

# Acting Ignorantly In Our Unbelief

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn in our Bible's end to the chapter of God's Word which we read. First Timothy chapter 1 and as God would help me I'd like to concentrate on verse 13.

First Timothy chapter 1 verse 13. I'll maybe read from verse 12. I thank him who has given me strength, Jesus Christ our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service. Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, an insolent opponent, but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.

But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief. These words need explanation. One can be very intelligent and highly ignorant and yet highly educated and yet ignorant.

[ 1 : 30 ] You can be highly intelligent and very well educated and yet ignorant. Before his conversion Paul was a very well educated man and highly intelligent.

But he tells us here he was ignorant. They say that by the time he was 21 that Paul had the equivalent of two PhDs.

Before he was 21, very smart person, highly intelligent and very, very well educated.

Here he is talking about himself being ignorant in unbelief. How come? If two PhDs before he is 21 and he calls himself ignorant, how come?

Well there are different types of ignorations. First of all there is an ignorance when there is no information available. There are many medical diseases and there is no information as to how we contract them or what the cure is.

[ 2 : 52 ] There is just no information but there hasn't been sufficient research into these things. That's one type of ignorance. Where is flight number 370 of Malaysian Airlines?

They can't find it in the ocean. There is no information available. That's one type of ignorance. But that's not the type of ignorance Paul is speaking about.

Paul is speaking about here, about information that is already available and presented to us for our learning.

That's the type of information that he's ignorant of and was ignorant and maybe you and I are ignorant of it. There is plenty of information available if we are sufficiently interested in it and if we will accept it as valid.

That's the type of ignorance Paul is referring to regarding himself as he says, formerly, formerly I was a blasphemer, formerly I was a persecutor, incidental opponent.

[ 4 : 12 ] That's what he says. And when this information came to him about Christ, he rejected it as invalid. The information was available but he didn't want it.

But he says, although that was me, formerly, God was gracious to me and now sent me into the ministry.

That's his whole theme here. Now let's move further, first of all, into this ignorance and unbelief. And then we'll do something, what actually is Paul saying here?

What's the thrust of his message in these verses? How can people be so intelligent, well educated and yet ignorant?

Well there's three verses of scripture that come very clearly to mind. First of all, what the Saviour himself said in Matthew chapter 11, addressing his Father in heaven, he said, you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes.

[ 5 : 29 ] No, God has to reveal himself to us. Elsewhere the Bible says, who by searching can find out God?

God has to be revealed to us. Our Saviour taught us that God hides these things from the intelligent, from university professors, from doctors of philosophy.

He hides these things from the wise and prudent but reveals them to babes.

It is true, who by searching can find out God? God must reveal himself. But here's the good news, everyone who seeks God finds.

If you genuinely seek him, there are promises in the Word, you will find if you seek. But it's because God has chosen to reveal himself.

[ 6 : 45 ] He reveals himself to babes, untoward, unskilled, immature mortals. So my friend, never envy too much the brilliant.

Never envy too much. We need to know God. Be whatever else we know about, we need to know God and especially his Son, Jesus Christ.

But at least another text we find in the Bible concerning how you can have such clever people ignorant.

The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. The natural man can hear about them.

The natural man can think about them. But the natural man, hearing about the wonders and the greatness of Christ cannot accept them, cannot receive them.

[ 8 : 00 ] The natural thing to do is to dismiss it. And it's the profoundest wisdom. The natural thing to do is dismiss it.

Paul says that's me. I was ignorant in unbelief. I was given that information and I dismissed it. I dismissed it. You see, the problem with the natural man is not simply blindness.

Another secondly is simply merely hardness of heart. It's firmly impetus, powerlessness.

You might want God and you might seek God but you can't find Him unless God reveals Himself to us.

[ 9 : 02 ] But as I said already, of course, the good news is God will reveal Himself to those who genuinely seek Him. And we have to put in the word genuinely there because some people maintain they seek Him but they don't really.

There's no intention of doing what He says. Are we seeking God to obey Him?

