

1 Timothy 1:8-11 (But reading from v. 1)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, 2 To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

3 As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, 4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. 5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

6 Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, 7 desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

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. (ESV)

- Why we love law.
- Why we hate the law
- Why the law is "good."

This letter is the only letter that Paul writes except for the letter to the Galatians, where Paul opens the letter without giving thanks to God for the congregation.

And that's notable, because as one pastor has said, "you can be the most screwed up congregation in the world, with every imaginable problem and every imaginable sin, and when the Apostle Paul writes to you, he'll say, 'Oh, I thank God for you.' 'I *praise* God for you.'" But not here.

Think on this for a moment: Why is it that a church can be filled with all kinds of sin – in Corinth there is a man who is having conjugal relations with his father's wife, his stepmother – and on top of that, the church is tolerant of it... and yet Paul still starts his letter off to the Corinthians by saying, "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus." And if he can thank God for them, what must be happening in Galatia – or at this time in Ephesus – that would cause Paul to NOT thank God for them?

The answer is, it must be something even worse. It would have to be *far* worse, right? And it is.

Paul knows that there is going to be heaps of conflict in every church. He knows there is going to be heaps of *sin* in every church. He's not surprised by that! Paul knows that God *only* calls sinners to himself, and it's only sinners who are saved by grace. God will call the sexually immoral, the idolaters, the adulterers, men who practice homosexuality, thieves, the greedy, drunkards – you name it, God will call them. God has called us! And when someone or a church falls back into those behaviors, Paul will **STILL** thank God for them!

So what is happening here at Ephesus? The problem is not that the heaps of sin are any higher here. The problem here is the *solution for* sin. The problem is not that there are sinners in the church any more than there are sick people in a hospital. Hospitals are *for* sick people, right? No, the problem is that if this church in Ephesus *is* a hospital, and if there are sick people there – sinners – then there better be able doctors with the right treatment. And at this church, like the one in Galatia, this is the problem: The treatment – the gospel – is missing.

This is why Paul starts out his Galatian letter by saying, "Grace and peace to you ...I am *astonished* that you are so quickly *deserting* him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a *different* gospel..."

And this is essentially what Paul says here to Timothy: "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, *remain* at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons *not to teach any different doctrine.*"

Do you see that? The reason Paul is so angry and so unthankful is that Paul can THANK God for sinners in the church, but he will NOT thank God for those that twist God's treatment for sin.

Let's put this another way: Timothy wants to move on, and Paul urges him to remain. Why? It's not because Timothy couldn't stand the pagans or the barbarians that were abusing Christians or the church. It wasn't because pagans or Roman authorities were coming into the church and asking him to defend his position on the person of Jesus or prove that Jesus is Messiah. No, Timothy can't stand it there because these people – the *Christians, believers inside* the church – have somehow twisted the gospel. Twisted it so hard that the gospel... isn't gracious anymore. The gospel is not...good news anymore. They've taken something that *cannot* change or heal the broken sinner – the law – and are using it to do precisely that: rid themselves of the disease of sin. And Paul knows it will not work.

I have never seen a pastor – a Timothy – leave a church because there were too many non-Christians coming! I have never seen a pastor leave a church because there were too many questions about who the "real" Jesus is. I have never seen a pastor leave a church because they were pastoring in a place or culture where almost no one believed in God. They never leave because of things outside the church, but because of things inside the church. (Coral Ridge: robe, politics, changing some staff members) It could be issues of homeschooling, how someone is given the sacraments. I've even heard that whether one chooses to breastfeed or not was a reason!

This is apparently right where Timothy was. And he apparently has written or contacted his father in the faith, Paul, and said something like, "Dad, I want to come home. I can't take these people anymore." But Paul writes back and says, "Timothy, I urge you to stay."

Why? Because Paul knows that when people start conflicts in a church over church politics, or over social politics or over childrearing or the color of the carpet, the gospel has disappeared, as that which is most important. Something has become a new law, and whatever that is, it's another gospel that not the gospel at all. In fact, what's happened is that they have shifted from

sin as the illness, and made some *behavior* the illness for which people need a cure. Look at verse 8: Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it *lawfully*...

Now what happens when a church focuses on something other than Jesus for a season? I mean, when a church is remodeling, what is all that wrong with spending six weeks on choosing a new carpet or deciding what political candidate to endorse? Well it becomes a problem, Paul says in v. 6, when these debates wander off "into vain discussion." These folks desire "to be teachers of the law" on some issue without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions." What's he saying?

He's saying this. We love the law because we think we are good, and that we can do the law that we are preaching! The reason we love the law is that we don't think, now that we are Christians who come to church, that we are sick any more. (Imagine a guy in a hospital who says I'm not sick) *We* think we are righteous – "it's *that guy* over there," or "*she's* got the problem, not me."

