

The Law and The Gospel

I Timothy

Downtown and Lexington

April 26, 2020

Hey church family. Happy Sunday to you. We are in week 2 of our series on the book of 1 Timothy. We're talking about the church - the family and household of God - what it should be, how it should function, all of that. We're going to be in 1 Timothy 1:6-17 this morning.

Recap from last week:

Let me recap last week for us → Paul is writing a letter to Timothy and the church he is pastoring in the city of Ephesus. And last week he started his letter right out of the gate by urging Timothy to stay at Ephesus for the specific purpose of defending the truth from false teachers teaching false doctrines. And he encouraged Timothy that the goal behind defending and teaching the truth is that the people of God would be built up into a people of love.

This week → We're going to get into the specifics of the false teaching Timothy is dealing with - He has a gospel issue on his hands. Let's start in verse 6 of 1 Timothy 1...

1 Timothy 1:6-7

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.

We see in verses 6-7 Paul says that these false teachers are mishandling "**The law**".

"The law" - here refers to the **Mosaic law**. It's the commandments of God given in the Old Testament to his people - the nation of Israel. It's the laws and regulations set up for the Jewish people by God before Christ to show them how they are to organize their lives in such a way that they are set apart as the people of God. These laws were summarized in the 10 commandments, but there were actually some 600+ laws and commands..

What was happening in the church is that certain teachers had come in, and they had become obsessed with what Paul calls "myths and endless genealogies". They are bringing all of these aspects of Judaism that were extra-Biblical, that were more than required or taught by the Old Testament texts, and they were adding and twisting and doing what they wanted with these Jewish teachings, particularly aspects of the Old Testament Israelite law.

And Paul calls them out on it - he says they don't know what they're saying and what they're talking about when they say those things. They don't have a clue. They're just guessing and babbling and don't know anything.

Then what Paul does with the rest of the chapter is so interesting - he's going to defend the Truth against these false teachers, and he does so in two ways.

First, he's going to teach about the proper use of the law - how should those who live after Jesus, and after his life, death, and resurrection, think about the law? How should New Testament Christians think about the Old Testament commands of God? Do we just disregard it and throw it out entirely? Do we have to follow every single one? What do we do with the law?

Second, he's going to use his own story to illustrate and show how the law and grace work together.

Let's start with what Paul teaches about the law in verse 8:

I Timothy 1:8

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully,

Paul starts with acknowledging → This shouldn't be any new information. We know the law is good. We know that it has its purposes...IF you know how to use it. If you know the proper way to approach the law. We don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. The law is good, just have to use it correctly.

I Timothy 1: 9-11

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.

If you read through the New Testament, you will find there are three ways New Testament Christians, followers of Jesus on this side of the cross, approach the law. It's often referred to by theologians as the **"threefold use of God's law"**:

1. To restrain sin.

In other words the law works to curb sin. It has some amount of restraint of sin - for both Christian and non-Christian alike. It doesn't change hearts, but it does help restrict behavior.

For example, we have a law in this country that you shouldn't murder. That law actually helps restrict people from killing other people. Now, granted there are still folks who will disobey the law, but there's also a whole group of people that this law actually helps restrict their behavior.

They don't do something because it is against the law. God's law works in a similar way. It helps curb wrong behavior.

2. To show God's design for life.

One commentator says - "As guidelines for changed lives." When we put our faith in Jesus, we are given new hearts and the Holy Spirit lives inside of us. And so we are drawn to the law of God, to meditate on His Word and to study it and apply it to our lives. We see in the law what God desires for His people, and we, as Christians are guided towards paths of righteousness and life. As the Psalm says it's a lamp for our feet and a light for our path.

It shows how we are to live as the people of God.

The third use, and the one Paul is actually referencing here:

3. To expose our sinfulness.

While God's law tells us - hey hold up, don't do this, do this...eventually, we give in. That leads to the third use of the law → **To prove to us we aren't holy before God. It's a mirror.** It exposes what is true about all of us - that we are sinners. That we rebel against God.

False teachers are bringing in these parts of the Jewish law and saying → You have to do these things to be right with God. We're gonna see Paul address this again in 1 Timothy 4:1-5. Follow this. Do this, follow this and you'll be holy and clean before God.

