

# Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

## Judged Faithful

### 1 Timothy 1:12-17

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### Analysis by Robin Morgan

12I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, 13even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost. 16But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. 17To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

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## DIAGNOSIS: Knocked Down to Size

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Doing the Wrong Things for the (Seemingly) Right Reasons*

Though 1 Timothy was probably written by a disciple of Paul after Paul's death, these verses in chapter one remind us of Paul's dramatic religious life before his conversion (Acts 9:1f

“Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord...”). When the writer of 1 Timothy speaks of Paul as a former blasphemer, persecutor and man of violence, we may very well have a hard time relating to these words of overt negative, aggressive power. If we’ve never gone through a time of “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” we may feel as if they have nothing to do with us. But blasphemy, persecution and violence can come wrapped in a variety of packages and it may not be what we have done, but what we have left undone that exposes our violent nature.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Ignorance Is Not Bliss***

The writer of 1 Timothy says that Paul acted as he did ignorantly in unbelief. Now it wasn’t that before conversion Paul didn’t believe in anything. Saul was a zealous believer in the righteousness found in the law. In Philippians 3:4-6 he says, “If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day; a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.” Our own religious pedigrees may not provoke us to go on persecuting rampages as Paul did, but protecting our positions in the right families, the right schools, the right jobs and appointments may just as effectively preoccupy us so that we forget to trust our Lord.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Knocked Off Our High Horse***

Though the story of Saul’s conversion in Acts doesn’t say anything about a horse, he does fall to the ground on the road to Damascus. A blinding light and a voice from heaven demand an accounting by Saul. Though we may believe our religious pedigrees are impeccable and our zeal without parallel, God is

still the One who makes the final judgment (v. 12) about our lives and the significance or insignificance of our thoughts, actions, and status.

## **PROGNOSIS: Raised Up**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *The Quality of Mercy***

How long-suffering is our God that, even and most especially, at those moments when we most deserve to be abandoned, our Lord comes to us on our own Damascus roads and leads us by his own mercy and love. In Christ, God willingly gave himself that we might not stay mired in our own conceits, but live with new sight, new understanding and new compassion for the world that can only come from Him.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Sure and Worthy***  
“The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost,” says the writer of 1 Timothy (v. 15). We can be sure and accept without reservation that God through the mercy of Jesus Christ has saved us (wherever we may rank on the sinner spectrum, “foremost” or not).

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Merciful Example***  
We have been judged faithful and appointed to His service (v. 12) so that we need not impress others with our worthiness. Instead, we can rejoice and be open about the reality that we, with all our faults, can be examples to others of how merciful and patient our Lord is. (“Look,” we can say, “he even saved somebody like me!”)

As Paul was, as the writer of 1 Timothy was, as the saints throughout time have been, we too are examples “to those who would come to believe in [Jesus Christ] for eternal life” (v. 16).

Thanks be to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God (v. 17). All honor and glory are yours now and forever. Amen.