

"BEFORE A BLASPHEMER . . . IGNORANTLY IN UNBELIEF"

I TIMOTHY 1:13

by

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## PREFACE

This examination into what Paul meant by a "blasphemer" and "ignorantly in unbelief" has been an interesting and fruitful experience for this writer. From the verse considered greater insight has been gained as to the statements the Apostle Paul made concerning himself. Further knowledge was attained as to the meanings of such terms as "before a blasphemer," "a persecutor," "an insolent man," "without mercy," and especially "ignorantly in unbelief."

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THE GREEK TEXT - I. THE GREEK TEXT

Edited with an Introduction by

THE GREEK TEXT - I. THE GREEK TEXT  
The Greek Text of the New Testament  
The Greek Text of the New Testament

THE GREEK TEXT

THE GREEK TEXT - I TIMOTHY 1:13

United Bible Societies 1966

13 τὸ πρότερον ὄντα βλάσφημον καὶ διώκτην καὶ ὑβριστήν  
ἀλλὰ ἠλεήθην, ὅτι ἄγνοῶν ἐποίησα ἐν ἀπιστίᾳ,

## ENGLISH TEXTS

### King James Version: New Scofield Reference Bible

Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

### American Standard Version

Though I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: howbeit I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

### Revised Standard Version

Though I formerly blasphemed, and persecuted, and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.

### New American Standard Bible

Even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a wanton aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.

### J. B. Phillips

Despite the fact that I had previously blasphemed his name, persecuted his Church and insulted him. I believe he was merciful to me because what I did was done in the ignorance of a man without faith.

### Weymouth

Though I was previously guilty of blasphemy and persecution and wanton outrage. Yet mercy was shown me, because I had acted ignorantly, in unbelief.

The Amplified New Testament

Though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and was shamefully and outrageously and aggressively insulting to Him, nevertheless I obtained mercy because I had acted out of ignorance in unbelief.

The Living New Testament

Even though I used to scoff at the name of Christ. I hunted down His people, harming them in every way I could. But God had mercy on me because I didn't know what I was doing, for I didn't know Christ at that time.

R. C. H. Lenski

Formerly being a blasphemer and a persecutor and an insolent; but I was treated with mercy because, being ignorant, I acted in unbelief.

Homer A. Kent, Jr.

Formerly being a blasphemer and a persecutor and an insolent man: but I received mercy because being ignorant I acted in unbelief.

Williams

Though I once used to abuse, persecute, and insult Him. But mercy was shown me by Him, because I did it in ignorance and unbelief.

Today's English Version

Even though in the past I spoke evil of him, and persecuted, and insulted him. But God was merciful to me, because I did not believe and so did not know what I was doing.

## INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this critical monograph is to examine the text in 1 Timothy 1:13. In such an examination related Scripture will be sought out for evidence and support of this author's viewpoint concerning the major problems found within the above mentioned verse. The New Scofield Reference Bible will be used for Scripture quotations. If any other English Version has a better rendering that version will be cited and noted.

## INTRODUCTION

1 Timothy 1:13 is not a much disputed passage. However, it does offer at least two major problems. The first major problem is: What did Paul mean by blasphemy? There are many other questions connected with this first major problem. For example, there are the three persons of the Godhead to be considered. Which one did Paul blaspheme? Also, if it was the Holy Spirit, was this the unpardonable sin? If so, why was Paul singled out and apparently forgiven?

The second major problem is: Why should anyone be the object of mercy simply because they sinned "ignorantly in unbelief"? Questions that need to be answered concerning this problem are as follows: What part does knowledge play in regards to a man's sin? Is the sin of unbelief the unpardonable sin? Why does God forgive those who are sincere in their beliefs toward Him, yet sincerely wrong?

These two major problems will be the central theme of this critical monograph. The various problems will have different interpreta-

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tations. These also will be dealt with in detail. After the various interpretations are considered this author's interpretation will also be presented. This will be followed by a personal paraphrase of I Timothy 1:13.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

## THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

The great apostle gives his own personal testimony, "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." "His description of himself must not be attributed to false humility or exaggeration, but was undoubtedly the way he felt about his past life. Those who live closest to God are usually the most keenly aware of their own faults."<sup>1</sup> This testimony of Paul does not stand alone here. It appears in part in other passages.

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In Acts 22:4-5 Paul gives this testimony to the mob by permission of the "chief captain." He had "persecuted this way unto the death . . . and . . . to bring them who were . . . bound unto Jerusalem, to be punished." He was "a persecutor who chased the Lord's people as one chases wild animals . . . who himself acted like a wild animal . . . who in his activity persecuted the Lord Himself."<sup>2</sup> "It is not surprising that Paul's reminiscences lead him to consider his pre-Christian state, for reflection upon Christ's enabling power only magnified his own sense of unworthiness."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Homer A. Kent, Jr., The Pastoral Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1946), pp. 89-90.

<sup>2</sup> R. C. B. Lusk, St. Paul's Epistles to . . . Timothy (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), p. 518.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Guthrie, The Pastoral Epistles (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), p. 64.

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Also in Acts 26:10 the apostle relates how he consented to the death of some believers: "I gave my voice against them." His testimony here was such that he referred to it many times. It was as though "Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the Church of God, but even then the heart of God was going out toward him . . . to . . . be changed into Paul the Ambassador of Christ."<sup>1</sup> This Apostle was thankful to God for bringing him out of his ignorance.

Again in I Corinthians 15:9 is still another example of the testimony of this great apostle. "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God." "Those of his children whom God intends to exalt to posts of honour and power, he commonly prepares for their elevation by leading them to such a knowledge of their sinfulness as to keep them constantly abased."<sup>2</sup> Paul did count himself as "the least" of the apostles, but the "emphatic personal pronoun 'I' . . . draws attention to the greatness of the condescension of Christ. . . . Paul holds to . . . the high dignity of an apostle and his . . . sense of personal unworthiness."<sup>3</sup> This is probably why Paul would call himself a "chief among sinners" in I Timothy 1:15. He felt a sense of unworthiness because he had blasphemed,

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<sup>1</sup>H. A. Ironside, Timothy, Titus & Philemon (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeau Brothers, 1967), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Hodge, First Epistle to the Corinthians (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), p. 317.

<sup>3</sup>Leon Morris, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 207-208.

persecuted the Church, and was also very injurious to the cause of Christ.

Therefore, one could conclude from these verses just referred to that Paul was an object of God's mercy. His former life was changed. He now possessed a high position before God which he had not possessed before. His testimony was that he had "obtained mercy" because what he had done was not done in willingness. The poet was right when he wrote:

There's a wideness in God's mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There's a kindness in His justice,  
Which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader  
Than the measure of man's mind;  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.<sup>1</sup>

Paul wanted to keep the record straight that he was the same man Saul who had been changed into the man Paul, an apostle to the Gentiles. He lays no credit to himself for the act of mercy, but he gives full and complete credit to God to whom it belongs. I was one, says Paul, "who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it in unbelief."

These preceding verses have contributed to the discussion on the analysis of I Timothy 1:13 only in the area of the personal testimony of Paul. Hereafter these verses will be used in connection with the problems that exist in the verse being treated for support of this author's viewpoint.