And Paul emphatically responds → Actually no! Here's the point of the law - it's given for lawbreakers. It's given for "the lawless and disobedient". **It's given to show us - it doesn't matter how hard we try, it doesn't matter how much good we think we've done, all of us fall short.** We don't measure up.

Pauls says it this way in **Romans 3**,

Romans 3:10-12, 20

None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one....For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his [God's] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

The Law is a mirror to show us we don't measure up.

Now you might be thinking - well Tim that sounds kind of harsh. No one does good? I do lots of good. I serve those in need. I'm generally a pretty kind and patient person. I don't have road rage that often. I'm raising my kids the best I can. I love my spouse. I'm a good friend. I don't date losers or jerks. I try to give some of my money away and be generous.

****I'm not saying that you don't do any of those good things.**

But what's wrong with this line of thinking is that we think we set the standard for "good enough". And we love to move the target to whatever we are hitting.

To be honest, even when we set the goodness standard, we don't even live up to that. If I recorded you, every time you said someone should or should not do something and then I used your own standards to measure you, you would fail your own test. We wouldn't even measure up to our own standards...And here's an even bigger problem for us...we don't set the standard for goodness.

God does. God sets the standard. **And not only does he set the standard, He Himself is the standard. God's holiness, God's goodness is the bar** - and the law shows us that none of us can match that standard. It's a mirror that gives so much clarity to our lived reality → We do not measure up.

Just think about the 10 commandments alone. The Bible, in James 2:10, says if you break one commandment you're guilty as if you've broken them all. Let me just give you a couple of them, see how you're doing:

1. **(10) You shall not covet.** Have you ever wanted what someone else has (marriage, paycheck, bank account, kids, singleness) because you believe what you have isn't enough and what they have would make you happy?
2. **(9) You shall not lie.** You ever exaggerated a story to impress someone? You ever shift the truth to avoid hurting someone's feelings?
3. **(5) Honor your father and mother.** There's proof your wonderful kids are also sinners.
4. **(1) You shall have no other Gods before me.** You ever love anything more than God? You ever desire anything more than God?

I mean, it takes me two seconds to read the law of God and realize - welp. I'm out. Not happening.

We are all tempted to think based on our standard of goodness that we're doing okay. We're hanging in there. **But listen, when it comes to God's goodness, we're not even on the radar. We're not even on the map or in the same universe. It's so totally other and different.**

Now at this point, it might come with some frustration, because we typically have an over-inflated view of ourselves. So rather than letting the law be a mirror to show us that we and our sin are the problems, we start to view the law as the problem. We start to view the standard of goodness as the problem. We start to think things like → *"Well if this is the goodness I have to reach, and I see I can't reach it, then I have to shift the target. Surely God will grade on a curve, and then if I remove this law I don't like and this law I don't really want to follow, or just elevate the ones I'm good at and remove the ones I'm bad at - then everything will be ok."*

And we twist it - instead of us and our sin being the problem, the law becomes the problem. The law becomes the enemy. **But the law is not the enemy. The law is a gift.**

This law God has given → it's a reflection of His character. It's an outpouring of His goodness. Not to harm us or to hold us back or to keep us from doing what we want and having fun or whatever. His law is good. It's delightful.

He's God. He created the world. He knows the best way we should live. He knows how things are supposed to go. **And in His goodness He's shown us - "hey, this is how life is supposed to be lived!"** In *Deuteronomy 6*, right after giving the 10 commandments, we read that God gave this law **"for our good always"**.

And in seeing how life is supposed to be lived we realize - we can do good things, sure. But we don't even get close to God. We feel the weight of the curse of sin affecting everything - our thoughts, our actions, our deeds, our motivations - all of it.

The law is a mirror, but the problem with a mirror is that it can show you what's wrong, but it can't fix it or clean it for you. It can show you what's wrong but it can't do anything about it. We need something, or rather someone, else.

Let's go to Paul's story in verse 12,

I Timothy 1:12-13

12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, 13 though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.

Here's Paul's story:

- Paul was a zealot for the Jewish faith.
- This is what we read in **Philippians 3:4-6: "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless."**
- Paul was a zealous dude. He was so zealous he did whatever it took to stamp out these followers of Jesus.

His argument in Philippians 3:6 is basically - if anyone could be declared righteous by following the law, it's me. I could.

But Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:13 - in the middle of me being this guy - that's where God found me. I was a blasphemer, I was a persecutor, I was a violent opponent of God - **thinking the**

whole time that I was doing the right thing. Thinking the whole time I was fulfilling this standard of goodness that was going to earn me right standing before God.

Paul's story is a case study of why good intentions don't matter. You can have all of the best intentions, doesn't mean you're in line with what God calls you to.

- So you can think → Yeah I know God says that's wrong, but I have really good intentions. But like my heart is good behind it and it's for a good reason.

Paul had wonderful intentions. In his heart he thought he was doing exactly the right thing. And he was wrong. Separated from God. Condemned by God. Enemy of God.

But God met him in the midst of his wrong actions and ignorant intentions...**Verse 13...I want you to hear this verse:**

But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Everyone. Everyone. Secular/religious, ancient/modern, eastern/western - everyone who sees the brokenness of the world and the brokenness of their own soul - have the same response to the problem.

We take action and we try to fix it.

- We try to fix it with religion, we try to fix it by throwing off religion.
- We try to fix it with more laws, we try to fix it with less laws.
- We try to fix it with therapy, counseling. Self-help books. Workout and diet plans.

The "good news" the world tries to offer for our deepest and truest need, the hope every other religion or worldview tries to offer - **is to do. To earn. To prove.** You know what you need to do?....

- Give more to the poor.
- Improve yourself.
- Become a better person.
- Learn from your mistakes.
- Obey the pillars.
- Empty yourself.
- Connect with the divine.

You have to be the one to fix it! **We try to be good on our own.**

But then here comes the good news of Jesus and it's absolutely, categorically different from what all other people think.

We always want to say go and do. The gospel of Jesus says come and receive.

Paul says → I **received** mercy. I **received** grace.

Receive! Receive!

Paul says → I went from trying to earn, trying to do enough, trying to prove myself, trying to be good enough, trying to fix it all, to a posture of receiving. And look at what happens → ***The grace of Jesus overflowed with faith and love.***

How shocking is this beauty of the gospel? That salvation is a gift to be received.

The law is good if it's used lawfully - as a mirror into our own sinfulness and brokenness. As proof that you, that I, that none of us can measure up. So we must receive.

Then Paul summarizes his teaching and his testimony in verse 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.

Jesus came to save sinners. He himself says this in Mark 2 - it's the sick who need a doctor. Jesus came to rescue all who would give up trying to be self-sufficient, all who would give up trying to earn it on their own. All who would instead of leaning on their own attempts at goodness or holiness or righteousness or self-sufficiency of any type would instead throw themselves on the mercies of Jesus.

To own and believe and admit → I don't deserve this. It's grace. It's all grace. I don't deserve the mercies and love of God and that's the beauty of the gospel. That it's when we stop thinking we can earn it or deserve it and start to trust in Jesus on the cross for us on our behalf that God meets us there.

The gospel is so crazy in that it doesn't just allow us to be broken.

It doesn't just allow us to be needy and sinful and messed up - it actually requires it.

A prerequisite to receiving the grace of God is owning the reality of your sin.

A few weeks ago for Good Friday we listened to a song called "**Come Ye Sinners**" together. And I wanted to read to you some of the lyrics from it that I thought were so on point in this regard:

Come, ye sinners, poor and needy
Weak and wounded, sick and sore
Jesus ready, stands to save you
Full of pity, love and power

Let not conscience make you linger,
Not of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him.

But it doesn't stop there. Paul doesn't just acknowledge one time - ok, I'm a sinner. I receive mercy and grace and forgiveness. I trust in Jesus, now I'm awesome. Glad I did that so I get on doing good things and being a good person now.

Notice what he says:

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Not "was" the foremost. AM the foremost. Currently. Now. Present tense.

The gospel isn't something you just check yes to once and then move on. You never stop being a recipient first. You never move past this. You keep coming back and coming back and coming back and finding grace and love from Jesus.

So let me tell you what this means - this means we've got to get what this whole Christianity, following Jesus thing is all about... following Jesus is not about making yourself better, its not "I was walking the wrong path and now I'm walking the right one", it's not "I pulled myself up and made some healthy changes in my life"... it's..."I'm a sinner in need of a Savior. I was lost and now I'm found."

