

1 TIMOTHY 1:8-11

MISUSING THE LAW

“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.”¹

The Apostle exposed the motives of the false teachers—they wanted to be teachers of the Law, though they had neither equipping for nor divine appointment to such responsibility. It seems apparent that they yearned for the recognition, the honour and perhaps even the moral authority that attends those who teach the things of God in truth. Exposing these frauds as Paul has done could leave the impression that the Word of God can be twisted into whatever shape an individual wishes. In fact, that is a common perception among many outsiders looking in at the Faith. They believe that the Bible can say about anything, depending upon the intent of the one presenting that word.

That reminds me of the man who took his daily guidance from a casual approach to the Word. It was his habit simply to let the Bible fall open. Then, dropping his finger to a page, he would read the verse on which his finger alighted. He would take that whatever he read was “God’s marching orders for the day.”

One day, his finger fell on a verse that left him disquieted, to say the least. The verse read, “[Judas] went and hanged himself” [MATTHEW 27:5]. He concluded that surely this verse had no application in his situation. Therefore, he closed his Bible and let it fall open once more. This time, the verse on which his finger landed read, “You go, and do likewise” [LUKE 10:37]. Thoroughly shaken, the man realised that this verse surely could not apply to him. Therefore, he once again closed his Bible and let it fall open. This time his finger alit on the verse that reads, “What you are going to do, do quickly” [JOHN 13:27].

I suppose it is possible to make the Bible say whatever one wishes it to say; however, a well-established hermeneutical principle cautions, “Any text out of context is pretext.” One who reads the Word is responsible to consider what is said in the context in which it is presented. For instance, you will note that on several occasions the Bible faithfully records the words Satan spoke. We know that the devil is “the father of lies” [JOHN 8:44]. This does not mean that Satan is to be obeyed or that his word is to be accepted as accurate; it does mean that the Bible faithfully records the statements that the evil one made. Similarly, there are instances when things are communicated that are blatantly false. While the Word of God faithfully records what was said, one should not conclude that God approves of falsehoods. The one reading the Word, and especially the one providing exposition of the Word, is responsible to handle carefully the Word, ensuring accuracy in what is communicated. The Apostle cautions anyone who would serve as a spokesman for God, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” [2 TIMOTHY 2:15].

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Let's invest time exploring the Apostle's presentation in order to discover the error these false teachers made. If we can determine how they erred, we will be better equipped to expose similar errors in our day, and also to avoid falling into the trap of such errors ourselves. Join me in exploring the Word of God as Paul explains how false teachers were misusing the Law.

THE LAW IS GOOD, BUT LIMITED — The initial matter which the Apostle addresses is the value of the Law. Nor is this the only time in his writings that Paul will speak of the Law and its value. Here is a point to note for those who will fully understand what the Apostle has written. Paul has been warning against false teachers, some of whom may actually have been among the elders who met with him at Miletus [see **ACTS 20:17-38**]. Thus, as I read what he writes in this text, the opening words jump out at me: "Now we know..." The Greek word used is *oídamen*, implying an intuitive knowledge in contradistinction to knowledge that is acquired through experience or relationship. Paul's point is that this knowledge is complete and not being acquired.

The second point to note is that Paul uses the first person plural form of the perfect tense, implying that he is drawing a distinction between himself and Timothy—and all who believe—from the false teachers. Those who know God and who are appointed by God possess this knowledge; the false teachers do not possess this knowledge.

Permit me quickly to point out in broad terms the purpose of the Law. In the first place, ***The Law is given to restrain us from trespassing onto the wrong territory.*** In **ROMANS 7:7**, Paul writes, "What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'"

Again, ***the Law resembles a mirror to reveal sin and to lead us to Christ.*** Paul has cautioned, "We know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin" [**ROMANS 3:19, 20**]. In **GALATIANS 3:24**, the Apostle has cautioned, "The law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith."

Finally, ***the Law serves as a rule and a guide to point out the works that please God.*** Here is a passage that explains this quite well. "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" [**ROMANS 13:8-10**].

In the Letter to Roman Christians, Paul addresses especially those who were from a Jewish background. Most of them would claim to be religious. In fact, most of them would take great pride in their heritage.

Here is a somewhat extended passage focusing attention on the advantages of the Law. "If you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'

“For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God” [**ROMANS 2:17-29**].

Today, we would perhaps apply these words to someone who says, “I’m an evangelical Christian.” We could no doubt apply this passage to someone who claims to be a devout Catholic or a devoted member of any religious organisation. Such a person would likely argue, “I’m a good person. I have been baptised, I partake of Communion, I go to church and I give to support the church. Leave me out of this discussion; don’t condemn me.”

