

Message #2

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1 Timothy

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SOUND TEACHING AND THE LAW

1 TIMOTHY 1:3-11

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

One of the primary reasons that my family moved from New England to southern Nevada was allergies. My other family members have had airborne allergies and food sensitivities that have made life complicated at times. Suzy and Bart had mold and mildew allergies, and a couple of doctors said that our family would do better in a warmer, drier climate. That has proved to be the case. We have indeed fared better here health wise than in the Northeast, even though we have to miss out on snow and ice and subzero temperatures.

The things in the air and in the food that cause bad reactions are known as allergens. We do the best job that we can to control the allergens that enter the bodies of our family members. We have a couple of air cleaners around the house. We try to eat a diet that avoids these food allergens and that has healthy foods. We also try to strengthen our immune systems with various medications and vitamins. We occasionally have referred to doctors who have experience in dealing with these problems.

We Christians live in a world that has other kinds of allergens floating around. These allergens are wrong ideas, misplaced values, and temptations. When these allergens get into our own lives and into our churches, they also produce allergic reactions. Our relationship with God gets messed up. Our relationship with other people gets messed up. At times this means disunity in the church and in the community. Our view of reality gets distorted. We may not feel good.

How do we screen out these allergens? That was a big question that the church in Ephesus in Asia Minor faced in the first century. We saw last week that the church there was planted by the Apostle Paul. It got off to a great start. But about ten years after Paul left, the church began to have allergy problems. It was taking in wrong ideas and listening to bad advice and getting sick as a result.

The New Testament was not put together yet. So the church didn't have a manual to explain how to do church and how to deal correctly with this particular challenge. But the Lord had provided apostles and prophets to help Christians to know how to think and how to relate to each other and to God. Chief among these apostles was Paul. We found out last week that Paul had sent Timothy to be his representative in Ephesus (PROJECTOR ON--- EPHESUS MAP), which was located on the west coast of Turkey. Timothy was a younger guy, but he had spent a lot of years already doing ministry with Paul. He was the guy that Paul wanted to be at Ephesus to help the church get its act together. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Last week we also looked at what the New Testament says about the kind of person whom Timothy was. I argued from the Biblical evidence that Timothy was probably not a bold and outgoing evangelist like Paul or Peter. Instead, he was a lower key kind of guy. Yet he was steady, dependable, reliable.

In that I find encouragement for us who aren't bold, outgoing, charismatic kind of people. The Lord can use people who are not necessarily talkative, outgoing extroverts. Timothy also may have had insecurities which related to his youthfulness. For later in this first epistle Paul tells Timothy, **"Let no one look down on your youthfulness..."**

I.

We are going to look then to see what instructions Paul gave to Timothy in this letter about how to deal with the allergens at Ephesus. First, in vv. 3-7 of 1 Timothy #1 (which is on p. 991 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs) we are going to consider THE WRONG TEACHING AT EPHESUS. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE WRONG TEACHING...) What was the chief allergen, or allergens, that was messing up the church at Ephesus?

In the last part of v. 3 Paul says that Timothy should **"...charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine..."** "Different doctrine" is apparently a compound word which Paul made up. For it doesn't appear in Greek literature any place before this. It literally means "other, or different, teaching."

The verb for "charge" is a strong word. The original Greek word was a military term which meant **"to pass commands from one to another."** Clearly the Apostle Paul regards Timothy as having a position of authority in the church. Some would be inclined to think of his position as that of a pastor. Actually there is no office of pastor in the New Testament. Timothy is not even called an elder or deacon. Timothy seems to have had a unique position. He was an apostolic representative. He was the hand-picked delegate from the Apostle Paul. Paul was the guy who had been commissioned by the Lord Jesus

Christ to build His church among the Gentiles as well as among the Jews. These early Christians, lacking a Christian manual, were largely dependent upon the teaching of the apostles and prophets of Jesus.

Acts #20 contains a description of the last meeting that Paul had with the elders of the church at Ephesus some ten years earlier. According to Acts #20 vv. 29-30 (ACTS 20:29-30) Paul warned these local church leaders, **“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”** It appears that Paul’s prophecy has now come true. There are false teachers, described as fierce wolves, who have infiltrated even the eldership at the church in Ephesus.

