

Let's open our Bibles to the book of 1 Timothy as we continue our study through this letter.

And as you are turning there let me remind you of where we are, we are in the opening section of Paul's letter to His young pastoral protege whom Paul left in Ephesus to pastor the church they had planted. And as pastor David reminded us last week the planting of the church at Ephesus was not without drama and conflict, the gospel was spreading such that the economic good of the city was threatened as the idol-makers saw their profit margins shrinking as the church of the Lord Jesus grew. David also reminded us that Paul spoke to the elders of the church at Ephesus that there would be threats to the church at Ephesus, but not of violence and persecution, rather it was corruption of the gospel within the very members of the church at Ephesus.

So then when we read the opening of Paul's letter we are grieved, but not surprised. We can also rejoice because God has not left us without clear help for how we might keep gospel doctrine at the center of our life as a church. We learn as we listen to the apostle instruct young Timothy about matters of first importance.

And as David showed us last week, the young pastor Timothy had tasks and responsibilities before him in order to shepherd this church well. But before he addresses anything dealing with church order, governance or polity, Paul addresses the theological threat to the church, why? Because it doesn't matter how solid the structures and policies of a church are if the gospel truth has shriveled. You can have all the beautiful trellises in your garden that are useless if the vines are dead. A church with good structure and no gospel life has ceased to be a true church, thus Paul's opening words address the gospel roots of the church before he turns to the practical branches of church life.

So follow along now as I read 1 Timothy 1:8-11, and I want to ask a favor of you. After I am done reading I am going to conclude by saying, "This is the word of the Lord", and then we will all respond together with the words, "thanks be to God!"

"⁸ Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹ in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted." (1 Ti 1:8-11)

This is the Word of the Lord...Thanks be to God!

Have you ever heard the expression, "To a hammer...everything is a nail"? We use that expression mostly about people who have one default mode of interaction, mostly impulsive or angry tendencies. Those who don't have any awareness that different situations require different responses and actions. They are the people that talking to them feels like you're trying to hug a porcupine...Its hard to be around people like that, if you're wondering why people turn and walk away from you, perhaps today you've learned something about yourself.

But what makes the expression punchy is that everyone knows certain jobs, certain tasks require the right tool used in the right way. You have to understand the task and what you need to

complete the task. Paul has been laying out the first task for Timothy in Ephesus and the first task is to confront false teaching and false teachers who have a desire to be teachers of God's law, but have no business teaching God's law because, as Paul says in vs. 7, "*7 desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.*" (1 Ti 1:7) Their theological corruption was rooted in corrupt desires, they wanted to be seen, respected, heard and recognized, and they were harming the church.

One of Redeemer's elders was a master carpenter, whose downstairs garage was a full array of mitre saws, table saws, belt sanders, routers, clamps, drill presses — I couldn't tell you what any of those tools were if you showed me a lineup of them, so it would be utterly foolish for me to take him to his shop and then start giving him a tour of the tools and telling him how to use them. Why? Because I have no idea what I'm talking about, but the danger would be if I brought a small child into the shop, and gave them a tour speaking confidently about how to activate the saws, and just let them start cutting, that type of foolishness is not only unwise, but its unbelievably dangerous — this is why Paul is so direct in confronting the false teachers.

They were misusing the law of God, they were giving instruction in the church about God's word, yet they did not understand God's law at all. This is the problem.

Now, let me pause to address you teachers of First Baptist, particularly you who teach our children and youth. Are you diligent to study the Word before you teach it to others? Do you make it a point to have a grasp on the Scriptures before you ever stand, or sit to instruct others? When we entrust our children to you, this is what we expect of you...and if that seems heavy, listen to James 3:1, "*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*" (Jas 3:1) — Now before anyone starts writing their Sunday School teacher resignation letter, listen to the encouragement Paul gives at the beginning of our text... "*8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully,*" (1 Ti 1:8) There's a play on words there, to use the law lawfully he must expose the unlawful use of the law.

To be clear Paul's references to the Law is shorthand for the Old Testament, particularly the Torah, or first 5 books of the Bible. And as David pointed out last week, this portion of Scripture was the false teachers playground where they pontificated about genealogies and myths speaking absolute nonsense that was confusing the church and corrupting the very message of the gospel — but Paul wants Timothy and us to know that the law of God is not the problem its the misuse of the law thats the problem.

Thats the danger with false teaching isn't it? Many of us would laugh if someone said hey actually Judas Iscariot is the real savior of the world, put your faith in him. That's laughable because its absurd...but the danger of false teaching is not the absurd, but the almost correct. Maybe you know the name Arius, one of church history's first heretics who argued that Jesus was the first created being, that he is not the eternal son of God. He did not deny that Jesus was God's son, nor did he deny that Jesus was divine, it's just that He argued Jesus isn't eternal. To untrained ears Arius made a lot of sense, and his descendants are still with us 1700 years later in the Jehovah's Witnesses.