I hope you see how this ruins the rest of the bible, and as Paul clearly thinks – ruins his entire ministry! And I hope you see how it actually kills your faith in Christ! Because Paul has been busy saying I am the WORST of sinners. I was a blasphemer. A persecutor of the church. I was sick – no I was *dead* – and Jesus raised me from the most final and violent of illnesses. Death itself.

If you do a search – an English bible search – for the word "trustworthy," you'll see that the word appears 6 times in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus. And every place it appears it is a lot like the way it is used down in v. 15:

15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

He uses the word "trustworthy" for the very reason that he knows people don't trust him on this! As if people we're reading his letters and not believing the gospel was really that effective. As if the good news about Jesus wasn't really all that good. "After all, we have the law! And we're pretty nice." So Paul says, "You better believe it: this is why the gospel is so good.... *Because I was so bad.*" Because *you* are far worse than you think you are.

But not only that. Paul says that your sin *is* the reason Christ Jesus came into the world. He doesn't offer another reason. It's not, "Christ Jesus came into the world to show people how to be nicer. The law CAN do that." No the incarnation was to *save*.

We have to move on, but the reason we love the law is because we think *doing it*, is what keeps us saved. It's what keeps us right with God. And teaching this will destroy a church. Because teaching law and morality to hopeless sinners will only show that they are sinners all the more. There is no hope there.

Friends, we have to stop aspiring to be teachers of our own personal morality, politics and behavior. Aspire to be a Christian! Good Christians make good teachers, but good teachers don't always make good Christians. Paul says, I was made a teacher by the command of God,

but these folks were self-made teachers... and were becoming horrible Christians, preaching another message.

So, we love the law because we think we are righteous. Now second, we hate the law.

This sounds contradictory, right?

Paul says in verse 8, "Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless..." We love the law, you see, as long as it's for the other guy. For the *lawless* other guy.

How do you know you hate the law? You can see it by how people read the bible. And a lot of us read the bible like we choose crocheted sofa pillows and bible verse cross-stitch pictures. Just once I'd like to go into a home with a bible verse on a pillow that says, "I am the chief of sinners." Or go into a bathroom to wash my hands and see the verse over the towel rack that says, "There is none righteous, not even one."

Why? Because we don't like those passages!

Mark Driscoll once said that all of his arguments – these are his words, not mine – "with heretics, freaks, nut jobs and false teachers are over the Old Testament. Particularly the law." Paul says, that part of your bible – the law – the Old Testament, is good, provided you know how to use it. It's good the way that a hammer is good provided you use it to pound nails and not your neighbor.

We know we shouldn't hate the law, so we try to like it by using it to pound others. It's either always for someone else or applies only to another time, era or dispensation. But it's not about me. The law may have brought us to faith, but now it's for everyone else!

How many of you read through your bibles – you happen to be in the Old Testament – and you're looking to feel better, you're looking for encouragement, you're looking for a good word, and page after page, you think, "I feel terrible." This page in **Isaiah** says, "I'm awful." And I flip the page again, and I see, "I'm awful." So then I turn to the next book of the bible, and I get a few verses into **Jeremiah**, and it says "I'm awful," too! And you're thinking, "I see a trend here, a theme..." And you come away thinking, "I'm terrible." No, you're biblical. NOW you're reading the bible correctly! Now you can say along with Paul, "I am the chief of sinners. Christ came to save *me*."

How do I know I am hearing a false teacher? When he teaches from the Old Testament and he says, "Do this, do this, and do this." And that's it. Those are teachers of the law. When you have a Christ-less proclamation of the law or the Old Testament, you will feel absolutely awful and hopeless. A *real* bible teacher will say, what this means is, "Do this, do this, and do this," but it all points to Jesus as the only one that could.

And THAT is when you will hear the gospel. That as Jack Miller used to say, you are far worse than you thought you were, but that in Christ you are far more loved than you ever hoped,

simultaneously. You see, we need double sided pillows that say on the one side, Liar, and on the other side Jesus is the truth. Pillows that on one side say, "Sexual offender" and on the other, "Jesus saves the adulterer."

Again, Mark Driscoll says, "False teachers care about what you do, and real Christian teachers care about who you love."

Friends, the reason we hate the law, is because we are receiving it without Christ in view.

Now lastly, why the law is good. A little complicated, but in the end, Paul makes it easy.

