

A Study on 1 Timothy

Week 3 | 1:8-20

Overview | The use of the law in the life of the believer

Paul makes a contrast between the false teachers who were “desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding... (v. 7)” and those teachers (primarily he and Timothy in Ephesus) who had been instructed in the proper use of the law for the believer.

In this section, Paul answers three main questions:

1. What is the proper use(s) of the law?
2. What is so amazing and magnificent about the gospel of grace?
3. Why is it important for leaders within the church to fight (contend) for true doctrine?

Paul also uses three illustrations to help us understand the principles he hopes to convey:

1. An overflowing fountain (1:14)
2. Warfare (1:18)
3. A shipwreck (1:19)

Introductory Illustration | Weeding a flowerbed

If we have a flowerbed and we leave it untended what happens? Eventually it gets overrun by weeds. A responsible gardener both waters and weeds. When flowers have what they need to grow and are not hindered or overtaken by weeds, the beauty of the flowers can be on full display.

What Paul is instructing Timothy to do in Ephesus is just that – water the church with the life-giving truth of the gospel while at the same time pull out the weeds (the false teachers and their doctrines) so that the beauty of the gospel will be on full display.

The Use of the Law | 1:8-11

Starting point: the law is good if it is used properly (1:8).

- Three uses of the law
 - To reflect our sinfulness and God’s holiness (a mirror)
 - To restrain evil (referred to as the civil use)
 - To show us how to live a life that glorifies God (a guide)
- The goal of the law is to drive people to the gospel of Jesus Christ which should then produce repentance and godly living.

Who is the law for?

- The just – the law no longer condemns those who have found their justification in Jesus Christ. The law still serves to expose our sin, lead us to repentance, and show us how to live.
- The unjust – Here, Paul focuses on the use of the law for the unbeliever. He specifically focuses on the way those in the Ephesian church (false teachers) were violating the law. They claimed to be teachers of the law yet were guilty of violating it.
 - The list of sins in verses 9-10 is a reflection of the 10 commandments.
 - This summary of a summary of God’s law is used to expose the hypocrisy of the false teachers, the emptiness of their teaching (it did not lead to repentance and faith in

Christ), and the fact that it did not contribute to the health of the church (sound doctrine – literally means healthy doctrine).

- The law, properly used, should drive us to worship.
- *That the Law is not for just people (v. 9) is not an absolute statement. Paul only means that the Torah does not restrain Christians the same way it does non-Christians, for believers have the Holy Spirit to keep us from evil (Rom. 8:9–10). Certainly, the Spirit speaks through the Law to reveal our sin and lead us to repent (2 Kings 22); yet the final effect does not produce fear of punishment, as in the unregenerate (see Gen. 4:1–16). Instead, the Spirit uses the Law to form in us the desire to please the Lord in holiness. God’s law, John Calvin says, is not against us like it is against non-believers. “It is not opposed to righteous persons, that is, to the godly and to those who willingly obey God.”*

In Ephesus, the false teachers used the Law neither to restrain sin nor to provoke repentance. In other words, they failed to focus on the Law’s opposition to ungodliness, keeping the church from seeing its need for the life-giving gospel, instead using it in a way God never intended. – Ligonier Ministries (<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/law-and-lawless/>)

The Power of the Gospel to Save Sinners | 1:12-17

Paul was called out of a life of rebellion to be an apostle. Prior to his conversion he had been one who used the law as a means to justify his persecution of the church.

- He describes his former life as one who was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent (violent man; 1:13). *See Acts 7:58; 8:3; 9:1-2.*
- It’s one of the reasons he is able to so quickly and accurately point out false teaching.
- He goes so far as to say he is the foremost sinner – this is not him exaggerating but rather an honest assessment of the depth of his sin (1:15).

Jesus is the one who pursued Paul.

- Christ came into the world to save sinners like Paul (1:15).
- Christ gave him strength (1:12).
- Christ appointed him to the ministry of apostle (1:1, 12).
- Christ’s mercy and patience toward Paul are a demonstration of the magnitude of God’s grace. If someone like Paul can be saved, who is outside the reach of the gospel (1:16)?
- Whereas the false teachers were misleading people by saying what you had to do in order to be saved, Paul reminded the church that it’s not about what you do but rather what has been done by Christ (1:15).

This leads us to worship.

- When we have an honest assessment about our own sin, rather than trying to justify ourselves by our “good deeds,” the gospel of grace is an overwhelming source of good news. This is where Paul uses the image of “overflowing” or “super-abounding” grace.
- Paul ends this section with a hymn of triumph:
 - To King of the ages – Jesus Christ is king now and will be when he ushers in the new heaven and earth; his kingship is eternal
 - Immortal – God’s essence, his being is eternal
 - Invisible – God cannot be seen, but he is knowable.
 - The only God – there is none other like God Almighty
 - Be honor and glory forever and ever

The Necessity to Guard the Faith | 1:18-20

A note about Timothy's authority: Timothy, unlike the false teachers, had the authority to instruct the church. This is not just because Paul trusted Timothy to be a faithful teacher but also because the elders of the church recognized Timothy as being called by the Lord ("prophecies made about you...") to teach (1:18; 4:14).

Timothy is instructed to "wage the good warfare" (1:18).

- The battle that is being waged is spiritual.
- The weapons that the believer wields are not the weapons of the world: clever schemes, argumentation, faulty logic, myths, and legends, etc.
- The weapons that the believer wields are the gospel and a concern for the souls of the unbelieving opponent. The full armor of the believer is evidenced in Eph. 6:10-20.
 - Belt of truth
 - Breastplate of righteousness
 - Shoes equipped with the readiness given by the gospel of peace
 - Shield of faith
 - Helmet of salvation
 - Sword of the Spirit – the Word of God
- The goal of the battle is not destruction of the opponent but rather conversion of a rebel and the defense of the truth.
- The disposition of the believer should be one of gospel confidence (holding faith) and godly conduct stemming from that confidence (good conscience).

Those that reject the gospel are said to have "shipwrecked their faith" (1:19).

- This imagery is to be understood as complete devastation and destruction of their faith.
- Those that have abandoned the gospel are not merely in danger of spiritual setback but of eternal judgment.

Two men, Hymenaeus and Alexander, are named as those who have walked away from the faith and have been "handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1:20).

- The term "handed over to Satan" is a term of excommunication. They have been put outside the church, declared an unbeliever, and are absent of any of the spiritual protections that are afforded to those who believe in Jesus Christ.
- The goal of excommunication is not ridicule, shunning, or judgment. The goal is repentance. The hope is that they see their folly, learn not to blaspheme, repent and return to the gospel.

So what? | Why does this matter?

Resource List

Teaching 1 Timothy by Angus Macleay (Primary Source for class)

1 Timothy by Philip Graham Ryken

Let's Study 1 Timothy by W. John Cook

1-2 Timothy & Titus by Philip H. Towner

Commentary on 1 Timothy by John Calvin

ESV Study Bible