

## I Timothy 1:8-11 (read v.7 also) “The Purpose of the Law of God”

Intro. In our last message we learned that Paul had encouraged Timothy to stay at the church in Ephesus to deal with some false teachers. There is false teaching in the Church today, and so we must stand for the truth of the Gospel and stand against false doctrine. Then in v.7 Paul pointed out that they desired to be teachers of the law but didn't even understand the true purpose or meaning of the law. They probably taught that keeping the law was a requirement for salvation and spiritual growth.

So beginning in v.8 Paul shares with us the true purpose of the law. Why did God give the Law? Can you answer that question? Did He give the law as a way to obtain eternal life? (See Mark 10:17-22). What is the relationship between the Law and the Gospel? We will answer those questions as we look into our text together. We will also see in our text some specific applications of the law of God. In other words, one commandment may be properly applied to several sins.

Since Paul preached that salvation is by grace, and not the law, he was accused of being against God's law. So the first point that Paul makes in our text is this:

### I. THE LAW IS GOOD

Paul was not anti-law. He says in v.8, “But we know that the law is good....” Paul's description uses a word (*kalos*) that means that the law is “commendable, admirable.” This is similar to Rom. 7:12 which says, “Wherefore, the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good (*agathos*).” The law is good because it comes from a good and righteous God, and because it has a good purpose, as we shall see.

Yet the effect of the law is good only if the condition stated in the last of v.8 is true, “if one uses it lawfully.” The law is good if it is used the right way, in accordance with its original purpose and intent. For example, the moral law can also be used appropriately to discover God's will for our lives. That's because the law objectively defines what is morally right and wrong. The law *should* also restrain evil, but for unbelievers, it does so only to the degree that law is heard and *enforced*. That's because the law itself grants no enabling power for obedience. In fact, the heart of man is so sinful that the law even provokes sin according to Rom. 7:8<sup>1</sup>. In a moment, we will also see that the ultimate purpose of the law is to convict us of our sin. Rom. 7:7 says, “... I would not have known sin except through the law....” (See also Rom. 3:20). And once we recognize our sin and guilt, that should lead us to seek salvation in Christ (Gal. 3:24). I will talk more about that in a moment.

On the other hand, Paul points out that the law can be used wrongly,<sup>2</sup> and thus not be used for good. These false teachers were an example of such misuse.<sup>3</sup> The epitome of their error was to set up the law as a requirement for salvation. They believed that they could be good enough to

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<sup>1</sup> “But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all [manner of evil] desire....”

<sup>2</sup> There is a play on words where Paul says the law (*nomos*) must be used lawfully (*nomimos*). There are too many lawyers who, instead of upholding the law, focus their energies on loopholes in the law and how to circumvent the law.

<sup>3</sup> Based on the context, Lea says, “They use the law as a launchpad to turn out spellbinding tales about ancestors...” (p.90).

please God and attain righteousness. As long as that is the case, they will not be saved, for they will trust in their own righteousness. That is the big problem with such a teaching. They also viewed the legalistic observance of the law as the way to live the Christian life. Apparently, the heretics were making a stringent application of the law to the “righteous” by trying to make the law take on a doctrinal or ethical role not appropriate for New Testament believers (cf. Mt. 23:23). The old nature loves religious legalism because rules and regulations enable a person to appear holy without really having to change his heart.<sup>4</sup>

So we should make sure that we use God’s law properly. When we do, it is good. But when we misuse the law, it can be detrimental. I would also say that too many preachers and teachers misuse the Bible. They misinterpret it, misapplying it, and so forth. False religion can send people to hell. We don’t want that!

So what is the purpose of the law? In what way should it be used? Well, the next truth we see from our text the fact that:

## II. THE LAW DECLARES OUR GUILT

We need to understand the limited purpose of the law. So Paul says in v.9, “knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person....” You see, those who are truly righteous and loving do not need laws to regulate our behavior. We do what is right out of a righteous and loving character produced by the new birth (Titus 3:5b). The righteous are also led, transformed and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-18, 22-25). Just as a healthy man does not need to call the doctor, so the righteous man does not need the law. He lives righteously by other means.

Instead, Paul says in the last of v.9 that the law was given “for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners....” Even human laws are written to address criminal behavior, not the actions of good law-abiding citizens (i.e. overly broad gun laws). When people see bad behavior manifested in a new way, they say, “There ought to be a law against that.”<sup>5</sup> The law was created for sinners, not the righteous.

