

“WHO MAKES THE RULES?”

1 Timothy 1:6-11

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This is the second in a series of studies on the Apostle Paul’s first letter to Timothy. Paul was Timothy’s mentor.

At the time of writing, Paul was in Macedonia and Timothy was in Ephesus—the pastor of a church the Apostle Paul had founded at least ten years earlier.

· We’re studying this New Testament letter because it’s chock full of insights into leading a church properly and keeping a church on track biblically. These are two of a pastor’s chief responsibilities.

In a few months you will undoubtedly welcome your new senior pastor. So this is an excellent time to delve into God’s Word to see what you ought to expect in the man who will come.

Let us remember that we are reading Timothy’s personal mail from his mentor. But it’s safe to assume that Timothy quoted extensively from Paul’s letter in his preaching and teaching at Ephesus.

· Last weekend I gave you a little background into what occasioned this letter and into the life of the young pastor Timothy.

Today let’s take a quick glance at the city of Ephesus, where the church was located. Ephesus was the chief city on the west coast of the Roman province of Asia—modern Turkey. It was the nexus of the busiest land and sea routes between Rome and the East. The temple of the pagan goddess Artemis (the Romans called her Diana) dominated the panorama of Ephesus. It was the most awesome architectural structure in the area. It was over 160 feet wide and 340 feet long. It had 100 columns over 55 feet in height. It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

It was also the center of lascivious practices. That’s because the way to worship the goddess Artemis was in unbridled sexual indulgence.

Las Vegas, or Bangkok or Amsterdam have nothing on Ephesus. From our perspective today, Ephesus would be ‘sin city extraordinaire.’ For the Ephesians it was the only way of life they knew.

It was here in Ephesus that Paul spent three years preaching the gospel, teaching, and establishing the church.

· We must understand, then, that the gospel Paul preached in Ephesus was a radical departure from everything Ephesian. The gospel of Christ clashed with the Ephesian ethos—big time!

When Ephesian people trusted Christ as their Savior their lives changed radically, and conspicuously.

They no longer indulged in the wanton practices of the Artemis Cult at the temple on the hill.

The Apostle Peter urged Christians to be holy—remarkably different in the way they lived. The Apostle Paul told them not to conform to the spirit of the age.

There was probably no place on earth where Christians were more noticeably different from those around them than in Ephesus.

· So there was probably a lot of talk in the Ephesian church about appropriate Christian behavior.

Maybe some Christians took new believers aside and instructed them about the kinds of things they should absolutely not do anymore.

I suppose that initially this was all well-intentioned.

But it seems that some church members started to make up their own lists of do's and don'ts, and expected the new believers to live up to their rules.

They became religious busybodies who 'laid down the law' for others. That became a big problem.

This is what C.S. Lewis said about religious busybodies: *'Of all tyrannies a tyranny exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It may be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, . . .; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end, . . .'* (C.S. Lewis, *God In The Dock*)

Isn't it enough that the devil tries to make our lives miserable? We don't need tormenters in the church as well.

So we shouldn't be surprised that Paul told the young pastor not to tolerate any teaching of strange doctrines and myths and genealogies.

He had to stop those who set up their man-made do's and don'ts and then judged other Christians by their rules.

· Last week we saw that the goal of the Christian life is love *that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.* (1:5)

Christians are not supposed to stick out in society because of their persnickety behavior. They're supposed to stand out because of their uncommon love.

Paul said the pastor of the church was to make sure people were not confused about this.S

· In 1 Timothy 1:6-11 the Apostle Paul offers three helpful insights for resolving confusion about standards of Christian conduct

1. The popularity of teaching
2. The purpose of law
3. The primacy of gospel

I. THE POPULARITY OF TEACHING 1 Timothy 1: 6,7.

Some people want to teach. But you mustn't let them, because they are not qualified to teach.

Pastors must guard God's flock from people who don't have love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (v.5), but they want to teach.

Paul says they have drifted away from the truth.

1:6 Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk (KJV: vain jangling).

1:7 They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.'

Some people know a lot more than they tell. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. They want to teach, but they don't know the truth.

