

This morning we're reading from 1 Timothy 1, verses 8 through 11, and it says this, 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 and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers.

for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

Thank you.

All right, we've got a fun passage today.

I say that.

Somewhat sarcastically, 1 Timothy is a little bit inside baseball.

It's Paul talking to a pastor about an issue in particular that his church is having.

And he's telling Timothy, especially in this first chapter, how to deal with that issue or how to deal with that heresy.

And especially in particular, he's got some problem elders that are teaching this heresy.

So a little bit inside baseball, but the reason that we're working through First Timothy is that I don't know what your Facebook algorithm is like and your social media algorithms are like, but mine is just a lot of churches and a lot of live streams and a lot of talking heads about church these days.

And I've just been overwhelmed by...

what seems to be a complete ignoring of Paul's instructions to Timothy in 1 and 2 Timothy and to Titus in the pastoral epistles about how we ought to conduct ourselves as the household of God.

So it's a little bit of inside baseball, but I think it's inside baseball that we all have a responsibility to know about as a congregationally ruled church, right?

So elder-led, congregationally ruled church.

And it's inside baseball that we ought to know about to, I think, also just help our brothers and sisters think through how we live together as the body.

All right, let's pray.

We'll ask for the Lord's help this morning.

We need that more than anything else.

Heavenly Father, we ask that as we open your word, that you would guard my tongue as I look to explain it.

Lord, that you would help me to...

explain your word correctly and not say anything beyond what your word says and not to say anything less than what your word says this morning.

And Lord, I pray that you would guard our hearts to love your truth and to love your word and to love your doctrine, even when it's contrary to our sinful sensibilities.

And Lord, I pray that you would renew us from the inside out this morning, as only you can do.

We pray all this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

You'll notice in Paul's writings, if you read through his books, especially if you take the time to maybe read through his letters all in one sitting, so sit down and read through 1 Timothy and just read through it in a sitting, or the book of Ephesians or one of his letters and just sit through it.

that Paul often takes strategic digressions.

So he'll be in one line of thought and then he'll pause and he'll go a different direction for a couple paragraphs and then he'll come back to his main line of thinking.

There's one famous one in the book of Ephesians where he digresses for pretty much the whole third chapter and then comes back to it in chapter four.

He starts with one line, pauses, and then goes into this big digression about the mystery of the gospel and how great and how unsearchable the love of Christ is.

Great digression, but...

You know, you have to kind of piece together the argument again to stay with this flow of thought.

That's kind of what we have here in 1 Timothy 1.

After stating in verse 7 that these Ephesian false teachers, that they desire to be teachers of the law even though they don't understand the law, Paul takes a quick digression here with our passage that we're looking at today versus Ephesians.

I think it's a quick digression to remind Timothy of a proper understanding of the law.

And actually the digression goes a little bit further than 11, it's gonna go into the next paragraph too, but we'll look at that next week.

So these elders that have left the faith, we talked about this a little bit last week, these elders that have left the faith, they've done so and are leading others astray through a misuse of the law.

So the avenue that they took to leaving the faith

was misusing the law.

And Paul wants to be clear and just remind Timothy, even though he knows Timothy's doctrine is sound, he just wants to take a minute, especially because this book would be read publicly.

It's written to Timothy, but it would have been read publicly at the Ephesian church.

He just wants to take a second to remind everybody there is a correct use of the law.

Misusing whatever little bit of God's law that we're aware of is a timeless flaw common to all of humanity.

It's everywhere.

It's in the headlines.

It's in our churches.

It's in us, right?

Not just talking about churches on the internet, talking about us.

We have a tendency in our sin to take good stuff, even God's law, and to misuse it.

So we want to take a look and see, and by God's grace, use his law for his glory and our good this morning.

We'll see.

In Paul's explanation of how to use the law properly this morning, that God's law, coupled with a proper sense of justice that the Holy Spirit helps provide, destroys self-justification and opens our eyes to our need of salvation.

So it helps destroy our self-righteousness and self-justification and opens our eyes to see our need of salvation.

So we're just going to look at how the law is used or how the law ought to be used, who it's for, and why it can't save.

All right.

So first, how's the law used?

You know, we'll look kind of how it's used wrongly and how it ought to be used.

