property. Here, it's clear that his being "counted faithful" (vs. 12) was of no doing of his own that would have pre-qualified him for God's favor and service, but rather as verse 13 continues, Paul says "...*but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.*" It's clear from the context that Paul is not suggesting that because his actions against Christ were the product of his ignorant unbelief, that this somehow excused him. His ignorance and unbelief were not a reason or a cause or his obtaining mercy. But rather, his ignorant unbelief proves that it was indeed mercy that he obtained. Only God's unmerited favor, His mercy, could overcome and deliver him from his unbelief.

- C. Verse 14: ***“And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”*** Here, the ðfaith and loveö spoken of is referring to the internal graces of God-given faith and love towards God and His people that Paul experienced. And so he continues in verse 15 writingí
- D. Verse 15: ***“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”*** Now ðfaithfulö here means worthy of putting your faith in, true, and trustworthy and therefore, it is worthy to be accepted by all sorts ó the truth that Christ came to save sinners, even one such as Paul.
- E. Verse 16: ***“Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy,...”*** And so we see Paul repeating the truth that he obtained mercy. I believe when he says ðfor this causeö he is referencing the prior verse, in essence saying, ðBecause Christ came into the world to save sinners, even one such as I, I obtained mercy.ö And so verse 16 continues with Paul indicating that in my obtaining of mercy as one so clearly opposed to Christ, there is the further usefulness to others as it reads, ***“...that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.”*** That word ðfirstö there is the same word as ðchiefö used in verse 15. That is Paul is saying that in me, a sinner in the first degree, the chief of sinners, Christ’s longsuffering is shown forth as a pattern to all believers hereafter.
- F. Verse 17: ***Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”***

III. Obtaining Mercy in accordance with Paul, our pattern:

- A. Well, in light of the fact that Paul is clearly the pattern for all true believers that come after him, let’s get personal a bit here and let us each ask ourselves, have we, have I, in keeping with Paul’s pattern ó Have I truly obtained mercy? All true believers ó those who believe on him to life everlasting, follow this pattern. They too have obtained mercy.
- B. ðObtainingö: We know that our common usage of the word ðobtainö often refers to that which we obtain as a result of some action taken on our part. For example, when one graduates from school, it is said that he or she ðobtainsö a degree ó something they worked for and earned. But we also use the word ðobtainö to refer to the receiving of something we do nothing to earn or merit. For example, men and women are said to ðobtainö an inheritance ó something they absolutely have no part in meriting or earning but rather simply that which they receive as a child or heir ó because of their birth into a family ó a family that they had no part in choosing, no control over being born into it, nor any contributing action in bringing that inheritance about whatsoever. But they ðobtainö it. So we see that it is the thing being obtained that determines whether the word ðobtainö carries the connotation of being something we earn or merit or simply something that is given to us, based upon no contribution whatsoever by anything we do or don’t do.

And given the abundance of scripture describing the mercy bestowed upon sinners saved by grace as an inheritance, (Gal. 3, Eph. 1, Col. 1 & 3, Heb. 9 just to name a few), not to mention the immediate context here in I Timothy, we know that Paul is attributing no merit whatsoever to himself when he says, "I obtained mercy." He is saying he received a gift for which he thanks God. He was born into it and, being spiritually dead, he did nothing to qualify himself to be born again or to acquire the favor of God's mercy and grace. By definition the obtaining of mercy (a blessing unmerited by the one upon whom it is bestowed) involves nothing done by, in, or through you the sinner in order to obtain it.

With that, I'd now like to share 3 observations concerning the obtaining of mercy.

IV. Obtaining Mercy:

- A. Those who obtain Mercy or need mercy. (I.e. or they must have it. They are brought to perceive their own desperate need for mercy.)
 1. In Philippians 3:5-6, Paul lists things he once (in his ignorance and unbelief) thought were gain, but now counted loss. Among this list he wrote, "**...concerning zeal, persecuting the church...**" In other words, his actions were taken as a product of his religious zeal and so were considered by himself and others to be meritorious. And certainly in Philippians 3, Paul's pattern of repentance from what he had once thought was gain is a valuable lesson for us all. But notice here in I Timothy, as he directs our attention to himself as a pattern for true believers, he makes no mention of his morality or any such things which others naturally find commendable. Back in Philippians 3, Paul had listed that when it came to "...**touching the righteousness which is in the law**, <he was> **blameless**." Yet, it's interesting that here in today's text he makes no mention of his strict religious observances.
 2. Instead, we get the sense from this passage that he is limiting his focus to relate to us the self awareness of his own sinfulness as he came to see the horrible evil of his daring to oppose Christ and His gospel or so much so that he considered himself as the chief (the worst) of sinners. Here, he makes no mention of the fact he once thought these things to be commendable but instead focuses solely on the reality of how he now views them or as one who needs and has obtained mercy. By nature, none of us would consider an (outwardly) blameless keeper of God's law as the worst of sinners. Why, we might say that about a rapist, a child molester, an Adolph Hitler, Idi Amin, or Charles Manson or but surely not a strict religionist such as Paul.
 3. Now when Paul says that Christ came or "to save sinners of whom I am chief" I believe he is expressing the real sense or apprehension of his own sinfulness that all

