

Title: Using the law, lawfully
Text: 1 Timothy 1.8-11
Theme: Spirit-driven hermeneutics
Series: 1 Timothy #4
Prop Stmt: The right use of the law exposes our sin and points us to Christ.

Read Text:

The Bible says regarding Judas Iscariot that, "...he went and hanged himself." (Matthew 27.5) The Bible also says, regarding the example of the Good Samaritan that you should "go and do likewise." (Luke 10.37) Now, what happens if you put those two phrases together? "He went and hanged himself...go and do likewise." We have a problem, don't we? Does the Bible say that? Those words are in the Bible but they do not appear in that way and they certainly do not teach that nor mean that.

When someone takes your words out of context, they are misrepresenting you. When you take the words of the Bible out of context, you are misrepresenting God. Bible abuse is a serious offense because it distorts the very character of God and can ruin a person. It can be devastating to a person to be told one thing about God, only to discover that what you were told was not true. That is why being a teacher of the Bible is a very important and serious job that demands careful study so that what you are saying is an accurate reflection of what God has said. The church is plagued with teachers who want to be heard, want to be liked, want to be respected, want to be popular, want to have influence and will use the Bible in order to pursue those goals. This sort of thing was happening in the church at Ephesus. Certain persons were using the Bible (OT Law) as the basis of saying things that the Law didn't really mean. They were misinterpreting the Bible. Misinterpreting the Bible is abusing the Bible. Some teachers abuse the Bible and they don't know it. They mean well. They want to be helpful. But, they do not interpret the text correctly. Others have an agenda. They have a message they want to convince you of, and they are looking for a text here and there that appears to prove their point. Others are simply lazy. They do not want to put the work into study and figure that people aren't all that interested in going deep anyway. The well-meaning, the point-prover, and the lazy have all contributed to a culture of chaos when it comes to interpreting the Bible. But, in spite of how many interpretations there are, we don't throw our hands up in frustration. My task is to study and to seek to faithfully explain the Scriptures to you and show you why I believe and say what I do. In the process, my task is to help you read your Bible better and be a discerning listener. Faithful teaching is a critical part of the life of a church. It is also so vulnerable to abuse.

Paul left Timothy in Ephesus with a mission. His mission, in part, was to correct the teaching ministry of the church because certain persons were abusing the law. They were claiming that it said things that were not accurate. It is obvious, then that...

I. **The Law is subject to abuse.** (8-9a)

The law is good, if one uses it lawfully. The law was a reference to the OT scriptures, particularly the Mosaic Law. The law is good if it is used the way God intended for it to be used. Instead of teaching it with a proper understanding of its purpose and role, these teachers were trying to make the law say things that it was never intended to. Some of the teachers were making confident assertions about things they did not understand. They were sounding like they were authorities, when in reality they were totally missing the boat. Have you ever listened to a sermon or a lesson that was based off a text that did not mean what the teacher was saying it meant? It's maddening, isn't it? It can be far worse than maddening. And here is why. When teachers teach things that the Bible does not say, they will inevitably not teach things that it does say. The early church faced two serious problems: the Gnostics and the Judaizers. They are still problems for us.

A. **Mysticism** (Gnostics)

I should have put this word up on the screen for you last week. Gnosticism is the idea that there are secret messages, or hidden truths that are only revealed to certain elite types. I won't be labor the point again today, as I did last week. But this was a problem in Ephesus, Colossae, Corinth, and in many of the churches as John's epistles indicate. The other problem was legalism or Judaizers.

B. **Legalism** (Judaizers)

East of Ephesus was a region known as Galatia. These churches were plagued with legalism because of a group known as the Judaizers. They were teaching that if you were really a follower of Jesus, then you would follow the OT law for circumcision, Sabbath observance, and diet. That kind of stuff still happens today. The OT law included specific dietary regulations for Israel. Did it have a practical benefit? Perhaps. But some of the OT laws were designed to help the children of Israel realize that they were different than the rest of the world. God wanted them to know that when he calls out a people, they are to be different. In the NT, that same idea is reinforced, but it is not through our diet. In fact, Christ declared all foods are clean (Mark 7.19). Peter's vision in Acts 10.15 reinforces this. When you hear people telling you that you need to follow the Daniel diet or the Bible diet and they try to use the OT dietary regulations to support it, they are guilty of a serious offense. They are guilty of saying that Jesus is wrong. They are guilty of saying that one can become more righteous based on the foods they eat. If you want to eat certain foods, or if you have food allergies that limit what you can eat, that is fine. But, do not make your diet a standard of spirituality, or a requirement for fellowship.

A pastor friend of mine has some boys. One day a new family that was visiting his church had a son that his boys invited over for the afternoon after church. On the way home, they went through the drive-thru at McDonalds and got everybody what they wanted. A few minutes later, the pastor's cell phone rang. It was the boy's mother on the other end, who said, "Oh I forgot to tell you that we are vegetarians." So, my friend looked in the back seat and there was this boy stuffing this quarter pounder into his mouth as fast as he could and the kid said, "Man, this is awesome!"