Look at verse eight.

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

It's like, okay, Paul, thank you very much.

But Paul's got a little bit of irony going on here.

These teachers, they claim to be, right, teachers of the law.

They know the Mosaic law better than anybody else.

They're also telling everyone, we see kind of in Acts 20, and we kind of piece it together with some other parts of 2 Timothy, that they're telling people that Paul doesn't really follow the law.

Paul wants to do away with the law.

He thinks the law is bad, and he doesn't want anybody to follow the law.

So what Paul's saying here in verse 8 is that for all of their knowledge...

for all of their knowing and wisdom of the law, these false teachers missed that the law itself tells us how the law ought to be used.

God tells us through the law, not only does he give us the law, but he also tells us why he gave us the law and how the law ought to be used.

He designed the law for certain purposes,

And he shared those purposes with us.

And these guys are using the law for their own purposes that are not God's.

Following so far?

God made the law.

He made it for a specific purpose.

These guys who claim to know the law aren't even picking up on why God made the law and they're using it for purposes that are not God's purposes.

Paul in 2 Timothy 3 reminds us that that's true of all of Scripture.

That's all of scripture.

He says, all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work, right?

So scripture, kind of all of scripture follows the same pattern of the law.

God gave us the law and he told us what the law was given to us for.

In the same way, God gives us scripture and he also tells us how scripture ought to be used, right?

There's a right and wrong way of using scripture

Similarly, there's a right and wrong way of using the law.

All right, so God's got purposes for the law.

What are his purposes?

Well, Paul doesn't dive into that in 1 Timothy, but I'll give you a little, a quick summary, quick systematic theology of why God gave us the law.

First off, and there's more than this, but there's three main reasons that the church has recognized that God has given us the law.

One, the law restrains evil.

In Galatians 3, 23 to 24, Paul tells us, "...now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

So then the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we may be justified by faith."

So God restrained evil, he kept his people, and I would argue the sin of the world from being as bad as it could be through the law.

So the law restrains evil, but it also condemns, or I think a clearer way to put it is that it reveals sin.

So the law condemns or it reveals sin, it shows us our sin.

Romans 7.13 says, that which is good, that's the law, so that which is good here in this verse is a stand-in for the law.

Did that which is good then bring death to me?

By no means.

It was sin producing death in me through what is good.

That's the law.

So sin produced death in me through the law in order that sin might be shown to be sin and through the commandment or through the law might become sinful beyond measure.

He's saying that the law was good, right?

The law was good.

It didn't create death in me.

It didn't condemn me.

It didn't make sin in me, but there's sin in me.

And the law reveals that sin.

It shows it to be sin.

And then it also not only shows it to be sin, but it magnifies the sin, right?

So the sin gets bigger and bigger and bigger as it's confronted with the law.

We see this in us all the time, right?

I'm not even tempted to necessarily steal the cookies until you tell me I can't have them, right?

And now I wanna take every cookie, right?

Or I'm not tempted to necessarily cross the line until you tell me the line's there, then I wanna cross it.

That's the law.

The law's like, here's the line, and it's basically exposing our rebellious hearts and our sin.

All right, we gotta keep moving.

We could keep talking about that.

Martin Luther, I think, helps explain it a little bit better.

Kind of clear in his very vibrant language.

He says, "...the law is a mighty hammer to crush the self-righteousness of human beings, for it shows them their sin, so that by recognition of sin they may be humbled, frightened, and worn down, and so may long for grace and for the blessed offspring, Christ."

It is in this sense that the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

So it kind of leads into the third purpose that the law educates.

So the law shows us our sin, it condemns, it shows us our sin, but it also educates us about God and his heart and what he loves and what he hates.

And Jesus is the fulfillment of the law in that way.

He says, Matthew 5, 17, he's the fulfillment of the law in other ways, but he's the fulfillment of the law in that he shows us most completely what God loves and what God hates.

Jesus said in Matthew 5, 17, do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.

So that's a really quick run-through of the purpose of the law or why God gave us the law in the first place.

But not only did God give us the Mosaic Law, he told us why he gave it and how it should be used for restraining evil, revealing sin, and educating us on what God loves and what he hates.

