

**From Defense to Doxology:**  
*A Reflection on Law & Gospel*  
 1 Timothy 1:8-17

*“Jesus Came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost.”*

**Introduction:** This morning I would like us all to take a moment and think about our life, particularly our relationship with Jesus Christ. To some this may sound and be foreign, and that’s ok. For others this will be a time to reflect on who you are in Christ and *how you got here*. Let's ask some diagnostic questions: *how often do you review the gospel in your own life? Specifically, how often do you remember who you were **before Christ saved you**? How often does thankfulness for you salvation take up space in your prayer? When was the last time you shared your testimony with someone else of how God saved you in Christ? How often have you shared the gospel with someone else?*

My point is not to guilt anyone this morning, but simply remind us of what we are called to in the gospel of Jesus. The gospel is NOT simply about *getting salvation*, although that is true, but it is about being restored to God in Christ, so that we now have a relationship with Him. It is out of that relationship that obedience comes. The gospel is what reveals the glory of God, frees us from our self effort, and secures us into the future. It is not simply an act in the past but an ongoing reality in our lives. It reminds me that God saved a young, self-righteous young man who gloried in his own goodness, thinking that somehow he deserved salvation rather than seeing the reality, that all his efforts were filthy rags and building an account for wrath rather than salvation. When I remember that God saved me in spite of myself because of the work of Christ alone, I not only a humbled but also motivated in giving thanks, sharing Christ and in worship. This is why understanding the gospel is imperative for all of us, since what is at stake is salvation and God's glory.

This is why Timothy had to deal with the false teachers: they were peddling a **false teaching** that ran counter to the gospel, teaching that the Law was a way of salvation. Paul clarifies the issues of Law and gospel with Timothy, which lead to a spontaneous remembrance of all that he was thankful for and expressing that in praise.

### **Purpose of the Law Explained (8)**

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

Even though the false teachers were using the Law in way that led to despair it did not make the tool they were using bad. In fact, the Law is seen as **“holy, and commandment is holy and righteous and good.”** (Rom. 7:12). The Law was given with a purpose and intent, and **if it stays in that lane**, or is used *lawfully*, it is intrinsically GOOD. Remember, the false teachers were leveraging the Law to do much more with it than it was intended to do. It had become a **measure and means of righteousness**. It had been brought into the church as a evaluation stick for believers and gave the teachers the power and control they craved. This begs the question, *what is the purpose of the Law? What role should it play in our life?* Paul does not lay it out here but he had in previous writings.

### **Law Restrains**

All law is given to restrain evil, which is how life in public with other people is possible. It is a restraint to law breakers since evil exists. Paul wrote about this earlier that the Law held people captive, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed (Gal. 3:15-4:7). It was a guardian until Christ came so that we would understand that we are justified by faith alone.

### Law Condemns

Not only does the Law restrain the reality of evil, but it actually is given to **condemn** rather than offer salvation. It is under the law that the world may be held accountable to God (Rom. 3:19) and through the law comes the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20). Romans 7:13 states *“Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, **producing death in me through what is good**, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.”* (cf. Rom. 7:7-25). The Law was a hammer! That is how Martin Luther described it:

“It is a mighty ‘hammer’ to crush the self-righteousness of human beings. For ‘it shows them their sin, so that by the 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 way that the law was our tutor bringing us to Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

### Law Defines

Though believers in Jesus Christ are no longer under the Law, the Law does continue show us two major things: 1) **The holiness of God, and the standard He sets; 2) The reminder we cannot keep the Law perfectly.** The Sermon on the Mount reminds us of God’s standard that goes beyond what is simply written, where lust is not an act alone but something that comes out of our mind and heart (Matt. 5:27-30), so that the goal of holiness is complete, from a heart outward, not simply our actions. But the **second reality is the largest to understand: we cannot keep the Law perfectly!** Jesus said unless our righteousness exceeded the Pharisees, we could not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20). So we do not try to keep the Law to gain or earn, but we operate out of **freedom from the Law**, which we live by something GREATER: *the Holy Spirit who guides, convicts, and produces fruit, against such things there is no law!* In other words, the Law does not produce obedience or righteousness or love, but Christ working through His Word and the Spirit to change us from the inside out! **The Law cannot legislate obedience from the heart.** Just like we cannot set up rules for our kids and hope they obey them with the right attitudes and motives every time. The gospel is all about the fact that as we **know God we trust Him more, and as we trust Him more we desire to obey more**, but not out of trying to earn, but rather to PLEASE HIM.

Paul makes this abundantly clear in the next section. .

