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**Dear Tim,
I Was Shown
Mercy**

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Series: I Timothy

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Dear Tim: I Was Shown Mercy

There really is no way to explain it—that incredible transformation takes place in some people when they come to Christ. We've all heard or read of at least someone whose past was a picture of a wasted life, whose character was flawed by dishonesty and immorality, whose years had been misspent in actual antagonism to the things of God. Then one day, heaven touched earth, darkness dissolved into light, the filth and the degradation was washed into the depths of the sea never to be remembered again, and a brand new person appeared—a new creature in Christ.

Granted, not every conversion experience is like that, and granted, not everyone comes from the kind of background that makes such a change so obvious. But, for some reason, God always seems to have in every generation a man or a woman whose life has been so demonstrably changed that there is *no logical explanation for it*. You may even *be* that person. When the world sees you, they may stand amazed because the person you were and the person you are do not even resemble one another.

Even in the early church, with thousands coming to Christ, a few conversion experiences stood out above all the rest. The most notable, without argument, belongs to the Apostle Paul. In fact, the story of his conversion appears in Scripture in one form or another *no less than six times*. In Acts 9 we have the historical account of his conversion; in Acts 22 we find him telling his Jewish brethren about it on the steps of the temple in Jerusalem. In Acts 26 we find him relating his experience before Festus and Agrippa. In Galatians 1 and 2 he tells how he, once the enemy of the Cross, reached the place where God revealed His Son to him. In Philippians 3 it is repeated again. And now, as he writes to young Timothy from somewhere in Macedonia, he relates again a bit of what he was like before he came to Christ, and how God's mercy and grace did something words cannot express. The story is always the same, but in each place, the emphasis is placed on a slightly different aspect, depending on his audience.

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As we open God's Word to continue our study of Paul's first letter to Timothy, we must look carefully for the key ingredients that sparkle like gold as they rise to the surface of the Apostle's recalling his coming to Christ. We will quickly see the key phrase, which is the title for this lesson and our outline of today's study will take this form:

Dear Timothy: I was shown mercy.

I- God's Mirror (I Timothy 1:8-11)

II- God's Mercy (I Timothy 1:12-17)

III- God's Mission (I Timothy 1:15)

IV- God's Message

I- GOD'S MIRROR

We take up reading where we left off in our last study, in verse eight of chapter one.

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.

We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers,

for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine

that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

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Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God,
be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

(I Timothy 1:8-17 NIV)

What a passage! Paul takes the reason for his writing, (to warn Tim about those who are teaching false doctrines) and turns it into a testimony of the grace and mercy of God in salvation. Mark that concept. Whatever Paul was about, *his message was about the cross*. It never left his conscious thoughts; it never escaped the forefront of his theology. Whatever else might be important wasn't important in the light of the cross. And even as he dictates this letter to his son in the faith in far-off Ephesus, he takes young Tim back in time to the former Paul, the moment of truth, and the amazing grace that separates the two.

But before he confirms that incredible event, he ties in his opening statements with an explanation of the mirror of God, which is the law. Now the word translated *law* in this passage does not have the definite article in front of it, and so most believe that what we are dealing with is the whole concept of law, not just the Mosaic law. We already know from Paul in Romans 13:1 that in God's sight, "the powers that be are ordained of God," and that

...rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.

For he [the one who is inflicting the law] is the God's minister to you for good. But if thou do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. (Romans 13:3-5 NKJV)

The basic principle in Scripture, then, is that the law, be it divine law, international law, or national law is a tool God uses to convict, to control, and to protect his saints. If they are in God's will, and obeying God's law, they have nothing to fear. But if they are violating that law, be it morally or legally, the law was placed there as a huge sign to tell them to STOP.

