

Proposition: 1 Timothy 1:8-11 reveals for us three things we know about the Law.

- I. We know the identity of the law (8).
 - A. It's good.
 - 1. It shows me what sin is (Romans 7:7).
 - 2. It leads us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).
 - B. It must be used properly.
 - II. We know the intent of the law (9-10).
 - A. It's not intended for the righteous.
 - B. It's intended for people who aren't right with God.
 - 1. It condemns those guilty of offenses against God.
 - 2. It condemns those guilty of offenses against people.
 - III. We know the inadequacy of the law (11).
 - A. The law can't accomplish what the gospel can.
 - 1. The law unveils our sinfulness.
 - 2. The gospel unveils God's glory.
 - B. The law can't do what the gospel can.
 - 1. The law can reveal our condition.
 - 2. Only the gospel can change it.
- Implications: There are two questions to answer...
- 1. Have you come to grips with the bad news?
 - 2. Have you responded to the good news?

When I was a freshman in college, I met a fellow my first quarter who shared two classes with me in the pre-med major (which was my major at the time). I can't even remember his name, but I do remember something he told me. He was an older student that already had a degree in Bible, but had returned to college to pursue a career in medicine. On one occasion we were studying for a Calculus or Cell Biology test, when my classmate said to me, "Do you realize you can prove anything from the Bible? You can use the Bible to justify adultery if you want to."

By the way, was my classmate correct in his assessment? Can a person use the Bible to substantiate even ungodly behavior? The answer is--it happens all the time. Yes, you can use the Bible to prove just about anything *if* ... you ignore the context of scriptural statements you cite, *if* you take Bible verses out of context, *if* you ignore the biblical authors' intent.

You can hijack a Bible verse, and take it places it was never intended to go. Liberal Bible scholars can do that. So can conservative, evangelical, fundamental believers who hold to the inerrancy of Scripture. You can believe that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God (which it most certainly is), and yet misuse the Bible by ignoring context.

It's one problem to be a person who doesn't use the Bible--perhaps that's your struggle; you know you need to be reading and studying the Bible, but haven't been. It's another problem to be a person who *misuses* the Bible. And not one of us is immune from that pitfall.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

It was that kind of biblical misuse that plagued a church many years ago. It was a good church with a good history. It had good teachers. But it also had some people who were misusing the Bible, and the misuse created a dangerous climate.

The church, of course, was the Ephesian church, the church where Timothy was serving as a trouble-shooter when he received the trouble-shooting manual we call 1 Timothy. The confusion had to do with a misuse of a part of the Bible called the "law."

Notice Paul's instruction to Timothy in verse 3, "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer." Stop there. Where did these "certain men" come up with the false doctrines they taught? What authority did they use to support their teaching?

Notice verse 7, "They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm."

Do you see what was happening? Some people were using the Scriptures, in this case the OT "law," to support unbiblical, ungodly, man-originated false teaching. So Paul told Timothy in verses 3-7 to stop them. But some of the damage had already been done.

The question remained: "What about the law?" If what these teachers were saying about the law was *false*, what is the truth about God's law? If they were misusing verses from the OT law, if they were using God's Word in a way God never intended, what's the correct use of those verses, of the law?

That's the question Paul addresses in verses 8-11. Here's what we'll see in 1 Timothy 1:8-11--three things we know about the Law.

I. We know the identity of the law (8).

Verse 8, "We know [in contrast with the speculation of the false teachers; we *know*] that the law is good if one uses it properly." According to that statement, what's true about God's law? Two things...

A. It's good. We know that the law is good. Just because some people misuse it doesn't mean the problem is with the law. There's no need to throw out the baby with the bathwater. The Law is good.

A key question. What is the "law"? Indeed the term is used in several ways in the Bible (for instance in Rom. 7:22-23, there are four distinct shades of meaning for the same word "law"). Here it seems to refer to the Mosaic Law, that is, the law God gave through Moses to His people Israel in the 15th century B.C. The *Torah*. In simple terms, it's the revelation God gave to Israel through Moses as recorded in the first five books of the OT.

The false teachers in Ephesus were misusing the Mosaic Law. They were violating God's intent for giving the law. Indeed, the law itself is good. How so? In two ways...

