# Paul - The Chief of Sinners

**The Glory of the Gospel applied to the Worst of Sinners!**

1 Timothy 1:11-17

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1. **Introduction (1Timothy 1:11-17)** 
   1. Often, people approach the stories and lives as described in the Bible as only stories, and not really real
   2. But the very fact that there are SO MANY lives described so openly and so thoroughly in the Bible tells you how important God thinks learning from people is very important!
   3. One of God’s special examples was the Apostle Paul
      1. One day, he wrote that he was not only a sinner, but a GREAT sinner – the chiefest of sinners!
         1. He wrote the following words, “*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*.” (1:15)
         2. Wow! This is the great Apostle Paul writing this.
            1. Not a mass-murderer, or drug cartel leader – but Paul!
            2. A first century Christian, who started churches all over the middle east and southern Europe. A man who stood before kings and princes, and who endured prison cells and almost constant hardships.
      2. **At first**, Paul never really believed he was a sinner, and not really that bad of one either!
      3. But something happened to him so that he wrote that he was not only a sinner, but a GREAT sinner – the chiefest of sinners!
      4. Paul finally understood what JESUS was all about
         1. Mat 18:11  *For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost*.
         2. Rom 5:6-8  *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*.
         3. 1John 4:14  *And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world*.
   4. This is his testimony, not just of salvation, but of life for him!
2. **Background (1Timothy 1:11-15)**
   1. **The Glorious Gospel (1:11)**
      1. Throughout Paul’s writings, there is this Amazement, this awe about the Gospel
      2. Paul loved hearing it, and Paul loved preaching it!
      3. It was the most powerful truth he had ever heard
   2. **His Affected Life (1:12-15)**
      1. The Gospel affected Paul – changed him; helped him
      2. So Thankful for what Christ Jesus had done TO him
         1. Not what his religion had done for him, or his education, or his own wits – but what JESUS had done for him!
         2. Jesus gave Paul the Gospel – over and over again from the lips of those he persecuted
         3. Enabled Paul – to finally live, and laugh, and love life
         4. Put Paul in the Ministry – the highest calling
            1. To Paul, Peter, James, John, Matthew, Stephen, Philip, all had the best jobs
            2. Better than being a KING, or a CEO of a billion euro company, or a world cup winner
            3. Being a minister, a servant of the King of kings and Lord of lords!
      3. So aware that he was NOW Important
         1. He used to think he was very important – as a religious zealot against Christianity
         2. But now he knew that he had to stay the course, stay in the ministry, keep preaching, keep praying, keep soul-winning, so believers could be encouraged to do the same!
3. **Message - Listen to Paul’s Testimony (1:13,14)**
   1. **What Paul was BEFORE Conversion (1Timothy 1:12,13; Acts 26:9-11)**
      1. ***Blindly Religious*** (Philp 3:4-6) – all caught up in everything about HIMSELF and what HE had done!
         1. Circumcised the eighth day
         2. Born of the stock of Israel
         3. Of the tribe of Benjamin
         4. An Hebrew of the Hebrews – the best of the best!
         5. A keep of the Law of God! As touching the law, a Pharisee;
         6. Super zealous - Concerning zeal, persecuting the church
         7. Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.
         8. That’s pretty GOOD if God were to count effort – Paul would have gotten an A+++
         9. But there was MORE to him than he wanted to admit!
         10. You see,
             1. There is NONE righteous, no not one
             2. All have sinned
             3. Paul was just a secret sinner – righteous on the outside, vile on the inside! He knew how to HIDE his sins. But GOD saw them! And THAT made Paul guilty, and the chiefest of sinners!
      2. ***A Blasphemer of Jesus Christ***
         1. People worry about blaspheming GOD
         2. But Paul found out that all his mockery of Jesus Christ was the same!
         3. Blasphemy is a serious offense - It is the same when people go around lying about YOU – libel. It is serious, and most people SUE people who lie about them!
            1. Paul mocked, ridiculed, made fun of, lampooned Jesus of Nazareth
            2. He cursed Jesus – made Him the same as the devil!
            3. Paul went everywhere saying Jesus was a liar, a fraud, a SINNER!
            4. Funny. That was exactly what Paul was before his conversion!
         4. The Bible says in Philippians 2:10, *that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow*! When we don’t and we mock, and brush off all this worship stuff, we are joining with Paul as the worst, and the chiefest of sinners!
         5. How we think about and dishonour Jesus dooms our soul, because there is no other Saviour than HIM!
         6. You blaspheme HIM, and you have no one else to turn to!
         7. I can’t make it any plainer than THAT!
      3. ***A Bully*** - Persecutor of the Church of God (1Cor 15:9)
         1. Persecuted believers beyond measure (Gal 1:13) – thousands lived in fear for their lives because of him
         2. Put believers into prison – just for believing that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 26:10)
         3. Injurious – he physically hurt people
            1. Tortured and even murdered Christians (Acts 9:1; 22:4)
            2. Remember Stephen? Saul stood there urging on those who were stoning, holding onto their coats!
            3. All in the name of “God”
         4. This is a dangerous guy, who in the name of his religion, and in the name of his God, he could justify anything he did!
      4. ***And an Unbeliever***
         1. Trusted his own goodness and righteousness (Rom 10:1-3) – self-righteous
         2. Didn’t think he needed a Messiah, a Saviour!
         3. That made him a Bible Rejecter – only accepted the parts he agreed with
         4. THAT’S religion for you! Not Christianity – Biblical Christianity accepts the whole package!
         5. In the big scheme of things, Paul was ignorant of just how serious his rejection was
         6. It is like someone on the verge of dying, and not accepting the only help being offered that would save him!
      5. ***Paul now understood what it meant to be a SINNER***
         1. What most people think a sinner is…
            1. Someone REALLY bad - Someone that has done some really bad stuff in their life
            2. THAT’S what a sinner is right?
            3. What you mean is, Basically, it is someone more evil than you are!
         2. What the Bible says sin is… (1John 3:4)
            1. Rebellion against God - The wilful choice to disobey what God says to do - We all go our own way, instead of God’s way, even in the slightest ways
            2. When we break any law of God – any of them! Like:

