

Gospel Godliness

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Date: 10 June 2007

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[0 : 00] if you're going to be accepted by God. Or it may be at the other extreme where they say the law is nothing. We can do what we like. We're liberated and free in Christ. It could be in particular Judaistic law that they're trying to hold up as somehow the ceremonies or the rites of, if you want to be a Christian and Gentile, yes, but you've got to obey some aspects of the law that are there in the Old Testament.

We don't know precisely what it is about the law that they've got wrong. It's clearly significantly ignorant and clearly significantly wrong.

And the way Paul goes from verse 7 onwards might just give us a bit of a hint of where they're going wrong. Notice that Paul says then in verse 8, in response to his indictment of these aspiring teachers, we know that the law is good.

Presumably that means that they were saying that the law is a bad thing. But maybe that's a bit speculative. It's good if one uses it lawfully.

It's actually a play on words. We've got legitimately in this translation which means the same thing. But the law is good if used lawfully. What Paul means is this means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient.

[1 : 28] Now what does he mean? What is the function of law? The law in general, really. The law in our own society. But what's the function too of the law in the Old Testament in particular?

Well, let's just stand back a minute before we go back into how his argument flows. The argument in the Bible, in both the Old Testament and in the New, it's not as though the New suddenly tells us what the law is about.

The Old Testament law itself knew what it was about and showed people what it was about. You don't actually need the New Testament to understand that. But the New Testament endorses what the Old Testament law teaches about itself.

And for those who've been here in the last few months, we've heard Paul expound that at some length in Romans 1 to 8. The function of the Old Testament law. One of its functions is to expose sin.

That is, it's there for sinners, for lawless people, as Paul has said in verse 9. That is, it's not there for the perfect people. What good have they got to do with law? They're not lawbreakers. But for the lawless, the people who break the law, the law is there to show us our sin, to show us our failure, so that we know when and what we have done wrong.

[2 : 43] We know when and where we've fallen short of God's standards. So it exposes sin, and it brings us under the condemnation of sin.

We are sinners. That is, the law has what we might call a punitive function, a punishing function, or a condemning function, because it exposes our lawlessness.

We might think that's a bad thing, but actually it's a good thing, that we know that. But it's not the only function of the law. The law also is a deterrent. It seeks to restrain sin.

So the law says, if you do this, then this is the punishment. This is the outcome. It's to deter people from doing wrongdoing. It might say that if you do this, the right thing, then God will reward you with his blessings.

That's common in the Old Testament. That is, also acting as a deterrent to restrain sin by enticing us into right doing. The law has that function.

[3 : 45] It's punitive, it's a deterrent, and thirdly, it's educative. It teaches us what God's will is. When the law says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, it's teaching us what God's will is for us.

When it tells us about our care for our neighbour and not moving their property, the landmark and all these sorts of things, it is telling us what God's will is for us. It's guiding us in right paths.

All three of those functions you can find in the Old Testament and all of them are endorsed in the New. So Paul says the law is good if it's used lawfully.

And then he goes on to give some categories of the lawless people for whom the law comes. There are three pairs to begin with in verse 9. The lawless and the disobedient, the godless and the sinful, the unholy and the profane.

General categories of wrongdoers. But then notice the list. Those who kill their father or mother. Why that in particular?

[4 : 55] But if we're aware of the law, in particular the highest part of the Old Testament law, the Ten Commandments, honour your father and your mother, as we read that, the bell rings.

That's the fifth commandment. And the next one, murderers, that's the sixth commandment. Fornicators, that's the seventh, don't commit adultery. And fornicators, sodomites, or literally male homosexual practices is really behind the word.

That's some examples of breaking the adultery law, the seventh commandment. Slave traders, well, that's stealing in effect. That's actually part of what's meant by you shall not steal, which includes the idea of kidnap in the Old Testament.

The ninth commandment. Liars and perjurers do not give false witness. The ninth commandment. So commandments five to nine are explicitly referred to or alluded to here.

And maybe therefore the first three pairs, the first six, are general things about those who are idolaters, who worship other gods. The profane and the unholy, perhaps referring to those who are Sabbath breakers, the fourth commandment.

