

THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING!

The proverbial formula of “a faithful saying” is found 5 times in the pastoral epistles (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; Titus 3:8; 2 Tim. 2:11). It is thought that in the early church this “saying” was used to emphasize key important truths.

1 Timothy 1:15–16 (NKJV)

15 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.

16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

The reference here is thought to probably tie to the statement Christ made regarding His coming to seek and to save the lost (Lk. 19:10). Christ became incarnate for the express purpose of saving sinners (John. 1:29; Heb. 2:14; 10:5).

Note this essential truth that Christ came to “save sinners”. He didn’t come to save saints. He didn’t come to save good people. He came to save SINNERS (cf. Rom. 4:5). As Christ said, “***I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.***” (Mt. 9:13).

True GRACE is Jesus paid it all! Christ ALONE and BY HIMSELF saves sinners. He ALONE died on the cross. And in His dying breath He said, “***It is finished!***” It is done! Saving faith says “AMEN!” It believes in the finished work of Christ on the cross. He alone is Savior! I make NO contribution. I simply BELIEVE IT! Salvation is by GRACE alone (Christ’s finished work on the cross) through FAITH alone! That is true GRACE and true faith rests in this ALONE! (Rom. 4:4-5; 5:1, 8).

Christ came to save sinners! In order to be saved you have to come as a sinner. You have to admit your need and you have to look to Christ as the Savior Who saves sinners.

How bad of a sinner can Christ save? Paul says he is the chief of all sinners! Literally he says, “of whom I am the foremost or the worst”. This was no hyperbole on the part of Paul. He literally saw himself as the worst of all sinners. There was “no holier than thou” with Paul. He saw himself as the worst of the worst (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15).

Paul is saying, “If Christ can save me, He can save anyone”. No matter how bad you are you are savable, if you will receive of the grace of God by faith. Christ promises that no one who comes to Him will be cast out (cf. Jn.

6:37). Yes, if one willfully rejects and totally turns from the offer of God's grace there may come a point where a person is hardened beyond the point of return. But only God knows that point. If a person wants to come, they can come. Christ invites, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt. 11:28; cf. Rev. 22:17).

"Notice that the title 'chief of sinners' is not given to a man steeped in idolatry or immorality, but rather to a deeply religious man, one who had been brought up in an orthodox Jewish home! His sin was doctrinal; he did not accept the word of God concerning the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Rejection of the Son of God is the greatest of sins." – **William MacDonald**

1 Timothy 1:16 shows that God saved Paul to use him as an example of the greatness of His saving mercy. Paul is a premier example of how patient God is in bringing people to salvation. God is longsuffering as demonstrated in Paul. He puts up with a lot for a long time (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9). Paul says he is a ***"pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."***

The idea of a "pattern" is that of an illustration, model, or example. Paul is a great illustration of how God takes a sinner and makes him a saint. How He can take a persecutor and make him a preacher. How He can take a murderer and make him a missionary. God is in the life-changing business and Paul is exhibit "A".

We might say Paul is the premier example of God's saving work - in that He took the world's worst sinner and made him the greatest of Christians – although Paul certainly would never say that last part. Paul is the pattern that says no matter how bad a person is Jesus can save them if they will believe on Him for everlasting life. That is the pattern of Paul. No one in their ignorance of unbelief is beyond the realm of God's saving grace. Paul is an illustration of this reality.

And what is the pattern, the example of Paul in saving faith? What kind of a faith did he have in his conversion? He states here one must ***"believe on Him"*** – that is on Christ for everlasting life. It's not enough to believe ABOUT Him – one must believe ON Him. That indicates personal appropriation. One must PERSONALLY accept the truth of Christ.

In the context Paul twice refers to Christ as "our Lord" as seen in verse 12 and 14. Believing on Him recognizes Him as the Lord Who saves sinners. Thus, a saving faith believes on Christ as Lord and Savior!

The pattern of Paul's conversion was definitely a "Lordship" conversion. He definitely believed on Christ as Lord and Savior (cf. Acts 9:4-6; 2 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 2:20). As someone has well said, "***If you believe as Paul did, you will be saved as Paul was.***" Paul is the pattern for all those who are going to believe on Christ for everlasting life.

Paul's personal testimony is recounted at least 6 times in the NT (cf. Acts 9, 22, 26; Gal. 1; Phil. 3; 1 Tim. 1). It is the model that God has given to us that illustrates the nature of a true saving faith and that none are too bad to be saved if they will but believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Everlasting life is better translated as "***eternal life***". When we believe on Christ, we come to share in the very life of God which is eternal. It denotes not merely existence, not merely quantity, but also quality of life. The life of God has neither beginning nor ending, and we as believers now share in that eternal life.

As believers, we right now have eternal life, but it will culminate in glory where we will intimately share in God's life forever.