Then he gives some specific examples of such unrighteous sinners. In other words, one purpose of the law was to show us that we *are* sinners. Romans 3:19 says that the law was written so that “every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” Not one human is so righteous that they fulfill the law perfectly. Instead, the law shows us that we are all guilty. The law is like a mirror. It reveals our sins to us.

To demonstrate his point, in vv.9-10 Paul isolated sinners into several categories based on the 10 Commandments (Ex. 20:3-17). The first 3 pairs in v.9 all relate to the first 4 commandments, dealing with our relationship with God. Then, he moves through the second half of the 10 Commandments, which govern our relationship to others.

First, let us see how God’s law demonstrates our guilt:

A. In our Relationship with God - The first 3 pairs give a negative characteristic and a resulting action. In v.9 Paul says that the Law was given for:

1. The Lawless and Insubordinate - A lawless person does as he pleases. He refuses to submit to law and authority. Thus, the attitude of lawlessness produces insubordination. In fact, that word translated “insubordinate” (*anupotaktos*) literally refers to one who does not submit to orders. It refers to one who is unruly.

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Tim. 3:5 says, “having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”

<sup>5</sup> In fact, human law is included in Paul’s statement, for the word “law” does not have the definite article.

Do you know anyone like that? I have done some substitute teaching in School and I have encountered some young people who are unruly and insubordinate! The Bible warns that the attitude of lawlessness will become prevalent in the last days (Mt. 24:12; 2 Th. 2:7-9). Just look at the lawless behavior manifested in many of our major cities, especially on the part of some protesters and the looters.

Are *you* unruly and insubordinate? Do you willfully refuse to submit to the laws of God or man? If so, you are most likely not saved. How you relate to the law says a whole lot about your spiritual condition.

Then in v.9 Paul also states the Law was given for:

2. The Ungodly and Sinners – The word translated “ungodly” (*asebes*) refers to those who are impious, irreverent, and ungodly. They mind earthly things and have little regard for God. Yet the first commandment says, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3). God should be number one in our lives but many of the ungodly ignore Him. As a result, such people are sinners. They sin against God. They veer off the pathway of righteousness.

Then in v.9 Paul also states the Law was given for:

3. The Unholy and Profane - An unholy (*anosios*) person is also irreverent and indifferent to God. Such an unholy and ungodly person that has no regard for what is sacred. Yet the third and fourth Commandments say, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain...” and “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” The ungodly person will take God’s name in vain. He will make ugly jokes about God and the things of God. He will have no regard for the Lord’s Day as a day of worship. They are atheistic in behavior.

Such persons will be profane (*bebelos*-that which may be trodden), which means they make no distinction between what is sacred and common. We are moving increasingly in that direction in our society. Yet even pagan Greeks considered certain activities unholy. For example, they declared unholy the Egyptian custom where a brother could marry his sister and the Persian custom where a son could marry his mother!<sup>6</sup> Such incest is contrary to the sacredness of the family.

In recent years we have heard of several examples of so-called art that has been funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and taxpayers. Some of that so-called art takes what is sacred and treats it as common and profane. One example was the 1987 photograph of a crucifix submerged in the artist’s urine. A more recent example was the perverted portrayal of da Vinci’s Last Supper at the opening ceremony of the Olympics (2024).

If you do not reverence God, and the things of God, then that should tell you something about your spiritual condition. If you have no desire to praise and worship God, or read His Holy Word, or pray, then you are still condemned by your sins. You need a Savior!

The law of God was not only given to reveal our sin in relationship with God, but also:

B. In Our Relationship with Others – Beginning in the last of v.9 we see that the law convicts us of violating the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the 10 Commandments. For example, the law convicts us of:

1. Violating the 5th Commandment - The fifth Commandment says, “Honor your father and mother” (Ex. 20:12). In stark contrast to that commandment, Paul makes reference in the last of v.9 to “murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers.” Those were technical terms.<sup>7</sup> Paul literally referenced patricide and matricide. This was not that unusual in the Roman world. At times parents would be murdered to seize the inheritance (cf. Mt 21:38), or simply because they were too

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<sup>6</sup> Xwedodah was widely practiced by royalty and nobility, and possibly clergy, but it is not known if it was commonly practiced by families in other classes (wikipedia.org).

<sup>7</sup> Not the general word for “murderer” with fathers and mothers as objects.

old and difficult to care for. Yet the law says that even to strike a parent is worthy of death. Ex. 21:15 says, “He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.” Someone who kills their father or mother is actually guilty of both the 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> commandments.

