



1 Timothy 1:12-20
House Rules: 1 Timothy
“Grace Rules”

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This morning we continue in our series that began last Sunday, going through the book of 1 Timothy. I’ve titled the series, “House Rules: Ordering the Church God’s Way” because the book of 1 Timothy is largely about how a church should be. And Paul – “our” Paul – kicked things off last week with a message from the first 11 verses, which focus on right doctrine, or right beliefs. The Apostle Paul starts his letter with that theme, and makes the argument that the goal of right doctrine is love (not a hammer to wield and bet people up with): Love that is rooted in a pure heart, a sincere conscience and a sincere faith.

And at the end of verse 10 and then into verse 11, Paul makes a statement that the law (Old Testament) exists for whatever stands in opposition to the gospel. Then he says, “...which has been entrusted to me.” In other words, the gospel has been entrusted to him. Not to him alone, of course. There are others...but nonetheless he’s entrusted with the gospel message.

And so right there, he takes the introduction from doctrine stuff, and speaking about those who stand against the right doctrine of the Gospel, and quickly and neatly transitions to how God has touched him and changed him. And he stays in that personal place through most of today’s passage as he tells us about God’s grace through his own story. So hopefully that helps to connect last week’s passage to today’s some, because they’re quite different, but they are connected. It’s one letter and it flows from one section to another logically and cohesively. So, let’s dive into verse 12, reading through verse 20. This is God’s Word to us today. **1 Timothy 1:12-20.**

So, he continues the letter by giving thanks to Jesus. This flows right out of what came before it, as I said, that he’s been trusted with the gospel message. And: **There are three things in particular for which he’s thankful: that Jesus has given him strength, that he considered him trustworthy, and appointed him to his service.**” You see, when we come to a place of faith in Jesus, there’s a responsibility we have, that God is entrusting us with: to share that good news with others. You’re a steward of the gospel message.

Every single one of us who are disciples are entrusted with this message, and being counted on to do something with it that benefits others beyond ourselves. And Paul is thankful for that responsibility. Are you and I? Are we thankful? Or do we see it as a burden? I think oftentimes, we fall to a consumer mentality rather than maintaining a trustee mentality. We are custodians and stewards of the gospel message, just as Paul was, and this is a good thing. It's something to be thankful for along with Paul.

And part of the reason Paul maintains this attitude is he always remembers from where he came, which he gets into in the next few verses. Now, earlier in verses 9 and 10, he gave a laundry list of different kinds of sins...but even with that list already stated, Paul says here that he was the worst of sinners. This doesn't mean he committed all of these and a whole bunch more...it doesn't mean he committed the deepest, darkest sins, as though they're ranked. It just means that: **He's as unworthy of God's mercy and grace as anyone else.** He counts himself right there with all those who have committed the sins he lists earlier.

So, he knows how far he's come. He once was a blasphemer and persecutor and a violent man. Paul gives more detail about all of this in other letters, but this is a good synopsis. And in spite of that history, Jesus did not withhold his mercy and his grace. There's a slight difference between mercy and grace. **Mercy is the withholding of deserved punishment. Grace is the giving of undeserved blessing.** Paul has received both, and speaks of both here.

We tend to focus more on "grace" in the Christian faith (with good reason: Scripture does, as well), and today's message is titled "Grace Rules," but let's take a moment to consider "mercy." Paul David Tripp, in his book, "New Morning, New Mercies" writes these words: "One of the stunning realities of the Christian life is that in a world where everything is in some state of decay, God's mercies never grow old. They never run out. They never are ill timed. They never dry up. They never grow weak. They never get weary. They never fail to meet the need. They never disappoint.

“They never, ever fail, because they really are new every morning. Form-fitted for the challenges, disappointments, sufferings, temptations, and struggles with sin within and without are the mercies of our Lord.