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<sup>1</sup>Ironside, Timothy, p. 36. [This will serve as a shortened title throughout.]

## USE OF THE TERM "BLASPHEMER"

In order to establish what the apostle meant by the word "blasphemer" it will be necessary to evaluate the various uses of the term.

The Greek form is βλασφημῶν. The general use of the term means "evil-speaking, slanderous, blasphemous, and a blasphemer."<sup>1</sup> The form used in I Timothy 1:13 is the accusative, singular, masculine and feminine, and is from the root βλασφημέω. "Robertson traces this word to either βλάπτω or βλάπτω to blaptō,

## VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF FIRST MAJOR PROBLEM

### What Did Paul Mean By Blasphemer In I Timothy 1:13?

The verb βλασφημέω means to speak slanderously or insultingly as to defame one's character or reputation.<sup>2</sup> Lamski uses the term to be aware of one using "the most wicked and hateful language."<sup>4</sup>

It appears at this point, that the term generally used to mean one who blasphemes is connected with evil alone. There is apparently no good sense connected at all with this word. Therefore, it is notable to consider the use to which other men put the term.

<sup>1</sup> W. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Kent, W., The Pastoral Epistles, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> Henschel H. Hobbs, An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> Lamski, Yin, p. 140.

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The verb βλασφημέω means to speak slanderously or insultingly so as to defame one's character or reputation.<sup>3</sup> Lenski uses the term in the sense of one using "the most wicked and hateful language."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>G. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 82.

<sup>2</sup>Kent, Jr., The Pastoral Epistles, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup>Herschel H. Hobbs, An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 152.

<sup>4</sup>Lenski, Timothy, p. 518.

The word in its verb form means "to speak reproachfully of, rail at, revile, calumniate."<sup>1</sup> In the noun form, it is one who is "using stupid or injurious speech."<sup>2</sup>

Keeping in mind the basic uses of this term, it is the wish of this writer to use βλάσφημον to mean one who is breathing out insults against someone or simply "an insulter."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth S. Wuest, The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>Russell Bradley Jones, The Epistles to Timothy (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>William Barclay, The Letter to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), p. 52.

## VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

### A. Christ and the Church View

Those who are the holders of this viewpoint usually base their view upon Acts 26:11. Paul "had been a blasphemer, for he had thought that he 'ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth'; and he had been a persecutor for he had punished believers 'oftentimes in all the synagogues,' and 'strove to make them blaspheme.'"<sup>1</sup>

There are several reasons why proponents of this view recognize the phrase to mean blasphemy against Christ and the Church.

The first reason is because of St. Paul's persecution of Christ and the Church. There are several passages which are alluded to in support of this point. Before these are considered, however, the term "persecutor" must be dealt with. "Διωκτης, meaning 'persecutor,' appears to be a coinage of his (Paul's) own, kept in countenance by the LXX ἑργωδιωκτης for 'taskmaster' (Ex. 3:7); and the fondness of Paul for the verb διώκειν in his Epistles renders the formation strictly in character."<sup>2</sup> "As a persecutor he had been guilty of surpassing cruelty."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Plummer, The Pastoral Epistles (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, n. d.), pp. 53-54.

<sup>2</sup>E. K. Simpson, The Pastoral Epistles (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954), p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Charles R. Eerdman, The Pastoral Epistles of Paul (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), p. 30.

"He had taken every means which was open to him under the Jewish law to annihilate the Christian Church."<sup>1</sup> If the apostle persecuted the Church as well as Christ, then it was also the same whom he blasphemed.

A second reason is found in the word ὑβριστήν . This term "means one whose insolence and contempt of others break forth in wanton and outrageous acts . . . . If the term could be allowed, 'a bully' . . . one who not only ill-treats others but does so with the insolence of superior strength."<sup>2</sup> In this word there is a sadistic delight in inflicting pain. That is what Paul was once like in regard to the Christian Church. That may be why he terms himself a chief among sinners in the verses that follow.

A third reason is found in the fact that Paul in his journey to Damascus met Jesus, face to face. In Acts 9:1, Paul met Christ and was converted. Probably one of the most striking parallels in modern times to Paul's conversion is Sundar Singh's story of his own conversion after a period of bitter hostility to the gospel.<sup>3</sup> Whether this story is true or not is debatable. However, it does illustrate what probably happened in the case of Paul's conversion on the Damascus Road. The story of Sundar Singh is:

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, Letter to Timothy, p. 52. /This will serve as a shortened title throughout./

<sup>2</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, First Timothy (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>F. F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), p. 196.

Praying in his room in the early morning, he saw a great light. 'Then I prayed and looked into the light, I saw the form of the Lord Jesus Christ. It had such an appearance of glory and love. If it had been some Hindu incarnation I would have prostrated myself before it. But it was the Lord Jesus Christ whom I had been insulting a few days before. I felt that a vision like this could not come out of my own imagination. I heard a voice saying in Hindustani. "How long will you persecute me? I have come to save you; you were praying to know the right way. Why do you not take it?" The thought then came to me, "Jesus Christ is not dead but living and it must be He Himself." So I fell at His feet and got this wonderful Peace which I could not get anywhere else. This is the joy I was wishing to get. When I got up, the vision had all disappeared, but although the vision disappeared the Peace and Joy have remained with me ever since.'<sup>1</sup>

Paul also realized that it was the Lord Himself that he blasphemed. He had breathed out insulting remarks which must be classified as blasphemy against the name of Christ.

A final reason why it is said that Paul blasphemed Christ and the Church is the fact of Paul's statement that he must do many things against the name of Christ, Acts 26:9. This verse refers to the fact that he had gone "against all that is denoted by his names and titles, which describe him as a Saviour, the Messiah, Prophet, Priest, King, etc."<sup>2</sup> The "many things" must refer to Paul's reference in I Timothy 1: 13: "A blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious."

F. F. Bruce sums up the matter of what Paul did in the following words:

Yes, he thought it his duty to oppose the name of and cause of Jesus the Nazarene with all his might. Pharisee though he was,

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce, Acts, pp. 196, 197. [This will serve as a shortened title.]

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Addison Alexander, Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), p. 876.

and thus in theory a believer in the resurrection of the dead, he judged it incredible in this particular instance, and denounced and persecuted as imposters those followers of Jesus who claimed that they had seen Him alive again after His passion. He took the lead in the campaign to uproot this subversive heresy, as he thought it; armed with authority from the chief priests he went from house to house and dragged the followers of Jesus off to jail; he went from synagogue to synagogue and enforced judicial proceedings against them there, and when they were put on trial he cast his vote for their condemnation, and demanded the death sentence against them. Not that he wished to make martyrs of them if he could help it; if he could make apostates of them, that was much more satisfactory, and he did his best in synagogue after synagogue to force them to blaspheme, to call Jesus accursed, and thus repudiate His claims, but such attempts met with singularly little success: they preferred death to apostasy."<sup>1</sup>

The AV "I . . . compelled them to blaspheme" is misleading; the imperfect ἠνάγκαζον indicates that he tried to compel them, but did not succeed.<sup>2</sup>

The logical conclusion, then, is that one would concur that Paul blasphemed Christ and the Church for the following four reasons:

(1) "In persecuting the Church of God 'beyond measure' he had persecuted Christ himself."<sup>3</sup> The verses that deal with this fact are Acts 9:1, 4, 5; 22:4; 26:9-11; and I Timothy 1:13.