Lying to anyone

Stealing

Lusting in your heart

Coveting

Dishonouring your parents’ rules

Skipping worship on Sunday for a ball game

* + - * 1. THOSE ARE SINS!

Sinning is NOT just murder

Or whoremongery

Again, it is When we break any law of God

* + - 1. There are some pretty awful sinners in the Bible
         1. Adam, and Eve – completely disobeyed God, and ruined life for everyone
         2. Cain – murdered his own brother, in cold blood
         3. Noah – got drunk after the flood
         4. Abraham – shacked up with a servant woman to try and get a baby
         5. Lot – traded his relationship with God, for the world’s wealth and success
         6. Moses – murdered a man while trying to be a great leader
         7. King David – committed adultery, and the covered it up with a lie and murder!
         8. Solomon – married 700 wives, and had 300 additional partners, and worshipped hundreds of false gods
         9. Peter – denied even knowing Jesus, and cursed His name when put under pressure
      2. No wonder people don’t want to be known as sinners!
    1. ***Paul saw himself as the “Chief of sinners”***
       1. Paul ranked himself right up at the top of all sinners who have ever lived!
       2. Chief – usually thought of as being the most important one, or the best, or the top. Like an Indian Chief was the leader of his Indian tribe
       3. But, “Chief of sinners” says something totally the opposite
          1. The first in the line of sinners, the head of all sinners, the most awful
          2. In other words, if you want to know what a sinner is really like, look no further – there is no better example of one that me! I am all that is what a sinner is!
       4. Paul realised that Such an awful sinner should not be able to get forgiven!
          1. When you realise just who Jesus really IS, how perfect HE is, how holy HE is, it will cut you to the heart!
          2. That is when you will start to realise just how Imperfect you are, and Unholy you are!
          3. Paul discovered that all his life, he had been…