Sometimes they are:

Awe-inspiring mercies

Rebuking mercies

Strengthening mercies

Hope-giving mercies

Heart-exposing mercies

Rescuing mercies

Transforming mercies

Forgiving mercies

Provision-making mercies

Uncomfortable mercies

Glory-revealing mercies

Truth-illuminating mercies

Courage-giving mercies.

(Paul David Tripp, *New Morning, New Mercies*)

I pray that you have been cognizant of the mercy of God in your life. Maybe his mercy has shown up in your life in one of these ways. His mercy really is new every morning.

Now, when Paul says that he was shown mercy because he acted in ignorance and unbelief, he’s not saying that ignorance and unbelief are prerequisites for God’s mercy. In other words, if you sin and *aren’t* ignorant about it, or are a believer and still sin, you *aren’t* disqualified from God’s mercy. What Paul is trying to do here is not glamorize his sin. Sometimes when people share their testimony, they almost glamorize the sin.

For instance, in his commentary on 1 Timothy, Presbyterian Pastor Gary Demarest writes, “I’ll never forget the woeful comment of an outstanding girl in our youth group after we had featured the witness of a former pimp and drug addict [she said]: “I guess the only way I could possibly be anybody in Christian witness would be to become a junkie and a prostitute, and then get converted.” And then Gary writes writes, **“She had a point because of the way the testimony had glamorized the wickedness” (Pastor Gary Demarest).**¹

You see, there’s nothing glamorous about sin, even if the world will tell you otherwise. If you sin, you sin. Repent of it, accept God’s mercy, and move on. If you’ve been really far gone in your life at one point, or if you currently are, God’s mercy is sufficient. Paul is testimony to that as are countless,

countless others throughout history. But don't go and intentionally try and sin big just so God can rescue you from a greater depth. Why test God? If he's given you a way out of a hardship here and now, why would you go down the rabbit hole of willful ignorance when you don't have to? His mercy is like a vaccine for your soul, and you don't want to delay getting your soul right with God. There's nothing glamorous about sin, and Paul wants to avoid that in how he relates his own story. Don't intentionally go and sin so you have a further depth of darkness from which God has to rescue and redeem you.

Paul drives this all home with a simple but memorable phrase in verse 15. Sometimes, clichés are not real insightful. That's kind of the definition of a cliché: an overused phrase that lacks original insight. When Paul writes in verse 15, "Here is a phrase that is trustworthy" you wonder if he's saying to them, "Look I know you've heard this before, I know it might be cliché, but I can't think of a better way to put it." And if that's *not* what he intended, and he meant it more genuinely than that, then I'll say it to you myself: "I know you've heard this before, and I know it might be cliché, but I can't think of a better way to put it: **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst” (1 Timothy 1:15)**. Now, this is interesting because the first part is about Jesus, of course, and the second is about Paul. And the statement about Jesus is still true today because Jesus is alive and active and working in the world through the Holy Spirit. Paul, however, is no longer alive, and it's a statement he's making about himself. We might be tempted to leave that off as a part of this statement he says is trustworthy. But the second half of his statement, when we say it and mean it about ourselves, is also still true.

You and I are also the worst of sinners. I don't care if you've literally helped little old ladies across the street, got straight-A's in school, and listen to Christian worship music 24/7...or if you have a background of drug addiction, murder, and rooting for the Yankees 😊: **Each and every one of us is still the worst of sinners compared to the holiness of God.** That's a really difficult concept for us to grasp, and Christians are among the worst at grasping it. We love to rank sins, and we tend to think our own are not as bad as everyone else's. The problem with that approach is that "everyone else" is *not* the standard. Jesus is the standard: and Jesus never sinned. Additionally,

what Jesus saves us from is not just our sin, but the *consequences* of our sin: and that's hell. Eternal separation from God. Jesus saves us from *that* – and that's the same regardless of what our sin actually is.