[6 : 11] The last one's not there. You shall not covet. But then that's more of an attitude than an action. What Paul is saying here is he's picking up exactly the heart of the Old Testament law.

He's saying the law is there for the breakers of the law so that they know the sin, so that they're deterred from sin, and so that they're guided into what is right to do.

We need the law because we're sinners. The law's good. We ought not despise it. It's exactly Paul's argument in Romans 1 to 8 as well.

But notice then what he says. Whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching, that is, he's summing up in effect, not just limited to the Ten Commandments, but notice that it's whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which he entrusted to me.

That is, the standards of the gospel are the same as the standards of the law. The gospel doesn't do away with the law. The gospel reinforces or affirms the standards of the law.

[7 : 23] Yes, it's true that the gospel of Christ might change some detail of law by way of ceremonies and other sorts of laws because now the fullness of all the ceremonial law is found in the cross of Christ and so on.

But the standards of the law are the same as the standards of the gospel. They're unchanged. So if these are people who are arguing the law is bad, we're done away with it, we're liberated in Christ, they've got it wrong.

They don't understand that they are sinners. They don't understand that the law is good and they don't understand that the gospel standards are the same as the law's standards either. Whatever the errors are of these false teachers, these wolves, they have failed to understand the link between the law and the gospel.

And that's why Paul goes on in this section as he does. He shows that the law is for sinners, but his argument leads into the gospel because they've failed to understand the gospel.

Therefore, they fail to understand the law. And if they fail to understand the gospel, they're preaching another gospel or no gospel.

[8 : 39] They're not preaching the central truths of the Christian faith. And that's why Paul develops his argument in the next paragraph. You see, when the law condemns us and exposes our sin, it drives us to Christ for mercy.

When the law restrains sin by deterring us from sin, it drives us to Christ for the power to break the dominion of sin.

We saw that in Romans 6. In teaching us God's will, the law drives us to Christ for power to obey the law.

In all of that, the law is good. It is driving us to its fulfillment. The power of the gospel of Christ. The power of mercy.

The power to break sin's dominion. And the power to break our practice of sin in our life. Exactly what Paul is taught in Romans 1 to 8.

[9 : 53] And that's why Paul summarizes as he does in verse 5, which I skipped over deliberately. The aim of the right teaching, divine training, is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.

You see, the law drives us to the gospel of Christ because the law itself, though good, is powerless to give us a pure heart. It is powerless to give us a clean conscience.

And therefore, it's powerless to lead us to love. The law is good. It points us to where the power comes from. Jesus Christ and his gospel.

You see, faith comes from the word of the gospel of Christ. The pure heart comes from the power of the cross. The cleansed conscience comes from the power of the cross and Jesus' blood shed for us.

And so a life of love is produced not by law, but by the gospel to which the law of the Old Testament drives us. Even laws about love don't produce love.

[11 : 05] Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. Deuteronomy 6 recited by Jews day by day by day written on their armbands and written on their foreheads and so on but it doesn't produce love.

The law even about love drives us to the gospel of love and the power of the cross. And that's why Paul then gives his own testimony.

It's not a digression as most people seem to think. He's actually showing now the power of the gospel and where law drives you to. See what he says at the beginning of verse 12.

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor and a man of violence.

You see Paul was a zealot for the law. He was a Pharisee. He loved the Old Testament law and he went around trying to condemn those who broke it. He was zealous for the law but what actually that led him to was not love but blasphemy.

[12 : 13] Blaspheming against Christ. It led him to be a persecutor. Persecuting those who followed Christ. It led him to be a man of violence our translation says.

The word is linked to our word hubris. That sort of arrogant insolence. That was Paul. But what happened to Paul? I received mercy.

Literally we might even say and in Old English it was said I was be-mercied. It wasn't just sort of I received it as though I sort of opened the letterbox one day. It sort of came upon him in a sense.

And he was on a road to Damascus from Jerusalem presumably. And there of course as you read three times in the Acts of the Apostles as it happened and then Paul's own recounting twice later his life was turned around for eternity by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ risen and ascended and the power of his gospel.