Paul’s argument is that these are all good things and they should not be discounted. “However,” he would say, “you still need the Gospel.”

Of course, such a blunt statement would elicit the response from the religious person, “Why?”

And the answer to the pitiful bleat of such religious people must, of necessity, be, “Because God is not interested in your outward efforts alone—church membership, baptism, communion, generosity; God is interested in what is inside the person.”

The “religious person” when Paul wrote was a Jew. They could legitimately claim multiple advantages.

- God had given them His Law.
- He had entered into a special relationship with them.
- Consequently, the Jews knew the will of God.
- They were able to approve only the most excellent moral standards.

These advantages were unconditionally true. Because these advantages were true:

- The Jews could lay claim to being a guide for the blind.
- They could claim to be a light for those in the dark.
- They could claim to be an instructor for the foolish.
- They could claim to be a teacher for those who are in spiritual infancy.

Each claim is true so far as each goes! Consider yet two other extended statements concerning the Law. “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

“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. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me” [**ROMANS 7:12-20**].

Paul is speaking here of a mature Christian who struggles against sin. The mature believer realises her involuntary imperfection, though she is powerless to change it. She may see glimpses of victory as the Spirit works in her life, only to slip back into what she detests. In Paul's case, it was the knowledge that the Law condemns greed. The mature believer looks forward to the transformation that is coming at the return of Christ, but the Law only condemns her in her struggle—it is powerless to arrest her in her sin. Consequently, when she thinks of the Law, she is miserable; with her heart, she delights in the Law, but she discovers that she keeps the Law only imperfectly. Therefore, she is frustrated and miserable. Her sole consolation is the knowledge that she is not dependent on her own strength to alter her condition. She knows that Christ Jesus has redeemed her and that He will deliver her from her bondage to sin at His return.

There is yet one other extended portion of the Word that will prove beneficial for our understanding of the text before us. This portion of the Word is found in **GALATIANS 3:10-26**. Paul, in this passage, warns the Galatians, “All who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

“To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

“Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

“Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

“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 might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” [**GALATIANS 3:10-26**].

Let's bring together what we know concerning the Law. We know that the Law is good. However, the Law neither replaces the Gospel, nor does it compete against the Gospel; law and gospel are given by God who is wise and perfect. Well-informed Christians will recognise that the Law is good so long as it is used with the purpose for which it was given. On the other hand, false teachers will misuse the Law, distorting it and twisting it to their own advantage. We have also witnessed that the Law reveals human sinfulness. The task that faced Timothy—and that faces each herald of the Faith in this day—is to oppose false teachers while yet affirming the Law, or while affirming the Gospel. The preacher does this by presenting healthy doctrine and refusing to force the Word into a role it was never intended to have.

FOR WHOM THE LAW IS WRITTEN — The Apostle immediately turns his attention to why the Law was given. The purpose had been neglected by the false teachers, and so Paul was compelled to remind Timothy of the reason the Law was given. “We know ...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.”

The immediate application of this passage is not the same today as it was when Paul wrote. Then, Paul saw false teachers were making stringent application of the Law in order to achieve their own purposes. They were attempting to apply the Law to righteous people in order to force what God had given into doctrinal or ethical roles that were never intended. So, Paul reminds Timothy that the Law was written for sinners. Then, just to ensure that the young theologian understood what sort of sinners were in view, Paul gives particulars. He provides Timothy with a dark list of sinful behaviour so that there will be no mistaking who is meant. Underscore this overarching truth: *the Law is made for people still under the domination of sin.*

Paul begins his dark list of behaviour that is condemned by the Law by naming six somewhat general attitudes, arranged in pairs—“the lawless and disobedient, the ungodly and sinners, the unholy and profane.” These attitudes cover sins against God; they are somewhat representative of the first table of the Decalogue. We need to take the time to examine specifically what Paul has in mind so that we may be properly horrified at such attitudes when they are exhibited in our presence. The Law clarifies what is dishonourable and despicable in the sight of God. It brings God’s standard into stark relief so that we have no excuse for doing what is displeasing in His sight.

The Apostle identifies “the lawless” as being in focus by the Law. The term that he uses describes people without commitment to any law or to any standard. This strong term was used of the people of Sodom in Lot’s day, of the antichrist and of those who crucified Jesus. Here are the passages that are in view. [God] “rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard)” [2 PETER 2:7, 8].

“The lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:8].

“Jesus [was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” [ACTS 2:23].