Someone said, "The trouble with ignorance is that it picks up confidence as it goes along." (Arnold H. Glasow)

Confidence and competence don't always go together.

A little further into this letter Paul wrote:

'If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.' (1 Timothy 6:3, 4)

Teaching is such a serious matter in the New Testament that James tells Christians to think twice about asking to teach: *'Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.'* (James 3:1)

· Paul told Timothy to stop people who wanted to be *'teachers of law'*.

Law exercises authority over people--if their behavior is unlawful.

I think it's safe to say that in the last week here in Albert Lea police, who enforce the law, have arrested some people for unlawful conduct—bad behavior. It's probably also safe to assume that no one was arrested just for having a bad attitude.

There is no such thing as law that can regulate your attitude. Law can only enforce external compliance—what people do.

Any form of religion, or any church, that emphasizes behavioral do's and don'ts is based on law. It puts pressure on people's behavior, but that doesn't change them within.

Like me, for instance. When I drive on the highways, I try not to venture too far beyond the speed limit that is posted as the law. But inside I want to do 100 mph.

You can't legislate attitudes or character.

· This is what breeds and feeds hypocrisy in churches. It's putting on an outward show to satisfy other people's expectations, but it doesn't match the inside that is not seen.

A certain preacher spoke of religious people who are *all dressed up on the outside, but all messed up on the inside.* (Buster Soares)

Lots of Christians work hard doing things they want others to notice. Then they'll be considered fine Christians.

"Men defend nothing more violently than the pretenses they live by." (Allen Drury)

· Do you know what happens when Christians get sucked into that vortex of trying to live up to man-made do's and don'ts?

It becomes a way of life that doesn't deal with their inner spiritual nature. They become so focused on people's expectations their own spirit shrivels and stagnates.

Millions of Christians live a meager spiritual subsistence trying to measure up to one another's expectations. God gets only the leftovers.

· We can deceive people by what we do outwardly, but God sees what's inside—the truth.

When I kneel before God in prayer I often say, *Father, I know you see me and you see right through me.*

· Paul urged the pastor to protect the church from ignorant teachers who caused confusion about how Christians should live.

Your pastor, when he comes, will have this serious responsibility—along with the elders, of course, of guarding the teaching in the church.

II. THE PURPOSE OF LAW. 1 Timothy 1:8-10.

The false teachers in Ephesus didn't understand the nature or the purpose of God's law. They were dragging naive Christians back into a prison of guilt.

· This same problem is one of the main causes of sickness in churches today.

If you find uptight, unhappy, and critical church members who have a heavy pack of man-made do's and don'ts strapped to their shoulders, that's the same basic problem that Timothy had to deal with in Ephesus.

Paul writes:

1:8 *We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.*

1:9 *We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers,*

1:10 *For adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine*

The law emphasized God's holiness, and declared that nothing less than righteousness is acceptable with God.

King David in the Old Testament said the ordinances of God's law are sweeter than honey from the comb (Psalm 19:9, 10)

Paul said that in his inner being he delighted in God's law (Romans 7:22).

But the law also has a curse. It judges you as a sinner. It doesn't save you.

It shows you how guilty before God sinners are. In that sense the law is bad news.

· That's why the world needs the good news—or gospel—of how God rescues people from the curse of the law.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul tells us that *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."* (Galatians 3:13)

· Paul tells us in verses 9 and 10 the law is intended for the lawless and the disobedient and the ungodly and sinners.

The law shows people how much they need a Savior.

· The law is not for Christians. Paul said (v.9), *Law is made for the unrighteous, not the righteous.*

If you are a Christian you have the righteousness of Christ.

Paul says *'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (i.e., Christians).'* (Romans 8:1)

If you are a genuine Christian, God's law cannot condemn you.

· Please hear me on this now: I am not suggesting that God's eternal standards of conduct don't apply to Christians. We are to live pure and holy lives.

What I am saying is that if you are a Christian you have been set free from the curse of the law that made you guilty before a holy God.

If a criminal is punished for crimes committed--that's the proper use of the law. It's good.

Law works when it finds guilty people guilty.

That's why law is not for Christians. Christians are not guilty before God. Law does not regulate our lives.