Now, when we see that, when we see the purpose, that three-fold purpose for why God gave us the law, we can see a little bit more clearly, and it's not that hard to see, who the law is for.

Look at verses 9 and 10, again, of 1 Timothy here.

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, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.

So who is the law for?

Well, first Paul says it's not for the righteous in Christ.

Now, Paul's not saying that the righteous in Christ, those who have been justified by Jesus's atoning work on the cross, he's not saying that we don't need to have our sin restrained and killed or mortified.

He's not saying that we don't need to see our sin more clearly.

He's not saying that we don't need to know God's heart, what he loves and what he hates more.

Believers in Christ who have, again, been made righteous through Christ's sacrifice, we still need those things.

But we don't need the law to do it because we have something better, right?

We have the Holy Spirit indwelling us who is a far better helper in revealing and restraining our sin and who with Jesus and what he's done on the cross shows us much more deeply and richly what God loves and hates.

So we have the indwelling Holy Spirit who helps restrain our sin and reveal our sin to us.

And he also, coupled with Jesus, shines a spotlight on Jesus to show us what God loves and hates more clearly.

Believers have been justified.

We've been made righteous through faith in Jesus.

who kept the law perfectly, right?

Jesus keeps the law perfectly on our behalf.

He takes our place on the cross.

He bears the punishment we deserved for breaking the law in the first place.

So now the law has no power over believers, and we have a helper who fulfills the purpose of the law more deeply and richly than the law itself ever could, right?

So believers don't need the law.

We've got the Holy Spirit, we've got Jesus.

Now, who's the law for?

So Paul says very clearly, right?

Again, understanding that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and the disobedient.

Now, if you've been wondering, like the whole sermon, like what is he talking about?

What am I talking about when I say the law?

Are we talking about the Constitution?

Are we talking about some unspoken moral code that we all understand?

What Paul means in this passage when he says the law is the Mosaic law summed up in the Ten Commandments.

Both Moses and Jesus sum it up further in love your neighbor as yourself.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

But Paul, I think, points to the Ten Commandments here.

So first, Paul, in verse 7, refers to the false teachers as those who desire to teach the law or to be teachers of the law.

Very common phrase to describe rabbis or people who taught the Mosaic law, the Ten Commandments.

Also, you know, Paul's big long list of vices that he makes here loosely parallels the Ten Commandments.

So you have these three pairs at the beginning of verse nine, right?

It says, just but for the lawless and disobedient, the ungodly and sinners, and the unholy and profane, right?

So you get these three pairs that correlate and correspond to the first four commandments of the Ten Commandments, which deal directly with our relationship with God.

Then he lists for those who strike their father and mother, paralleling the fifth commandment to honor your father and mother.

For murderers, you shall not murder.

The sexually immoral or fornicators, men who practice homosexuality, you shall not commit adultery.

Enslavers, who enslaving here are those who would charge exorbitant interest so that nobody could ever catch up with their debts, eventually landing them in indentured servitude

Or slavery, you shall not steal, right?

Or take somebody else's stuff, like their money.

Liars, perjurers, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

And then at the end, instead of paralleling, you shall not covet, Paul just ends the list with a broad sweeping and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, right?

So Paul's saying, what he's saying is, there's a lot of ways that people are breaking the 10 commandments or there's a lot of ways that people are breaking the law today, right?

Even today, right?

And, you know, we talk about sharing the gospel, the good news with people a lot, as we should.

That's one of our responsibilities, to share the good news, to share the gospel with other people.

But often, what we need to share first is the law, right?

The bad news.

It's bad news because we've all broken it and we deserve judgment for breaking the law.

The self-righteous...

which to an extent we all are, especially need to hear the bad news.

There's really two types of self-righteousness that have existed as long as there's been sin in mankind.

There's the religious and moral self-righteousness,

That kind of says, you know, I, by my own strength and willpower, have kept myself from becoming a terrible sinner that God would reject.

You know, it's the person that says, or that would pray, I thank God that I'm not like that guy over there.

Or I thank God that I'm not like those dirty sinners over there.

And the religiously self-righteous person says,

who's not, to be clear, is not right with God, not born again, not justified, they need to hear, we need to hear James 2.10.

I'm sorry, I got behind on this.