### Placement of the Law Portrayed (9-11)

*“...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.**”*

### Law Speaks Loudly to the Sinner

The Law is for the sinner, not the righteous. There are a few things to take note of in verses 9-10:

1. The first 3 couplets have to do with the relationship between man and God, and contain a negative effect and what it produces. Lawlessness will produce disobedience and so forth. These are taken from the first portions of the 10 commandments

<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *Guard the Truth*, p. 47

2. The second list follows the rest of the 10 commandments and represents the heinousness of sin that would have been going on in Ephesus.
3. The last phrase is to encapsulate anyone that thought they'd be left out from the first two groups. Disobedience and sin is defined by **anything** contrary to the sound doctrine or teaching of God, which leaves everyone listening in a state of evil and under wrath.

When we look at the Law, we do not see a way of escape or a way back to God but rather a desperate condition that leaves us hopeless in ourselves. This is why ANY emphasis on our works or obedience that would lead to salvation is heretical, a false teaching. It moves us away from the solution rather than closer to it. There is ONLY ONE answer to our condition revealed through the law and that is the Gospel.

### Law is the First Step in Understanding the Gospel

**How does the Law play together with the Gospel?** The Law is the entry gate, the entrance to the path that leads to life. The Law is what shows us our need in light of God's holiness. This is why the **Law is good but NOT GOOD NEWS**. It can only bring us to the doorstep of salvation but it cannot deliver. We are saved ONLY in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the righteous One dying for the unrighteous, the Savior who kept the entirety of the Law to save those under the Law. Jesus was perfect in fulfilling all the Law so that He would be a PERFECT sacrifice, so that God's requirement would be satisfied and His substitute for us would be accepted. This is GOOD NEWS. Its not about what we can do but what He did! Its not about our obedience but His. It's not about our holiness but His.

That is why Paul said this is gospel **shows or manifests the glory of God**, unveiling to us His majesty. All blessedness resides in Him and proceeds from Him. It is THIS gospel that Paul was entrusted, to guard, teach, and proclaim. When Paul got to this point of his letter, he simply had to stop and give thanks for what the glorious gospel had done in His life.

### Personal Testimony of the Gospel Displayed (12-17)

*I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, 13 though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. 17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

### A Response of Thanks (12-14)

Here Paul moves from the *academic to the personal, from intellectual to affection, from truth to truth*. His aggressive clarity to Timothy gave way to reflection on the role of the Law to the gospel, which inevitably gave way to **thanksgiving**. In other words, Paul never moved far away from his own personal testimony or how the gospel affected his life, both at the point of salvation or each and everyday. The gospel is **transformative, life giving, and something to be displayed to the world**. **Thanksgiving** is an essential part of our life with Christ, since thanksgiving is the antidote to so many of our sinful trappings. It is difficult to be thankful and angry at the same time, or unhappy or joyless, or frustrated and anxious,

or greedy and prideful if we are continually thankful for what we have IN CHRIST. Here Paul gives two main foundations for his thanks:

- **Thankful for what he was saved FROM**

Paul never ventured too far away from the reality of his **past**. In fact, he leveraged his testimony multiple times in sharing the gospel with those in power. He could point to very specific ways that he was a sinner, and even the foremost of sinners. He was:

**A blasphemer** – He spoke evil about God Himself, slandering His name and even went so far as to get Christians to blaspheme (Acts 26:11) as he had a “raging fury” against them, but it was really against Jesus Himself

**A persecutor of the church and Christians**- He was aggressive in his persecution, creating havoc and entering houses to arrest people (Acts 8:3, 9:1) giving approval to the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1) and to many others as well (Acts 26:10).

**Insolent Opponent** -The word here means a “person driven by violence and contempt for others to mistreat them”. In other words, he did not just carry out acts of violence, it was someone who garnered pleasure from it.

This list not only violates the Law, it is particularly egregious since it was directly against Jesus Christ. Here in lies a challenge for us today. Sometimes we get caught in the wrong thinking that we were not *that bad* before salvation. If we think that we were just ok, especially compared to others, it actually lowers our thankfulness since we diminish the need for and work of Christ. Every act of salvation is miraculous, changes a heart of stone to a heart of flesh, and without it we’d be hopeless. It should be a regular practice that we review who we were BEFORE Christ saved us, even if that was a long time ago.

- **Thankful for what he was GIVEN in Christ Jesus our Lord**

*What was he specifically thankful for?* The same things we can/should be:

**Strength** – Paul was moved from persecutor to missionary, from killer to bringer of new life, from adversary to friend. He was not pointing to his own faithfulness, but God’s grace that gave faith and appointed him to service. It was greater to be a servant of the king than a master of the miserable. He viewed his life of service, sacrifice, and suffering as an act of grace in his life, a reason to give thanks, and the hopeful antithesis of the hopelessness of his former life.