(2) Paul was also injurious toward the Church as well as Christ. In being injurious or "an insolent man" toward God's people he could be counted as a blasphemer of the blasphemers. "Injurious" could be the stronger word for the Greek, ὑβριστής, which means "one who, uplifted with pride, either heaps insulting language upon others or does them some

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce, Acts, p. 490.

<sup>2</sup>Bruce, Acts, p. 490.

<sup>3</sup>William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary, "Exposition of The Pastoral Epistles" (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 74.

shameful act of wrong."<sup>1</sup>

(3) Christ's testimony affords a basis for believing that Paul blasphemed Christ and the Church. In Acts 9:4,5 Christ gives this testimony to this fact: "Saul, Saul why persecutest thou me? . . . I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the goads."

(4) In Acts 26:9 Paul says, "I verily thought within myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." The many things must refer also to the fact that he blasphemed the name of Jesus of Nazareth as well as against those who claimed the name of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup>Paul F. Barackman, The Epistles to Timothy and Titus (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), p. 21.

There are various reasons to hold this view. These reasons are set forth again by this writer and are not to be counted as unimportant. One could arrive at these conclusions by the study of the various passages dealing with the subject.

The first reason is that all blasphemy is initially against God.

<sup>1</sup>E. H. Rieu, The Acts of the Apostles (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), p. 163.

<sup>2</sup>Kent, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, "The Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon" (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), p. 120.

### B. Blasphemy Against God View

Those who hold this view are few. Holding to such a viewpoint does not mean that these are unbiblical views--much to the contrary. There is much Scripture to support all the views. The purpose is to present them and decide from the evidence which is best.

When Paul blasphemed, he is said to have blasphemed against God. "To 'blaspheme no doubt means to pronounce a formal curse.'"<sup>1</sup> This was the dastardly ritual of the persecutor. The word "denotes evil and injurious speech directed usually against God. Paul had spoken untruths against God and the Word."<sup>2</sup> "This does not mean that Paul before his conversion was what would now be regarded as an open blasphemer--that he was one who abased and reviled sacred things, or one who was in the habit of profane swearing."<sup>3</sup> His character was just the reverse of this. He felt he was being of service to God. Yet, looking back on his past life he would have to say that it was God the Father he had blasphemed.

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<sup>2</sup>Kent, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, "Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon" (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), p. 120.

the Father. Although no specific Scripture can be cited to support this statement, several passages should be considered here. Matthew 15:19 says, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Blasphemy is listed with a number of other sins which are considered initially against God. "He had flung his hot and angry words at the Christians, accusing them of crimes against God, while it was he himself who was the criminal."<sup>1</sup> When the word βλάσφημον "stands in connection with God's name it naturally has the more special and frightful meaning of 'blasphemy'."<sup>2</sup> An example of this very thing would be in II Kings 19:21 and Isaiah 37:23. The verses are identical. "Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? . . . Even against the Holy One of Israel." The Holy One is a reference to God initially, but also it is in reference to the Messiah who was to come. Paul realized after his conversion that it was God whom he had blasphemed.

The second reason Paul is said to blaspheme God the Father is found in Acts 26:11. Here Paul "forced them to blaspheme."<sup>3</sup> Since Paul would not have counted this as blasphemy against God at the time of the action, it is proper to say that, as he looks back to the instance, he would attribute the blasphemy to be against God. The Pharisees believed

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, Letter to Timothy, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup>Charles J. Ellicott, The Pastoral Epistles (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1883), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Alexander, Acts, p. 877. /This will serve as a shortened title throughout./

it was Jesus who was blaspheming God, Matthew 9:3, "This man blasphemeth." Notice in each case there is no mention of the one being blasphemed. This is also true of I Timothy 1:13.

The third reason would be that "to blaspheme would be profaning the name of God."<sup>1</sup> God is blasphemed when one reproaches His commands (Isa. 37:23). Paul did not recognize that it was he who was at fault until his conversion.

The final reason given that Paul blasphemed God is because his persecution was against the people of God. Though he considered them to be outside of God's family, when Christ met him on the Damascus Road, he realized he was "pursuing God's people as far as Damascus."<sup>2</sup> Persecuting the people of God is a sin against God Himself. "This is the sin which Paul never forgave himself. He often refers to it with the deepest contrition. The forgiveness of sin does not obliterate the remembrance of it; neither does it remove the sense of unworthiness and ill-desert."<sup>3</sup> "Because of his record as a persecutor, Paul feels that he is hardly fit to be called an apostle, but in all humility he recognizes that he has labored more than any of the rest, though all by the grace of God."<sup>4</sup>

In summing up this matter four reasons are given special notice.

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<sup>1</sup>Hobbs, Exposition on Matthew, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup>Kent, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Hodge, An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), p. 317.

<sup>4</sup>G. Coleman Luck, First Corinthians (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 115.

These do not necessarily entail the complete scope of study on this point. But it is noteworthy to present these reasons in brief.

(1) All blasphemy is initially against God the Father, although no Scripture specifically states this to be true. Though the accusation or reproach may be directed in name to Christ or the Holy Spirit, initially all blasphemy is against God's character.

(2) One who is compelling others to blaspheme against God is, in essence, blaspheming God himself. Paul was guilty of blasphemy to this extent, as well as blaspheming the name of God in his attack on the ministry of Christ in the believers of the way.

(3) To blaspheme would be profaning the name of God. Paul "repudiates Christ's Messianic claims and stamped Him as an imposter. His sin was double-dyed because he himself thus spoke against the Lord and tried to force others to do the same."<sup>1</sup>

(4) Paul's persecution was against God's people. It was for their believed blasphemy that Paul was persecuting them. But again, Paul was the one in error.

These reasons will be helpful in forming this author's viewpoint, which is to follow immediately. The first two views are correct in the scope of their study, but this writer is of the opinion they do not include in themselves what is completely involved.

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, First Timothy, p. 40.

## THE WRITER'S VIEWPOINT

In the presentation of this viewpoint the two views already considered will now be revisited. However, they will be held open to some extent. The reason for this statement is because this writer is of the opinion that the "blasphemy" to which Paul referred in 1 Timothy 1:13 was against the Godhead. "In Paul's case the blasphemy was particularly against Christ, since Paul thought he was honoring the God of his fathers."<sup>1</sup> But the blasphemy was also "against God."<sup>2</sup>

### WRITER'S INTERPRETATION OF

#### THE FIRST MAJOR PROBLEM

There are several reasons why the writer embraces the viewpoint that Paul blasphemed against the Godhead. These are not the only reasons; however, they are sufficient to present this viewpoint.

The first reason is found in the meaning of the term blasphemy. There are three words used to mean blasphemy or blasphemy. The first is the verb *blasphēō*. This means "to speak lightly or profanely of sacred things, especially to speak irreverently of God, to blaspheme." The verb is used nineteen times in the New Testament. It would be well to investigate the use of the verb in reference to the particular period or person to which it refers. This investigation will ascertain a clearer

<sup>1</sup>Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup>Eugene Smith, *Plain Talk by the Pastoral Epistles* (London: W. & Scott, 1944), p. 136.