Blindly religious

A Blasphemer

A Bully

An Unbeliever – Bible rejecter

* + - * 1. I bet you have some sins of your own, don’t you? I bet you do!
        2. That may NOT describe YOU perfectly, but believe me, Paul was powerless to change. Trapped in a body that only knew how to go its own way, and dig a deeper hole towards hell
    1. But then something wonderful happened to Paul! On a road, just outside Damascus… He was saved from his sinfulness – converted – born again!
  1. **Conversion Changed Everything (1Tim 1:15,16)**
     1. Paul had a past – that’s for sure
     2. But now Paul had a past that was in the past (Romans 6:17-19)
        1. I love this part!
        2. Used to serve and obey sin and every temptation that came against him
        3. Now, he had been made free to serve and give into God’s will
        4. His past Didn’t haunt him, worry him, depress him in the slightest anymore
        5. You will learn why in just a few moments!
     3. What Changed Paul?
        1. Amazing Grace – God’s kindness, shown towards undeserving people!
        2. The Gospel changed Paul – GOOD news, when you realise just how bad things really are for you with a Saviour!
        3. God’s MERCY – Him NOT giving us what we really deserve – hell
        4. Christ’s love for us!
     4. HOW was Paul Converted from a Killer, to a Preacher? It is simple
        1. He had been forced to accept he had been oh so wrong – that’s repentance
           1. About Jesus – that He is alive, and that He is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world
           2. About Christians – that they are not perfect, but they are right, and Jews, Muslims, pagan, atheists, are all the wrong ones!
           3. And about himself – that he was really a wicked man, who deserved hell!
           4. What is it going to take to convince YOU?
        2. He then threw himself on the mercy of the very One he had hated and blasphemed, and cursed, and tried to blot out!
           1. You had better do that NOW, while you still can!
           2. That act of surrender, of defeated, of a desperate cry on that road to Damascus, brought not only God’s mercy, but also His grace, and complete forgiveness!
           3. Which is what Paul REALLY had needed all along!
           4. All the sin record that was against him, was now gone – it had all be placed on the record of an innocent Man, named Jesus of Nazareth, who had died in Paul’s place on the cross!
     5. And Paul was changed
  2. **What Paul Became (1Tim 1:12)**
     1. ***Not perfect*** - but different, and a better man
        1. I wish the Bible said he was perfect! That he never sinned again!
        2. Don’t YOU wish that salvation meant that we were no longer sinner? No longer giving in to temptations?
        3. But it doesn’t. It tells it like it is! And it is better than you think!
     2. From the moment Paul meet Jesus Christ, on that road to Damascus…
        1. ***He was now a new creature*** – Conversion does something to you – makes you a whole new person on the inside (2Cor 5:17)
        2. He ***no longer was powerless against his old nature***
           1. His religion had only made him a killer
           2. His successes only made him prouder
           3. His Bible was only a tool to control others – never himself!
           4. But now, he could put up a good fight, and win if he wanted to!
        3. ***He became ABLE*** – able to live free from the sins that had ruled his life before
     3. All because Paul was forgiven
        1. You see, the world spends so much time trying to drown out our guilt, and drug-out our guilt, and tell us there is nothing to be guilty about
        2. But deep down, we are as guilty as hell! Guilty as the devil!
        3. And when you finally, truly take away that guilt, you change the person – for good!
     4. And because JESUS became Paul’s new life (Gal 2:20; 5:17)
        1. Jesus no longer was just somebody he read about
        2. But someone who now lived in him, and lived through him (Gal 2:20)
        3. Jesus gave Paul a whole new nature – a perfect heart, a soft heart, new desires
        4. Totally opposite to what he was (Gal 5:17)
     5. Interestingly, Paul was two people in one now – I don’t have time to go into all this yet!
        1. Yes, **STILL A SINNER** – listen to his own words… “*Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am*…” still right now…
           1. Still temptable – he would wrestle against temptations for the rest of his life

Would still be selfish at times, and self-serving

Still struggling against the urge to quit, to get angry and frustrated at people

Still a sinner

Free from the dominion of sin over his life, but not free from the pull of sin – it still was beautiful, and attractive, and tempting to him

And he would find himself giving in from time to time (Romans 7:19)

* + - * 1. Still wicked – there is NOTHING in us that is any good at all – that’s why we needed JESUS “IN” us! He makes us GOOD and CLEAN and ACCEPTABLE to God!
        2. Still unable to be perfect

Paul never “attained” perfection – never arrived at perfection

Out of his own mouth, he describes himself as LEAST of all the apostles (1Cor 15:9) – on his best day!

