

Thoughts From Other Minds:

Now follows a general announcement respecting this grace, grounded on the apostle's own experience, and exemplified by it. *Faithful is the word, and worthy of all acceptance, etc.* By designating the word he is going to enunciate as faithful, he presents it to our view as perfectly reliable, entitled to implicit credit; and the additional characteristic, worthy of all acceptance ... commends it to us as deserving not only of being rested on with confidence, but of being received with every mark of inward affection and regard. ...

The word is, *that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners* – the whole gospel in a sentence – and, indeed, but a slightly modified form of the original announcement made to Joseph, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Only here, along with the fact of the salvation of sinners as the one and all, in a manner, of Christ's undertaking, He is represented as coming into the world to accomplish it, which implies His pre-existence in a higher condition, and His descent from that into this lower world for the execution of the task He had previously undertaken. So also in John 1:9, 16:28. But the apostle is not satisfied with expressing the general object of Christ's mission; he must also indicate his own specific relation to it, or to the class whose good it contemplates. And this is the more remarkable part of the statement, as he places himself in the foremost rank of sinners ... – first in the sense of greatest, as at Mark 12:28, 29).

Commentators have often sought to qualify the strength of the expression ... But there is no warrant for any limitation of this sort. It accorded with the deep practical insight which St. Paul had through the Spirit obtained into his own case, that he should set his guilt in the foremost place: to his own eye it bulked more than all; as, indeed, for direct and palpable hostility to the cause of Jesus, it could scarcely be exceeded. It is not surely for us to extenuate what he has himself so broadly marked – the less so, as in this very depth and intensity of feeling respecting his sinfulness we recognise the essential element of his spiritual greatness, according to our Lord's declaration, that he who humbles himself most shall be greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:4).

... The former reason assigned by the apostle for his obtaining mercy had respect to his personal relation to the principles of the divine government, as one little entitled to expect any manifestation of mercy, yet not placed beyond the sphere of its exercise. But the reason here adduced points to the economical design of God in selecting such a sinner to be a vessel of mercy: it was that he might be a living exemplar or pattern, as well as herald, of the wonderful grace exhibited in the gospel; so that from what had been wrought in him others might take courage, and repair to Christ for the pardon of sin and life eternal, – might, as it is put by Bengel, conform themselves to the pattern, and say to themselves, "If thou believest as Paul, thou shalt be saved as Paul".

Patrick Fairbairn, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, pp. 95-97.

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

2 October 2016—Lord's Supper

Sermon: "To Save Sinners"

Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:1-20

Sermon Notes

Introduction: Our text today is one of the 'faithful' or 'trustworthy' sayings of the Pastoral Letters (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus), 'The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (1 Tim 1:15). If we were not sinners, we would not need a Saviour—but we are sinners!

1. Knowing our need

This 'saying' brings us to the very heart of the gospel—and it does so because the apostle was writing into a situation where the gospel was being denied. The apostle urges Timothy to stop some persons from teaching 'any different doctrine' - that is, different from the doctrine taught by the apostles.

He was also to charge them not to devote themselves to 'myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.' 'Speculations' lead to controversies—but the apostle is contrasting human ideas with the gospel, revealed by God; it is his plan, and by faith. (vs. 3-4).

And 'the aim of our charge—as entrusted by God with the stewardship of his gospel—is not speculation, but love (v. 5). Sincere faith in the Lord Jesus produces a good conscience and a pure heart, and from this good conscience and pure heart come love.

In Ephesus certain persons by swerving from these, by turning away from the gospel, from the goal of love issuing from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith had wandered into vain discussions; they wanted to be teachers of the law [of God] but they didn't understand what they were saying or talking about.

They didn't know how to use the Law lawfully (NIV 'properly'); like many other things that are 'good' if they are used properly, but bad if they are used wrongly (like fire, a good servant but a bad master) the law is a good thing if rightly used, but a bad thing if used unlawfully, as those who differed from the apostles were.

The 'unlawful' use of the law is to use it as a means of salvation, as way of getting right with God, or of gaining a greater acceptance with God; we know the law is good understanding that it is not laid down for righteous persons, but for sinners, rebels against God (vs. 9b-10).

'Righteous' persons are people who do what is right—and what is right is according to God's law; 'righteous' men and women are law-keepers, not law-breakers; God did not lay down his law for them, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the unrighteous, the law-breakers.

The law was given to give knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20); the apostle Paul gives a short list of behaviour against the law: 'strikers of parents' (5th commandment); 'murders' (6th); 'sexual immorality' (7th); 'enslavers' (8th); and liars (9th); it's a short list, but it includes us, for we have broken them all in thought if not in actions.

It's not exhaustive, for he continues 'and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine'; he had urged Timothy to charge certain persons 'not to teach any different doctrines' (to the teaching of our Lord and his apostles); the different doctrines are not 'sound' or 'healthy'; many suppose doctrine doesn't matter—but it does.

In other times people have put their lives on the line for what they believed; doctrine matters because some doctrines are healthy, while others are soul-destroying; some suppose God's law and God's gospel are incompatible—but they actually work in harmony with each other.

Sound doctrine is in accordance with the gospel; it brings conviction of wrongdoing as against God. It is the glory of God to save sinners; until we see ourselves as sinners we will never see ourselves as in need of his salvation. This is how the law is used lawfully, to convict us of sin so we know our need of the Saviour.

So few are interested in the gospel because they have never seen themselves as sinners in need of the Saviour. People don't like being told they are sinners; the temptation is to present Jesus to them as the answer to loneliness or lack of self-esteem or some other perceived need; we must not be ashamed of God's law.

2. Trusting the Saviour

When God's law speaks to us by the power of his Spirit, and we know our sinners, then we rejoice 'that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'. God's law applied to our hearts enlightens us in our need of salvation from the wrath to come and that Christ Jesus is the Saviour.

The apostle Paul once supposed himself righteous; he thought he was serving God by killing Christians—but he was really 'a blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent' of God and his people. But he received mercy because he acted 'ignorantly in unbelief'.

He was guilty, otherwise it would not have been mercy—but he had not, like some of the Jews, sinned against light and knowledge; the Lord had mercy on him; the grace of the Lord overflowed to him 'with the faith and the love that are in Christ Jesus, and he was able to testify that Christ Jesus did indeed come into the world to save sinners because he was a great sinner, and the Lord had saved him.

The Lord also had mercy upon him for our benefit, so that in him, 'as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.' He became living proof that 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and an encouragement to us not to despair because of sin, but trust the Saviour as the Saviour of sinners and as our Saviour.

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My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does the saying that is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' bring us to the heart of the gospel? What does it mean to say he 'came into the world'?
2. What contrast does the apostle Paul draw between the aim of 'our charge' (NIV 'this command') (v. 5) and the teaching and conduct of those who were teaching a 'different doctrine' (NIV 'false doctrines') (vs. 3-4)? Different from what? (cf. Jude, v. 3).
3. What was it that these teachers wanted to be? (v. 7) What did they not understand? (vs. 7-9) What indication is there in these verses that by 'law' the apostle Paul is thinking of the Ten Commandments?
4. How can the things laid down in the law and that are contrary to sound doctrine be 'in accordance with the gospel of the glory of ... God?' (v. 11).
5. How is the apostle's Paul experience of the grace of the Lord 1. a testimony to the fact that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and 2. an encouragement to us when we are tempted to despair because of our sins?