who obtain mercy come to experience as they are convinced of the dreadful evil of their former religious thoughts in having imagined that they might be found in God's favor based upon something other than or in addition to the one perfect righteousness Christ alone came to (and did) produce so as to save sinners. Keep in mind that while Paul persecuted the church, he was doing so because of his religious zeal. So here we have Paul, a moral religionist, seeing himself as the chief of sinners ó not crediting himself with even the slightest degree of worthiness when it comes to his standing before God (his salvation) ó no more worthy than even the most wicked, outwardly immoral tyrants that have roamed this earth throughout the history of man.

4. And notice that whereas he spoke in verse 12 as one who was before a blasphemer, etc., in verse 15 he doesn't refer to himself as one who was previously the chief of sinners, but he uses the present tense ó noting how Christ came "*...to save sinners of who I am chief*" ó present tense, even now. He doesn't say, "I was" but rather "I am" the chief of sinners. And this was Paul's testimony even here when he wrote this epistle to Timothy towards the end of his ministry. And so, likewise, for all whom obtain mercy, they never find any worthiness before God by looking within themselves but rather always, even in heaven's glory, find all their worthiness in the Lamb of God that was slain.

5. As with Paul, when God the Holy Spirit convinces a sinner of his exceeding sinfulness, he ceases to compare himself to other sinners, but rather being convinced of righteousness (of that being the standard by which God judges), he sees that he or she must possess a perfect righteousness apart from which they have no hope ó truly deserving of God's wrath even if based upon their very best efforts at obedience to God. They come to see that their very best efforts hold no candle to the perfection which they must have ó that which the Lord of glory alone could and did provide for them so as to save sinners ó sinners "of whom I am chief" in light of His righteousness.

One who obtains mercy, in being taught what it truly took for a holy God to be reconciled unto them, a sinner, no longer will dare to presume to have contributed even one iota toward their gaining acceptance before God. He will no longer look to the works of his own hand ó his faith, his zealous religious endeavors, etc. ó as a contributing factor in his salvation ó placing his sin tainted efforts in a position of rivalry with that which it took ó the precious blood of the God-man! He will plead God's mercy in Christ and that alone. For one who obtains mercy is one who has been given spiritual eyes to see his desperate need for it. Those that obtain mercy ó need mercy! And so we see, secondly, that

- B. Those who Obtain mercy ó receive the accompanying gifts of grace. (It is thereby they discover their need for mercy).
1. Like Paul (as indicated in vs. 14), they receive the internal graces of faith and love as gifts from God. (Quote Eph. 2:8-9). So in accordance with the pattern of Paul, these who have obtained mercy do not view faith as that which they exercise so as to merit God's blessings for themselves. No, instead, they discover it is of God's abundant grace towards them in Christ ó a gift of grace He purchased for them by His death on the cross. Thereby, those who obtain mercy are brought to comprehend their previous ignorance and unbelief.
 2. And their newfound love for God (as He is uniquely revealed in the gospel of grace) is a product of discovering the truth of I Jn 4:10: ***"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."*** Those who obtain mercy know that they only love God ***"...because He first loved..."*** them (I Jn. 4:19) and sent His son to be merciful unto them ó propitious ó satisfying all that God required to reconcile them unto Himself.
 3. So all who obtain mercy according to the pattern of Paul, likewise come to faith and love toward God, not in order to earn or merit anything from God but rather strictly as a fruit and effect of Christ having purchased these graces for them. They see that the works of God in the believer is all owing to the abundant grace and mercy of God toward them as the objects of His everlasting love for whom Christ came into this world and lived and died.
 4. As I had noted earlier, I thought the language of verse 12 in our text was also interesting as Paul describes how he was õputõ into the ministry. Clearly, not all believers are called or gifted to be preachers such as the apostle Paul was. Yet, when we consider that all believers make up the church body of whom Christ is the head (as is spoken of extensively in I Cor. 12), then as vital members, there is a sense in which all believers are õputõ in the ministry. This God-given faith and love that is shed abroad in the hearts of all those who obtain mercy, inevitably involves true believers in support of the ministry of the gospel as they make use of the respective spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit grants in some degree unto all believers. One who has obtained mercy comes to see that the gospel ministry they take part in (or support) is vital and presents the very message that God uses to draw His sheep unto Himself, just as He did for them.