Now Paul lists examples of the kinds of things that law was meant to stop. And those in our society who think that laws, which inhibit man from committing these crimes are in violation of *human rights*, don't understand that human rights begin and end with divine law. This table gives us an overview:

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KJV	NIV	GREEK	DEFINED
Lawless	lawbreakers	(anomoi)	deliberately
Disobedient	Rebels	(anhupotaktoi)	insubordinate
Ungodly	Ungodly	(asebes)	defiantly
Sinners	Sinful	(hamartoloi)	Void of morals
Unholy	Unholy	(anasioi)	Impious, openly
Profane	Irreligious	(bebeloi)	profanes
Murder father mother	Kill father mother	(patraloai metraloai)	Abuse of
Manslayers	Murderers	(androphonoi)	Kill or harbor
Whoremongers	Adulterers	(pornoii)	practice
Defile with man	Perverts	(arsenokoitai)	practice
menstealers	Slave traders	(andrapodistai)	Hold for ransom
liars	Liars	(pseustai)	Knowingly alter
perjured	perjurers	(epiorkoi)	Give false witness

Now we won't get hung up here, for this is not the meat of the lesson, but just a glance at a few of those subjects of the law will reveal to us one of the key ailments that has befallen our society. We have come to believe that it is the goal of government to protect the lawbreaker from society, rather to protect society from the lawbreaker. And we have changed what are and what aren't acceptable standards of conduct. You will see that the law was put there to warn first, then to punish those who are deliberate lawbreakers, who resist authority, who defy God, who are amoral, who profane religion, who abuse or dishonor parents. It was the purpose of law to punish homosexuals, not protect them. It was the purpose of law to define immorality, not refuse to. It was the goal of law to punish terrorists, or those who hold others for ransom. It was the goal of law to deal with those who lie or commit perjury in a court of law. The law was made for the lawless, and God clearly defined in this passage and elsewhere who they were and are.

What a pity that society with all of its committees and agencies and studies trying to determine what's wrong with the justice system and with the moral values of our youth, don't simply go back to the Word of God where the answers are.

Paul said, "The law is good, if you use it properly". The word "good" used here was not the word used for that which is intrinsically good. It was a word used for that, which is good when used in its proper context. The law is to be obeyed, but it isn't

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good because it's the law. It's good when it is aligned with God's law and kept there. It ought not to be a threat to the godly. It was meant to punish those who defy authority and deny absolutes. And if politicians or elected judges are not willing to accept those principles, we ought not to elect them to public office, because unless the law is used properly, as Paul put it, the cure becomes the disease.

So the law was not to be an end in itself, but a means to an end. It was to be a mirror to reflect when man was in sin, a stop sign to warn of impending doom; that unless he made a "U-turn" he would plunge off the cliff ahead. But it wasn't the *solution*. It was the warning. The solution is found in the Word of God.

II- GOD'S MERCY

But Paul doesn't stay at the stop sign long. He has a more meaningful destination. He is headed for "grace mountain by-way-of mercy parkway". The law told him that was the only way to go. And that's where this epistle is moving. Now in each of Paul's letters, as was the custom of the day, the opening words of greeting were usually followed by an anthem of praise or thanksgiving. In this letter, he goes directly to the problem then comes back in verse 12 to begin his praise session. First, we have God's *manifestations*, then Paul's qualifications, followed by the implications. He begins,

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength,
that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

(I Timothy 1:12)

Those are the *manifestations*. God did three things: he gave Paul strength, he counted Paul as faithful, and he appointed Paul to a ministry. Mark it! Every time Paul wrote of his ministry, he wrote of God's power. Never did he even allow the reader to imagine that Paul had something to do with it. The strength was not his. The power was not his. The ability was not his. It was God's ministry, and God's ministry requires God's power. Anything less is a satanic fraud. You cannot do the work of God. Period. Jesus couldn't, apart from the Father; and if He who knew no sin couldn't, then we who know it all too well certainly have no qualifications. If God calls you into any ministry, God will empower you to do it, and the less qualified you feel, the more likely you are to succeed. Paul made it plain that it was his weakness that made God strong in his life, and once again, in

this passage, he reminds Timothy that it is God's enabling grace that equipped him to do what God's inviting voice had called him to do.

