

I TIMOTHY 1:12-17
CAN GOD USE ME?

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Timothy chapter 1 as we continue our in-depth study of Paul's first letter to his son in the faith, Timothy!

Keep in mind that Timothy is leading the church there in Ephesus and Paul wants Timothy to stay there and take care of some of the problems that were happening in this church there in Ephesus.

We see this in I Timothy 1:3-4, **“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia - remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.”**

It was not going to be easy, and Paul is admonishing Timothy to continue on in this work, to take care the people of God so they don't get lead away into false teaching by the false prophets!

The focus here in the verses we will be looking at this morning is pretty simple and yet, something many struggle with – ***CAN GOD USE ME?***

We look at our past, we look at what we have, and we think that there is no way that God can use us. But we are mistaken. Think about this for a minute.

God created everything from nothing!

Let me give you an example of how powerful our God is. In the universe there are some two trillion galaxies. That is amazing but when you look at the stars within those galaxies, that is even more amazing.

You see, there are approximately 200 billion trillion stars in our universe or some 200 sextillion stars!

God not only created them, but He also knows them by name, everyone of them! It is as Psalm 147:4-5 tells us, **“He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite.”**

Those are just the stars that He created. And when you put everything together, all that God created, do you think He can use us and equip us to do the work that He has called us to do?

Of course He can and of course He does! Nothing is impossible with God!

Now, let me show you what I mean that God can use anybody.

There was a young man. He did not do very well in school. He graduated High School, but not the top in his class. But he helped the bell curve out you might say for everyone else.

In terms of writing papers, his English teacher is still in therapy after grading his work!

In terms of speaking in front of people, he hated it, and he feared speaking in front of people.

And one day, in his twenties, he came to saving faith in Christ! It was truly amazing because he did not even believe in God prior to that.

One day that Lord spoke to him and told him that he would be a pastor one day up in Wisconsin, of all places.

He did not know anyone in Wisconsin, no one!

But he knew what the Lord had told him, so he waited.

He had no seminary training, even though he tried to get one. The doors were closed on that.

So how in the world can God use a guy who did not do well in school, did not like writing papers, did not want to speak in front of crowds, had no seminary training?

Because He is God, and that person is ***ME!***

And if he could use me, he could use you as well!

Why?

Because He is – ***GOD!***

Here in I Timothy chapter 1 Paul is going to give to us an illustration of a wicked man, a religious man, and how God turned his life around and in spite of all the evil he brought against God and God's people, God would use him mightily.

My prayer, as we go through this study, is that you would place yourself in this situation and see that no matter where you are at, no matter what you have done, God can use you if you will just turn to Him.

I have broken down the verses we will be looking at this morning into the following main points. They are,

PAST LIFE – I TIMOTHY 1:12-13

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST – I TIMOTHY 1:14-15

MY LIFE AS AN EXAMPLE – I TIMOTHY 1:16

ALL PRAISE TO GOD – I TIMOTHY 1:17

So with that as our introduction, let's begin reading in I Timothy chapter 1, beginning in verse 12 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word and look at this topic – ***CAN GOD USE ME?***

I TIMOTHY 1

VERSES 12-13

Keep in mind that what Paul says here flows from what he was just speaking about, our salvation by Grace through Faith in Jesus Christ.

Here, to show the grace of God in service, Paul shares his former life outside of Christ. He was chief of sinners according to what he tells us, a blasphemer, a persecutor of God's people, violently arrogant.

Paul was not a good guy even though he thought he was good. All his persecution of Christians, he felt that he was doing it for God, but that was not the reality. Paul was actually fighting against God!

Remember when God spoke to Paul when he was on his way to Damascus to bring Christian Jews back to Jerusalem to stand before the religious council. This is what the Lord said to Paul, who was called Saul before his conversion, “... **‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’**” Acts 9:4.

When people persecute us, come against us, they are really coming against the Lord, that is how closely He associates with us. If they do it to us, they are doing it to Him! And that is what Paul was doing!