The false teaching at Ephesus is not fully defined in this letter or anywhere else. The brief mentions that we have assume that Paul and Timothy and the Christians in Ephesus all know what the apostle is talking about. We will look at the evidence that we have. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In v. 4 Paul continues his thought beginning in v. 3 that Timothy is to tell certain persons not **“to devote themselves to myths and genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.”** Genealogies were historically important to the Jewish people. Knowing your lineage proved one’s Jewishness. It also determined your connection to your tribe. It was especially important to priests and Levites who had important religious functions in the tabernacle and the temple. Descendants of King David wanted to know their connection to that ancestor. In the Gospels in the New Testament we see that it was important to determine Jesus’ descent from David to prove His qualification to be Israel’s Messiah.

Apparently some Jews took this genealogy stuff to an extreme. The Book of Jubilees is a Jewish work written a hundred years before the time of Christ. It has additional explanations of events and lineages in Genesis. It has what most of us would regard as speculations about the descent of angels and certain characters described in the Book of Genesis. These false teachers at Ephesus were seemingly trying to make a big deal out of such speculations.

In v. 20 of our chapter Paul mentions two of these false teachers whom he accuses of blasphemy. They are Hymenaeus and Alexander. Further along, in #4 v. 3, Paul says that these false teachers **“forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”**

Then over in 2 Timothy in #2 v. 18 these false teachers say **“that the resurrection has already happened.”** So they believed in the resurrection of the body from the dead for Christians, but somehow they had spiritualized it. For clearly there had been no literal resurrection of the body which the apostles taught would be accompanied by the physical return of Jesus to earth. There are hints in these two epistles that this false teaching was accompanied not only by blasphemy but also with immoral behavior. So we don't fully understand what this false teaching was at Ephesus, but we are told enough to know that it deviated from the teaching of the apostles.

According to v. 5 of our passage Paul says, **“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”** Paul seems to be saying, “Be firm, Timothy. There is wrong teaching being given at Ephesus. Don't worry about being tough, because the goal is love. Some people may be offended, but they need to know the truth.” The product of false teaching is intellectualism and pride and meaningless speculation. But correct teaching should produce love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

There is danger that comes as we grow in our understanding of God's Word. I saw it in seminary. That danger involves pride. We can begin to pursue knowledge for its own sake. We can come to look down on those Christians who don't know the Bible as well as we do. But God did not intend Biblical knowledge to be an end in itself. He intended it to affect the way that we live. It should produce love--- love for God and love for our fellow human beings. If it is genuine love, it will have for its focus service for God and the genuine well-being of other people. It will not have as its focus our own justification or recognition or position of authority.

One of the professors whom I had in seminary was a man by the name of Dwight Pentecost. He wrote a number of books and theological articles during the course of his long life of 99 years. Toward the end of his life he was given an apartment in a student dormitory. Earlier in his life he had been trained as a tailor. So he spent a fair amount of time in his last years sewing clothes for students and their mates in his dorm and doing alterations--- all for free. What a beautiful demonstration of practical love.

Paul continues his discussion of this false teaching in vv. 6 & 7: **“Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.”** These false teachers are missing the meaning of the law, the Old Testament Scriptures. Instead they are dogmatizing on mere speculations. It is bad to be off on doctrine. It is worse to be dogmatic and confident about it.

II.A.

So what is THE WRONG TEACHING TODAY (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE WRONG TEACHING TODAY) which we Christians face? I find at least four categories of wrong teaching today in our Christian world. The first category I would describe as BIBLICAL NUMBERS, COLORS, AND LETTERS. (II. THE WRONG... A. BIBLICAL NUMBERS...) There are certain numbers that appear in the Bible which have significance--- numbers like one and three and twelve and forty. There are certain colors which seem to be associated with royalty and purity. But one teacher whom I knew in Connecticut wanted to make an interpretation or theological conclusion out of almost every color or number that appeared in the Bible. That seemed to me to fall into the category of vain discussion and foolish speculation.