We're catching up right now.

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

That's an impossible standard.

Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

You can't go through that list of Ten Commandments or even Paul's updated list, right, without seeing at least in some way that you've broken one of those.

No one can keep the law.

Jesus says in Matthew 5.20, For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

There's another type of self-righteousness, though, that we can struggle with, and I'll call this the social or relational self-righteousness.

This one's a little bit harder to describe, but this is largely what drives critical theory and woke culture.

It's a social self-righteousness that says, you know, I see a real or sometimes a fake or a perceived injustice committed against myself or someone else,

And I must bring down wrath and condemnation on whoever is committing this injustice.

I see injustice, I see a wrong, and I will be the one to bring down wrath and condemnation on this injustice.

There's no grace or mercy for the accused.

and the relationally self-righteous person will justify all sorts of things that they would normally condemn, even violence, in order to punish the oppressors.

Why?

Why is this such a need?

Why is there always a cause?

Just looking at the person now, not necessarily the social phenomenon, right?

Why does it seem for those of us that struggle with this kind of relational self-righteousness, why is there always a need, why is there always a cause that I have to be involved in?

It's because in this scenario, the spotlight is now on someone else's sin, someone else's law breaking, while highlighting my own righteous indignation towards that wrong that is clearly worse than my wrongs.

The socially and relationally self-righteous person needs to hear the law too.

Because God's law not only covers God's design for our relationships, how we relate to one another, but it also covers how we are to honor God and to worship him with all that we are.

We're to honor God with our bodies and his design for sex and marriage.

Fornication, which is an old-fashioned word that I always feel a little weird using, but that's what Paul's talking about here, sex outside of marriage, and consensual homosexuality are not necessarily violent sins that obviously harm the other person that we're committing them with, but they are, more importantly, sins committed against God.

And holiness, you know, the first four commandments that Paul kind of summarizes in those three couplets there, is what we were made for.

And sharing the law shows the socially self-righteous person that our anger towards other people's wrongs is a thinly veiled cover for our guilt with God, right?

We're trying to cover up our own known guilt.

We know we stand guilty before God and we're trying to get the spotlight off of our guilt before God and shining the spotlight on something bad that somebody else is doing that's clearly worse than what I'm guilty of before God.

Listen, apart from the gospel, we're all like these false teachers at Ephesus, misusing the law, trying to justify ourselves, but we can't use the law to save or to justify ourselves.

That's the whole point of this, right?

If I know I stand guilty before God, I'm going to try to use his rules.

I'm going to try to use his regulations to make myself look better, whether that's by keeping a few of them as best I can and beating other people over the head with a bunch of religious rules and regulations, or if it's by trying to accept everybody and make everybody else feel bad when they hurt somebody else.

There's a couple of ways to go about it.

But the law can't save.

If we just grab a part of the law...

and cling to it, it can't save.

Paul tells us in verse 11 that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

Listen, the law is good and right and hopeless apart from the gospel.

The law, there is beauty and there is righteousness in the law, but it's a beauty and righteousness that we have no way of obtaining apart from the gospel.

Again, the law has to be understood in the context of the gospel.

The Ten Commandments and the Mosaic law in general, they're good, they're just, but they were just primarily a means of showing us our sin and to point us to a need of our Savior.

No one ever has and nor will they ever make themselves acceptable to God by keeping the law.

Again, because we said no one can possibly keep the law.

Paul also tells us in Romans 2 that not only can no one keep God's law, but no one can keep their own law or moral code.

Like, is Billie Eilish really gonna turn over her estate to those Native Americans who are claiming it?

Like, nobody keeps their own code.

The protesters in Minnesota are reported as setting up and enforcing borders around their neighborhoods for safety purposes.

Like, nobody keeps their own code.

or more closer to home, right?

The steady barrage of reports of abuse of authority and position, both sexually, physically, spiritually within the evangelical church hasn't slowed down these last 10 years, right?

Nobody keeps their own code.

Nobody keeps their own law, let alone God's.

We can't use the law to justify and save ourselves.

We can only use it to self-righteously cover up our shortcomings by shining the spotlight on somebody else's flaws, again, that are clearly worse than ours.

We need a savior.

We need someone who is just, but also justifying towards us, right?