You see Paul the zealot for the law was using the law in a sense unlawfully. That is not as the law was intended to be used. And Jesus turned him around on the road to Damascus and pointed him to where the law does lead him to.

[13 : 34] To the gospel and the power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I was be-mercied verse 13 because I'd acted ignorantly in unbelief.

It was an unwitting sin. It was a I mean he was an associate in effect to murder when Stephen was stoned to death in Acts chapter 7. So there were serious sins that Paul was engaged in but he thought he was acting in the right way.

And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. You see the very things that we're meant to find from gospel ministry faith and love back in verse 5 they came to Paul through grace not law.

But the law was to drive us to the grace for love and faith. It's a powerful image the grace of our Lord overflowed for me he says.

That is it's super abounded it's poured out it's bursting its banks sin away not in a destructive way like we see in the central coast of New South Wales but in a great way just pouring out gushing to Paul the grace of the power of the gospel.

[14 : 50] Paul is not just giving his testimony here. He's not just wanting them to know how I became a Christian that's not his actual point. His point is that from personal experience he is showing them where law should lead it should lead to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The gospel is the goal of the law. The gospel is what deals with sin and sinners. The law exposes that it shows us our need and it drives us to the gospel of Christ for mercy.

It drives us to the gospel of Christ for power over sin its rule and its practice in our lives. But the wrong use of the law whatever that wrong use may be and there are all sorts of variations of wrong use will never drive us to the gospel for salvation.

It will never drive us legalism will never drive us to the gospel for salvation. Or the opposite of legalism a despising of the law what's called antinomianism will never lead us or drive us to the gospel and salvation.

Only the right use of the law will do that. And that's why the errors of these wolves teaching in Ephesus is so important. It might look trivial and meaningless drivel but it's not driving people to the gospel and therefore it is lethal and therefore the wolves must be silenced.

[16 : 03] This is an error worth fighting for. Wolves enslave the gospel liberates. Wolves devour the gospel gives grace. So Paul summarizes this gospel in verse 15.

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance that is full acceptance personally that is without doubt confident full intensive use of the word full but also an extensive full acceptance meaning it's for everybody without any exceptions.

It is worthy of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. To save sinners.

Not the righteous not the law keepers sinners. people like Paul needing to be bemerced by God's grace.

Indeed Paul says at the end of verse 15 of whom I am the foremost the chief of sinners. What an encouragement that verse is.

[17 : 20] What an encouragement Paul's own example and experience is. Here is a blasphemer a persecutor a man of violence saved by the gospel of Christ.

Not by law but by gospel grace. A grace that is super abounded and overflowed to him. No wonder grace is so amazing.

So we take that expression as a sort of cliché almost. Christ. We often don't realize how amazing grace is. How completely undeserved we are to receive it.

That's what Paul's saying. The grace of God is astonishing. And that's where the law should lead us to. The law will never do what the gospel of the grace of Christ does.

And what's more, if Paul can be saved, well so can you and I. If this murderer in effect, persecutor, blasphemer, man of violence, if Paul could be saved, well who are you and I to think that maybe our sins might just be a little too big for God?

[18 : 37] See what a powerful gospel this is. That someone like Paul could be saved. What a wonderful, glorious gospel this is. No wonder Paul overflows in verse 17 or 16 and 17.

For that very reason I received mercy so that in me as the foremost sinner, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who'd come to believe in him for eternal life.

Paul sees that his own example of being turned around by gospel grace is an encouragement to other sinners. So he says to the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever.

Amen. Paul's not boasting that he's a Christian. He's not boasting that he's received mercy. He's saying it's undeserved. All the glory goes to the king of the ages. All the glory goes to God.

That's what the gospel does. It's not our doing one skerrick, one iota. All of it is God's work, God's initiative, God's mercy. And all the glory goes to him and him alone.

[19 : 48] It's a great verse, verse 15. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

There was a man, a Cambridge graduate in England, whose life was turned around when he heard that verse for the first time.

At last, he said, I heard speak of Jesus even then when the New Testament was first set forth by Erasmus in English. And at the first reading, as I well remember, I chanced upon this sentence of St.

Paul, O sweet and comfortable sentence to my soul. In 1 Timothy 1, it is a true saying and worthy of all men to be embraced, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the chief and principal.