We would conclude from these few uses that the term is used to describe perverse acts, that which is satanic and in opposition to God, and to describe that which is bent on assailing the Son of God. Thus, the term has very strong negative connotations.

“Disobedient” translates a term that occurs three times in the Pastoral Letters and one other time in the New Testament.² The word describes those who refuse to be in subjection to authority. It describes those who throw off authority, demanding autonomy. It is stepping out of line when the rule is to arrange oneself under the reign of a sovereign. It is often translated “rebellious.”³ Rebellion is a grave sin in the eyes of Holy God. Recall the stern warning Samuel issued to Saul: “Rebellion is as the sin of divination” [1 SAMUEL 15:20].

² 1 TIMOTHY 1:9; TITUS 1:6, 10—“disobedient,” “insubordination,” “insubordinate”; HEBREWS 2:8, where the word is translated “control”

³ E.g., NET BIBLE

The third term Paul uses is “the ungodly.” This adjective speaks of one who is irreverent and irreligious. To be godly was to step back in awe in the presence of one who was greater than you. When the term is negated, it speaks of one who refuses to step back in the presence of one who is greater. Thus, the term means to refuse to honour God by showing respect for Him as God. The ungodly person is that one who refuses to revere God. Jude describes such men in these terms: “Certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” [JUDE 4].

Near the conclusion of his missive, Jude pointedly warns such people in strongest terms. “It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.’ These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage” [JUDE 14-16].

The fourth term Paul uses is “sinners.” Just to be clear, Paul will use this same word in describing himself, and all who are in need of redemption, which is each one of us. “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” [1 TIMOTHY 1:15].

In another place, Paul tied this word to the Law in order to prove that no one can be justified by the Law, but only through Jesus Christ. “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

“But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not” [GALATIANS 2:16, 17]!

The fifth term Paul uses is translated “unholy.” This adjective occurs only twice in the New Testament—here and in 2 Timothy where the word is used to describe people living during the last days. The term refers to people who “impiously reject sacred obligations.”⁴ An unholy person is indifferent to what is right. As an aside, consider the description of people in the last days, trembling at the thought of those among whom we live. “People will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.” [2 TIMOTHY 3:2-5].

The sixth term, and the final term in the list of pairs, is “profane.” The term describes that which is ungodly, irreligious or vile. The word can be used to describe the character of people [e.g. 1 TIMOTHY 1:9; HEBREWS 12:16] as well as the words that issue forth from their mouths [1 TIMOTHY 4:7; 6:20; 2 TIMOTHY 2:16].

There follows a more particular list that spoke of the gravest of sins present in that ancient world—sins which, consequently, are seen as ever more acceptable, even sins that are to be celebrated in our present world. Bear in mind that the Apostle is exposing the dark side of fallen people by naming this particular sins. The previous sins are committed against God; these sins express the degradation of mankind without God.

⁴ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1985) 735

The seventh and eighth sins listed are sometimes mistaken as one sin to the casual reader. Paul says the Law was given for “those who strike their fathers and mothers.” However, these are two grave sins which the Apostle names. The words can indeed point to the murder of one’s father or mother, but it includes all forms of violence to and failure toward one’s parents. We do well to remember the fifth commandment: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” [EXODUS 20:12].

This particular commandment was strengthened in its application soon after it was given. “Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death” [EXODUS 21:15]. Shortly after this warning was given, Moses wrote, “Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death” [EXODUS 21: 17]. Children are to treat their parents with respect. If they will not do so, they are under a divine curse.

Paul follows this final pairing with a series of single words, each of which is dreadful and dark. The first of these terms is the word “murderers.” This is a hapax legomenon, occurring only here in the New Testament. It is a compound word made up of “man” and “murder.” It undoubtedly references the sixth commandment: “You shall not murder” [EXODUS 20:13].

The next term describing those for whom the Law is given is “the sexually immoral.” The term is built from the root word, *proneía*. This word is the root of such English words, pornography and pornographic. The term spoke generally of one who was debauched, promiscuous, licentious or dissipated. The word speaks of one who is consumed with sexual gratification however such gratification may be found.

As a significant aside, we live in a day when pornography is ubiquitous and a growing number of professing Christians accept viewing pornography as though it were a minor foible. Studies have suggested that so many as sixty percent of pastors view pornography at least once each week. When religious leaders engage in such wickedness, should it be surprising that the parishioners have become casual about this particular sin. God sees things differently, however.

As a warning to the people of God, may I cite a couple of warnings from the Word? “You may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” [EPHESIANS 5:5].

“As for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” [REVELATION 21:8].