That's a question we have to ask ourselves. Are we seeking God to worship Him? Challenging these things, aren't they?

As a third verse teaches us why the clever are ignorant regarding things of God, it's because the God of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe.

The blinding influence of Satan is frightening. He's got a power to blind us from reality, from the truth that affects us so greatly.

[ 10 : 22 ] His power of blinding us is frightening. As Paul said elsewhere, we are now not ignorant of His devices.

Satan uses devices to blind us and keep us from the truth.

And the device number one that I would mention is Satan presents God to us in a false light.

He convinces us God is not who He is. God is, this is how He began in the Garden of Eden, you remember. Didn't God make it crystal clear in Genesis 2.17?

The day you take that forbidden fruit, Adam, the processes of death will commence to operate in you and in society.

[ 11 : 26 ] The day you eat, they're off. You'll surely die. That's pretty straight forward language.

What did Satan come along and say? What did he say to him? You will not die. As before he said you will not die, he had already put a spin on it.

Oh, God said you can't eat a factory. Isn't he miserable? Isn't he rotten, not making you eat of that? Look how nice is he one like he is. Isn't he a miserable sod? And what did God actually say? He said Adam. You can eat as much as you like.

You can eat as often as you like. You can eat of as many trees as you like, apart from one.

[ 12 : 29 ] Satan says isn't he miserable? Isn't he miserable? Well, you see, he's just the same today for you and me.

You pray for something and God doesn't answer you prayerily. And we think God's miserable. He knows fine this will be good for me, but he doesn't give it to me and I pray for it.

But you see, it's not as simple as that. Why did God withhold the fruit of that tree from Adam? Because he was good.

And it was good not to eat of that tree. However nice it looked, because of the curse that did actually come when he did eat of it.

God keeps things from us in our prayers for our good, although we may not see it at the time. I always remember praying for a Christian relative actually who was a real need in the family.  
[ 13 : 42 ] He was a good honest worker and he actually was professionally, academically qualified for the job.

And everybody said, oh, you'll get the job here. You've got the qualifications. It's obvious you've got experience straightforward. He didn't get the job. He asked me, and I remember being very upset that God didn't grant that prayer, because I thought it was needy. They gave it to somebody quite unqualified, who just wasn't worthy, you would say, but it disturbed me. Why did God, if God is good, why did he not give him that job? I couldn't see why it was good that he didn't get it. I've just waited a while. Just wait. Shortly afterwards, the person who got that job was killed on the job, doing the job. And a little while after that, the whole company which was an international company, went bust. It was good.

[ 14 : 50 ] He didn't get the job. Number one, he might have been killed. If he wasn't killed, he'd have lost his job. But Satan hides that, and it makes insinuations.

That's just the same today with you and with me. All these things are so challenging for our Christianity, isn't it? We pray for healing, and God doesn't give it to us.

And we wonder why. I found it very salutary reading about a church father called Basil, a well-known church father.

But apparently he was subject to many headaches, severe headaches. One day, he prayed to God that he would remove the headaches.

They seemed to have been preventing him getting on with his work. So I prayed that God would remove the headaches. And God did remove the headaches.

[ 15 : 58 ] But then he noticed after a while that he noticed that she was much more prone to temptation, since he had no headaches, much more subject to temptation.

So what did he do? I asked myself, what would I do? What would you do in that situation? Well, Basil prayed to God and said, Lord, if you had sent me these headaches to preserve me from temptation, then I pray, send the headaches back.

I asked myself, would I have prayed that? God sent the headaches back.

They kept him from temptation. God is good, but if Satan presents God to us in a false light, that's his device.

And it's the same with the scriptures. He knows, Satan knows, Satan knows, scriptures have life in them. And if he can stop you reading the scriptures, you'll do that.

[ 17 : 23 ] But if he can't do that, what does he do? He misinterprets the scriptures. He misinterprets them and gets you to misunderstand what they mean.

He did it in the temptation with Christ. You remember, he quoted scripture from Psalm 91, but he does two things, I'm not going to see the times really going on.