In other words, what Solomon wrote in Proverbs 14:12, Paul was living. This verse says, **“There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”**

And Paul did not try to hide his past life or ignore it like it never happened. In fact, he lets us know that he considered himself chief or the biggest of sinners! (I Timothy 1:15)

And he also does not dwell upon the past like it was a badge of honor. This is what I did and he moves on to what Christ has done in him!

Paul, in Acts 22:4-5 explains his behavior before he was saved by saying, “**I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.**”

Think about all that Paul did before he was saved, thinking he was serving God and yet, his actions showed that he was fighting against God.

Paul was there when Stephen was martyred. He then went on his own personal crusade to stamp out the people of the Way or Christians.

In Galatians 1:13 Paul tells us of this time, “**For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.**”

Keep in mind that Paul had been a leading rabbi in his day (Gal. 1:13–14), so he was certainly known to some of the people in the crowd.

Not only that, but they could also check this out with the High Priest and the other council members, how Paul obtained what we might call “*arrest warrants*” for Christians, to take them into custody.

And Paul pulled them out of their homes and was rounding them up wanting to bring them back to Jerusalem to place them on trial.

Again, in Acts 26:9-11 we are told by Paul, **“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”**

In Jerusalem, Paul had a field day running around and arresting Christians, throwing them in prison with the authority of the chief priest, the religious leaders were backing him up.

Paul even tried to get them to renounce their faith in Jesus!

Paul, in Galatians speaks of this time as he tells us, **“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.”** Galatians 1:13-14.

Paul was trying to destroy the church, he had a zeal but not really for God but for the traditions of the fathers, which were wrong!

As we have read, the Lord told Paul that he wasn't serving God but persecuting God, fighting against what God was doing!

And for Paul, Jerusalem was not enough, he traveled to other cities persecuting Christians and on one of his journey's, on the road to Damascus, he is going to have an encounter with God!

Let me share a few other points here.

First of all, when Paul says that he **“cast [his] vote against them”** in verse 10 of Acts chapter 26, I believe Paul is telling us that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, having a **vote** against Christians who were tried before the Sanhedrin.

Not only that, but this man who said he was so in love with God and was just serving God, was **“exceedingly enraged against them.”**

Make no mistake about it, Paul was an angry man before his conversion. And that anger just showed that his relationship with God was not right.

That is what the Law will do, and Paul was a keeper of the Law, or so he thought. He saw the freedom that others had, those who were believers in Christ, and it made him angry, and he went after them, and we see that today with people.

Now you read that about this man named Paul and you think, ***“How in the world can God use a man like that? He was horrible. He was angry, consented to the death of Christians, put them in prison, they lost their jobs and even their ability to go to the Temple. So really, how can God use a bad person like that?”***

Here is the reality, we are all bad, none of us are good not even one of us! And yet, in spite of our past, God can and does use us!

It is as Spurgeon wrote, ***“After Paul was saved, he became a foremost saint. The Lord did not allot him a second-class place in the church. He had been the leading sinner, but his Lord did not, therefore, say, ‘I save you, but I shall always remember your wickedness to your disadvantage.’ Not so: he counted him faithful, putting him into the ministry and into the apostleship, so that he was not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles. Brother, there is no reason why, if you have gone very far in sin, you should not go equally far in usefulness.”***

We remember our past, but the Lord doesn't because when we repent of our sins and come to Christ, all our sins are cast as far as the east is from the west, to be remembered no more!

One more point here and this is something that many don't think about. Paul put it like this, "**... putting me into the ministry.**" I Timothy 1:12.

The question I want to ask you is this. Do you see anywhere here where it says that Paul ***VOLUNTEERED*** for service?

That to me is an interesting question. But as you read this verse it does not say Paul volunteered for service but that the Lord placed him in this ministry.

Yes, Paul had to step forward and go but notice that it says the Lord counted Paul "**faithful.**" In other words, God called him into service, and he was obedient to the Lord and stepped forward.

The point is simple. We are bondslaves of Jesus Christ, we serve Him. And thus, since we are duty bound servants of Jesus Christ, our faithfulness is expected!

Listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 12:9-16, "**Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.**"

As this chapter here in Romans opened up, Paul spoke of laying our lives on the altar of sacrifice allowing God to use us as He pleases. In other words, we are bondslaves of Christ.

And here we see Paul speaking of how we as Christians are to behave and he starts out with our love not being hypocritical, no hypocrisy, but sincere, genuine!

Do we as Christians have good manners or are we obnoxious around people?

Are we lazy or diligent in the work that God has called us to do?

Is our heart boiling over with the things of God or is it just simmering or cold as we serve the Lord?

Again, walking as God has called us to walk, in holiness and in sincerity!

And listen to what Paul said in regard to our service, “**serving the Lord.**” Did you notice that he did not say, “*Serving Calvary Chapel of Manitowoc!*” He did not say, “*Serving pastor Joe!*” He did not say, “*Serving myself!*” No, he said, “**serving the Lord.**”

If you lose sight of that, you will serve for a short time and then you will get burned out, you will get mad at what someone said or did to you, and drop out. I have seen it over and over again and it is not pretty. ***WE SERVE THE LORD!***

And even in the difficult times, times of tribulation, we have our hope based in Christ and that is unchanging even though everything else around us may change!

Are we prayer warriors or do we shoot up prayers as a last-ditch effort?

Do we have a love for strangers or just the close group we associate ourselves with?

You see, Jesus said in John 13:34-35, “**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**”

Again, just practical thoughts and it is like Paul is just firing them out there for us to evaluate alongside our lives so that we may correct what needs to be corrected.

The nineteenth century Englishman Robert C. Chapman wrote: ***“Seeing that so many preach Christ and so few live Christ, I will aim to live Him.”***

Did he accomplish that in his lifetime?

His friend, J. N. Darby said of him: ***“He lives what I teach.”***

That is my prayer. That when people look at my life that they see Christ because I am living what I am saying I believe and what I teach!

William Arnot, the popular nineteenth century English author, had this legacy that he left behind regarding his life: ***“His preaching is good. His writing is better. His living is best of all.”***

Amen to that! All the words that I say, all my study notes I put online are really meaningless if I am not living what I say I believe. If Christ is not seen in me!

May people say that about us as we live for the Lord, may we live what we believe!

And that truly is just being a bonds slave of Jesus Christ. And keep in mind that a bonds slave is not someone who is forced into this position.

In fact, the idea with a bonds slave was that the slave had paid his debt and he was free to go. But, because he loved his master so much, he was willing to stay as a slave, not because he had to, but he freely gave his life to his master and that is exactly what we are doing.

Jesus does not force us but because of His great love for us, we willingly serve Him because we love Him!

And really, we have been talking about Paul’s ***PAST LIFE***, but that past life is what has now brought him into this new life in Christ and that is what we will be looking at next, Paul’s – ***NEW LIFE IN CHRIST!***

VERSES 14-15

Now let's think about this for a minute. We looked at Paul's *PAST LIFE* or his life before he was saved. Was there anything in his life that God said, *"That Paul, what a great guy. I love the way he loves Me. I don't worry about him; he does nothing wrong!"*

Obviously that was not true. First and foremost, he was fighting against God as Paul was persecuting the people of God. But there are none who do not sin and that past life for Paul was not good, even though, for a time, he thought he was good.

So Paul did not deserve anything from God, not even salvation.

Then how did Paul get saved?

Paul tells us that it was all God's grace, His unmerited favor that not only saved Paul but also allowed him to serve the Lord.

He didn't deserve it, but God graciously used Paul mightily.

And that same grace that was extended to Paul and has been extended to millions of other Christians, is extended to us and that is the only reason we can serve the Lord, out of His grace and not because we are so special or talented.

It is as Paul said in Romans 5:20-21, **"Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."**

Exceedingly abundant grace that God extends to each of us not only for salvation but also for service!

Remember what we are told in II Chronicles 16:9, **“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him . . .”**

Now you may be thinking . . . How can God use me . . .

I hurt so many people!

I have done so many bad things!

I was in prison!

I stole things many times!

I have lied so much I don't even know what the truth is anymore!

I have been addicted to drugs and alcohol!

I've been involved in adultery!