Such a sin is not unheard of in our day. Our nation was shocked to learn that Lyle and Erik Menéndez worked as a team to kill their parents in 1989. And if you do not honor and value your parents, and provide care for them in their old age, you are sinning against this clear commandment of God, as Jesus pointed out in Mk. 7:10-13. Other violations against the fifth commandment include Lev. 20:9, “For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.” Dt. 27:16 says, “Cursed [is] the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.” Some parents have had their hearts broken by the words or actions of their children.

Next, the law also convicts us of:

2. Violating the 6th Commandment - Ex. 20:13 says, “You shall not murder.” So in the last of v.9 Paul says that the law was also given “for manslayers.” Paul does not have in mind “manslaughter” in the modern legal sense, but literally the murder of a man (*androphonos*). How it must have brought back bad memories for Paul, for he was involved in the judicial murder of Christians at one time. No wonder he wrote in v.15 that he was the chief of sinners.

Doesn't the killing of an innocent unborn life fall into this category of sin? And what is the real difference between killing an unwanted baby before or after birth?

Next, the law also convicts us of:

3. Violating the 7th Commandment – Exodus 20:14 says, “You shall not commit adultery,” which violates the sanctity of marriage. So in v.10 Paul gives two examples of violating the commandment regarding the sacredness of sex within marriage. He says that the law was given “for fornicators, for sodomites.” Fornication is a general word that refers to all types of sexual sin outside the bonds of marriage. This has become widespread in modern society. In this context it especially refers to adultery (see NIV).

Paul also says that the law was given to show the sinfulness of homosexual relations, which was all too common among the Greeks and Romans, but rare among the Jews. The word translated “sodomites” (*arsenokoites*) comes from a compound Greek word which refers to two men in bed together. In other words, Paul is clearly referring to homosexual relations. Homosexual marriage is now legal in many countries, but God's law forbids it and calls it sin! It is contrary to God's creative design. As someone has said, God created Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve! This is not just an Old Testament teaching but as we see here, it is affirmed in the New Testament as well on several occasions (see also Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:9).

It is sad to see that such perversion is becoming increasingly common and accepted in our day as we have moved further and further away from our Judeo-Christian heritage. We are becoming increasingly like the world of Noah's day (Gen. 6:5-7, 11-12), and like Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet God's law hasn't changed! It applies to all cultures in every generation. That's because God never changes (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8).

Next, the law also convicts us of:

4. Violating the 8th Commandment - Ex. 20:15 says, “You shall not steal.” So in v.10 Paul gives one extreme example of stealing, and that is stealing *people*, which was specifically forbidden by the law in Ex. 21:16.<sup>8</sup> The Greek word (*andrapodistes*) literally refers to catching a man by the foot. Slavery was commonly practiced in the ancient world, and so stealing someone away and selling them as a slave was all too common. Also, especially beautiful or accomplished

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<sup>8</sup> Ex. 21:16 says, “He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death.” See also Dt. 24:7.

slaves were stolen from their masters and resold. I'm sorry to say that slavery was practiced in our country at one time.

Yet this is happening even today! Human trafficking that is forcing women and children into the sex industry is taking place right here in our country! This kind of activity is exposed in the movie, "The Sound of Freedom."

Now you may think that you are pretty well off, for you have not committed the gross sins that Paul has mentioned so far. Well, Paul has not finished. Next, the law also convicts us of:

5. Violating the 9th Commandment - Ex. 20:16 says, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." So in v.10 Paul gives two forms of lying. He says the law was given "for liars, for perjurers." The first word (*pseustes*) refers to any form of lying. The second (*epiorkos*) refers to breaking an oath, often the oath taken just before giving testimony.

We are in the political season and I am appalled at how many politicians tell such boldfaced lies! Then those in office commit crimes and corruption and when caught they do what is called "plausible deniability." They just deny and lie! I would like for every lying politician to hear what Revelation 21:8 says, "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone...."

When was the last time *you* told a lie? If you lie several times a week, then you need to examine your heart, and see if you still need to be saved. A true Christian should rarely lie. Is the law convicting you of sin?

So one thing that is clear from this text of Scripture is the affirmation that the moral law of God as reflected in the 10 Commandments has abiding relevance.