Then look at verse 16: Jesus' mercy has been shown to Paul, and it will be shown to us as well. But note the reason why: this mercy and the patience of Jesus has been shown to Paul for the purpose of being an example for others so they would come to believe in Jesus and receive eternal life. Paul returns to this theme of service that he mentioned briefly in verse 11. We are saved not just for ourselves, but for the purpose of being an example to others of God's grace at work in our lives.

What we see in these verses therefore, is that grace rules. Grace is king. Grace conquers all. God is gracious towards us – I would argue that mercy is an aspect of grace, but if you want to separate them out then we can say that God is merciful and gracious. There's nothing wrong with saying that. But to say God is gracious encompasses both, really, because grace is giving us what we don't deserve, and the first thing we don't deserve *is* mercy. So grace is king. It rules.

But there also are grace rules. First, you can't earn God's grace. Otherwise, it's not grace. We're probably mostly familiar with that one. Second, and what Paul emphasizes in this passage: when we receive the grace of God by saying "yes" to Jesus, believing in him, and receiving that eternal life that Paul writes of...when we do that we are then entrusted with this message, to serve others in the name of Jesus. We, like Paul, become an example for others so they would believe. There's a responsibility that comes with it. That's a rule about grace.

And that responsibility is our mission. To be recipients of God's grace, to be a part of *the* Church ("C") and part of *a* church ("c") is to accept that responsibility...it is to be entrusted with the message of salvation. Paul uses his own life as an example of the grace of God, but it's never about him. It's always about Jesus, and God's grace flowing through Paul out to others. And that is part of the example he sets for us. He is our example of what it means to be a Jesus follower. We know this to be true because this is how Jesus

lived. Jesus didn't live for himself. He set an example of how to be in relationship with God, how to shine the light of Christ for the world, how to live with his word as our foundation, and so forth. Paul is just modeling for us what Jesus himself modeled.

And so if we're going to be a church that is all about Jesus and about the grace of God, then we have to get strong on this mission. Otherwise, we're really just making it about ourselves; we're consumers of God's grace. So, I would encourage us all to ask ourselves about our church and its ministries: Are we shaping disciples here at Rose Hill so that we would be an example to the world around us? Is our preaching (both mine and others) helping us live as an example for the world? Are our classes and our small groups helping us to live as an example for the world? Is the mission of our church helping us to live together as a church family – for the world?

It's been said that: **The Church is the only organization in the world that doesn't exist for its members.** Is it true about us? Or is our disciple-making more about ourselves? The irony is that when we live on mission for others, to be a living example of the grace of God so that others might know Jesus and receive eternal life...when we do that, we also grow in faith. But if we only focus on ourselves, we *won't* be an example for others. In one scenario, both points are achieved; in the other, only one is. And in verses 18 and 19 he strongly encourages Timothy to live out his faith so that both points are accomplished. If only one is, then our faith – to use Paul's words from this passage – is shipwrecked. We don't want that for our faith.

And I don't know exactly what the false doctrine was that was going around in the church that Paul was seeking to squelch, but he names a couple of people, with some strong language about them. Maybe they were even teaching that one's faith is really just for themselves, and that being a living example for others is wrong. If that is the case, it's a heresy that persists to this day, because so many Christians, and so many churches really don't live as an example so that *others* would believe in Jesus and receive eternal life.

If we're honest, we've got some work to do here on this ourselves. We're not perfect. I think our heart is in the right place. That's half the battle. We want

to be that kind of example in Kirkland and the rest of the Eastside, but we're not sure how to do it. Or we know, but we're afraid to do it. We need to absorb and live out more completely the grace rules – so that our heads and our hearts are transformed more completely. That we'd realize how far in the pit we once were and that God has brought us out of it, and what a walking, living miracle each of us is – testimonies of the mercy and grace of God...testimonies of the gospel message which you and I, like Paul and Timothy, have now been entrusted with – not for ourselves, but so that *others* would know that the grace of God rules. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ Gary Demarest, *The Preacher's Commentary: 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus*, p. 164-165.