So Paul isn't simply engaged in theological nit-pickery here the stakes are high it is nothing less than the misuse of God's word among God's people. The stakes could not be higher because if the gospel is corrupt sinners are doomed to hell, but if the gospel is made clear sinners are brought to repentance and faith.

Paul here helps Timothy and perhaps even provides hope for these false teachers to repent of their foolishness. The Law of God is good Paul says, if one uses it lawfully.

Well, how then do we use the Law of God lawfully, how should Christians use God's law, this is where understanding how Paul is using words becomes the key to unlocking what he is saying, so he says, in vs. 9, "*9 understanding this,*" this referring back to the goodness of the law and its right use "*that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient*" (1 Ti 1:8-9) — Paul gives us the "who" that the Law of God is given.

Paul says that the law is not laid down for the "just," meaning the justified, the ones who have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ, or Christians. Now before we assume then that we can simply tear the Old Testament out of our Bibles, we know Paul loves and believes the Old Testament, he quotes from it relentlessly in his letters and emphasizes its importance for godly living.

So what does Paul mean by this? Well without getting too far into the weeds He is combatting the notion that anyone can attain righteousness through keeping the law. If we are in Christ we have been justified, we are free from the law in that we do not have to keep the law to earn God's love, affection or care. This is what Paul wrote in Romans 3:20, "*19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*" (Ro 3:19-20) But these false teachers seemed to be making the argument that you can be justified through keeping the law, and their new rules which we gate a taste of in ch.4 where we see they were teaching that people shouldn't get married, eat certain foods or consume alcohol. That your right standing for God somehow depends upon you...and not the Lord Jesus Christ.

Again, the problem isn't the Law, but how it is being used in the church by the false teachers. These false teachers were claiming an acceptance from God through keeping the Law, they said you can actually attain righteousness through keeping the Law of God.

But we can never keep the Law of God, and the gospel tells us we don't have to, Jesus did it for us. Jesus fulfilled the law, keeping it perfectly and then taking upon himself the penalty for every time we broke the law of God. This is the good news that we proclaim, but the good news that we rejoice in, that we celebrate is first bad news.

Paul then turns to who the Law was established for, the Law was "established" or "made" for sinners — He then proceeds to give 14 categories of sinful actions and lifestyles. Now what strikes us from this list is how comprehensive it is. Just look again at the categories:

1. lawless and

2. disobedient, for the
3. ungodly and
4. sinners, for the
5. unholy and
6. profane, for
7. those who strike their fathers and mothers,
8. for murderers,
9. ¹⁰ the sexually immoral,
10. men who practice homosexuality,
11. enslavers,
12. liars,
13. perjurers,
14. and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, (1 Ti 1:9–10)

If you somehow look at that list and feel good about where you stand, I think you are missing the point Paul is making, or your reading with your eyes closed. What these descriptions show us is the nature of the law as a tool for exposure... Many have said this before, but it bears repeating. The Law of God is a window through which we see the glorious perfections of our holy God. The commands of God reveal his perfect purity to us, He bears none of the marks of this list. On the other hand the Law of God is a mirror for it reveals who we are and shows us the imperfections and how unlike God we are, and what's more our guilt before God. This list hits everyone somewhere...if your like me I'm on this list more than once.

Now if you are here this morning and you can see yourself on that list, perhaps multiple times, ***what will you do about that? What if you see your name written in these sins?***

Friend, hear me, that's why God gave his law, so that we might become aware of our desperate position before Him, but that's not all the Lord has given, He sent Jesus His own son to keep the law that you could not keep and then to bear your penalty for sin in His own death on the cross so that if you would repent of your sin and trust in Christ you can be declared righteous before God, receiving the righteousness of Christ as he takes your sin, this is what Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 5:21, *"²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (2 Co 5:21) Dear sinner, you can be forgiven by God and freed from the penalty of the law.

Now, this list no doubt troubles even we who are followers of Jesus, maybe we see not only our name in this list, but the names of those whom we love...Brother/Sister the power of God is not limited in salvation. The Lord can save any guilty sinner, he saved you didn't he? So this list drives us to our knees in prayer for sinners doesn't it? We pray to a God who is the God of salvation. There is no soul that has gone too far from the reach of God's mercy and grace. So cry out to Him, seek the Lord's mercy for the sinners we want to see saved for our mothers & fathers, sisters & brothers, sons and daughters all who need to see the hope that is found in Jesus alone.