<sup>3</sup>Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 82. (This will serve as a satisfactory illustration.)

## THE WRITER'S VIEWPOINT

In the presentation of this viewpoint the two views already considered will now be refuted. However, they will be built upon to some extent. The reason for this statement is because this writer is of the opinion that the "blasphemy" to which Paul referred in I Timothy 1:13 was against the Godhead. "In Paul's case the blasphemy was particularly against Christ, since Paul thought he was honoring the God of his fathers."<sup>1</sup> But his blasphemy was also "against God."<sup>2</sup>

There are several reasons why this writer embraces the viewpoint that Paul blasphemed against the Godhead. These are not the only reasons; however, they are sufficient to present this viewpoint.

The first reason is found in the meaning of the term βλάσφημον. There are three words used to mean blaspheme or blasphemy. The first is the verb βλασφημέω. This means "to speak lightly or profanely of sacred things, especially to speak impiously of God, to blaspheme."<sup>3</sup> The verb form is used nineteen times in the New Testament. It would be well to investigate the use of the verb in reference to the particular person or persons to which it refers. This investigation will ascertain a clearer

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<sup>1</sup>Kent, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Eugene Stock, Plain Talk on the Pastoral Epistles (London: Robert Scott, 1914), p. 238.

<sup>3</sup>Abbott-Smith, Greek Lexicon, p. 82. /This will serve as a shortened title throughout./

meaning of the verb itself.

There are several passages in the gospels which use the verb βλασφημέω in reference to Christ. In Matthew 9:3 the scribes accused Christ of blaspheming because He had forgiven the paralytic man of his sins (9:2). To the scribes Jesus had blasphemed because only God could forgive sin. To their way of thinking this was blasphemy against God. The verb form is also applied in this way in John 10:36. Jesus answered their accusation which was that He had blasphemed because He called Himself "the Son of God." A final application of the verb form in reference to Jesus is found in Matthew 26:65, ἔβλασφήμησεν. The Sanhedrin's verdict was that He had "spoken blasphemy."

There are two passages in the gospels which use βλασφημέω in reference to the Holy Spirit. Both passages have to do with speaking blasphemies against the Holy Spirit, a sin which the Lord Himself said would not be forgiven. "He that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness."

The verb is also used in reference to the Jews and their blasphemy against the "name of God" in Romans 2:24. Again, when they were filled with envy toward Paul, they were "contradicting and blaspheming" (Acts 13:45). Also, in Acts 18:26, when Paul turned to the Gentiles, it was said of the Jews that "they opposed themselves and blasphemed."

The verb is used in reference to Paul in the very familiar passage, Acts 26:11. Here Paul was recounting the episode where he himself "compelled them to blaspheme," the "them" referring to the Christians he was

persecuting. When in Acts 19:37 the town clerk stated that "these men, who are neither robbers of temples, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess," he was actively setting a defense for Paul, Aristarchus and Gaius. Although the translation would appear to be a noun form it is nevertheless a participle which might better be rendered "ones who blaspheme."

There is one passage in I Timothy 1:20 which is in reference to Church discipline. "Hymenaeus and Alexander" had been "delivered unto Satan" for the purpose "that they may learn not to blaspheme."

In reference to slaves or servants, the servants were to "count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed" (I Tim. 6:1).

In reference to the older women of the Church as teachers, they were to teach the younger women "to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:5).

James had something to say in reference to the rich (James 2:7). He asked the question to those who would show partiality to the rich, "Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which ye are called?"

The Apostle John in Revelation 13:6 speaks in reference to the Antichrist. It is the Antichrist's purpose "to blaspheme his (God's) name, and his tabernacles, and them that dwell in heaven."

Finally, the verb form appears in reference to the Bowl Judgments of Revelation 16:9, 11, 21. In verse 9 men "blasphemed the name of God" because they were "scorched with great heat." In verse 11 they "blas-

phemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores." Finally in verse 21 "men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail."

The second is βλασφημία meaning "impious speech against God."<sup>1</sup> This form is used sixteen times in the New Testament. It is the noun form.

The first two appearances of the noun form are in reference to the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31; Mk. 3:28). The verb form also, as previously mentioned, appears as well. Christ is speaking of the injurious or impious speech which is breathed out toward the person of the Holy Spirit.

The next two passages deal with the origin of all blasphemies. In Matthew 15:9 as well as Mark 7:21 "out of the heart proceed . . . blasphemies" is found. It is the will in man's own heart that draws out the blasphemy.

There are five passages dealing with "blasphemy" in reference to Christ. These are all false accusations against His divine character. The false accusation of blasphemy on Christ's part was the final charge which produced His crucifixion. In the four gospels (Matt. 26:65; Mk. 2:7; 14:64; Lk. 5:21; Jn. 10:33) Jesus was accused of blasphemy against God. The rulers said, "Now ye have heard his blasphemy" (Matt. 26:65).

Paul uses the noun "blasphemy" once in reference to believers. It was his charge in Colossians 3:8 that they "put off . . . blasphemy." There are two passages in Revelation which are in reference to those of the synagogue of Satan. "I know the blasphemy of them who say they are

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<sup>1</sup>Abbott-Smith, Greek Lexicon, p. 82.

Jews, and are not" (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

Also in Revelation there are three more references to the beast or the Antichrist. In Revelation 13:1 the text states, "upon his head the name of blasphemy. . . ." Likewise, in 13:5 he is "speaking great things and blasphemies." And finally, Revelation 13:6 reveals that "he openeth his mouth in blasphemy against God."

The final appearance of the noun form is in reference to the Apostate Church. In Revelation 17:3 the words are concerning this church that she is "full of names of blasphemy."

All these references deal with blasphemy toward different persons of the Godhead as well as Christians themselves.

The third form is the word used by the Apostle Paul, βλάσφημος, meaning one who uses slanderous or blasphemous speech against God, hence a blasphemer.

This word is used twice by Paul, once in the previously mentioned verse, and again in II Timothy 3:2 in reference to the last days. Paul warns Timothy that in the last days perilous times shall come "for men shall be . . . blasphemers."

The only other reference is to Stephen in Acts 6:11, 13. False accusers claimed they heard Stephen speak "blasphemous words against Moses and against God." But further they accused him of speaking "blasphemous words against this holy place (meaning the temple), and the law" (v. 11).

Having considered the verses which deal with the three words

meaning to blaspheme, blasphemy, and a blasphemer, it appears that the latter has more of an adjective force, "blasphemous words."

The fact that they are blasphemous oppositions to God and to Christ is significant.<sup>1</sup> This blasphemy is an attack upon God's character, name, and nature. It can be said that this, then, is an attack on everything that God stands for. Paul did not realize this fact at the time of his injurious actions. But he would be the first to say that he was against all that is God, even though ignorant at the time of his actions.

