

**Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse - Sunday September 17th 2006
1 Timothy 1:12-20**

Some events are so big (England's 1966 World Cup Victory, your wedding day, exam results) that we never get over them. They are such defining moments that as soon as they are mentioned, you live them all over again.

This is what happens with Paul as he addresses Timothy in verse 10: 'whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God.' That word 'gospel' is the trigger to his memory of his own conversion. This grips Paul, he has never got over his own conversion.

We also need to feel the drama of Paul's conversion (Acts 9), not to match it with our own story, but to think of that critical moment when the astonishing sense that God would choose me to come into His Kingdom was so vivid.

Paul was a blasphemer, a persecutor, violent, an arrogant man – in his mind's eye he could see himself delighting in denouncing Jesus as a deceiver, and persecuting Christians. He states that he acted in ignorance, but knows that he deserved punishment. The river of God's judgement that should have washed him away was however a river of grace, and not only that, of blessing, fruitfulness, along with faith and love. Paul becomes the most compassionate of people. Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners. Verse 15: 'Christ Jesus came in to the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst'. This is not a careful look through all the documents of his past, trying to work out if he really was the worst, but he is reflecting on Jesus' words in Mark 2: 'It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick', and in Luke 19v10: 'This Son of Man came to seek and save the lost'.

This is the first note of the gospel – self-righteousness has no place in the Church. Not the Transactional Analysis :

I'm OK, you're OK – psychiatric nonsense

I'm OK, you're not OK – self-righteousness

But, we can say: I'm not OK, you're not OK, but that's OK because Christ died for us. When our backs are to the wall, and we are under pressure, then our nastiness comes out, because our hearts are deceitful above all things.

At the very core of the being of God is what it is that causes the Church to worship. His long-suffering, at the very core of the being of God, is such that He welcomes 'the chief of sinners', the 'expert sinner' to the home of God, at the expense of His Son. This is why the Church worships, and you won't understand why unless you understand His mercy and long-suffering.

So stop pretending.

God's judgement is on His Son, so that we might receive His mercy. He has 'a safety-lock on His wrath, a hair-trigger on His mercy'. Our love is so proportionate, we love when the other is loveable, when it is convenient, and not one of us would qualify for the Kingdom, if God's love was like this.

What would it be like if we were left to ourselves? Hopeless. God's love suffers long - if you confess the sin, God's love is there. There is no-one beyond the reach of God's grace, while it is today. No-one is 'too bad'. How do we come to Him, do we come preening ourselves, or do we recognise our need of the grace of God?