The second thing God did for Paul was *to count him faithful*. In other words, by giving him a ministry, and by empowering him within that ministry, God was saying to Paul, "I trust you". And this was an overwhelming thought to Paul. For as we shall see momentarily, if you or I were choosing someone to entrust with a ministry to Christians, we wouldn't reach down and pick up their greatest enemy. But, you see, we can't see the heart. And God knew what Paul would be like when grace intervened. So He considered Paul to be a potentially faithful man, knowing that the key to faithfulness is surrender. Paul knew that "faithful is he who calls you; He will also do it."¹

God enabled Paul, trusted Paul, and called Paul. So third, He *put Paul in the ministry*. And no one else can. If you put yourself in the ministry, you will glorify yourself in the ministry, and the ministry will fail. *The God who will enable you must be the one who calls you*. Paul knew that. His calling was clear. And it was important that both Timothy and the rest of the flock in Ephesus realize that, for this one God had called and enabled had some strong words of rebuke and exhortation for them to follow.

Now Paul, in verse 13, gives his *qualifications*:

Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. (NKJV)

Paul says, "Look at my resume." It contains three sections:

- 1- My spiritual qualifications: I was a blasphemer.
- 2- My vocational qualifications: I was a persecutor of Christians.
- 3- My character qualities: I was a violent man.

1- God looked at that resume and said, "There's my man!" Now I ask you, aren't His ways higher than ours? *This man was a blasphemer*. The word meant "one who reviled or spoke reproachfully of authority. "In this case, the authority was God. Paul had blasphemed the name of God. He had cursed and mocked and railed at the precious Name that he now knew was above every name. He had mocked the King of Glory; he had

1 I Thessalonians 5:24

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laughed at the very God who would ultimately reach down into the depths of hell itself and pay the price to save him. Paul could never forgive himself for that. He accepted God's forgiveness, but he allowed his own memories to haunt him just enough to make him usable. It isn't totally wrong to remember your sins, so long as you remember them as *forgiven*. Paul was a blasphemer who had been called into the ministry.

2- Paul was a *persecutor*. This broke his heart every time he thought of it. He wrote,

For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.
(I Corinthians 15:9 NKJV)

In Acts 22:20, we read,

And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him. (NKJV)

Paul had not only reviled the Name, he had hunted down and slain the very men whom God had called to preach that Name. He was a persecutor, an enemy of the church, perhaps its greatest enemy. But God, who sees the bigger picture, knew what power could be exercised if an enemy of the cross became its friend. God knew that the lower someone had sunk, the farther he could lift them; and the farther he could lift them, the more grace there would be to glorify His Name.

3- But Paul went one step beyond that. He admitted to being a *violent man*. The word used here in the Greek comes from the noun *hubris*, a word that in that day was a terrible word. It meant "capable of brutal violence, the kind of man who inflicted pain because he enjoyed it". It was indicative of an arrogant sadist. Aristotle defined the word as "inflicting pain simply to find delight in the suffering of the other person". So there you have Paul's credentials. Spiritually, he was a blasphemer of God's Name. Vocationally, he was a murderer of God's people. He thrived on hunting down Christians, and seeing that they were executed for their very beliefs. And his final qualification was that, left to himself, he was a wicked, violent man who would punish or kill just for the sheer pleasure of it.

But then comes the key phrase: "But I was shown mercy". My friend, if you never remember another thing about Paul, remember that in his own right, he deserved only to die. If God

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operated on an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, this man was a goner, but not so. Paul was *shown mercy*. And so were you. And so was I. The word literally means *compassion followed by forgiveness and freedom*. It means that when God saw Paul, one of the greatest enemies he had, He had compassion on Paul. His heart broke for Paul. He didn't just see what Paul had done—He saw what Paul was missing. It is much easier for us as believers to condemn those who, to us, are the scum of the earth. They may be reviling God's Name, persecuting God's people, violently opposing truth for the sheer enjoyment of it. But, deep in their heart of hearts lies the same potential you have, and all they need is the same forgiveness you experienced to be whole.