And let's be honest enough to name sin what the Bible names sin, this passage cuts across political lines doesn't it? Paul is not foggy on human sexuality, but clearly condemns sex outside of marriage, pornography & homosexuality — everything that many claim as freedom in our

society. Equally, Paul condemns enslavers, so he would oppose monuments erected in honor of people who bought and sold humans. Paul's ready to offend everyone, which kind of makes sense with the gospel doesn't it?

The Law of God exposes our deep need for rescue, and praise God we have rescue by the Father in the person of the Son, applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit. We must be clear on what is actually sin, so we can be crystal clear on what Christ has accomplished for us.

But, the most striking statement to me from that list is the last category at the end of vs. "*and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,*" — At first glance this seems like a catch all, and a necessary one for us to have...that no one is innocent, all of us are condemned before God's perfect law. But notice that Paul equates behavior with sound doctrine...

Many of us have been conditioned, or have conditioned ourselves to separate belief and practice. We categorize doctrine in one category and life in another. Paul doesn't permit the splitting of what we believe from how we live. So the reality is this, your day to day life is a plain declaration of what you truly believe.

These false teachers denied what was true from Scripture not only in their teaching, but in their living. Isn't this why we are so horrified when pastors collapse in moral failure and sin? Why does that trouble us so? Because we rightly expect pastors, while not perfect, to be examples of godliness. And Paul will exhort Timothy of this later in ch. 4 saying, "*11 Command and teach these things. 12 Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.*"(1 Ti 4:11-12)... and "*16 Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.*"(1 Ti 4:16) Godliness in the life of Christians is not just what we know, but how we live, and we ought to live in keeping with the gospel we claim to believe.

To restate what Paul says positively, we could say it this way, we should do whatever is in keeping with sound doctrine. Life and doctrine lining up with God's Word.

For Paul to live contrary to the Law of God was to live contrary to the gospel he had been entrusted with, Paul wasn't declaring that we should forget God's law, but rather that we recognize that God's Law is good and to use God's law, lawfully to point sinners to the salvation found in Jesus Christ and for Christians to use God's law as a guide.

Our lives should nor be marked by sinful lawlessness or by extra commands and speculations, ***Our lives*** should be marked by obedience to God's Word.

You see Paul's conclusion is not that Christians have no use for the law of God, that's absurd, of course we need God's law, how else would we know how to live in a lawless world. The difference is in how we approach God's law, as Christians we do not approach obedience to God's law to earn acceptance, we seek to obey God's law because we have already been accepted through Christ. We have been brought into God's presence through the person and work of Jesus and so our obedience to the law is joyful response, not self-salvation.

J.C Ryle sums this up far better than I can, listen to what he said in his classic book *Holiness*, “*There is no greater mistake than to suppose that a Christian has nothing to do with the law and the Ten Commandments, because he cannot be justified by keeping them. The same Holy Ghost who convinces the believer of sin by the law, and leads him to Christ for justification, will always lead him to a spiritual use of the law, as a friendly guide, in the pursuit of sanctification.*”¹

What Ryle is saying is what Paul declares in the final verse of our text that we live, “*in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.*”(1 Ti 1:11) — The gospel that Paul was entrusted with is the same gospel we have been entrusted with. The false teachers were departing from the gospel in their misuse of the Scripture. Their departure from the truth actually distorted the gospel and veiled the glory of God.

But when the gospel is preached with our mouths and backed up in our lives we too declare the glory of the blessed God for, like Paul, we as Christians lay hold of the gospel and proclaim it, and like Paul we defend the gospel against error and perversion.

Do you realize that you have a job in this church that is greater than whatever service team your on? You and I have been given a sacred trust by God. As a body of believers we have been entrusted with the greatest treasure in the universe, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have been redeemed by Jesus you have been commissioned as a soldier in defense of the truth of the gospel. We have the privilege of waging war against the evil one and for the sake of each other in the great fight of faith.

To a hammer everything is a nail, but when you have a nail before you the appropriate tool is a hammer. Paul lays out the problem of false teaching in the church and misuse of the Law, and Paul takes the tool of God’s Law and shows us how to use it properly and in doing so he confronts the error of the false teachers and strengthens the church through sound doctrine, and he does this because the defense and preservation of the gospel is the first and most important need in the church at Ephesus. And beloved its our first and most important need here, to proclaim Jesus as the only hope of salvation as revealed in the Scriptures that we would be a people marked by the glory of our blessed God, and to live for his glory until he returns or calls us home.

And one way we remember the truths of the gospel together is to sing them, so lets stand together and sing, “In Christ Alone”

¹ J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties and Roots* (London: William Hunt and Company, 1889), 39–40.