And so our respective involvement in the ministry of the body is that which springs from the love of God having been shed abroad in our hearts. It is õputö there and so we are õputö into some aspect of supporting the ministry of the gospel. I can only speak to you today because the love of Christ and His gospel has been put here. And I know it's vital ó life and death!

5. And so it is with all who obtain mercy. They, like Paul their pattern, attribute all that takes place within them ó including their God-given faith and love for Christ ó as owing to His mercy and grace. And in no sense do they ascribe unto these things any causal role in their obtaining the mercy. No, it was obtained for them by Christ's obedience unto death.

C. Those who obtain mercy ó recognize that they do so solely because of the Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ for them.

1. In vs. 15, as we read, Paul wrote, *õThis is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*” And he goes on to say in the next verse it was for this cause, he obtained mercy. I believe that all who obtain mercy in accordance with the pattern of Paul, likewise see the truth of the Gospel ó of salvation (for even the chief of sinners) to be solely owing to the Person and work of Christ in His incarnation ó in His obedience unto death, having been made under the law (having come into this world as a Substitute for sinners) to redeem them ó to work out all that was necessary to save them from their sins.
2. “...a faithful sayingí ö: The word faithful there refers to that which is true, sure, and so completely trustworthy. Paul is asserting that which all who obtain mercy come to realize ó that salvation is solely a result of what the Lord Jesus Christ alone accomplished on this earth by the perfect satisfaction to God's justice He made. And Christ, the God-man, could not and did not fail to do that which He came to do ó to save sinners. And so, we see that salvation is sure and certain for all those He came to save. It is a faithful saying!
3. “...and worthy of all acceptance...”: Because the gospel that sets forth how all of salvation is by Christ alone is so sure and certain ó because it is a faithful saying ó it is worthy of all acceptance. That is, it is worthy to be received by all sorts of sinners ó rich or poor, evil tyrants or religious zealots. Here's how worthy it is ó it is of great worth for it is as worthy as the price of the precious blood of Christ. It is worthy to be accepted by all because it is (1) absolutely necessary for God to be just and still save a sinner and (2) suitable to the case of all –*“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom. 3:23).

You see, Christ didn't come to try and save anyone or to make them savable. He came to save sinners! All those for whom He lived and died shall be saved. He cannot fail. It is sure and certain and so worthy of all acceptance!

4. And for this cause, (vs. 16) all of the objects of His everlasting love ó all for whom Jesus Christ came into the world to save ó they, like Paul, obtain mercy. It is upon no other basis that any obtain mercy other than the Person and work of Christ in His obedience unto death on the cross whereby God is uniquely glorified.
5. Finally, we see at the close of our text for today in verse 17 Paul's words of praise that springs from the heart of one who has obtained mercy. When one comes to see all of his or her worthiness in Christ and Him alone, as objects of His pure mercy ó we see how God alone is honored and glorified in the salvation of sinners. And so we attribute all glory and honor to God alone as we bow at His feet in thanksgiving and praise. Those who obtain mercy ó truly see that they do so based solely upon the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, whereby God is glorified, and where there is no room or basis whatsoever left for boasting in them, the sinner.

V. Closing: Well how about you?

- A. Do you really need mercy like the Apostle Paul ó the chief of sinners? If so ó if you must have it ó then there's great news. You too have obtained mercy! For none truly can conclude that apart from God-given faith that is an exclusive product of the mercy and grace that is in Christ Jesus.
- B. Secondly, have you received the gifts of grace, faith and love that would cause you to look to Christ alone for all of your salvation? Well, if you need mercy, you have! And like Paul, you ascribe your faith and love towards God to being solely a product of his abundant mercy and grace in Christ. Sadly, most who call themselves Christian continue to imagine that they obtain mercy because they believed ó because of their faith. Well, I trust it's clear such notions certainly don't fit the pattern provided by Paul ó the pattern of all who truly believe unto everlasting life.
- C. Lastly, do you see yourself as one who has obtained mercy solely as a result of Christ's finished work ó His obedience unto death? Today, can you from the heart say with Paul, ***"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy,..."*** What a blessing to be able to identify with that!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself ó the Bible.