I've had an abortion!

I've been involved in fornication!

I've murdered someone and have spent a long, long time in prison!

And the list can go on and on.

But God did not reach out to you because you deserved it. No, He reached out to you because He loves you and He extended His grace towards you!

Now you may be thinking, ***“You mean that if someone has murdered someone, God will extend His grace to that person?”***

Absolutely. It does not mean that they don't have to go to prison for the crime, but if they repent of their sins and ask Jesus to be Lord and Savior of their lives, their sins are gone, remembered no more!

And once we get saved, and that is the key, once we are saved, we are bondslaves of Christ, and we serve Him. Not because we are so special, but because He is God and He can use a person like me, like you for His glory!

You see, God is looking for faithful people to serve Him, available people, not talented people.

Be faithful in the small things and see what doors God will open for you.

Now here is a problem that we get into sometimes in our service for the Lord. We want the big positions, if there really is a big position in God's Kingdom. But we want the power positions, the ones that people can see.

Think about that for a minute. A bondsman could not pick and choose what he wanted to do and what he did not want to do. His master told him what needed to be done and he did it.

The same is true for us. Our Master, Jesus tells us what He wants us to do, and we do have a choice, but if we are truly a bondsman we will go forward and do the work that God has for us!

I am sure you heard people say this before, "***We are looking for volunteers to help us out in this ministry!***"

That is not true. Remember what I have said. We are not volunteers but bondslaves of Christ and we are duty bound to serve Jesus, not just when we want, but every day. It is what is expected of servants.

Again, some of you might not agree with that but listen to what Jesus said in Luke 17:7-10, **“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’? But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”**

That is how Jesus views servanthood, and it is what is required of us!

Let me share this with you and you will see how if we truly give our lives to the Lord, He can use us in the most amazing ways.

We are told,

In 1972, NASA launched the exploratory space probe Pioneer 10.

According to Leon Jaroff in *Time*, the satellite’s primary mission was to reach Jupiter, photograph the planet and its moons, and beam data to earth about Jupiter’s magnetic field, radiation belts, and atmosphere.

Scientists regarded this as a bold plan, for at that time no earth satellite had ever gone beyond Mars, and they feared the asteroid belt would destroy the satellite before it could reach its target.

But Pioneer 10 accomplished its mission and much, much more. Swinging past the giant planet in November 1973, Jupiter’s immense gravity hurled Pioneer 10 at a higher rate of speed toward the edge of the solar system.

At one billion miles from the sun, Pioneer 10 passed Saturn. At some two billion miles, it hurtled past Uranus; Neptune at nearly three billion miles; Pluto at almost four billion miles. By 1997, twenty-five years after its launch, Pioneer 10 was more than six billion miles from the sun.

And despite that immense distance, Pioneer 10 continued to beam back radio signals to scientists on Earth.

“Perhaps most remarkable,” writes Jaroff, “those signals emanate from an 8-watt transmitter, which radiates about as much power as a bedroom night light, and takes more than nine hours to reach Earth.”

The Little Satellite That Could was not qualified to do what it did. Engineers designed Pioneer 10 with a useful life of just three years. But it kept going and going.

By simple longevity, its tiny 8-watt transmitter radio accomplished more than anyone thought possible.

So it is when we offer ourselves to serve the Lord. God can work even through someone with 8-watt abilities. God cannot work, however, through someone who quits.

Philippians 3:12-14 Hebrews 12:1 Mark 10:45

- Craig Brian Larson, Pastoral Grit: The Strength to Stand and to Stay, Bethany

I think that is important for us to remember. When we opened up this morning, we talked about God creating the heavens and the earth and if He could do that, then He surely can equip me to do the work that He has called me to do! And we too can keep going and going and going!

Let me ask you another question. ***“Why did Jesus come into this world?”***

Let me be clear on this. Jesus did not come to help us to be better people! I know, that may be shocking to you, but it is a reality.

Then why did Jesus come?

TO SAVE SINNERS!

It is when we come to that saving faith that the outflow of Jesus living in us is that we do become better people, or I should say we become more like Jesus!