Before leaving this point, Paul adds in the last of v.10, "and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine." This shows that Paul not only has in mind these obvious examples of sin, but all other sins as well, including the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment against coveting. We have all broken at least parts of the 10 Commandments. And in our hearts we have broken most or all of the 10 Commandments! Which sins in vv.9-10 have you committed? We are all guilty before God and need forgiveness of sin. Galatians 3:10 says that we are under a curse if we have broken God's law. Have you repented of your sins, turned to Jesus, and placed your faith in Him? Galatians 3:13 says that Christ bore the curse of sin in our place. So if you haven't done so, I encourage you to trust in Christ as your Savior this morning!

Notice he refers to "sound" doctrine. That is from the word which means healthy, wholesome.<sup>9</sup> The teaching of God's Word and obedience to His Word promotes spiritual health and wholeness, and even tends to promote physical health. On the other hand, false doctrine and violating the commandments of God leads to spiritual and physical sickness, and even death.

I will give one example. Genesis 2:18 says, "It is not good for a man to be alone." So God created the institution of marriage between a man and woman. If a man chooses to remain in a committed, marital relationship instead of the sins mentioned in v.10, what is the result? A 2019 Harvard Health Publishing survey found that men who are married are healthier than men who are never married or divorced, and that the longer a man stays married, the greater his survival advantage.<sup>10</sup>

Now the last point I want to bring out from our text is this:

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<sup>9</sup> Paul only uses this medical metaphor in the pastoral epistles a total of 8 times (see especially 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:3; Tit. 1:9), perhaps as a result of the influence of Luke.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mens-health/marriage-and-mens-health>. Illus.#C-\_\_\_\_\_.

### III. UNDERSTAND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

Paul has been talking about the proper role of the law but notice in v.11 that he also mentions what is “according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God.” The law and the gospel go together if properly understood. By convicting us of sin, the law should lead us to the gospel, which offers the only true hope of forgiveness. Gal. 3:24 says, “Therefore the law was our tutor [to bring us] to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” The Law without the Gospel is diagnosis without remedy. And by calling the gospel “glorious,”<sup>11</sup> Paul shows the pre-eminence of the gospel. The law is not the way of salvation. It is only a needed step *toward* salvation. Salvation only comes through the Gospel. Yet the false teachers in Ephesus had given their energies to various teachings about the law as a replacement for the gospel. What a contrast between the glorious gospel and the shameful and destructive false teaching of some in Ephesus. Any teaching that does not conform to the “glorious gospel” is clearly not sound doctrine and should be abandoned.

What is the gospel? It is stated in v.15, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” Man is a sinner of such depth and depravity that he cannot save himself. But Jesus Christ came into the world, died on the cross and rose again that we might be forgiven of our sins. What a blessing forgiveness is! No wonder Paul referred to God as the “blessed God.” That means that God is not only blessed in the ultimate sense of the word but He is also the source of all blessing, including the blessing of forgiveness. He is the source of the Gospel. It was not invented by men. It is the Gospel of God.

So I hope you understand the relationship between the law and the Gospel. But too many today want to take the legitimate role of law out of the gospel completely. We have preachers today who hardly ever preach God’s law or preach about sin. Instead, they preach about the prosperity gospel and how to have a good life. When was the last time you saw a sinner, under heavy conviction during the preaching of God’s Word? Folks, no one will be saved by believing the gospel until they first are convicted that they are sinners! The law and the gospel must go together!

Conclusion: Paul concludes in the last of v.11 by pointing out that this gospel was committed to his trust. He was going to stand firm on the gospel, and defend the gospel against those who would pervert it. Now the gospel has been passed down to us. Will we be careful not to pervert the gospel but faithfully proclaim the gospel? The 10 Commandments and other laws of God are good and we ought to teach them, but the law cannot save us. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ saves! Who will be the first today to step forward in repentance of sin and to trust in Christ as Savior?

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, & Philemon* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2007; Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: 1-II Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957); H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the First and Second Epistles of Timothy* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947); Thomas D. Lea, *New American Commentary: 1, 2 Timothy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992); Walter L. Liefeld, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999); John MacArthur, Jr., *Avoiding Spiritual Counterfeiters: Study Notes on 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 6:3-6; 2 Timothy 2:14-19* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1988); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); Donald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Waco: Word Books, 1974); Warren W. Wiersbe, “*Be*” Series: *New Testament Volumes 1 & 2: Book* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989); Kenneth S.

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<sup>11</sup> 2 Cor. 4:4 speaks of “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” The gospel is glorious because it points to the glory of Christ!

Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: The Pastoral Epistles* in Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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