He quotes Psalm 91 verses 11 and 12 with the wrong meaning and misses out some of it. Misses out some of it. Doesn't quote the whole verse, just part of it.

Because they're all sex, and it's the same today. So Satan's devices, the God of this world, blinds our minds by presenting God in a false light, by preventing scripture in a false light, and presenting providence in a false light.

You know perfectly well, don't you? How often do you, well, I shouldn't project onto you my feelings, but I often have to say to myself, well, I have to say, Lord, if you loved me, why'd you let that happen to me?

[ 18 : 40 ] And Satan says, God would never do that to you if you loved you. He doesn't love you.

But you see, it's all our ignorance of what's revealed, and that's why it's so important to be embedded in the scriptures, because that's where there is real truth.

But we must move on. I did it ignorantly in unbelief. Now, understand this, first of all, unbelief is not the same thing as doubting.

Think about it. Think about it rationally. What do you doubt? You only doubt what you believe.

Think about it rationally. Unbelief is not the same thing as doubting at all. You only doubt what you believe. Just think about it.

Just before Christ gave the great commission, we read, the disciples worshipped him, but some doubted.

[ 19 : 55 ] It's worshippers. It's worshippers that doubt. It's Matthew 28, 70. They worshipped him, but some of the worshippers doubted.

You only doubt what you believe. Now, it's not good to doubt, but it's an actual consequence. In a fallen world, in an imperfect heart.

Unbelief, on the other hand, is so different. Unbelief is the rejection of truth. You doubt what you believe. You question it.

Unbelief, on the other hand, you reject that information. I don't treat that as valid. It is a decision not to accept information.

Not to accept evidence, if you like. That's what unbelief is. In a sense, just to help us grasp the concept, in a sense, the heathen who've never heard the gospel.

[ 20 : 57 ] They're not guilty of unbelief. They've just never heard the truth. Now, of course, they're very simple, but are they guilty of unbelief when they've never heard the truth?

Because unbelief is a rejection of the truth, not accepting information. So in a sense, heathen don't commit. They commit idolatry.

If you don't worship God, you worship something else, even though it's yourself. We're made to worship.

We're worshipping creatures. And if we don't worship the one living in truth God, we worship a false God, either another God or ourselves.

I did it in unbelief. Unbelief is called disobedience. Five times in the Bible, it's clearly written, they did not obey the gospel.

[ 21 : 56 ] They disobeyed the gospel. They disobeyed the truth. It's disobedience. Information, white is given to you, you reject it.

Well, we better look at what Paul is saying then, therefore.

What is the thrust of his message in these verses? It's really 12 to 14. When he says, oh, but I did it ignorantly in unbelief, he is not trying to lessen his guilt, his responsibility in former life.

He's trying to exalt the grace of God. That's what he's trying to do. He said, I was such a great sinner, a blasphemer, a persecutor, a violently arrogant person, he says.

Yet God put me into the ministry. And I was such a wicked person. So what's he doing? He's not trying to make excuses for himself.

[ 23 : 08 ] He's trying to exalt the greatness of grace, this wonderful grace that's in the Lord Jesus. It's for sinners, blood, red, and guilt.

It's for you. It's for me. It's for all who have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And that's one of the things Paul's spelling out here, exalting the grace of God in these verses.

But he's also, in these verses, trying to focus on the reliability of Christ as Savior.

He's saying, look, if I found mercy, you could find it quite easily. If someone as bad as I was obtained such grace, all you can.

You also can find it. And you see, we have plenty examples in the Bible. You ask them that you know very little about Christianity.

[ 24 : 21 ] I ask them about the gospel. And they're almost, I think every time I've ever done it, and I'm not good at it, I assure you of that. But they all seem to come back there and say, it's for good people.

Bible for good people. The gospel's for good people. Is it? I used to think as a young person, one of the most gory people, gracious, soft, gentle, sweet women that ever lived would be Mary Mandeleine.

Your heart just goes out there just like a lovely Christian person, eh? But wait a minute. When Christ found her, he was possessed of seven devils.