Again, it is an outflow of what has taken place in our heart!

In many churches today, especially in the Seeker Friendly churches, Emerging Churches and the like, the word “*sin*” has been removed from their vocabulary because it is offensive.

But if Jesus came to save us from our sins, then we have negated what Christ has come to do so we can be more politically correct or less offensive to people.

You see, God became man (Jesus) to pay in full the penalty for our sins.

Don't lose sight of that message!

We are all sick in sin in need of the Great Physician Jesus Christ to cleanse us from our sins, even though some may negate the fact that they are sick in sin, that is the reality!

Thus, if you remove sin, you remove the need for a Savior, for Jesus and that is exactly what the Devil wants people to believe! Be warned and obey God's Word and not the foolishness of man!

Now, if your life is no different after you said you came to Christ then it was before you were saved, something is wrong. You need to do a heart check. Have you really given your life to Jesus?

I am not saying that we don't sin after we are saved, but there should be changes in our life and we will deal with that more in a minute when we look at – ***MY LIFE AS AN***

EXAMPLE!

Paul, in II Corinthians 5:17 put it like this, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”**

What is the key to this promise?

Being **IN** Christ – you must be saved!

Paul is speaking of the new life and what God is doing and has done! Don’t live in the past, you are brand new in Christ and thus, live accordingly.

It is as Clarke said, *“The man is not only mended, but he is new made . . . there is a new creation, which God himself owns as his workmanship, and which he can look on and pronounce very good.”*

One author put it well when he wrote, *“God plants new desires, loves, inclinations, and truths in the redeemed, so that they live in the midst of the old creation with a new creation perspective (cf. Gal. 6:14). That perspective, as it is nourished and developed, helps believers gain victory in the battle against sin and conforms them to the image of Jesus Christ.”*

May we not forget that! God sees the finished product; we are perfect in a positional sense.

And in a practical sense, God is still working, just don’t live in the past and what you have done, but in the present and what God has done and is doing in your life!

And that should then be seen by others, as Paul is going to show us as we look at – ***MY LIFE AS AN EXAMPLE!***

VERSE 16

Paul is basically saying, ***“Hey guys, if God can forgive a person as bad as me, he can forgive you too!”***

I don’t know about you, but those are very encouraging words to me. And it is these words that Paul wants Timothy to guard, to speak forth so that others, sinners, can receive the Savior!

I know that there are some who feel that they have done so much wrong that God can never forgive them.

Paul wants them to understand that there is no sin you can ever imagine that is stronger than His love for you and yes, He can save even the chief of sinners, like Paul!

And notice what Paul says here regarding his life after he was saved. He tells us his life is **“... a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.”**

The Greek word for **“pattern”** is *HUPOTUPOSIS*, (hoop-ot-oop’-o-sos) and the idea with this word is that it is speaking of an outline. I like that.

An outline of what or who?

Our life should be portraying Jesus to the lost world!

Now here is where we need to be careful. Who are you patterning your life after, who are you watching?

Let me give you this example and you will see what I mean.

We are told,

President Calvin Coolidge invited some people from his hometown to dinner at the White House. Since they did not know how to behave at such an occasion, they thought the best policy would be just to do what the President did.

The time came for serving coffee. The President poured his coffee into a saucer. As soon as the home folk saw it, they did the same. The next step for the President was to pour some milk and add a little sugar to the coffee in the saucer. The home folks did the same.

They thought for sure that the next step would be for the President to take the saucer with the coffee and begin sipping it.

But the President didn't do so. He leaned over, placed the saucer on the floor and called the cat.

- Source Unknown

That is awesome. I wonder what the President thought about what they were doing and the laughter that ensued! But it is true, it matters who we are watching, who we are patterning our life after.

And yes, as the Master artist is drawing this outline of Christ in us you might say, also keep in mind that this is a work in progress. But we should never use that as an excuse!

You know me, I have a temper!

Hey, it is my opinion, and I am free to say whatever I want!

I don't care what people think of me, if they don't like it tough!

And again, that list can go on.

Now some of you may be angry and what I just said because you do those things. But if you are angry with me, let me ask you this. Would Jesus do those things?