**Mercy** – *Mercy* means having pity and compassion on the miserable, and specifically its God’s goodness toward those in misery and distress. It is withholding what is deserved. Notice that Paul was clear that he *received* mercy, or was literally *mercied by God*. He did not deserve it. He had done all of his violent, vile, blasphemous sins in **ignorance** and **unbelief**, which meant he was still qualified for mercy. He was not like those who understood Christ’s teaching and power but still rejected. It is a hopeful for us that a sinner who blasphemed still was a recipient of mercy. I’ve been asked the question before by those who have feared that if they cursed the Lord or took His name in vain they may have committed blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and are beyond salvation. (Matt. 12:31) My short answer is that if you are worried about your soul and asking the question, you have NOT. When faced with the truth, Paul responded. When called by Christ, He followed.

**Grace** – *Grace* is the kindness, goodness, and favor of God toward those who deserve only punishment. It is a gift, an unmerited favor, an undeserved gift of forgiveness to those who neither earned or deserved it. Here the grace of God *overflowed*, or was “superabundant” (the Greek word *huper* was

used before abundant to intensify it). Grace is **lavished on us in salvation** (Eph. 1:7-8). He received grace and the twin realities of faith and love from God through Christ Jesus. Infinitely loved. Eternally secure. Faith that is precious and refined. None of it deserved or earned but freely given in Christ Jesus.

Listen, sometimes we look at things to be thankful for and we look at **material or circumstantial things**, and we are left wanting: I feel bad, I don't have what I want, I didn't get what I deserved, and there is nothing good on the horizon. We feel stuck. But these realities are NOT the basis of true thankfulness. When we look deeper at what we **do deserve and what we do POSSESS in Christ, we are free to overflow with thanksgiving in SPITE of circumstances.**

### A Response of Purpose (15-16)

**Mission of Christ** – Paul then turns to a “trustworthy” statement, a phrase that appears 5 times in the Pastoral epistles (1 Tim. 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:8) that meant a statement that would have had universal agreement in the church, since this was written after the church had formulated clear theological statements. There is so much packed into this small phrase, but for sure we walk away with the idea of **incarnation and redemption FOR any and all sinner**. Jesus entered humanity, not ceasing to be God but veiling His glory with humanity, so that He could live our lives the way we never could. And His mission was to redeem those called and given by God to Himself. This simple, short, and profound sentence was one that the early church clung to and one that **every** church needs to remember, live out, and praise God for. This is why we exist. This defines OUR mission, since Jesus is calling the elect to Himself, we have clarity in what we are to engage in and purpose to act out.

### Display of Paul's Life

*Was Paul speaking in hyperbole when he said he was the foremost of all sinners?* The answer is, not at all. Paul understood his life was the epitome of self-righteousness, believing himself to be saved and special since HE was exemplary in keeping the Law, to the point that he acted violently and deplorably in unbelief. But that is not the point as much as **why** he said this to the church. It seems that he was signaling multiple truths to Timothy and the church:

1) **If God could save someone like Paul, He can save anyone, even the 'good' people** - Paul had a view of His life as one that was NOT his own, but one that existed to the glory of God, whether by his life, death, suffering, pain, or comfort. His own life and testimony was a signal, an example, to those that he ministered to that God can save the worst AND the best (which are often the hardest to save). Pride plays into mankind's unwillingness to yield their life to Christ, which produces fear of the unknown, of stepping out of a known life that is miserable to the prospect of the unknown but glorious life. Pride plays out on both ends of the spectrum.

Some believe they are too bad, too far gone, for God to save them. We can't move beyond the skeletons in our closets, the guilt and shame that we carry around and are weighed down by the insecurity of being known.

Others think they are actually good, fine, and don't actually NEED saving. This group believes in God, Jesus, forgiveness, etc, but does NOT apply it to themselves. Sure we "sin", but not the bad ones, not the damning ones, and those small enough sins can be overcome by our goodness. This is not only foolish, it is DAMNING.

The question this morning is which group do you identify with? Even if you're a believer this morning, most will struggle with one side of this battle with pride or the other.

**2) If God could save someone life Paul, He could even redeem the false teachers** - Timothy also had to have assurance that there was hope for his mission, not only to silence the false teachers but to see them be redeemed. Just as God exercises patience like a good Father, Timothy also had to exercise hopeful patience with those he was tasked to confront.

### **A Response of Praise (17)**

*What was Paul's response to this path of thinking about the Law, Gospel, and His own testimony?*

**Praise! Worship! Doxology!** Its as if his pen burst forth with a song of worship, halting his charge to Timothy and the issues at Ephesus and simply magnified the King of the ages who is to be honored and glorified forever. This is where true fervency for worship comes from, and should proceed from our lips and heart daily as we reflect on the goodness of God in the gospel in our lives.

Are you living under the bondage of the Law or the freedom of Grace? Have you remembered who you were before Christ and does the reflection of all that you are IN Christ breed thankfulness, purpose, and praise. Let's take a few minutes to respond to this in song as we remember the **gospel of the glory of the blessed God, who is the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, who is to receive honor and glory forever and ever! Amen!**