This is the good news our church and our lives are to be grounded upon, this trustworthy saying.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Paul's example proves this reality: **CHRIST CAME TO SAVE SINNERS.**

And that's all of us!!! Paul's story is proof - no one can say this isn't for me. No one is excluded from this gospel. No one is past Christ's saving reach. No one is too bad! No one is too good!

You can't be any more righteous than Paul - he had the first five books of the Old Testament memorized. He was the best of the best.

He also had people murdered. He was the worst of the worst.

Paul is both better than you in every way and worse than you in every way. He's got you beat in the law following and the law breaking.

So his story is proof → This gospel, this good news - it's for everyone!

The gospel is for law breakers and law followers.

1. Law breakers

There are some of you listening right now, and it's the hardest thing you could ever do to believe that you're not too far from saving. You're not past Christ's reach. That you aren't too bad or too broken or too messed up or too sinful for the saving grace of Jesus.

THIS GOSPEL IS FOR YOU. Christ Jesus came to save *sinner*s.

I don't care if you think you're the worst person who has ever walked the face of the earth. You wake up thinking about your sin and your brokenness and your shame and your guilt. You go to bed thinking about your sin and your brokenness and your shame and your guilt. I mean it just smacks you in the face. You don't need to be told or convinced or reminded you're a sinner!

THIS GOSPEL IS FOR YOU. Christ Jesus came to save *sinner*s.

I know you're beat up. I know you're broken. I know you're addicted. I know you're defeated. I know you're hopeless. I know you're stuck. I know you're cast down. I know you're ashamed. I know you're guilt-ridden. I know you have nothing to offer Jesus.

THIS GOSPEL IS FOR YOU. Christ Jesus came to save *sinner*s.

Jesus, the Son of God, came to save and redeem you to Himself. To wash you clean and make you new. To forgive you of all of your sins. To bring you into God's Kingdom and Family forever.

Would you repent and turn to him. Would you receive His grace and His love and His mercy and His forgiveness? Would you make Him Lord of your heart and of your life? Would you throw yourself on the cross?

If you are beat up and beat down by your sin, you're in the perfect spot for God to work in power to save you! If you turn to him, and believe in Him for the forgiveness of sins and life forever with God.

2. "Law Followers"

To the law followers. And I don't mean those trying to live up to the Jewish law, I mean all of us who are trying to be self-sufficient:

- Living up to our own law. Setting our own standard of goodness.
- Thinking we are good enough, strong enough, tough enough, self-sufficient enough.

- Those of us who think that all we need to be ok or to be good is to work a little harder and try a little more.
- One more technique, one more plan, one more thing and then we've got it.
- That deep down we have what it takes.
- That we can do enough churchy things to get God's approval - read my Bible a little bit more, watch a few more sermons, pray a few more minutes - then I'll be good with God.

THIS GOSPEL IS FOR YOU. Christ Jesus came to save *sinner*s.

And as much as you think you can just do a little more, or that you're ok, or that you've got it all together - the truth is that title "sinners" is all of us. It's you, and it's me.

Because we don't set the standard. God does. And His goodness and the goodness and holiness He requires to be near Him and with Him isn't even on the same playing field as we are.

The invitation of Christ is to receive. To cease your striving - whatever it looks like. Stop trying. You know it's not working. You know it leaves you empty. You know it never feels like enough. You know your soul longs for rest. You know you want to return home. You know that "just one more thing" becomes one more thing, becomes one more thing. You know there's no end in sight to your attempts to earn.

THIS GOSPEL IS FOR YOU. Christ Jesus came to save *sinner*s.

Cease your striving and throw yourself onto the mercies and grace of God.

Family, this is the gospel of Jesus → Christ came into the world to save sinners. That is the truth and good news we are to be grounded and established upon. We don't move past it, we keep swimming in it.

- So this week in your LifeGroup time, confess your sin. Own it. Repent of it. And allow others to push you back to receiving the grace of Christ.
- This week in your time with the Lord reading through our Bible reading plan - bring your whole self before the Lord - sin and all. And receive mercy and grace from Him.

THIS GOSPEL IS FOR YOU. Christ Jesus came to save *sinner*s.

Let's end this morning with the worship of Paul in 1 Timothy 1:17:

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.