He cast seven devils out of Mary Mandeleine. That's what she was like. But Christ made all the difference. And Christ made her a sweet, gentle, gracious woman that your heart goes out to just reading about the things she did.

Manasseh in the Old Testament. We're talking about the reliability, the ability of Christ to save.

[ 25 : 34 ] Look at all the great sinners he has saved. Look at the wonderful job he made of Mary Mandeleine. Look at the wonderful job he made of Manasseh. Oh, what sins Manasseh was guilty of.

What sins. He was the son of a godly father, a godly father. Now what was the first thing he did when he got power?

He undid the godly reforms of his father. Undid them legally, made it law. A godly son, sorry, a son of a godly father.

And then, he was a godly father. A godly son, sorry, a son of a godly father. And then, he worshipped the sun, the moon and the stars.

He actually worshipped them. He actually dabbled in the occult wizards. He worshipped the pagan god Moller, which required, and which poor Manasseh did, burnt his children in the fire, threw his children into the valley of Inam, and set it alight.

[ 26 : 55 ] Manasseh. And then, he gets into problems in life. And he cries out to the god. Did God turn round to him and say, Hey, Manasseh, you threw me off.

Try the sun, the moon and the stars now. See if they'll not be off. Try Moller. You cast me off. Did God see that when Manasseh called on God?

My friend, God's not into that sort of behaviour. No, God heard him, and God recedes his entreaty, and God forgave him, and God saved him, and God made him a new person, Christ.

That's the one living and true God. Now, what Paul is saying here, as we pause, he's saying here, one way or another, look, I am a test case.

What does he say? I am the foremost sinner. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

[ 28 : 08 ] I died in the womb, bigot, with Paul. This is, I receive mercy. It's the type of sinner he was. It's the type of conversion he had.

It's the type of Christian he became, the apostle to the Gentiles. But what a sinner he was. Saul of Tarshish.

Paul, the apostle, was not a normal sinner. He was an extreme sinner. He was the foremost of sinners.

But I found mercy. There was blood on his head, if not on his hands, as well as Manasseh, who made the streets of Jerusalem red with the blood of the martyrs, the blood of the saints.

So Paul at one time, formerly, formerly he was absolutely convinced that Jesus was an impostor. Formerly he was absolutely convinced that Christianity was a hoax, formerly, and he was prepared to kill, to prove it, formerly.

[ 29 : 24 ] But Paul is absolutely determined that because he himself had been saved by Christ, he is able to save anyone and everyone who trusts in him.

And Paul is totally committed to proclaiming this gospel. As he says, this gospel, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

And the bigger sinner you make yourself out to be, the more qualified you are for the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

May God, the Holy Spirit, make his word effectual to every one of us. Let's bow our heads. Our Father in heaven, we ask that you would take the things of Christ and make them ours this morning, in this place now.

That we make sure of calling an election so that we can rejoice with a million others that Christ Jesus has come into the world.

[ 30 : 36 ] So hear us in mercy, answer us in peace as we pray only and all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

We conclude by singing the God's praise from the Scottish altar, Psalm 130, Lord from the depths, to thee I cried, My voice, Lord, do thou hear, and to my supplications voice, give an attentive ear.

And I want to read the last verse because personally it could have been one of the verses that I was instrumental in my own conversion. And plenteous redemption is ever found with him.

And from all his iniquities to Israel, the shawarma, Psalm 130, the God's grace. Lord from the depths, to thee I cried, My voice, Lord, do thou hear, and to my supplications voice, give an attentive ear.

And a attentive ear, for who shall stop? Revival, Lord, shall smorgain equity, for death with thee, for diveness is not mere amnesty, I'm weak or gone, my soul's away, my hope is in his word, more than they thought, for mourning was my storage for the morn, my same war than they thought, the mourning I'd to see, let Israel open the door with emergency, redemption is ever found with him, the robe of his iniquities, the praise, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all now and forevermore.

[ 34 : 43 ] Amen.