“Outside [the Holy City] are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” [REVELATION 22:15].

Paul then says the Law is given for “men who practise homosexuality.” The term he uses speaks of one who has sexual relations with a man as he would a woman. In other words, the term speaks of a sodomite. Clearly, the Law condemns such activity.⁵ Moreover, despite the rush to accept that which is unacceptable in the sight of God, we need to hear the divine warning. “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Sinful individuals—those who transgress God’s holy Law—will be excluded from heaven. One should never read this dark passage without reading the verse that follows, however. There, the Apostle has written, “Some of you once lived this way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” [1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11 NET BIBLE].

⁵ See GENESIS 19; LEVITICUS 18:22, 29; 20:13; DEUTERONOMY 23:17, 18

Paul states that the Law was given for “enslavers.” Many translations render this particular term as “kidnappers.” The Law condemns those who enslave others, especially those who are taken while in their youth. In his day, theft of children was somewhat common. Six in ten people in the Roman Empire were slaves. Many were born into slavery, but Roman conquest of new lands ensured a steady supply of slaves into the flesh markets of the Empire.

People have sometimes condemned Paul for failure to censure slavery. However, his condemnation of those who traffic in slaves in this verse renders all such questions moot. Despite the fact that kidnapping was commonplace in Paul’s day, it was a capital offence in the Old Testament. “Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death” [EXODUS 21:16]. Here is another instance where the sin of kidnapping was condemned. “If a man is found stealing one of his brothers of the people of Israel, and if he treats him as a slave or sells him, then that thief shall die. So you shall purge the evil from your midst” [DEUTERONOMY 24:7].

Paul then states that the Law is given for “liars.” It is estimated that people lie routinely. According to Robert Feldman, a psychologist at the University of Massachusetts, there are three lies for every ten minutes of conversation. Obviously, this may include exaggerations, but we struggle to tell the truth. Think of some of the lies that we drop so casually! “Nice to see you!” “Sorry I missed your call.” “The cheques in the mail.” “I’ll phone you back in a minute.” “This tastes delicious.” “Of course I love you.”

We lie in great measure because we don’t want to deal with the consequences of speaking truthfully. If you doubt that, men, how do you respond when your wife asks, “Does this dress make me look fat?”

We are fearful, so we avoid speaking the truth. We need to remember that lies are the native language of the devil. Confronting the religious leaders of His day, Jesus warned, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God” [JOHN 8:44-47].

Finally, the fourteenth and final specific sin Paul says the Law was given to counteract is that of perjury. The term, again a hapax legomenon, speaks of one who, though under oath to tell the truth, tells falsehoods.

After this long list of sinful acts, Paul appends this summary category for which the Law was given, “and whatever else is contrary to sound (healthy) doctrine.” In saying this, he was including the false teachers as every bit as wicked as those named in this dark catalogue of sinful behaviour. They were, after all, contradicting sound doctrine. Let it be stated without apology: the preacher who teaches error, or who even tolerates a bit of error, is guilty of high crimes and treason against the Lord of Glory.

The false teachers had “an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words” resulting in a sordid catalogue of grave sins among the people who sat under them. Among the maladies arising from their unhealthy teaching were, “envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain” [1 TIMOTHY 6:4,5]. Unhealthy teaching attracts “people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth.” Consumed by greed, such people “will exploit [the faithful] with false words” [see 2 PETER 2:3].

ANTIDOTE TO THE LAW — Paul has expressed the purpose of the Law—the value, if you will. God gave the Law to expose our sinful nature. In this respect, the Law serves as a disciplinarian or a custodian. Recall Paul’s statement in **GALATIANS 3:24-26**: “The law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” The Greek term used here is *paidagōgós*. The word described a man, usually a slave, charged to conduct a youth to and from school and to superintend the conduct of that young person. He was not a teacher, but rather a custodian or a guardian. When the youth became of age, the superintendent was no longer needed.

This is the situation with the Law; the Law served a distinct purpose for the believer. Our sinful conduct was exposed by the Law, condemning us before God. However, when faith came, we no longer required that instrument to expose our sin. As redeemed people, we relate to God in grace—and aren’t we glad. The bad news of the Law compels us to look to the Master that we might receive the good news of the grace of God. Where the Law promises condemnation, the Gospel provides mercy.