And this one sentence, through God's instruction and inward looking, which I did not then perceive, did so exhilarate my heart, being before wounded with the guilt of my sins, and being almost in despair, that even immediately I seemed unto myself inwardly to feel a marvellous comfort and quietness, insomuch that my bruised bones leaped for joy.

[21 : 14] And after this, the scripture began to be more pleasant unto me than the honey or the honeycomb. That man is not particularly famous.

His name was Thomas Bilney. He was one of the very early, brave, English reformers, lives turned around by the gospel, by that verse in his case, in Cambridge.

Bilney was later put to the stake and martyred for believing the Bible. But not before he was the one who led another man to Christ, amongst many in fact, little Bilney as they called him in Cambridge.

And that man, Hugh Latimer, became one of the leading reformers in England, a bishop, a great preacher, and also a martyr for the truths of the gospel.

My challenge to you for next week is to remember this verse, 1 Timothy 1 verse 15. A powerful verse indeed.

[22 : 16] A powerful word of the gospel of grace. Paul finishes the chapter by reminding Timothy of the charge that he'd mentioned in verse 3 and again now in verse 18.

I'm giving you these instructions, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies made earlier about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight. Having faith and a good conscience, Paul is stealing him for the fight.

It's a military term to fight the good fight. It reminds us that contending for the truth of the gospel is not always an easy matter and it may in fact require quite a deal of courage.

By rejecting conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in the faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander who might have turned over to Satan so that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Indeed, contending for the truth may require what we call church discipline, something that's rarely practiced, at least in Anglican churches these days. It may look odd to say I've turned people over to Satan, but it doesn't mean casting them into hell or anything quite so severe as that.

[23 : 28] The expression seems to be synonymous with excommunicating them out of the church so that they're in the realm of the world, Satan's domain, but the purpose of it is remedial, that is, to turn them round so that they learn not to blaspheme, so they come back into the church.

That was certainly Paul's intention in 1 Corinthians 5 when this same language is used, as it is, it seems, here as well. 1 Timothy is written to a young man, a young leader in a church being devoured by wolves.

It is a corrective letter. It is a desperate letter, actually, and it's charged to Timothy. It is to silence false teachers who are speaking in ignorance to stop their speculation, their controversy, their mindless myths, and in particular to stop their preaching of something other than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy therefore is promoting the gospel as the goal of law, the gospel that brings power to change, power to forgive, power to produce godliness, power to produce love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.

Notice in this, finally, one point. truth and godliness cohabit.

[24 : 50] Truth produces love. The truth of the gospel will produce love, as the end of verse 4 and verse 5 suggests. Sound teaching, the language that's used in verse 10, literally means healthy doctrine, healthy in the sense not only of statements that are true, but lives that are practiced according with that.

The bad conscience of verse 19 is somebody who's got a distorted view on what is right and wrong, presumably because they've got a wrong view of the law of God, and that bad conscience shipwrecks their faith.

Immorality produces godlessness. So a test of truth is does it produce godliness?
Because godliness and truth cohabit.

A final warning. Wolves are not an endangered species, at least in church circles. They're actually pests of plague proportions.

The instructions to Timothy apply within a local church. He's placed over a fellowship of people in Ephesus. Not all that long presumably after Paul had indeed founded the church.

[26 : 12] Fighting wolves in other churches, the diocesan wolves or the worldwide Anglican wolves or whatever we might call them, that has different strategy I think.

Paul is exhorting Timothy here to deal with the wolves within a particular local congregation and he's placed Timothy in its charge. to silence the wrong teaching.

It's a reminder to us, because this is so serious, that where error leads people away from the gospel, it is deadly and must be stopped.

Wolves must be silenced. We cannot afford to compromise the glorious gospel of the grace of God.

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. So to the King of the Ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, the honour and glory forever and ever.

[27 : 22] Amen. as we stand and sing again, oh the mercy of God, let us remember that we may be drawn towards the power, the gospel of Christ.

Let's stand and sing together. sing together.

Lord, have you called us your children, chosen in him, to be holy and blameless to the glory of God, to the praise of his name.