Would Jesus say . . .

You know Me, I have a temper!

Hey, it is My opinion, and I am free to say whatever I want!

I don't care what people think of Me, if they don't like it tough!

Of course we don't see Jesus say those things. Then why are we if we are to be a pattern for people to see Jesus, an outline you might say of Him?

You see, God wants others to see what He can do by working in us.

Paul wrote in Colossians 1:27-29, **“To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.”**

Paul is speaking of the fact that Christ is living in us, and that enables us to be like Him.

And let me say this. We are not imitating Christ, putting on a show. It is not that when we come to church we are saints, but when we leave through those doors we behave like the Devil.

No, it is not imitation but impartation! And folks, our hope of glory is not based upon our hard work, our devotion to God but that Jesus abides in us, He is present with us!

And in I Corinthians 11:1, Paul wrote, **“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”**

Now that is a great verse, but do you know what this verse here in I Corinthians 11:1 flows out of?

It flows from what Paul wrote in I Corinthians 10:31-33, **“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”**

As you look at these verses there are two great rules that should guide us as Christians.

The first is that all that we do we do for **“the glory of God.”**

The second follows it, and that is that we are to look out for the welfare of our fellow man, **“not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”**

It is as Jesus said, **“... ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”**

Good rules to live by!

But if we are angry, bitter, spuing things out of our mouth that are not of God, then are we really imitating Christ or is that just the flesh showing itself?

I think we know; it is the flesh, and the flesh is ugly but when people see Jesus in us, it is beautiful because there is so much grace and love that flows from our lives that people are drawn to the Lord through it all!

So, are the things that you are doing bringing glory to God, are they building you up, are they helping others?

If they are then continue doing them. If they are not, then flee from them! Good principles to follow as we are in this race that God has set before us!

Again, we see the heart of Paul here that his actions would save many. That they would see God in him and be drawn to the true and living God and I believe that is our hearts desire, that people would see God in us, that the flesh life would melt away so that they may come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior!

Keep in mind that the believers in Corinth were self-confident, self-seeking and thus Paul tells them to get refocused, to follow him as he is following Christ, to get back on the course that God had set for them.

We are on a new course, not running to and fro and being directed by the prince of this world, but by the Lord and the course He has set for us is perfect.

We have a purpose in life, to bring glory to God. We were created for His good pleasure, and thus, the plan, the race that God has us in He will see us through till the end!

Walk in the liberty that God has given you but do so in love and not as the Corinthian's were doing!

Let me show you what I mean about how our lives can influence others as they see Christ in us.

Many of you may not know who Thomas Bilney was. He was born in 1495 and he was known as "*little Bilney*" because, well, he was vertically challenged, he was short!

And he was a very smart man. He studied law at Cambridge. He became a fellow of Trinity Hall in 1520. He was a great thinker who was left unsatisfied by the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

But during his time in the church, the young scholar began to question "*can I truly be right with God?*"

You see, even with all that knowledge, with all that he had, it never brought him the peace that he was looking for.

And he began to read the Latin translation of Erasmus's Greek New Testament and upon reading it, Bilney came to realize that he possessed the very Word of God – the truth.

And it was the words of 1 Timothy 1:15 – *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst”* – that brought Thomas Bilney to salvation.

“If Paul, the chief of sinners could be saved”, he reasoned, *“then why can't I?”*

That is just part of the story. Listen to what transpired after his conversion, after he got saved and how his life impacted others.

We are told after his conversion to Christ,

Bilney immediately became a central figure in a group of theologians who met at the famous White Horse Inn, which stood on King's Parade, adjacent to King's College, in Cambridge.

And there this group prepared for the Reformation in England.

Bilney was arrested in 1527 and was forced to recant.

But Bilney couldn't contain himself and set off preaching again in 1531. He again was arrested, then tried and burned at the stake.

His most famous convert, Hugh Latimer, who became the most prominent preacher of the English Reformation, was inspired by Bilney's courage and reverently referred to him in his sermon as “St. Bilney.”

Latimer, too, died at the stake, in Oxford in 1555.

