

1 TIMOTHY 1:14-17 | PAUL'S UNBELIEVABLE ANNOUNCEMENT

- Verse 14 –
  - Paul bridges the conversation between his old life as Saul the blasphemer and persecutor (v. 13) to Paul, the chief of sinners (v. 15) by celebrating the **exceeding abundant** grace of our Lord.
  - Paul puts “bookends of praise” on this segment of the letter, both v. 14 and v. 17 being a word of praise for God and His grace.
- Verse 15 –
  - One wonders why Paul calls this a **faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance**? Is this not true of all that Paul says?
    - He uses the same phrase in 1 Timothy 4:9, where he says that **godliness has promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come** (1 Tim. 4:8).
    - He uses a similar statement in 2 Timothy 2:11 (concerning the resurrection) and Titus 3:8 (concerning good works).
    - One would assume that Paul would only make such a statement if there was risk of people saying that the statement was *unfaithful* and *should not be accepted*. Indeed, when the plain sense of this verse is seen, *the majority of Christianity today rejects it*.
  - It is readily accepted that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners** -or, literally, “...the sinful to save.” What is *not* accepted is the words that follow, literally rendered, “of whom first am I.” Taken literally, the passage says “I am the first sinner that Christ Jesus saved.” The astonishing implications of this are:
    - Nobody was saved prior to Paul. Therefore, all of the “how were people saved in the Old Testament” are misdirected questions.
    - Paul was the first member of the Body of Christ, the first to be saved by grace, through faith.
    - Those who were first called “Christians” in Antioch (Acts 11:26) were not “Christians” as we use the term today.
  - Two things we must consider. First, does the word **chief** mean *first in order* or does it mean *first in importance*. Second, is there any indication that Christianity (as we know it) began with Paul?
  - The word translated **chief** is *πρῶτος* [*protos*]. Used as a noun 105 times in the New Testament, it is translated as *first* or some other word meaning *at the beginning* 95 times (according to Strong’s). The word is translated **first** in verse 16. The word is translated **chief** in the following passages:
    - As the subject (as in 1 Tim. 1:15):
      - Matthew 20:27 (along with Mark 10:44) - where the implication is *first*.
      - Luke 19:47, where **the chief of the people** is certainly *not* the “chronologically first” of the people.
      - Acts 25:2, where **the chief of the Jews** was not the first Jew.
    - As the indirect object: Acts 28:7, where the **chief man of the island** was certainly *not* the first on the Island, chronologically.
    - As the direct object: Acts 13:50, where **the chief men of the city** were not the first men to live in the city. The same case is seen in Acts 28:17 with **the chief of the Jews** who was not the first Jew in that city.
    - As a genitive (typically descriptive, such as an adjective):
      - Acts 16:12, where Philippi **the chief city of that part** was likely *not the first city*.

- Acts 17:4, where **the chief women** were not the first women.
- As an adverb in Romans 3:2, where it could be considered as *first*.
- Additional note: Concerning **chief**, see note one 2 Corinthians 11:5. -- Paul is not behind **the very chiefest apostles**. The word for **chiefest** here is *λίαν* [lian] which is *exceeding*. It is *not* the word used in 1 Timothy 1:15 where Paul claims to be the **chief** sinner saved by grace (that is, the first). Had Paul wanted to say *exceeding* in 1 Timothy 1:15, he easily could have done so.
- So, since we have proven that *protos* chiefly means first (chronologically), but that it can mean *most important*, what is its meaning in 1 Timothy 1:15?
  - To begin, should we not allow the *most basic sense of the word* to be the primary contender for the meaning here? The rule by which we interpret must be used here: *if the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense*. It is important to recognize that *in all the other places in which the word is translated chief, the plain sense of "first" would not make sense. Here, it does make sense, and is even confirmed in the next verse*.
  - Furthermore, does the idea of *chief sinner* work?
    - Was Paul the worst of all sinners? Was his sin somehow worse than others in the Bible (Nimrod, Judas, etc.)?
    - Were there others who did exactly what Saul did, yet never repented? Is Saul somehow worse than they were?
    - Was Paul simply exaggerating? If so, what was his motivation for the exaggeration? Humility? Pride?
  - In the final analysis, *chronologically first* makes sense and *allegorically first* does not.
- Did Christianity begin with Paul?
  - If Paul was the *first* to be saved, then Christianity (as we know it) *must have begun with Paul*.
  - Atheists and those who reject Christianity almost always claim that Paul, not Jesus, was the founder of Christianity.
    - They do this for shock value, but also because they know that Christianity *by necessity* is more Pauline than Jewish, that Jesus was totally Jewish and not Pauline, and that the two are incompatible. *And they are right!*
    - The challenge is that Christian theologians do not understand that Pauline theology is *totally different* than the theology of the Gospels. One offers salvation by grace through faith, the other a promise of future life by obedience to the commandments. Christianity has mixed the two (to its own detriment).
    - Thomas Jefferson has been quoted as saying, "Paul was the first corrupter of the doctrines of Jesus." Had Jefferson understood *right division*, he would have understood that Paul received a mystery revelation about a new dispensation.
  - In reality, if a person's doctrine for Christian living is not rooted in Paul, then they are living some form of perverted Judaism, and not the Christian faith at all. For a list of quotes (from a website that does not rightly divide, and is not recommended for theology), [click here](#).
- Verse 16 –
  - Paul now shares the reason that God saved him: *so that he would be the first to display God's longsuffering* and that he would be **a pattern** to those who **hereafter believe on him to life everlasting**. These words confirm our interpretation of verse 15.
  - Paul again uses *protos*, this time translated **first**, then he says that God's work in his life was so that he would be **a pattern** to those who come afterward (that is us!). Paul would use the same Greek word in 2 Timothy 1:13, where he would tell Timothy to **Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou has heard of me...**