Mercy is that aspect of the nature of God that sees us as forgiven, not because we are not guilty, but because God has chosen to charge that guilt to His dear Son instead. Nothing Paul could ever have done could have earned back the right to serve the Living God. All Paul deserved was an eternity in hell. And that's all you and I deserve as well. But Paul shouts it now, "I was shown mercy." When was the last time you had a *mercy party*? Not a *pity party* but a *mercy party*. That's a time when you just stop your mind-boggling flurry of activities long enough to remember what life was like before you met Christ, and what your life would be like today had you not met Christ. Crying out with Paul, you can say, "But I was shown mercy". You will be getting nearer to the heart of God.

So there we have the manifestations and the qualifications, now for the *implications*. Why did God choose to use a man like Paul? Why not a Rabbi whose character was without flaw? Why not a teacher who had never so much as questioned the faith? Why not make up your team of apostles out of men who *never had a problem*? Paul is about to tell us why. He is about to give us the implications of his qualifications.

For that very reason I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life.

Paul was saying, "God needed a living illustration of mercy and grace. He needed to find the worst scenario to demonstrate His power, so he chose me." Paul continually referred to himself as the *worst of sinners*, not as an act of reverse pride, but as

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an expression of deep humility. He was saying, “No one could deserve salvation less than I do.” He was saying, “Dear Tim: I, Paul, preach to you today, not by virtue of the magnitude of my credentials, but by virtue of the awesomeness of God’s eternal mercy. He loved me. He drew me. He forgave me. He even called me to preach His dear Word.” “Oh, Timothy,” Paul seemed to be saying, “If God can use the likes of me, imagine what He can do with you.” He was saying, “Here I stand, Big Chief Paul, I am the greatest sinner of all. And yet...*I was shown mercy.*”

III- GOD’S MISSION

That is the Gospel. That’s why, in verse 15, Paul gives us the whole counsel of God in a sentence:

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. (I Timothy 1:15 NKJV)

I want to fall to my knees with Paul and cry, “Me, too!” Unworthy? “Dear God, I am unworthy but I was shown mercy.” How soon we forget. How quickly we become self-righteous. How utterly bankrupt are our memories. We were, like Paul, shipwrecked, headed for an eternity in hell; and we *deserved every second of it*. Through the annals of history, God looked upon us as we were saw us, *as we could be*, and decided to *show us mercy*.

That’s why Christ Jesus came into the world to show us mercy, to save sinners, and oh, do we qualify. But it wasn’t Paul’s sins that qualified him for greatness. They only qualified him for mercy. What qualified Paul for greatness was that he never forgot how unworthy he was to have been given the riches of Christ. And because he never forgot, every day he lived, grace became sweeter, mercy became deeper, and God’s power multiplied with each reminder.

I think it’s time we had a mercy renewal in the church of Jesus Christ. I think it’s time we stopped just long enough to remember that were it not for His magnificent mercy, we would never have tasted His amazing grace. Had God not chosen to forgive us our sins and wash us in the blood of His dear Son, we would have perished in our sins, and nothing we could ever do would ever make us one tiny bit more worthy than we are.

Mercy? Do we even grasp the meaning of the word? Or has not

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our society, which is so caught up in man's self-worth, convinced us that we are inherently good? No, if 99.99999% of it was up to God, and only a fraction of a fraction of a fraction depended on our goodness, we *would still be forever lost*.

So God's message in the light of God's mercy is humble yourselves and never forget that you are what you are, a child of the King.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, (Titus 3:5 NKJV)

No wonder Paul got so excited in verse 17. He had been shown mercy. And so have we. Let's shout it with him in closing:

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.
(I Timothy 1:17 NKJV)

Amen indeed.

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