Who is just, but also merciful towards us.

Paul puts it this way in Romans 3.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

What Paul is saying here is that Jesus kept the law perfectly.

Jesus had every right to pray, thank you God that I'm not like them.

He's the only person in history who never stepped on anybody's rights or dignity, who could protest injustice without an ounce of hypocrisy or need to cover anything up.

And yet, when he comes to earth the first time, he doesn't come bringing wrath and condemnation on the unjust like the ultimate social justice warrior.

Rather, he comes and he dies for the unjust and the oppressors.

That's beautiful, right?

Being a religious tightwad or a social justice warrior and using bits and pieces of the law to make other people pay for their sins when we know we have a massive bill to pay ourselves that we couldn't possibly cover.

There's nothing beautiful about that.

Jesus had no bill to pay, and yet he freely offers to assume our debt and to give us the riches of his glorious grace.

So don't shy away from sharing the law when we're sharing the gospel.

We need to know our need.

If we just tell people Jesus loves them and they think they're okay, if we just tell people Jesus loves them and they think that they're morally superior than everybody else around them, that's not gonna mean a thing to them.

We need to share the law so that we can see, share the 10 commandments, practically speaking, walk through the 10 commandments with somebody that you're sharing the gospel with.

Trust me, we've all broken at least one.

And if we've broken one, James tells us we're guilty of all, right?

Walk folks through the Ten Commandments to help them see their sin and their need of the Savior.

Listen, delivering bad news is tough.

It's not easy.

You will face rejection if you're sharing bad news with people.

But we know that there's good news that far, far, far exceeds the bad news to follow up with the bad news, right?

So share the bad news, say the hard thing so that we can bring the good news to people.

And let me just ask, we gotta do a little self-reflection here.

Are you like the Ephesian elders?

Are you using the law to feel good about yourself?

Right, this started, Paul's talking to church people, right?

And this crept up and started within the church.

Let me just ask, are you overly critical of other people?

Are you able to admit when you're wrong?

Have you confessed sin recently?

If not,

you might be, I'm not saying definitely, but you might be misusing the law to justify or sanctify yourself.

So let's stop striving.

Just stop.

stop the striving and the pushing and the trying to earn it and to measure up and just behold and adore Jesus.

Take some time to look at what he's done for you.

Take some quiet time to grow in your knowledge of what he's done for you.

And take some time to let that sink in that he did it for you.

To cover those sins that you know about and maybe only you know about and one other person.

Take some time to let that sink in.

Adore him.

And then walk, right?

And then put the next step foot forward and walk in joy and obedience as an act of worship, not an act of self-righteousness to make yourself feel better about your relationship with God.

Let's pray.

Lord, pride and self-righteousness are subtle things

addictive things.

So Lord, I pray that you give us eyes to see through the power of your word and your Holy Spirit, see it in our own lives and help us to root it out, Lord.

Lord, we want to be joyfully following you, walking with you and after you, not trying to earn your favor, knowing that Christ has earned it for us, but Lord, joyfully and obediently following you as an act of worship.

and a desire to be with you and more like you, Lord.

So, Lord, I just pray that, again, that you give us, even today or this week, a little time to reflect on why we're doing what we're doing, why we're volunteering, why we're toeing the line morally.

And Lord, I pray that that reflection would lead us not to less law-keeping, Lord, but to a deeper appreciation of your grace and mercy and a freer, more joyful obedience in you.

And Lord, I do pray that you would give us boldness as we desire to share the good news of what you've done with our friends and family.

And Lord, would you give us courage to say the hard things?

Lord, we don't want to be obnoxious or belligerent, but Lord, we all need to hear and all needed to hear before we could accept your grace and mercy, Lord, the our need of that grace and mercy.

So would you give us wisdom to know how to share the law and the condemnation and just the purpose that you gave us the law for with others, Lord, and that you would just even open eyes, some eyes this week to their need of a savior and open hearts to receive what Jesus has done on their behalf.

Lord, we're thankful for your word that doesn't leave us in the dark about who you are and even about who we are, even when it's hard to hear.

And Lord, we're thankful for this time that we spent in your word this morning.

We pray that you would bring fruit from it, even today.

We pray all this in Jesus' name.

Amen.