

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (v 15). That’s not what we expect. Christ Jesus, the holy Son of God, came into the world to **condemn** sinners. **That’s** what we expect. Christ Jesus, the almighty Son of God, came into the world to **destroy** sinners. That’s what we **deserve**. Christ Jesus, who will come again to judge both the living and the dead, came into the world to **punish** sinners. **That’s** what we **think**. Christ Jesus, the perfect lawgiver, the great rabbi, came into the world to teach sinners how no longer to be sinners, by being nice to one another. **That’s** how we act. But this is **not** what our text from 1 Timothy says. It says: “Christ Jesus came into the world to **save** sinners.” Yes, Jesus Christ **Saves Sinners**.

Which leaves us only one thing to do: Be a sinner.

Well, **that** doesn’t seem like a very hard thing to accomplish. After all, **everyone** sins. All of us break the Ten Commandments. Everyday. Paul, in this letter to Timothy, runs through the Commandments, showing what sinners look like. They are unholy and profane, striking father and mother, murderers, sexually immoral, homosexuals, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and so on (vv 9–10). That’s me and that’s you. It might be possible that you’ve held back your **hand** from committing these sins, maybe even your **lips**, but your **heart** and **mind** are constantly bent toward sin.

Remember how Jesus shows this to us? To be angry is to commit murder (Mt 5:22); to look with lust is to commit adultery (Mt 5:28). We have these two great tables of the Law staring us down: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk 12:30–31). Which of us can check these off the list? Do the dishes, check. Take out the trash, check. Love the Lord with every ounce of my being, **check?** I’m afraid not.

Which means that you are a sinner, and this is **good**, remember? Because that’s who Christ Jesus came to **save**: sinners. “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (v 15). “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick”, Matthew chapter 9 verse 12. Jesus didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. But who is so healthy that he or she doesn’t need a doctor? Who is so righteous that he doesn’t need a Savior, that she doesn’t need Jesus?

This is where we get to the difficulty. The Pharisees Jesus is talking to in Matthew 9 are just as sinful as you and me, but they don’t know it. They **think** they are righteous, that they are well, that they need no help, no Savior, and this

is trouble. This is what Paul describes in our own text today, “Certain persons . . . have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions” (vv 6–7).

We are sinners, but we hate to admit it. Our old Adam, that sinful flesh that hangs around our neck, hates to admit our sin. “Sure, I’ve made mistakes. I’ve messed up, but everyone makes mistakes. To err is human. Nobody’s perfect.” This is the soothing confession of our sinful flesh. “I’ve tried my best.” But you **haven’t**, have you? And just because everyone else has messed up doesn’t make it okay with God. He is holy; He doesn’t grade on a curve. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), but our flesh clings to the illusion of its own goodness with a **death grip**, like a cat at bath time with claws sunk into the carpet. To confess that we are sinners, to acknowledge this, is death to the old man, but this is what we’re after. The cure only makes sense after the diagnosis.

Imagine that some random guy comes up to you and tells you to take a pill. “It’s going to make all your hair fall out; you’re going to lose your appetite; you’ll have to quit working for a few weeks because this pill will make you so sick.” What would you do? You’d run from this guy . . . and call the police! But imagine that this guy is your doctor, and he’s just given you the bad news that you have cancer. The diagnosis is bad, but we’ve caught it in time so that the chemo pills can take care of it. Now you don’t run from him. You stay. You take the pills. You pay this man thousands of dollars! You rejoice in the cure because you know the sickness, the alternative. What a difference the diagnosis makes.

We are sinners. That is our diagnosis: poor, miserable sinners. Paul tells us, “The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and the disobedient, of the ungodly and sinners” (v 9). We have broken God’s Law and stand deserving of His judgment, His wrath. And when we are sinners, when we acknowledge that nothing good dwells in us, that we have deserved God’s anger because of what we’ve done and because of who we are, **then** the cure comes breaking over us with light and joy and peace.

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (v 15). “Hey, I’m a sinner! Jesus came to save me!” Yes! And **that’s** just what He does: His agony in your place, His death for your life. His blood like a flood washing away your sin, your fear of death, your condemnation. All of this comes to you through His cross.

Paul was bold to confess his sins. In our text, he calls himself the “foremost” of sinners (v 15). In his letters, he boasts of his weakness, of his sins. Paul’s

companion and friend Luke recorded in Acts how Paul had watched over and gave his approval of the brutal murder of Stephen and how Paul had obtained permission to trouble the Christians in Damascus, throwing them, even the mothers and children, into prison for believing in Jesus. Paul makes no attempt to hide his sin; he is a sinner, a sinner with a Savior. Paul knows the horrendous depth of his own sin, but for Paul, this simply means that he knows all the better the height of Jesus' love. "But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost [sinner], Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (v 16).

Paul knew He was a sinner, but even more Paul knew that He had a perfect Savior, Jesus Christ who displayed perfect patience with Paul. And this made a huge difference in how Paul lived His life. The former persecutor of Christ now suffered for Christ. Like Jesus before him, Paul prayed for those who hated and persecuted him. Paul was patient with them, as God had been patient with Paul.

In the **same** way, God is patient with us, each in our own unique, sinful ways; all the ways we have strayed from God's paths of righteousness and done what is evil in His sight. He forgives us, because "for our sake (God) made (Christ) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21).

Because of God's unearned, undeserved love and patience with us, we are made able, like Paul, to be patient and forgiving of those who do wrong to us. A case in point:

This past week a horrible event took place in the college town of Orem, Utah. A 31-year-old activist whose passion, through respectful debate, was to travel around to college campuses to talk about current cultural issues and most importantly to lead people to saving faith in Christ, was martyred. Charlie Kirk was shot to death for speaking up for Biblically based truths. Not unlike Stephen who was martyred for witnessing to the truth, that eternal salvation is found in no one else, but in Christ alone.

In Acts chapter 7, Stephen forgave Paul and the others responsible for his death. That served as a **powerful** witness to other Christians at the time and even to non-believers like Paul was at that point. Soon after-wards, the Christians who witnessed what happened to Stephen, spread the Gospel of Jesus with **great** boldness and conviction. My prayer is that something similar will now happen after the death of this 21st century Christian martyr, Charlie Kirk. May many people in our day, like Paul, back then, come to repentance and saving faith which is found only in Christ.

Less than three months ago, Charlie Kirk said in an interview, "If I die, I want to be remembered for courage and my faith." (6.29.24)

(<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/266523/charlie-kirk-before-death-i-want-to-be-remembered-for-courage-for-my-faith>)

Several years ago, Charlie Kirk rightly quoted the Christian author, C.S. Lewis when he said: "To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." (12/29/14) (<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/103229-to-be-a-christian-means-to-forgive-the-inexcusable-because>)

Just as with St. Paul, C. S. Lewis, Charlie Kirk and countless other believers in Jesus from every time and place, Jesus Christ displays perfect patience with **you** and **me**. And **that** makes a huge difference in how we live **our** lives. Christ gives us the strength to stand up for the truth, despite the cost, and to be patient and forgiving of those who do wrong to us and our fellow believers. And it's all because:

Chief of sinners, though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me.

Died that I might live on high, lives that I might never die.

As the branch is to the vine, I am His, and He is mine. (LSB, 609:1)

Your sin can't stand in the way of that. Your **death** can't stand in the way. Your troubles in life can't separate you from Him. Your Savior is Jesus, the one who came to save sinners, who came to save **you**. Amen.

"To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (v 17).