He was LESS than the least of the saints (the other believers) (Eph 3:8)

* + - * 1. That’s us Christians! Don’t fool yourself – you are not fooling anybody!

Are you THIS honest about YOURSELF? **Try it!**

You are still a sinner – and God knows it!

Whether you admit it or not Christian, you still lie, lust, think mainly of yourself and not others, you neglect doing the will of God… and the list goes on!

***But that’s okay – God’s committed to working on you! And finishing that work***

* + - * 1. But that is not all that he was
      1. **HE WAS SAVED!** (1Cor 1:18) – his soul was saved, forgiven, heaven-bound!
         1. He was Saved from God’s righteous wrath!
         2. Believing what JESUS had done, saved Paul!
         3. He was MADE righteous (Rom 3:25) – made right in the eyes of God!
         4. He was Free! Now free to do right

Never could do right well enough before

But now, he was able to conquer any sinful habit! By the power of the risen Son of God in him!

* + - * 1. He was Secure and safe in the hands of Jesus!
        2. Paul, the sinner… was saved
      1. Getting victory over sin is very important, but being SAVED from your sins is MORE!
    1. Does ANYBODY in here hunger to know any of this?
    2. Doesn’t it just thrill you to know…
       1. That yes, after conversion, you still sin
       2. But you are still saved!
       3. Isn’t salvation wonderful?
       4. Isn’t this news GLORIOUS! It is to me! And I am saved 37 years!

1. **Conclusion** (2Cor 6:2)
   1. Maybe all this talk about sin describes YOU
      1. A nice girl or guy – a religious person – a good person on the outside - but a secret sinner inside (secretly lusting, angry, bitter, critical, lazy, hater, apathetic)
      2. A Blasphemer – making a mockery of Jesus by the way you live
      3. A Bully – against everyone who doesn’t believe exactly like you do
      4. An Unbeliever – Bible rejecter – only like and believe the parts that you like
   2. If so, then you are in a mess
      1. Don’t lie to yourself, that maybe you are not really that bad a sinner!
      2. It’s time to get truly saved! (2Cor 6:2)
      3. God will help you, if you want Him to!
      4. Trust in Him, not with words, but with your sinful record, and your sin-sick soul!
      5. We live in a wicked age when no one wants to be honest and admit they need a Saviour
         1. They would rather remain Blindly religious
         2. They don’t care how much they Blaspheme the name of Jesus by their wicked personal lives, and wicked speech, and wicked thoughts
         3. They don’t mind Bullying everyone else about *their faults*, just as long as they don’t have to deal with their OWN sins!
         4. And they don’t care that they really are an Unbeliever – a flat out Bible rejecter
         5. Could that describe ANYONE in here? **Probably!**
         6. Will you admit to God you are NOT good enough to enter His holy heaven, and HAVE been wicked, and sinful, and that you now understand just how much you need a Saviour?
   3. Christian, Maybe you are struggling with that old part of you, that still sins, and still struggles with temptations.
      1. Believe this…
         1. Jesus died for you while you were yet a sinner
         2. Loved you while you were ungodly
         3. And took the place of unworthy wicked people like you and me
      2. He did not make you perfect and sinless
      3. He just gave you HIMSELF as the means to live in spite of your sin now
      4. He gave you the power to not sin, on a moment by moment basis, if you only would want to not to!
      5. What is it YOU want to do?
         1. Lie to yourself that you are not really saved because you sin?
         2. Or lie to yourself that you don’t really sin anymore because you are saved?
         3. Or will you accept the reality that you are a pretty wicked sinner still, that Christ so loved, and gave Himself on the cross for, and will now and always keep you, all the way home to heaven? Will you believe that?