Paul describes the Gospel—the Good News, if you will—as “the glory of the blessed God.” Many older translations spoke of “the glorious gospel of the blessed God.” While such a translation is permissible, it expresses a partial truth, missing the grandeur Paul was ascribing to God Himself. We have received “the gospel of the glory of Christ” [**2 CORINTHIANS 4:4**]. In this Gospel, God “has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” [**2 CORINTHIANS 4:6**]. The important truth to seize is that the Law, used lawfully, show us our sin. The Gospel reveals God’s glory, which are His attributes. Among the attributes of God are His holiness—expressing His hatred of sin, and His justice—revealing His demand for punishment when the Law is violated. The Gospel is supplied to reveal God’s grace and mercy, required because of our inability to justify ourselves.

Again, in the text, Paul distinguishes healthy teaching and the Gospel. Restating that truth, the “sound doctrine” is not exactly the same as “the gospel.” However, “sound doctrine” is in accord with “the gospel” and extrapolates the practical implications and applications in a manner that exalts God, magnifying His glory. Sound teaching always points us to the glory of God, causing us to praise Him and rejoice in His mercy and grace. Anything that moves away from the Gospel of the glory of God, any teaching that depreciates this Gospel, must be recognised as unhealthy, diseased and dangerous. The church that fails to make this Gospel central is a congregation that is in danger of being relegated to the ash heap of history.

There is this final thought in the text, Paul states that he was entrusted with the Gospel. Paul is emphatic in stating that he, and not the false teachers, was entrusted with the Gospel. Moreover, the construct of his statement indicates that God entrusted this Gospel to the Apostle. No man takes this ministry upon himself; God appoints to service. Paul was astonished that God would entrust such a precious item to his oversight. Similarly, any herald of this Gospel will be humbled and amazed at God’s assignment.

I do want to be practical in these closing moments. First, I must remind each Christian that we who are the saved bear responsibility to watch out for false teachers. Indeed, the overseers of the congregation bear responsibility in this area, but it is a shared responsibility with the entire assembly. We must be alert to the presentation of the Word of God, asking if what is presented is biblically sound. Are those to whom we listen handling the Word of truth accurately [see **2 TIMOTHY 2:15**]?

In the same way, each Christians is responsible to examine the goals of those who instruct us. Do those who stand before us, through their teaching and through their lives, endeavour to love, honour and glorify God? Are they enamoured of personal happiness, material wealth and the pursuit of self-love? Does the message presented encourage us to seek a pure heart, a good conscience and sincere faith [cf. 1 TIMOTHY 1:5]?

Then, we who receive the teaching must examine the motives of those who teach. Are those who teaching us humble? Are they selfless? Do they endeavour to serve? Or are they promoting themselves, seeking pre-eminence?

Finally, we are responsible to examine the effect of the teaching we receive. Can we testify that those who listen clearly understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Is the Gospel properly defined? Is the Law handled properly?

Those who meet the tests are to be welcomed as brothers in Christ. Those who fail to meet the standard that is erected are to be rejected, no matter how capable they appear and no matter what experiences they may seem to have. We are to be vigilant to infiltration by error. To fail to be alert to the insinuation of such error is to open the door to disaster, both personal and ecclesiastical.

Tragically, good Christian will often permit the insinuation of error for personal, political or sentimental reasons. We may imagine that overlooking teaching that fails to conform to the “gospel of the glory of the blessed God” is gracious or even necessary at some time; however, all such failure is to be rejected and declared false.

Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell cite Gresham Machen at the conclusion of a sermon on the Gospel of the glory of the blessed God. This is what Machen said. “What good does it do me to tell me that the type of religion presented in the Bible is a very fine type of religion and that the thing for me to do is just to start practicing that type of religion now? ...I will tell you, my friend. It does not one tiniest little bit of good... What *I* need first of all is not exhortation but a gospel, not directions for saving myself but knowledge of how God has saved me. Have you any good news for me? That is the question that I ask of you. I know your exhortations will not help me. But if anything has been done to save me, will you not tell me the facts?”⁶

Do you know Jesus, who died because of our sin? Is He Master over your life? God sent His Son to present His life as a sacrifice because of sinful people. This Jesus gave His life, He was buried and then He conquered death, rising from the grave on the third day. He was seen of man and then ascended into the heavens where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Now, He calls all people to receive Him as Master of life. The Word declares, “If you openly agree that Jesus is Master, believing with all your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be freed of sin. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father and with the mouth that one confesses and is set at liberty.” The promise of God concludes with this citation of the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved.”⁷

I pray that each one listening has received this grace and that each one now stands in the grace of God extended through Jesus the Son. If you have not yet received this mercy, may God graciously open your heart to faith that you may know the life He offers. Amen.

⁶ R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, **Preaching the Word, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit** (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL 2000) 39

⁷ Free rendering of **ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**