- R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, 1-2 Timothy and Titus, pp. 41-42

We need to understand that people are watching us, the saved and the unsaved.

For the saved, they are learning, being encouraged by the pattern of Christ we are portraying in our lives. They see that our faith is real and what Christ has done on the inside is overflowing in our actions, in our words, how we treat people.

For the unsaved, they too see our lives and the love we have for people. We are not arguing with them, fighting with them, telling them that they are only getting what they deserve. But we are loving them as Christ loves sinners and died for them so that they too can come to saving faith.

Christ in us, the hope of glory! Are we giving people hope by what they see in our lives? I think for all of us, if we are honest with ourselves, we need to do a heart check and ask the Lord to increase in our lives so that we may decrease, that flesh nature would decrease, and people would see Jesus!

Again, that is my prayer for my life. That as you look at my life, the way that I treat people, that you would see Jesus, His love, His grace flowing. And I am far from where I need to be, but I am farther along than I was a year ago, five years ago, ten years ago and so on.

Maybe you are thinking, *“Pastor Joe is boasting about himself!”*

No, I am not, and neither is Paul. Paul’s point is simple – *MY LIFE AS AN EXAMPLE*, and that is my prayer, and like I have said, I am sure that is your prayer as well!

But notice what flows next, because it was not about Paul, it is not about me and what I have done, but – *ALL PRAISE TO GOD!*

VERSE 17

Remember we talked about Paul and how he felt that he was the chief of sinners and if God could save him, then God can save anyone!

Again, that is tough for some people to wrap their head around but let me give you this example and then you will see how it is God alone who gets the glory!

Charles “Tex” Watson was part of the Charles Manson gang that murdered seven innocent people.

He is presently serving life in prison for his heinous crimes, which is appropriate.

Now here is the question.

“Can God save a person like this let alone use a person like this?”

You bet and He did!

This is what he has to say regarding his life,

My beliefs changed from those of Manson to trusting in Jesus Christ as my Lord & Saviour.

I was only 23 when Manson’s beliefs led to the deaths of 7 innocent people, which I deeply regret. And I regret the enormous pain I caused their families.

Today, I am 58 years old, very thankful for my new life in Christ, and all He has done, God’s grace which I am so undeserving, is the sole reason for my success and sanity after being in prison for 35 years.

- Charles Tex Watson

God’s grace is so rich and so deep that not only did God save him but is also using him in service to God in a mighty way, even in prison.

It was not because Tex was so great, he wasn't.

It is not that Paul was so great, he wasn't.

It is not that we are so great that God had to use us, we are not.

Then what is it?

It is the grace of God, His unmerited favor that He bestows upon us even though we don't deserve it, that is what grace is all about!

And listen to what Paul tells us in II Corinthians 9:8, "**And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.**"

Out of God's grace, all that He gives us, all that He supplies us with is never ending resources to serve Him, to do good works, which we were created for!

You see, for Paul and for us, God's grace not only brought him and us to salvation, the inward working of God in our lives, but also to service, the outward working of God in our lives, the things we do as we are directed by Him, as we are obedient to His leading!

But again, Paul does not take any credit for what he is doing for the Lord. All he can say is, "**Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.**"

As Paul finishes up speaking on God's grace, His longsuffering towards him and us, he breaks out in this doxology or praise unto God, he just can't stop!

He understood that the King is eternal, immortal, invisible, wise and He alone gets the honor and glory forever, ***AMEN!***

This was also an encouragement for Timothy to continue on in the work there in Ephesus, or as David Guzik wrote, *“This description of God gave Timothy still another reason to remain in Ephesus. He could and should stay there when he considered the greatness of the God who he served. This great God was worthy of Timothy’s sacrifice and could empower his service in Ephesus.”*

Remember the title of our message this morning – ***CAN GOD USE ME?***

What do you think? Can God use you?

Of course He can because He is God and nothing is too difficult for Him to do, not even working in our lives. We just need to be open and allow God to work and as we do people will see Jesus in us because His love, His grace will flow!

And I will close with this, because what more can be said except, **“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”**