The second reason Paul blasphemed against the Godhead was because he compelled others to blaspheme. These that he tried to force to this act were not likely eye-witnesses to Christ's resurrection, but they had been witnessed to by eye-witnesses. This fact could be connected with the term ὑβριστήν . This is a "substantive . . . as of one arrogant, overbearing, blustering, applied to Philip by Demosthenes (Olyth. 1:23), descriptive of an Old Testament 'scorner.'"<sup>2</sup> Paul recognized himself to be one that was a "scorner" of God's character. Even though the Apostle did not believe that Christ had risen, he became one who was injurious to believers who based their whole theology upon that fact. Christ's resurrection was the main reason for Stephen's martyrdom. His murder "precipitated a persecution which must have fallen most heavily on the Hellenistic Jews . . . . Pharisees and Sadducees were to some extent

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<sup>1</sup>John F. Walvoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>Simpson, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 33.

united, and the 'young man' Saul was the guiding spirit of evil."<sup>1</sup> The "old man" Paul later realized his outrageous attack on the character, name, and nature of the Godhead.

The third reason is that Paul persecuted the Church, but in doing so was persecuting Christ especially, God initially, and the witness of the Holy Spirit indirectly. In Acts 9:4,5 he encountered the Lord Jesus in the light that came from heaven. Christ "identifies himself with his people, not as an aggregate body merely, but as individuals, according to the principle which he had formerly laid down, when teaching his disciples they might indulge in their feelings of attachment to him, even in his absence."<sup>2</sup> "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). Jesus was talking about things that were good in this passage, but if it is true of the good it is also true of the evil. That is why Christ said, "Why persecutest thou me?"

By the same token, anything that is done whether good or bad is done toward God initially. Persecution against Christ is also persecution against God. If that is so, then the Holy Spirit was persecuted as well, though indirectly. All three persons of the Godhead can be blasphemed in the same manner in which they are persecuted. Paul had no knowledge that the Spirit had been given even though he may have understood Joel's prophecy.

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<sup>1</sup>Blaiklock, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Alexander, Acts, p. 358.

The preceding statement leads to the final reason one could say Paul blasphemed the Godhead. His ignorance in unbelief blinded him to his act of sin. "He had been a blasphemer, for he had thought that he 'ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth' and he had been a persecutor for he had punished believers 'oftentimes in all the synagogues,' and 'strove to make them blaspheme.'"<sup>1</sup> "There was just this one atom of palliation, that 'I did it ignorantly.'"<sup>2</sup> One might say that Paul recognized later that he had blasphemed the character of God, persecuted Christ in particular, and was a wanton and outrageous<sup>3</sup> aggressor to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, The Pastoral Epistles, pp. 53,54.

<sup>2</sup>Guy H. King, A Leader Led (London: Marshall, Morgon, & Scott, 1962), p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Patrick Fairbairn, Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), p. 94.

## USE OF THE WORDS "IGNORANTLY IN UNBELIEF"

Three words stand in the Greek text,  $\delta\iota\alpha\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\eta\varsigma\ \alpha\iota\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ ,  $\alpha\iota\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$  should also be considered here.

The term  $\delta\iota\alpha\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\eta\varsigma\ \alpha\iota\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$  is a substantive, singular, masculine, genitive participle derived from the active verb  $\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omega$ . The use of this term is found in 1 Timothy 3:13 as well as Hebrews 5:2 in the sense "to be ignorant," or "not to know."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the term could be translated, "being ignorant,"<sup>2</sup> or not knowing. The passage in Hebrews 5:2 employs

### VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SECOND MAJOR PROBLEM

#### What Did Paul Mean By "Ignorantly In Unbelief?"

The  $\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omega$  makes it clear in this passage that it is the latter. The term may be interpreted "as able to be understood with the ignorant" or "erring."<sup>3</sup> A more literal rendering would be "the ones who do not know" or "erring" or "the ones who are ignorant and are erring."

The verb  $\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omega$  appears as first person singular, first active indicative of  $\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omega$ , 1 Timothy 3:13. In Philippians 3:17 the word  $\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omega$  appears as a second person plural, first active indicative of the same verb. In both cases the meaning

<sup>1</sup> Abbott-Smith, Greek Lexicon, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Lenski, Timothy, p. 319.

<sup>3</sup> E. C. R. Lenski, The Epistle to the Hebrews with the Epistle of James (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), p. 34.

## USE OF THE WORDS "IGNORANTLY IN UNBELIEF"

These words stand in the Greek text, ἄγνοῶν . . . ἀπιστίᾳ . The verb ἐποίησα should also be considered here.

The term ἄγνοῶν is a nominative, singular, masculine, present participle derived from the active verb ἄγνοέω . The use of this term in I Timothy 1:13 as well as Hebrews 5:2 is to mean "to be ignorant," or "not to know."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the term could be translated, "being ignorant,"<sup>2</sup> or not knowing. The passage in Hebrews 5:2 employs the word ἄγνοοῦσιν which can be either third person plural, present active indicative or dative, plural, masculine, participle, present active. The τοῖς makes it clear in this passage that it is the latter. The phrase may be interpreted "as able to be moderate with the ignorant and erring."<sup>3</sup> A more literal rendering would be "the ones who do not know and are erring" or "the ones who are ignorant and are erring."

The verb ἐποίησα appears as first person singular, first aorist, active indicative of ποιεῶ , I Timothy 1:13. In Philippians 4:14 the word ἐποιήσατε appears as a second person plural, first aorist, active indicative of the same verb. In both cases the meaning

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<sup>1</sup>Abbott-Smith, Greek Lexicon, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, Timothy, p. 519.

<sup>3</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Epistle to the Hebrews and The Epistle of James (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 156.

of the verb is to do, perform, carry out, or execute.<sup>1</sup> The term could be translated "being ignorant I have carried (it) out" in I Timothy 1:13, and "you have performed well" in Philippians 4:14. The KJV translates, "Ye have well done that ye did"<sup>2</sup> in reference to the later verse.

The term ἀπιστία appears in I Timothy 1:13 meaning "want of faith" or "unbelief."<sup>3</sup> In Hebrews 3:12 one may

. . . note that ἀπιστία is the opposite of πιστός which is used in v. 2,5: 'unfaith' and 'faithful'--Jesus and Moses true and 'faithful' to God in every respect in regard to the house (church)--an apostate member of that house faithless and casting away his faith in God. The Greek makes this contrast more effectively than the English which must use 'faithful'--'unbelief.'<sup>4</sup>

"In unbelief then further defines the ground of his ἄγνοια : his ignorance was due to his ἀπιστία . How far that ἀπιστία was excusable is, as Heither observes, left unnoticed."<sup>5</sup> Rather, "it is only implied that the ἄγνοια which resulted from it was such as did not leave him wholly ἀνακολόγητος; οὐ γὰρ φρόνῳ βαλλόμενος ἐπολέμουν, ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ τοῦ νόμου δῆθεν ἀγωνίζομενος --Theod. (cf. Acts 3:17; Rom. 10:2)."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Abbott-Smith, Greek Lexicon, p. 369.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Young, Analytical Concordance to the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), p. 266.

<sup>3</sup>Abbott-Smith, Greek Lexicon, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>Lenski, Hebrews, p. 118. /This will serve as a shortened title throughout./

<sup>5</sup>Ellicott, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup>Ellicott, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 16.