Paul says, "Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless ..." Paul is turning from all of these false uses of the law, and now wants us to focus on right use. And then he provides a list. A very famous list. It's a summation of the Ten Commandments. I don't have time to explore it, but Jack DeBardeleben is summing up our preaching on the commandments tonight at our evening service, and taking us to the Lord's Table. But look at the parallels: v. 9 - those who strike their fathers and mothers, of course, break the fifth commandment. Murderers clearly break the sixth commandment. The sexually immoral and men who practice homosexuality break the seventh commandment against adultery because all sex outside of marriage that is between a man and a woman is adultery. Enslavers are the worst kinds of thieves (the 8th commandment) that there are – they don't just steal stuff, they steal people. This is one of the verses William Wilberforce reflected on that started a movement of Christians that would end slavery. Liar and perjurers clearly break the ninth commandment, and so on. What is Paul's point? That the law is not contrary to sound doctrine, but leads to it.

When we were first married, we celebrated a delayed honeymoon by driving across the country, and then back again. And there was a place out in the Midwest where there was a long stretch of new highway. It was so new that there were no place names or exit signs for miles. All that was posted were the signs that they always have on hand when a road is built. These are always the first signs to go up. Signs that say stop. Signs that command you to yield. Signs that put limits on your speed. Signs about hazardous materials. Signs that say, "Dangerous when wet."

Now these are all important, and good signs. These are good signs if they are used for the right purpose – to help you get somewhere. But you see, without the signs they had not yet made that actually tell you about the good places you want to go or where you are – "50 miles to Seattle" or "Welcome to Washington State," it is a very dreary drive. Some of the Christians in Ephesus were making the law central, and following the law the message of their teaching. And that, Paul says, is like sending people on a drive where all of the signs only tell them where *not* to go. The law is very good for this. It's necessary. It WILL keep you from danger. But the goal of the law is not goodness. The goal of the law is the gospel! Think about it. What does the gospel tell you? It tells you that you have no ability to keep the law. It tells you that moralism – getting holy on your own – is undoable.... And yet the folks in Timothy's church are saying you *can* do it! The law shouldn't drive you to speculations, it should drive you to *Jesus*.

Here is Paul's implication: If you want to teach the law, fine. But if that's all you do, you presume your hearers are *only just* this sort of people: lawless, disobedient, ungodly, unholy and profane. You see what Paul is saying. It's *just* as bad to go into a home and see only *that* side of the pillow! We are, as Luther said, simultaneously sinners AND saints.

Back in March of 2006 out in Lodi, California, a city dump truck backed into Curtis Gokey's car. The car was damaged so badly that Gokey sued the city of Lodi, for \$3,600.

The catch? Curtis Gokey was *driving* the city dump truck that crunched his personal car. That's right. He backed into his own car. He even admitted the accident was his fault.

The court dropped the lawsuit, stating that Gokey could not sue himself. And that is our problem, if the law is used for anything other than accusing us or leading us to one who can rescue us, then it won't work. We'd like to use the law to shift blame on someone else, but that is what the law is for – the lawbreaker!

Friends, the problem in Ephesus, as much as it is in the church today, is that there will always be people in the church that will tell you to do things for God. They may be of the liberal stripe, where the church looks like the Peace Corps. They do so many good deeds for people in need that you think they must be perfect. But a real bible teacher tells you that it's God who saves you. God needs to save the church more than he needs a church to save his people!

There are other churches of a conservative stripe, and they are always telling people to do things for God too. It's usually a certain kind of right behavior, but sometimes it's a right feeling or emotion, or even a level of success. But a real bible teacher tells you not what you are to do for God, but what God has done for you.

You see, those are the signs that are missing in Ephesus and so often missing today. It's the sign of the cross. The sign of what *God* has done – that is what will change you. It's not a simple sign of don't, but a sign that says, "He did." *That* will change you. Transport you. That's what will cause you to love God, and as you love him for what he's done, Paul says you find yourself living out the law more and more because whoever follows the law enjoys the gospel of the glory of the blessed God! Jesus says if you love me, you will obey me. Love comes first! Obedience is a consequence of loving the Lord, and you can only love the Lord if you know he first loved you!

Friends, this is why Paul couldn't thank God for this group. They were missing God's love. The law should have driven them to see the depth of their sin, and that should have driven them to the cross.

Here is what this means. If you are worried about someone else's obedience or your own – that's okay as far as it goes. But that doesn't go very far. That kind of worry only focuses on what you need to be safe *from*. It only worries about danger and not where you really need to go. "Worry" about Jesus... and obedience will follow. You need Jesus more than you need right behavior because right behavior will never give you Jesus!

If you've turned from Christ – turned from Christ IN the church (!), where other things in your Christian life are more important than Jesus – turn back. There is no other road that gives peace or leads to heaven. There is only Christ crucified.

Let's pray.