Fifteen or twenty years ago there was another subject which gained traction in some parts of the Christian world. A guy by the name of Michael Drosnin wrote a couple of books about the Bible code. He claimed that by measuring the distance between letters, especially in the Old Testament, one could find messages about the future in the Biblical text. Part of the problem with that claim is that we don't have the original text of the Old Testament. We have slight variations of words and letters in the manuscripts of the Old Testament. So we don't have certainty about the exact letters and words of the original text. This guy made a number of predictions about the future based upon his theory, which did not prove to happen.

B.

Another category of wrong teaching today is the CULTS. (I. A. B. CULTS) This would include groups like the Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses and the Moonies and the International Church of Christ. These groups generally hold the Bible in high regard. They have many values and views with which we can agree. But they get off on a few key points and end up in serious doctrinal error. Traditionally these cults don't accept the doctrine of the Trinity, and they don't believe in the full deity of Jesus Christ.

C.

A third category of false teaching today is the HEALTH AND WEALTH GOSPEL (I. A. B. C. HEALTH AND WEALTH GOSPEL), sometimes called the Prosperity Gospel. This has gained a lot of popularity in our country. Many of its proponents appear on Christian TV. It has become a dominant influence in Africa and in parts of Latin America. The health and wealth gospel basically says that if a Christian uses the right formula and exercises the necessary faith, God is bound to make you healthy and materially prosperous. One survey found that 50 of the 260 largest churches in the US promote this prosperity gospel. (Baptist Press, 9/22/2011)

Many of the televangelists are prosperity gospel promoters. A group called the Trinity Foundation says, **“Sixty percent of the donor pool for televangelists comes from elderly women. Thirty-five percent are what we call a desperation pool--- they’ve tried everything else. Their son is dying of AIDS, or they have cancer.”** The rest **“are people that are relatively well off, that want a spiritual justification for their own greed. If their preacher who they listen to is justifying greed, then they feel comfortable with their greed.”** (Crosswalk, 6/13/2005)

If the reasoning of prosperity preachers is taken to its logical conclusion, then it means that Jesus blew it in His earthly ministry. For He never had very much in terms of the world’s earthly goods. He largely lived in borrowed houses, rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, and was buried in a borrowed tomb. He obviously had a painful and early death. Most of the apostles of Jesus had shortened lives and had little material possessions. The Apostle Paul claimed that he had a thorn in the flesh which the Lord would not take away.

One example of these prosperity preachers is Kenneth Copeland. Copeland (KENNETH COPELAND), who has been divorced twice, has an extensive television and writing ministry. He is reported to have a net worth of at least \$300 million. He says in one of his little books (*Welcome to the Family*, p. 25), **“God intends for every believer to live completely free from sickness and disease. It is up to you to decide whether or not you will.”** He also says, **“... Confession brings possession.... It brings salvation, healing, protection, prosperity and so on.”**

Another prosperity preacher is Joel Osteen. (JOEL OSTEEN) This Houston preacher boasts a huge church and a large nationwide following. He comes across as a likeable guy and an effective communicator. He presents a positive message, but it is largely a self-help, personal success talk. He told a Sixty Minutes interviewer several years ago that he is not very well equipped to teach the Bible. He said, **“....when I think about it, Sunday’s in a few days and I gotta get back up here and feed everybody and be my best and inspire them and have some good stories, keep them listening....”** The Bible says that the task of church leaders and preachers is to present the gospel, to teach the Word of God. Jim Garnett from our own congregation is working on a book about the health and wealth gospel. When he has it ready, we will be sure to let you know.

D.

Perhaps the greatest threat to Biblical Christianity today is what I have labeled the FALLIBILITY OF THE BIBLE. (II. C. D. FALLIBILITY OF THE BIBLE) These are teachings that undermine the authority of the Bible. In the first eighteen centuries of the church if an individual said that he or she was a Christian, it went without saying that he or she believed that the Bible and everything it contained was true. But then in

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries some scholars began to claim that the Bible was only a human book and that much of it could not be trusted as being actually true. So the real Christians began to speak about the inspiration of the Bible to distinguish themselves from these liberal theologians.

Then some Christians came along who claimed to believe in the inspiration of the Bible but who also thought that there were errors in it. So churches and Christian institutions began to include the word “infallible” in their statements of faith to express their confidence in the Bible.