Having discussed the use of these words a better rendering is possible. Therefore, this phrase may be translated more literally, "not knowing I have carried (it) out in unfaith."

Man's sins are classified in two categories: "Sins of Ignorance" and "Sins of Knowledge."<sup>1</sup> In this section this writer will deal with the latter first. On this point, "guilt is measured by the degree of light possessed, or in other words, by the opportunities of knowledge and grace."<sup>2</sup> And the power with which they have been naturally endowed. "The more light and privilege increase responsibility. The heathen are guilty of sins to whom the promises of God have been committed are more guilty than they."<sup>3</sup> In other words the "greater the degree of knowledge, the greater the guilt."<sup>4</sup> There are several passages that deal with the knowledge of sin: Matthew 10:5; Luke 12:47-48; 23:34; Rom. 1:32; 2:12; 7:14; 1 Timothy 1:13, 15, 26. Dealing with all these verses is not possible here. Therefore, the sin of knowledge will center around Romans 7:

<sup>1</sup> Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1943), p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Thiessen, *Systematic Theology*, p. 270. (This will serve as a standard title throughout.)

<sup>3</sup> Augustine Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, Pa.: The Judson Press, 1967), p. 648.

<sup>4</sup> Thiessen, *Systematic Theology*, p. 270.

### A. Sins Against Knowledge View

Knowledge plays an important part in the economy of God. Men are judged "according to the amount of information the individual possesses."<sup>1</sup> This does not fully answer the question, what part does knowledge play in regard to a man's sins?

Man's sins are classified in two categories: "Sins of Ignorance and Sins of Knowledge."<sup>2</sup> In this section this writer will deal with the latter first. On this point, "guilt is measured by the degree of light possessed, or in other words, by the opportunities of knowledge men have enjoyed, and the powers with which they have been naturally endowed. Genius and privilege increase responsibility. The heathen are guilty, but those to whom the oracles of God have been committed are more guilty than they."<sup>3</sup> In other words the "greater the degree of knowledge, the greater the guilt."<sup>4</sup> There are several passages that deal with the knowledge of sin: Matthew 10:15; Luke 12:47,48; 23:34; Rom. 1:32; 2:12 including I Timothy 1:13,15,16. Dealing with all these verses is not necessary. Therefore, the sin of knowledge will center around Romans 1:32.

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Clarence Thiessen, Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), p. 270.

<sup>2</sup>Thiessen, Systematic Theology, p. 270. [This will serve as a shortened title throughout.]

<sup>3</sup>Augustus Hopkins Strong, Systematic Theology (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: The Judson Press, 1967), p. 648.

<sup>4</sup>Thiessen, Systematic Theology, p. 270.

There are three truths that must be pointed out here. The first is that men "have complete inner knowledge from God that their ways deserve and must have Divine condemnation and judgment."<sup>1</sup> "How did they know this? By the law of conscience (see ii. 14) confirmed by the laws of nature (i. 20)."<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:32 says, "who, knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them." "They all know, as a class, and by discernment (οἵτινες ἐπιγινόντες), the decision of God (δικαίωμα) manifested in their moral consciousness, viz. that men who practice (πράσσουσιν) such things as are described . . . are worthy of eternal death."<sup>3</sup> According to Romans 1: 23-25 they go against their conscience to serve idols rather than God.

This leads to the second truth. "They persist in their practices despite the witness of conscience."<sup>4</sup> That is, "from the religious point of view man quenches his intuition of the Divine being, and clothes God in the form of an idol; his punishment in this connection is self-degradation by monstrous impurities."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William R. Newell, Romans Verse by Verse (Chicago: Grace Publications, Inc., 1941), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, The Life and Epistles of St. Paul (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), p. 502.

<sup>3</sup>H. P. Liddon, Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1893), p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>Newell, Romans Verse by Verse, p. 39. [This will serve as a shortened title throughout.]

<sup>5</sup>F. Godet, Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1892), p. 188.

The third and final truth is that "they are in a fellowship of evil with other evil-doers."<sup>1</sup> That is, they "not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them." This has to do more with the conduct. "They not only do ( ποιοῦσιν ) the acts in question but are also . . . in agreement with others who practice the sins ( πράσσουσιν ) habitually."<sup>2</sup> That is, then, "in the moral point of view, man quenches the light of conscience, and as a punishment his moral discernment is so perverted that he puts the seal of his approbation on all the impurities which he shall have condemned and prevented."<sup>3</sup>

The sins of knowledge, then, hold one to be more accountable than the sins of ignorance. "To whom much is given much is required." The nation Israel had the oracles of God committed to their trust, therefore, they have a greater knowledge, and thus a greater guilt. Paul had the oracles of God also, but he was not considered to be among those with knowledge as is explained here. This will be covered in a later section.

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<sup>1</sup>Newell, Romans Verse by Verse, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Liddon, Analysis of Romans, p. 37. /This will serve as a shortened title throughout.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Godet, Romans, p. 188. /This will serve as a shortened title throughout.<sup>7</sup>

### B. Sins of Ignorance View

Ignorance also plays an important role in the economy of God. "If ignorance does not excuse a crime, it at least diminishes the atrocity of it."<sup>1</sup> There are several truths to be considered on this point.

The first is that, "Ignorance is itself part of the result of sin and is itself sinful."<sup>2</sup> Ignorance in itself does not excuse sin. The one who sins in ignorance is nevertheless, guilty before God.

For, though all alike are guilty before God, men's deeds are weighed and degrees of guilt gauged, in scales of unerring equity by the Most High. The record teaches us that sins of ignorance are more capable of pardon than sins against knowledge, committed by one conscious of his wrongdoing, yet resolved to have his way at all costs (cf. Lk. 24:34).<sup>3</sup>

The second truth is that no one is completely ignorant. This point is expressed by Luke 12:48 in "the servant that knew not." This is "not absolute, but relative or comparative ignorance. All, even the heathen, have some light, or else are willingly ignorant, and hence responsible for not knowing."<sup>4</sup>

The third truth is that all sinners are ignorant "to the real nature and the fearful consequences of sin."<sup>5</sup> Luke 23:34 expresses this

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<sup>1</sup>Adam Clarke, The New Testament with a Commentary and Critical Notes (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1884, V), p. 297.

<sup>2</sup>Hiebert, First Timothy, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>Simpson, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup>J. S. Lamar, The New Testament Commentary, Vol. II, "Luke" (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Co., 1890), p. 181.

<sup>5</sup>Lamar, "Luke," p. 27.

fact so well: "Father, forgive them . . . they know not what they do." The "them" refers "not to the soldiers alone, but all who were in any wise implicated in the deed; and we may well believe that the whole world of sinners was included."<sup>1</sup>

The final truth is that ignorance causes the absence of a distinct conviction concerning specific sins. The truth of this fact is expressed in Acts 3:17: "Through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." "The language of Peter concedes to them such a palliation of the deed as consisted, at the time of committing it, in the absence of a distinct conviction that he whom they crucified was the Lord of life and glory . . . but it does not exonerate them from guilt."<sup>2</sup> Concerning Romans 2:12: "For as many as have sinned with law shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law," whether "those that do not have the (Mosaic) Law, or of those living as Jews did, under it, if they choose sin, there is doom."<sup>3</sup> "We cannot fail to observe in Scripture that sins of ignorance are less sinful before God than sins of knowledge."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lamar, "Luke," p. 270.