1. *It shows me what sin is (Romans 7:7).* Romans 7 is a key, related text which sheds light on 1 Timothy 1. Consider verse 7, "What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law." And then Paul gives an example (7b), "For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet [the 10th commandment, Ex. 20:17].'"

Consider a stop sign. What is it? A pole in the ground with a piece of red-painted sheet metal? It's more than that. Those four letters S-T-O-P are the law. That sign tells

me that if I go through the intersection without bringing my vehicle to rest, not only might I injure someone, I am guilty of breaking the law.

So, too, with God's law. The law shows me what sin is. What else does it do?

2. *It leads us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).* Galatians is full of warnings about the misuse of the law (see 2:21; 3:10-11). But God never gave us the law so we could earn His favor by keeping it. What was the intent of the law then? Galatians 3:24 tells us, "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith."

It's important to realize that the Lord Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Law of God, both its precepts and penalty. That's why Paul offers this conclusion (Gal. 3:25), "Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law."

Warren Wiersbe observes (212): "Law and Gospel go together, for the Law without the Gospel is diagnosis without remedy; but the Gospel without Law is only the Good News of salvation for people who don't believe they need it because they have never heard the bad news of judgment."

So concerning the law's identity, first it's good. But there's a qualifier in our text (8): "We know that the law is good if one uses it *properly* ["lawfully" in the AV]."

B. It must be used properly. And that was the problem in the Ephesian church. Some people weren't using it properly.

The word "properly" (*nomimos*) appears only one other place in the NT, in 2 Timothy 2:5, "If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not have the victor's crown unless he competes *according to the rules*." That's the word. To use the law properly is to use it according to the rules, God's rules. It's to use the law as God intended it to be used.

Quite frankly, the misuse of the law was a huge problem in the early church. Significant sections of the New Testament were written to help Christians respond to false teaching about the law, such as Acts 15, Romans 7, Philippians 3, Colossians 2, and the whole book of Galatians.

It was happening in Ephesus, too. False teachers were not using the law properly? How so? Paul doesn't tell us explicitly. He gives us some hints, however. Apparently, according to 1:4, they were doing some fancy footwork with genealogy passages from the law. 1 Timothy 4:3 suggests they were using the law to promote celibacy and asceticism. In short, they were undermining the gospel by using the very tool that God designed to point people to the gospel, that being the law.

Beloved, God's law is good. God's Word is good, but we must always determine to use it properly. Allow me to offer a practical suggestion.

To insure that we use the Bible properly, we must always ask two questions in our Bible study, and the order is critical. The first question is not, "What does this verse or passage say *to me*?" The first question must be, "What does this verse or passage *say*?" Period! That is, what is the author's intent for saying what he's saying? Only after answering that question can I ask the second question: "What is this verse saying *to me*?"

And by the way, if I read the Bible without asking the first question, I'm in danger of heresy. But if I read the Bible without asking the second question, I'm in danger of becoming a Pharisee, a person who studies the Bible only for intellectual stimulation. I challenge you to study the Bible, and study it properly.

II. We know the intent of the law (9-10).

Verses 9-10, "We also know that law is not made for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine."

In verse 8, we learn that the law is good, but who needs it? For whom was the law intended? First, negatively...

A. It's not intended for the righteous. Or as the KJV puts it, "The law is not made for a righteous man." A righteous man doesn't need the law any more than a person with 20/20 vision needs corrective lenses.

But who are the righteous? According to Romans 3:24, Christians are. Those who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are "justified" by God, that is, God declares them to be "righteous." The intent of the law isn't for the righteous. Who then?

B. It's intended for people who aren't right with God. Who needs the law? Paul lists 14 types of people who need the law; the list includes four pairs and six single descriptions. The list includes the worst of the worst types of sinners: murderers, parent killers, slave traders, and those guilty of sexual perversion. Furthermore, the list includes sins we're prone to condone, like lying and fornication.

Indeed, when you read the list of sins mentioned here, you discover how depraved the world was even in the first century. Lest we think we're the first generation of the Church to face blatant sin, take a close look at the catalogue given here.