Eating whole foods, foods without GMO's, or non-processed foods, may be your preference. But, if someone invites you over to their home and they serve you food that you otherwise would not eat, what do you do? You eat it with thanksgiving and humility. That is called missions! So, it is clear from the church in Ephesus that some people were abusing the law and Timothy has to correct it. So, now we see, this is why

II. The Law was given for a purpose.

Now, before I go on, I want to acknowledge the fact that what I am about to say is extremely counter-cultural. In fact, if you are a skeptic and you are here because you lost a bet or something like that, I fully realize that what I am about to say is considered to be shocking, offensive and in some circles even hateful. I do not relish the shock or the offense and am saddened when thought of as being hateful, because my intent is anything but that. So, my hope is that you will hear me out and if you do, I think you will acknowledge that I have a point.

It is my observation that our cultural seems to be bi-polar. On the one hand, we are told to own your label, revel in it, and be proud of it. As Lady Gaga said in "Born this way." But, on the other hand, why is there so much anger or so much despair if we are really proud and content with who we are? Why are the same people who one day are so proud of what they are, are the next day saying how depressed they are, how much life stinks, how they just want to leave, quit, start over, get a new wardrobe, get a new job, move to another city, country, get a new body, a new look, a new gender, new friends, etc.? Do you not feel the confusion? "I can't change who I am – don't judge me." Then..."I hate my life and want to change or die."

In this text, the apostle Paul refers back to the 10 commandments. The 10 commandments are 10 laws that God gave to Israel when they were being formed as a nation. These 10 laws summarize the rest of the laws. But, one of the things that these 10 commandments do, is they judge us. They reveal our sin. They reveal that we really do have a problem. But, these commandments were not given to leave us judged, but to make us aware of the fact that we need to change, but we cannot change ourselves. We need someone to change us.

A. **To reveal our sin.**

We all know that we sin. We know that instinctively as part of the image of God written in our hearts. We all have a concept of good and bad, and right and wrong. But, unless God revealed what his law is, we would not know what category to put certain things in. For example, we live in a culture that is desperately trying to get rid of any moral law at all. So, we hear stuff like, "well that's just your opinion." Or, "it may be wrong for you, but it's not wrong for me." Or "who do you think you are imposing your morality on everyone else? You have no right to do that."

Now, if there was no god, and if we indeed did actually evolve into self-conscious, moral, relational, ethical-minded, creatures, without any absolute truth, then you can understand

the utter despair we would be in. So, a protester says, “Black lives matter.” Another person could say, “That’s just your opinion, but your opinion doesn’t count.” Of course the person who said it was just expressing an opinion that doesn’t count either. If there is no ultimate lawgiver- then there is no ultimate law. What happens when there is no law? You will have anarchy followed by absolutism. Absolutism is rule by force. He who has the biggest gun or bomb, rules. So, you can see that God was very loving and kind to give the world his law. And the law revealed what God demands and what God condemns.

Here is what he expects and here is what he will judge. When the nation of Israel came out of bondage and slavery in Egypt, and pitched their camp at the foot of Mt. Sinai, God called Moses to go up the mountain, where God revealed his law to Moses. This law is an amazing gift. It is proof that we have a personal creator. It provides a basis for culture, community, cooperation, and for civilization to flourish. It protects us from judgment, disease, brokenness, and chaos. And it reveals our sin. It reveals the things that we are prone to do, that would damn us, if we kept doing them. Thank God for his law.

Notice this now. Paul tells us that the law is to be used to help people become aware of the fact that they are sinners. We are sinners, not just in a general sense, but we are sinners because of these specific things that we do. The category of sinners is described by 3, 2-word phrases: lawless and disobedient, ungodly and sinners, unholy and profane. Notice the relationship between the words and between the 2-word phrases. The lawless are going to be disobedient because they either reject the law or in their ignorance of the law break it. Those without God (ungodly) are going to miss the mark that God has established, because you cannot make the mark on your own. People without God are people who live more like animals instead of like humans. They are unholy and profane.

But, these two-word phrases are the general heading over a specific list of sins. These sins are each examples of violations of one of the 10 commandments. For example, a person who strikes his father and mother is a child who is guilty of severe dishonoring of his parents. Committing adultery is wrong. Sexual immorality and homosexuality are aggravated and heightened examples of breaking that law. The next law in the 10 commandments is the prohibition of stealing. Well, an enslaver, that is, one who kidnaps people and sells them into any form of slavery, is an aggravated form of stealing. Lying and committing perjury (lying under oath) is a more extreme version of bearing false witness to a neighbor. These sins are a partial listing of offenses that the text describes as being contrary to sound doctrine.

Some of the sins that Paul lists here are hot button issues, aren’t they? For example, to say to a couple living together or being sexually involved without marriage is like speaking in a foreign language. Our culture assumes that you are sexually active if you are not married, and that you are probably unfaithful, if you are. For anyone in authority to say that any form of sex outside of marriage is wrong, is now controversial. To say that homosexuality is a sin, is asking to be labeled as a hateful, bigot who needs to be silenced at all costs. Why does our culture think like this? Why are passages like this under a gag order and not permitted to be preached? I would argue that churches have failed to preach on the whole counsel of God. The law is viewed negatively instead of positively. The law

is seen as being a bunch of rules that an angry God set forth in order to have an excuse to punish people.