<sup>2</sup>H. B. Hackett, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1882), pp. 60-61.

<sup>3</sup>Newell, Romans Verse by Verse, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup>J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), pp. 467-468.

#### A. What Was Paul's Sin?

What exactly did Paul's sin involve? He says, "I did it ignorantly in unbelief." What was the nature of that ignorant unbelieving sin? There are several things to consider while dealing with the nature of Paul's sin. There is a positive as well as a negative aspect to the nature of his sin. The first two characteristics considered will be the negative aspects.

The first characteristic of Paul's sin is that it was the sin of his proud heart. "The thing that struck him to the core, as a Jew contradicted with a Jew, was recognition of his own sin—not his own sinfulness, but the downright sinfulness of his proud heart." Paul says that he was ignorant of the consequences of his action while in unbelief.<sup>2</sup> When he saw that Jesus was alive, he saw what a sin-pride, proud, egotistical creature he was, and he fell on his face before the risen Saviour (Acts 9:4-7).

The second characteristic of Paul's sin was his blind will. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, yet the "gentleest beseecher one who will never forget the agonizing and laid upon his greedy of blind will.

Paul is not pleading unbelief in bar of sentence, but in order to obtain the special amnesty accorded him in spite of his foul history for unbelief."<sup>3</sup> The last two characteristics are the negative aspect of

<sup>2</sup>Alan Redpath, The Road to Heaven (Greenwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1960), p. 138.

<sup>3</sup>Jones, The Spirit is to Timothy, pp. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup>Philippians, 34 Philippians, p. 34.

### A. What Was Paul's Sin?

What exactly did Paul's sin involve? He says, "I did it ignorantly in unbelief." What was the nature of that ignorant unbelieving sin? There are several things to consider while dealing with the nature of Paul's sin. There is a positive as well as a negative aspect to the nature of his sin. The first two characteristics considered will be the positive aspect.

The first characteristic of Paul's sin is that it was the arrogance of his proud heart. "The thing that shook him to the core, as he was confronted with the truth of the resurrection, was recognition of his own sin--not his immorality, nor his impurity, but the downright arrogance of his proud heart."<sup>1</sup> "Paul says that he was ignorant of the significance of his actions while in unbelief."<sup>2</sup> When he saw that Jesus was alive, he saw what a stubborn, proud, egotistical creature he was, and he fell on his face before the risen Saviour (Acts 9:4-7).

The second characteristic of Paul's sin was his blind zeal. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, yet the "sentiment bespeaks one who could never forget the arresting arm laid upon his grenzy of blind zeal. . . . Paul is not pleading unbelief in bar of sentence, but in order to acclaim the signal clemency accorded him in spite of his fond zealotry for Judaism."<sup>3</sup> The last two characteristics are the negative aspect of

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<sup>1</sup>Alan Redpath, The Royal Route to Heaven (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1960), p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>Jones, The Epistles to Timothy, pp. 16-17.

<sup>3</sup>Simpson, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 34.

Paul's sin.

The third characteristic was not willful persistence against the light of the Holy Spirit. "Consequently, though he was deeply guilty for that unbelief, repentance was still possible and, subjectively, he stood within the pale of mercy. There is here no thought of extenuating his guilt, but only an explanation of the fact that, being so great a sinner, he could still find mercy. He had not committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost."<sup>1</sup> Paul realized the guilt of his sin, but also realized that since it was not a "sin unto death, he" obtained mercy because "he did what he did ignorantly in unbelief."

The fourth and final characteristic is that it was not a plea of sincerity. "He proved the sincerity of his convictions by persecuting all that contradicted him . . . not only in desire and intention, but in fact, as we know him to have done in Stephen's case, and probably in others."<sup>2</sup>

Paul was sincere about what he did, though sincerely wrong. "At least he had not been a trickster or hypocrite. . . . Palliations do not exculpate culprits, nor sheathe the sword of Justice, nor does the plea of sincerity wipe out a multitude of sins."<sup>3</sup>

Paul admitted the full nature of his sin in I Timothy 1:13:

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<sup>1</sup>Harvey, Commentary on New Testament, p. 25. [This will serve as a shortened title throughout.]

<sup>2</sup>Alexander, Acts, p. 757.

<sup>3</sup>Simpson, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 34.

"Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." He did not shrink back; he took the full blame.

### B. Why Did Paul Obtain Mercy?

In answering this question the reader will note that the answer will be somewhat of an expansion of the previous question. It is necessary to establish the nature of Paul's sin as well as why he obtained mercy, seeing there are a few more considerations to note before the problem is solved.

Why was it that Saul, the persecutor, was singled out to be shown mercy by God? There are no doubt many more reasons why he received mercy than those which will be presented, but they, at least, will be representative.

The first reason Paul was "mercied"<sup>1</sup> was because "his sinful state was maintained in a good conscience."<sup>2</sup> "Unlike that willful ignorance which increases guilt . . . , Paul's ignorance was linked with a 'pure conscience' (II Tim. 1:3), marred only by unbelief."<sup>3</sup> His was a "positive act of sinful disbelief."<sup>4</sup>

The second reason is the very fact that his sin was a sin of unpresumptuous ignorance. It is the opinion of this writer that Paul was referring to Numbers 15:27-29 when he wrote I Timothy 1:13. The statement is, "if any man sin through ignorance . . ." This statement is in

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<sup>1</sup>Kent, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup>Barackman, Epistles to Timothy, p. 21. /This will serve as a shortened title throughout./

<sup>3</sup>Guthrie, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup>Wuest, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 34.

reference to even one man. As in what precedes allusion is had to cases

. . . where the sin in question could be considered as that of the whole congregation, so in the present passage the sin of a single individual, acting on his sole responsibility is treated of, and the appointed sacrifice specified. Such a private person, when guilty of any mistake or neglect in the worship of God through inadvertence, ill example, or infirmity, was required, as soon as he became sensible of his offence, to bring a female goat to the priest, for a sin-offering, the penitent oblation of which would exempt him from any farther penalty.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, for "sins committed unwittingly by individuals, a sin offering would bring forgiveness."<sup>2</sup> Paul was not pleading for mercy, just stating the fact why he was the object of it. "Surely, if our God, in His infinite goodness, has made ample provision even for sins of ignorance, that is no reason why we should coolly shelter ourselves behind the plea of ignorance, when there is the most abundant information within our reach had we only the energy to make use of it."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, one may conclude that Paul "stood substantially on a footing with the Jerusalem sinners who, on and after the Day of Pentecost, were charged by St. Peter with the awful crime of having crucified the Lord of glory, yet with the qualifying circumstance of having done it in ignorance" (Acts 3:17).<sup>4</sup>

The third reason Paul obtained mercy was because his sin was not open rebelling against God. In Numbers 15:30,31 Jehovah warned "the

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<sup>1</sup>George Bush, Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Numbers (New York: Ivison, Phinney & Co., 1863), p. 272.

