

# 1 Timothy 1:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

## Analysis

**Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.** Paul describes his pre-conversion character with three devastating terms. "Blasphemer" (*blasphēmon*, βλάσφημον) indicates he spoke against God, particularly against Christ and His followers (Acts 26:11). "Persecutor" (*diōktēn*, διώκτην) describes his violent opposition to the church (Acts 8:3; 22:4-5; Galatians 1:13). "Injurious" (*hybristēn*, ὑβριστήν) means insolent, arrogant, or violently abusive—Paul wasn't merely mistaken but aggressively harmful.

Yet despite this wickedness, Paul "obtained mercy" (*ēleēthēn*, ἡλεήθην). The passive verb emphasizes divine initiative—God showed mercy; Paul didn't earn or deserve it. This mercy came "because I did it ignorantly in unbelief" (*agnōon epoiēsa en apistia*, ἀγνοῶν ἐποίησα ἐν ἀπιστίᾳ). Paul's ignorance and unbelief don't excuse his sin but explain why mercy rather than judgment met him. He opposed Christ from sincere (though terribly misguided) religious zeal, not hardened rebellion against known truth.

This doesn't mean ignorance eliminates guilt—Paul elsewhere states he was "chief" of sinners (v. 15). Rather, it distinguishes types of sin: those committed in ignorance differ from knowing, willful rejection of Christ (Hebrews 10:26-31). The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31-32) appears to involve

conscious, persistent rejection of clearly revealed truth. Paul's pre-conversion sin, though grievous, wasn't this unpardonable sin because he acted in ignorance.

## Historical Context

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Paul's former life as a persecutor was well known in early Christianity (Acts 9:13-14, 21; Galatians 1:13, 23). This notoriety made his conversion all the more remarkable and his gospel all the more credible—if God's grace could transform Christianity's fiercest enemy into its greatest missionary, it could transform anyone. Paul frequently referenced his past to illustrate grace's power (1 Corinthians 15:9; Philippians 3:6).

As a Pharisee trained under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), Paul zealously sought to preserve Judaism from what he perceived as dangerous heresy. He sincerely believed Christians blasphemed by claiming a crucified man was the Messiah (Deuteronomy 21:23 indicated God's curse on anyone hanged on a tree). His persecution stemmed from religious conviction, not mere malice—which makes his transformation more profound.

The distinction between sins of ignorance and deliberate rebellion against God appears throughout Scripture. The Mosaic law provided atonement for unintentional sins but mandated severe punishment for "high-handed" rebellion (Numbers 15:27-31). Jesus prayed for His crucifiers' forgiveness because they didn't know what they did (Luke 23:34). Yet ignorance doesn't eliminate guilt—all sin deserves judgment, making mercy all the more amazing.

## Related Passages

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**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

## Study Questions

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1. How does Paul's testimony of mercy encourage you regarding your past sins or current struggles?
2. In what areas might you be sincerely but wrongly convinced, requiring humble submission to Scripture's correction?
3. How can churches effectively communicate that no one is beyond God's grace while warning against presumption?

## Interlinear Text

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τὸν πρότερον ὅντα βλάσφημον καὶ διώκτην καὶ  
Who before was a blasphemer and a persecutor and  
G3588 G4386 G5607 G989 G2532 G1376 G2532

ὑβριστήν ἀλλ' ἡλεήθην ὅτι ἀγνοῶν ἐποίησα ἐν  
injurious but I obtained mercy because it ignorantly I did in  
G5197 G235 G1653 G3754 G50 G4160 G1722

ἀπιστίᾳ.  
unbelief  
G570

## Additional Cross-References

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**Acts 8:3** (Parallel theme): As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

**Acts 9:13** (Parallel theme): Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

**1 Peter 2:10** (Grace): Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

**Hebrews 4:16** (Grace): Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

**Acts 3:17** (Parallel theme): And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

**Luke 23:34** (Parallel theme): Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.