But, if the church in Ephesus is going to look like Jesus and if this church is going to look like Jesus and if any church is going to look like Jesus, then we have to use the law in a lawful manner. We have to preach and teach the law for the purpose it was given.

The law reveals our sin. That is so good of God to do that. The law reveals that we have a problem. If we never knew that we had a problem, then we would never know why there is so much evil and chaos in this world? If we did not know what the problems were, we would not know what to do about them. Sure, we can try to reject the law. We can try to reinterpret the law. We can try to rebel against the law, but the fact that the we have the law gives clear definition to our rebellion.

A very talented screen actor recently said that whenever he is in a hotel where a Gideon Bible is, he finds the 18th chapter of Leviticus, and rips it out and throws it away because he does not want that disgusting trash near his head while he sleeps. Leviticus 18 contains a series of laws that govern sexual relationships, including a very clear statement prohibiting homosexuality, which is what is so offensive to him. Ok, so he throws it away. He hates that chapter. Those words do not condemn him; they reveal his condemnation unless he repents. If God never gave us his law, we would not know that we are condemned and we would not know why we are condemned. These prohibitions are not hate speech; they are actually love speech. If I do not teach this, and if you do not believe this, then our theology is corrupt. The consequences are enormous. If I do not teach this and if we ever stop believing this, then at our very core, our belief about God is corrupt. You cannot be a follower of Christ with a corrupt belief about God. God is serious about what we believe. That is why this book was written.

Here is the reality. God is not a minor league god, who plays for fun. If God were a minor leaguer, then there would be such a thing as small sins. Our sin would be small if God were small. But God is not small. God is infinite and because he is serious about his glory, and rightfully so, God plays for keeps. The story of the OT is the story of God graciously loving his creation, revealing himself to them and punishing those who rebel. He plays for keeps. The story of Noah is the story of a worldwide judgment of God because he plays for keeps. The plagues on Egypt, the golden calf fiasco and the story of Korah, Dathan and Abiram are the story of God playing for keeps. Uzzah touching the ark? Saul disobeying a prophet of God? Kids, what did you learn about this morning? You learned about Uzziah the king. He did a lot of good things and he figured that since he did some good things, that he could usurp the role of a priest. Even though God said only priests could offer sacrifices, Uzziah was the king and he could do whatever he wanted, right? But Uzziah was a king, not THE King. And God, the ultimate ruler, plays for keeps and doesn't care who you are. The Assyrian invasion and the Babylonian captivity are all stories of how serious God is about protecting the integrity of his righteousness. But there is more. In the story of the OT, is the story of a people that God chooses to rescue, because this infinitely righteous God loves to rescue people. He does not rescue every person. Every person does not go to heaven. Every person is not okay.

He only rescues those rebels who repent of their sin and trust Him. So, God gives us his law so that we will know how serious our sin is. Our sin is not measured in contrast to others, but in contrast to his law. And if you take God's law seriously, as God does, then you will realize that apart from Christ, you stand condemned by your sin and that left to yourself, you will only keep on sinning and adding to your condemnation. You need to be rescued, but you cannot save yourself. God gives us his law ...

B. To point us to Christ. (11)

Do you see what verse 11 is saying? When Paul speaks about sound doctrine at the end of verse 10, he is referring to a proper use of the law that informs us about the nature of our sin. He then says that this sound doctrine, that is, this proper view of sin is in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. In other words, the good news of what you are saved from cannot be accepted, nor understood, nor is it effectual unless you believe and are convinced of the actual nature of your sin. Simply put, you cannot turn to Christ and trust in him, unless you turn from your sin and you cannot turn from your sin, unless you know what sin is so you know what you are turning away from.

When you deny the reality of certain sins, you minimize sin. When you minimize sin, you minimize the righteousness of God and you minimize the gospel. That is why when you minimize sin, then the gospel changes from what Christ has done, to what we can do to better ourselves and our world. This is what has happened historically in the church. It is called liberalism. Liberalism wants to liberate the church from its narrow and negative views of sin. But when you minimize sin, then there is nothing to be saved from. If there are no sins to repent of and if there is nothing to be saved from, then there is no need of a savior and therefore no gospel message to declare. Christianity is now distorted from what Christ has done to rescue me from my sin, into what I can do to help others. Now I am the Savior. I am the healer. I am my own god. But, I do not make a very good healer, or god, or savior. But, when you own your sin, you are then humble and finally in a position to give up your game, and give up trusting in yourself and in turning from your sin, you turn to trust in Christ. He will save you. He will forgive you. He will change you. And the law that you hated because it condemned you, is now a law that you love because it told you the truth. And now, with a new heart, you not only love the law, but you are able to live out God's standards for you. You don't do it perfectly, but you pursue it, knowing that one day, life will be perfect.