<sup>2</sup>Irving L. Jensen, Numbers (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), p. 69.

<sup>3</sup>C. H. Mackintosh, Notes on the Book of Numbers (Neptune, New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1965), p. 285.

<sup>4</sup>Fairbairn, Pastoral Epistles, p. 95.

sin of open rebellion

. . . against Him, raising one's hand ('with a high hand') against Him, was a sin of blasphemy and was punishable by death. This sin is the kind that originates in a heart which despises God's Word, and therefore breaks God's commandments openly and fearlessly. God made it plain that souls of this sort would not be tolerated in the land of Canaan--nor any other land.<sup>1</sup>

"It is a truth of solemn import, that every presumptuous sinner is a virtual blasphemer of Jehovah, even though he may never orally profane his name."<sup>2</sup> Paul was not considered a blasphemer of this sort. His sin was not presumptuous.

The fourth and final reason he obtained mercy is just that, his sin was not beyond the realm of God's mercy. He "had not deliberately acted against better convictions, stubbornly hardened his heart, or willfully resisted the Holy Ghost."<sup>3</sup> Paul did not exhaust the mercy of God, nor could he. His

. . . outrageous and violent procedure, however inexcusable in itself, was still not such a kind as placed him beyond the pale of mercy; since he had not, like the worse part of the blaspheming and persecuting Pharisees, sinned against his better convictions (Mark 3:28-30); he had not deliberately set at nought the counsel of God, and defied Heaven to its face.<sup>4</sup>

If Paul had been guilty of any of these faults he would not have received the mercy of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Jensen, Numbers, pp. 69,70.

<sup>2</sup>Bush, Book of Numbers, p. 272. /This will serve as a shortened title throughout.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Hiebert, First Timothy, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup>Fairbairn, Pastoral Epistles, p. 95.

## WAS THIS THE UNPARDONABLE SIN?

In the previous section it was noted that Paul blasphemed against the Godhead. This means that he blasphemed the Holy Spirit.

The question arises naturally, did he commit the unpardonable sin?

There are three passages which deal with the so-called unpardonable sin. Rather than dealing with all three discourses will consider only the first. The other passages are similar in content but Matthew's gospel puts forth more context on this sin. So the first is Matthew 12:

### APPENDIX

12:31-32. "Wherefore, I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven men. . . . whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come."

Paul in a fit of anger blasphemes, and thinks right away that

he has committed this sin. . . . Others regard such a sin as unpardonable. Again, rejecting Christ until death is so regarded. Even some Christians occasionally feel that they are guilty of this sin. Let it be said that a Christian cannot commit the unpardonable sin. For he is already saved by grace through faith in Christ, and has been sealed by the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:13-14).<sup>1</sup>

Beck's notes give an excellent discussion of this passage. It would be well to note his conclusions.

The 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit' consisted in ascribing to Satan the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. v. 24). Such a sin was unpardonable because of the unusual circumstances of their rejection of Christ. This most serious sin of the Pharisees was the

<sup>1</sup>Beck, *Exposition of Matthew*, pp. 152, 153. [This will serve as a shortened title throughout.]

### WAS THIS THE UNPARDONABLE SIN?

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There are three passages which deal with the so-called unpardonable sin. Rather than dealing with all three discussion will revolve around the first. The other passages are similar in content but Matthew's gospel puts forth more context on this sin. So the first is Matthew 12: 31,32: "Wherefore, I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven men . . . whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come." "A man in a fit of anger blasphemes, and thinks right away that

. . . he has committed this sin. . . . Others regard murder as unpardonable. Again, rejecting Christ until death is so regarded. Even some Christians occasionally feel that they are guilty of this sin. Let it be said that a Christian cannot commit the unpardonable sin. For he is already saved by grace through faith in Christ, and has been sealed by the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:13-14).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hobbs, Exposition of Matthew, pp. 152,153. [This will serve as a shortened title throughout.]

climax of their continual denial of the obvious truth that the miracles of Jesus represented the power of God . . . , so that Jesus' message was heaven-authenticated. Their folly in deliberately apostatizing by ascribing to the devil the mighty works of Christ by the Holy Spirit is summarized by our Lord in Mt. 23:13-36 and Lk. 11:52. Anyone who is concerned about his rejection of Christ has obviously not committed this unpardonable sin,<sup>1</sup> and can still come to Christ.<sup>1</sup>

This is the unpardonable sin. Jesus here speaks of internal attitude and its seriousness (cf. Matt. 12:34,35). Involved is the very essence both of good and evil. Prejudice, selfishness, or malice may so cloud a man's judgment as to make, for him, evil good, and good evil. For such there is no hope.<sup>2</sup>

The unpardonable sin has been touched upon in brief to this point. It is necessary, however, to discuss the full nature of this sin in order to bring out a much clearer meaning of what this sin actually is. This raises the question, what is the true nature of the unpardonable sin?

(1) It was not a sin of impulse. The Pharisees did not impulsively utter these words of blasphemy. They came as a result of a long process of opposition to Jesus and His work.<sup>3</sup>

(2) It was a sin of knowledge. They did not speak these words in ignorance. The people had the same knowledge, and attributed the miracle to the power of God. The Pharisees attributed it to Satan.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C. I. Scofield, ed., The New Scofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 1012.

<sup>2</sup>Herschel H. Hobbs, The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), p. 66.

<sup>3</sup>Hobbs, Exposition of Matthew, p. 154.

<sup>4</sup>Hobbs, Exposition of Matthew, p. 154.

(3) It was a sin of deliberate choice.

They had accompanied Jesus and had observed His work. Repeatedly they had spoken against Him. But now they are faced with a choice. Before their very eyes a miracle had been performed. They cannot deny the fact. They can only decide as to its source. They have but two choices, the Holy Spirit of God or else the evil spirit of Satan. So crusted were their hearts in their opposition to Jesus that they had lost the power to discern between good and evil. Or else discerning it, they with full knowledge chose evil and rejected the good. In the words attributed to Satan by John Milton in Paradise Lost (Book IV, line 108) they said,

So Farewell hope, and, with hope, farewell fear,  
Farewell remorse; all good to me is lost.  
Evil, be thou my good.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, one may conclude that to the "one sinning with full consciousness of it and willful persistence in it against the light of the Spirit, mercy becomes impossible (Matt. 12:31ff.; Luke 12:45; 23:34). But in the case of Paul his ignorance left it possible for mercy to be shown so vile a sinner 'without impairing the holiness and righteousness of the Lord.'"<sup>2</sup> "He had not sinned willfully, after receiving a knowledge of the truth, but rather as blinded by ignorance in the darkness of unbelief (Acts 3:17)."<sup>3</sup> Paul did not commit the unpardonable sin, though he did commit sin against the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup>Hobbs, Exposition of Matthew, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup>Edmund J. Wolf, "First Timothy," The Lutheran Commentary (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1896, X), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>H. Harvey, "Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles," An American Commentary on the New Testament, ed., Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1882), p. 25.

ENGLISH PARAPHRASE

1 TIMOTHY 1:13

The one who was before being a blasphemer of the  
Godhead, and a persecutor of Christ and His Church,  
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