Then some Christians came along who said that they believed that the Bible is infallible in matters of faith and practice but that it has errors in matters of science and history. But who determines what constitutes matters of faith and practice? So evangelicals began to add the word “inerrant” in their statements of faith to express their confidence in the Bible.

Now in more recent years there are some people who sign statements of faith in seminaries and denominations and other Christian organizations indicating that they believe in the inerrancy of the Bible but who also say, “I believe that everything in the Bible is exactly what God wants to be there. But that doesn’t rule out the possibility that God put contradictions in it or that there are events described that really did not happen in history.”

So it is unclear what term we will come up with next to describe that we simply believe the Bible. We need to be on guard against those who would deny the authority of the written Word of God. Within the family of God we can have different views on Calvinism vs. Arminianism, end time events, and charismatic issues. But these other beliefs fall into the realm of false teaching.

III.

Look next at vv. 8-11 as we consider THE LAW AT EPHESUS. (III. THE LAW AT EPHESUS) In v. 7 the subject of the law was mentioned. Now in these verses the Apostle reminds Timothy of the proper role of the Old Testament Law and moral law in general. He writes, **“Now 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...”** These descriptive terms could be used to describe violations of the first four of the Ten Commandments.

The connection with the last six commandments is made more clear in the next couple of verses. Beginning in the middle of v. 9 Paul speaks of **“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 section concludes in v. 11 with the assertion that sound doctrine is **“in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.”** The implication is that the false teachers, who are described in v. 7 as wanting to be teachers of the law, are following the wrong law, or at least adding to it. They are also using it in the wrong way, saying, as we find later in #4, that good Christians have to abstain from marriage and avoid certain foods in order to please God

This introduces the problem of legalism. That term does not appear in the Bible. But it accurately describes a wrong approach to law that is found in the Bible. Charles Ryrie defines legalism in this way. (LEGALISM DEFINITION) It is **“a fleshly attitude which conforms to a code (or law) for the purpose of exalting self.”** The three elements in this definition are a law, or code of conduct, and a power to live up to that code, and a purpose in following that code.

The false teachers at Ephesus had distorted God’s law, or added onto it. In addition they were encouraging people to exert their own energy to follow this code. The proper way to live up to God’s code is to seek power from the Holy Spirit to live up to it. Then also false teachers at Ephesus were bringing attention to themselves as their motivation in following this code. The proper motivation is to glorify God in our following of God’s law. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Thus in v. 11 Paul speaks of the gospel of the glory of the blessed God. “Gospel” means good news. Down in v. 15 we are told that the good news is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

IV.

(PROJECTOR ON--- IV. PROPER USE OF THE LAW TODAY) We come then to the PROPER USE OF THE LAW TODAY. It seems to me that there are at least three purposes for which the law of God serves.

A.

The first is that IT SHOWS PEOPLE THEIR SINFUL STATE. (IV. PROPER... A. IT SHOWS PEOPLE...) A central purpose of the law is to show people their sin and their need for a Savior. Thus in v. 9 Paul says that the law was laid down for the lawless and disobedient.

In Romans #3 v. 10 (ROMANS 3:10) the Apostle Paul says, **“None is righteous, no, not one...”** He then goes on to cite a number of Old Testament passages which confirm this. Everyone is a sinner.

The result of this sinful state is bad. In Romans #6 v. 23 (ROMANS 6:23) Paul writes, **“For the wages of sin is death...”** This is not just physical death, but also spiritual death. It is separation from God. The Book of Revelation speaks about the destiny of the lost as involving a second death which leads to an eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire.

God’s law in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament shows that we humans have a problem. We are sinners. If this sin problem is not properly dealt with, it will lead to horrible consequences.

There is a large sign that most of you have seen beside Highway 93/95 that says, “It’s OK to not be OK.” It was put there by a large church. It seems to me that this is a bad message to present to the world from a Christian church. The Bible says that we humans have a problem. It is not OK to be not OK. Our sinful plight will have horrible consequences. Too many people in our culture believe that we are all OK, that we are all basically good.