Nothing in the whole universe can find a true Christian guilty before God. Of course, that doesn't stop our enemy the devil from trying to do so. He's the Accuser.

· Any attempt to regulate the lives of Christians in a church by a code of laws--do's and don'ts--is a misapplication of God's law. That's not what it's for!

It abuses the people of God. It robs Christians of their joy.

No wonder Paul told Timothy to command the false teachers to stop (1:3). They were crippling the lives of healthy Christians.

· Are you a Christian who feels trapped in a dark cell of guilt and despair?

You feel condemned and that God is displeased with you.

Listen to these words from the third verse of Charles Wesley's great hymn of Christian faith, *And Can It Be . . . :*

Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin and nature's night. Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray; I woke--the dungeon flamed with light? My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose went forth and followed thee. (Charles Wesley, *And Can it Be*)
How did you get back into that prison? If you have sincerely repented of your sins and placed your trust in Jesus Christ alone as your Savior you don't belong in that dark dungeon of guilt! Wake up; get up, throw off the chains of guilt, get out and follow Christ with joy--and with a pure heart.

· It's one of a pastor's greatest responsibilities to make sure that nobody is allowed to use rules and regulations to tyrannize Christians in the church.

III. THE PRIMACY OF GOSPEL. 1 Timothy 1:10b-11.

The Apostle Paul's work was all about gospel, not about law. That's how he opened his letter to the Romans: *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.* (Romans 1:1)

The Apostle Paul explained to Timothy,

1:10b-11 '...--and (law is laid down for) *whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.*'

The law applied to everything that is contrary to sound doctrine and the glorious gospel of God.

· God had entrusted the gospel to him. He had a solemn responsibility to guard the truth of the gospel.

The church of our Lord Jesus Christ is at its foundation a community of grace, not of law.

Any man-made rules with all their do's and don'ts don't guide us as Christians. God's word regulates our lives. *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work* (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

Paul said a pastor must not allow teachers to abuse Christ's church by using law to judge Christians on the basis of external behavior.

In one of his novels George MacDonald spoke of a pastor who had the courage not to accommodate people's scruples that distorted the truth of the gospel: *'Happily both for himself and others, the curate was not one of those who cripple the truth by trying to worry about every scruple and judgment of their listeners.'* (George MacDonald, *The Curate's Awakening*. p. 161)

· Any church that is regulated according to the scruples of church members will die spiritually. It may look good on the outside but be lifeless inside—just a shell. I have a beautiful scorpion spider conch shell. For those of you of a marine-scientific bent, it's a variety of tropical marine gastropod mollusk.

It came from a bay in the South China Sea near Calatagan on the Philippine coast, where I was snorkeling one day about 28 years ago.

Some churches are like beautiful conch shells. They may be very attractive on the outside, but there is no living organism inside. They're just lifeless shells.

If a church gets trapped in legalistic do's and don'ts, and neglects what Paul called *the glorious gospel of the blessed God*, it's only a matter of time before the church shrivels and dies.

· That was beginning to happen at Ephesus where Timothy was the pastor. The Apostle urged the pastor to deal with it.

Don't let legalism—the rules with its do's and don'ts—displace the gospel of grace.

Let me ask you a few forthright questions, because when I deal with God's word like this, I must.

· What should we do about judgmental Christians?

This is one of the hardest things to deal with. Some of them are convinced they are right. Nothing you say can change their opinion. I know. I've had to deal with people like that for 36 years. As Paul wrote in v.7: *'they don't understand what they are saying with such confidence.'*

Pray that God will open their eyes. Only he can do that. Pray for wisdom from the Lord to know how to keep them from suffocating the spirits of other Christians in the church.

· Have you been influencing other Christians with anything that is contrary to the gospel of our glorious God?

A critical spirit, a judgmental attitude, or condemning others is contrary to the gospel—the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

If you have been doing anything like that, I must urge you from God's word to humble yourself before our God of all grace and repent, and stop it.

· If you have alienated some Christians because they didn't measure up to your expectations, please go to them and ask their forgiveness and be reconciled?

Paul said these are vital matters that a pastor has to deal with.