There's a downward progression in the list that follows the pattern of the Ten Commandments. People who need the law are people guilty of two offenses, both which are condemned in the law.

1. It condemns those guilty of offenses against God. According to the first table of the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. No idols. No misuse of God's name. No misuse of God's day (Ex. 20:3-11)."

Thus, the law condemns those who sin against God. That's what "lawbreakers and rebels" do. A lawbreaker refers to a person who may know the law, but lives as if it didn't exist. He's not committed to any standard outside of himself. That's what leads him to be a "rebel." By the way, here's the #1 problem of mankind. We're born as rebels, as lawbreakers. You didn't learn that, nor did I. We inherited it. It's called depravity.

The "ungodly and sinful" need the law. To be ungodly is to be without regard for anything sacred. If that's your perspective on life, you will be "sinful."

The "unholy and irreligious (or profane)" need the law, too. An unholy person is one who is indifferent to what is right--he is indifferent to God and his duty to Him (MacArthur, 22).

The rest of the sins come from the second table of the Ten Commandments, those that deal with our relationships with other people. First, the law deals with sins against God...

2. It condemns those guilty of offenses against people. The list specifies: "those who kill their fathers or mothers" [an obvious violation of the 5th command]; "murderers" refers to those who break the 6th commandment; "adulterers and perverts" are violators of the 7th command [the second term literally means "males in the marriage bed" and refers to homosexuals]; "slave traders" (NIV) could be translated "kidnappers," the stealing of people [of course, stealing was prohibited in the 8th command]; "liars and perjurers" refers to individuals who have broken the 9th commandment.

That's who the law is for, then, those who are guilty of offenses against God and people. Why do they need the law? Because the law reveals their condition. The law tells lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, murderers and adulterers and liars and perjurers that they're in trouble.

But what else indicates a person needs the law? Verse 10 concludes, "And for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine." The truth is, *every* sin is a sin against sound doctrine. The Greek word translated "sound" is *hugiaino* from which we get the English word "hygiene." It means healthy. That's what doctrine does--it is health-giving spiritually. And those who oppose such "sound doctrine," those who insist on that which is contrary to it--as the false teachers in Ephesus were doing--they need the law.

Someone has said (Scott, in Guthrie, 62), "Law is a sort of medicine, only to be applied where the moral nature is diseased; Christian teaching is a healthy food for healthy people, a means of joy, freedom, larger activity."

Which brings us to a third insight about the law. To help correct a misuse of God's Word, Paul clarified the law's identity and intent--what the law is and is for.

III. We know the inadequacy of the law (11).

A cartoon in a newspaper showed a man ready to leap from the ledge of a high-rise apartment building with a suicide note in his hand but with a parachute strapped to his back. His wife, leaning out of the window, says to him, "Just can't make a commitment to anything can you, Larry?" (Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 145)

As Christians, we're faced with a question, a commitment. Which will it be: law or gospel? Will we choose to live by adherence to the law, or by acceptance of the gospel?

Many people choose the law. They think that being right with God is up to *them*. If I live a good life, obey the Ten Commandments (i.e. the law), and live a decent life, that will be good enough, won't it? The truth is, it won't. Why not? Because of the inadequacy of the law. The law isn't bad; it's just inadequate to bring us to God, in two ways.

A. The law can't accomplish what the gospel can. To illustrate, listen to the following story as told by Jerry Bridges (75): "During the long years of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, a Russian air force pilot flew his fighter plane from a base in Russia to an American air force base in Japan and asked for asylum. He was flown to the United States where he was duly debriefed, given a new identity, and set up as a bona fide resident of the United States. In due time he became an American citizen."

Bridges concludes: "The Russian pilot's experience illustrates to some degree what happened to us when we died to sin and were made alive to God. He changed kingdoms; he was given a new identity and a new status. He was no longer a Russian; he was now an American. He was no longer under the rule of what was then an oppressive and totalitarian government. Now he was free to experience all of the advantages and resources of living in a free and prosperous country."

That's what the gospel can accomplish in the life of a sinner. But not the law. What's the difference between the ability of the law and the gospel?

1. *The law unveils our sinfulness.* I look at the law, and I see my utter depravity. But the law can't remove my depravity. It just keeps shining the spotlight on my sinfulness. On the other hand...

2. *The gospel unveils God's glory.* Verse 11 explains, "That conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me." In the Greek, the term "glorious" probably modifies "God" rather than "gospel" in this verse, as commentator J.N.D. Kelly observes.

Let that sink in. The Law reveals the sinfulness of people, but the gospel brings to light the glorious character of God Himself! Or to put it another way, "It is the sharp needle of the law that makes way for the scarlet thread of the Gospel (Samuel Bolton, in Chantry, 43)."

There's a little poem that some attribute to John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, that captures the essence of the limitations of the law and the sufficiency of the gospel (Bridges, 90):

Run, John, run. The law commands
But gives neither feet nor hands.
Better news the gospel brings;
It bids me fly and gives me wings.

The law can't accomplish what the gospel can. It's inadequate in a second sense, too.

B. The law can't do what the gospel can. In what sense?

1. *The law can reveal our condition.* Why is it that we don't see more people getting saved? Could it be due to our failure to present the demands of God's law?

Listen carefully to an observation by Walter Chantry (45-6): "It is imperative that preachers of today learn how to declare the spiritual law of God; for, until we learn how to wound consciences, we shall have no wounds to bind with the Gospel bandages. In the twentieth century the church has tried to see how little it could say and still get converts. The assumption has been that a minimal message will conserve our forces, spread the Gospel farther, and, of course, preserve a unity among evangelicals. It has succeeded in spreading the truth so thinly that the world cannot see it."

What's missing? Chantry elaborates (25): "Much of modern preaching is anaemic, with the life-blood of God's nature absent from the message. Evangelists centre their message upon man. Man has sinned and missed a great blessing. If man wants to retrieve his immense loss he must act thus and so. But the Gospel of Christ is very different. It begins with God and His glory. It tells men that they have offended a holy God, who will by no means pass by sin. It reminds sinners that the only hope of salvation is to be found in the grace and power of this same God. Christ's Gospel sends men to beg pardon of the Holy One."

The truth is, the law can reveal our condition. But...

2. *Only the gospel can change it.* The gospel has the power to change people inside out. Perhaps you're wondering, "Just how powerful is the gospel?" Would you believe it's powerful enough to turn a blasphemous man who killed Christians into the man that wrote this letter?! We'll hear his story next time, how the gospel changed him from a persecutor into a preacher!

Beloved, the gospel can do what the law can't. It can change people. It can change you. It can change those you've given up on. It can happen today.

There's an old illustration that's worth repeating (told by McGee, 29): "Imagine a judge on a bench who has a lawbreaker brought before him. He is guilty, and he should pay a heavy fine and go to prison. However, the judge says, 'I have a son who loves this prisoner although he has broken the law and I must condemn him. My son is a wealthy man and has agreed to pay his fine. He's also agreed to go to prison on behalf of this man. Therefore, his penalty has been fully paid. I am going to take this criminal into my home, and I am going to treat him as a son of mine.'

"When the judge takes the criminal into his home, he no longer says things like, 'Thou shalt not kill' or 'Thou shalt not steal.' The man is now his son. The judge will talk to him about loving the other members of his family, how he is to conduct himself at the table, treat his wife with respect, and take part in the family chores. You see, this man is treated on an altogether different basis from what he was before."

That is what God has done for us. On the basis of what His Son, Jesus Christ, did--on the basis of His perfect life, His death on the cross, His resurrection--He changes us. He does what we can't do for ourselves. That's the gospel. The law reveals our need, but only the gospel can remedy it.

Implications: There are two questions to answer...

1. *Have you come to grips with the bad news?* The bad news is revealed in the law. The bad news is the truth of your condition before a holy God. The law screams to me, "You are in trouble. You have violated the standard of a holy God. You deserve to be punished." God's Word says, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." Unless you're perfect that's bad news. Yet it's the truth.

Beloved, there's hope for imperfect people. But the hope isn't through the law. The law can show us we need hope, but can't give it to us. Hope for imperfect people is available only through knowing the One who is perfect, Jesus Christ. So question #2...

2. *Have you responded to the good news?* The gospel is the good news.