But that is not what the Bible says. The Bible says that we humans have great value and worth. We are created in the image of God. We have infinite value from the moment we are conceived until the moment we die. But we are deeply flawed. We are sinners. We are not OK. Our beings are scarred by this sin, and we are headed for hell unless we get the situation remedied. It is not OK to not be OK, but there is a solution.

The second part of Romans #3 v. 20 (ROMANS 3:20B) says, **“...through the law comes the knowledge of sin.”** That is the central purpose of God’s law. It shows that we have a problem.

The entirety of Romans 3:20 (ROMANS 3:20) says, **“For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”** The danger is that religious people, including many who call themselves Christians, try to earn their way to heaven. They try to do as good as they can to follow God’s law, whatever they understand that to be. But that’s not it. That is not how we get right with God. If we could do something from our own effort to become right with God, there would have been no need for God to send His Son to have a horrible death on a Roman cross.

The Gospel is that Jesus Christ was God who became man and that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He was our substitute. If we will simply put our trust in Him, we will have eternal forgiveness. We will be declared righteous by God.

So it is that Paul declares in (EPHESIANS 2:8-9) Ephesians #2 vv. 8 & 9, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”** Salvation is a gift. It cannot be earned. It can only be accepted.

B.

The second purpose that the law serves is that IT TELLS US ABOUT GOD. (IV. A. B. IT TELLS US ABOUT GOD) As we get to know people we discover the rules by which they live. They may be stated or unstated. But if we want to get to know people better, we have to learn the codes by which we live. We learn about what they think are the right sports teams to cheer for. We learn about how they think that they should spend their money or where they should take a vacation and what they should do with their free time. I learn that Ralph thinks that Pepsi products are the only soft drinks that should be consumed. So if I have Ralph over at my house, I should have Pepsi available to him. I learn that some people are military veterans, and they probably think that it is an important rule to support our military.

In a similar way, if I want to know the God who is really there, it is important to learn something about His rules. The Ten Commandments tell me important things about God. They tell me that He is a jealous God. He does not want to have any other gods before Him. He wants us to have Him as our top loyalty in life. Other laws in the Bible tell us other things that are helpful for us to know about His being and character.

C.

Another purpose that God’s law serves is that IT TELLS US HOW TO LIVE WISELY. (IV. A. B. C. IT TELLS US HOW TO LIVE WISELY) Many of you have heard me use the illustration before that the Bible is like a car

owner's manual. If we want to get the best use out of a new car, we need to have some familiarity with the owner's manual. We have to understand its maintenance schedule and its proper operation. We have to change the oil once in a while. We have to pay attention to warning lights.

In a similar way the Bible with its rules and laws is like an owner's manual. God is our manufacturer. He knows how we can have the most successful and worthwhile life possible. We do best when we follow the owner's guide which He has provided for us.

(PROJECTOR OFF) Now following the law, focusing on a code of dos and don'ts, is not the primary route to spiritual maturity. When I became engaged to be married, I did not sit down and think, "Now what will be the limits of behavior that Suzy will tolerate from me now that we are engaged. I wonder if I take her out once every other week if she will love me. I suppose that I will have to stop dating other women now. I will probably also have to start taking a shower at least once a week, or else she might get upset with me.

That is not the way that I thought. I doubt that this is the way that you thought either, for those of you who have had the experience of becoming engaged to be married. Our focus when we are in love is not on dos and don'ts, on the limits of our relationship. Our focus is upon pleasing the one whom we love. We spend time with that person not because of any rule we have agreed upon but because we love him or her and want to get to know that person better.

A similar thing is true in our relationship with God. When we place our trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior, we begin a personal relationship with God. The basis of that relationship is not how well we have done in following a certain law, it is the death and resurrection of Jesus. We enter into the benefits of that by receiving the gift of salvation by faith. It is nothing that we earn or deserve. It is simply what we receive by faith. When we do that, we become His children. We love God because He has blessed us. We want to get to know Him and spend time with Him because we love Him and seek to know Him better. At least that should be our motivation.

Without sound doctrine on the foundational issues of who Jesus is and how we should relate to God and what basic things God expects from us, we will end up with false teaching. We could end up either with a strict, cold legalism. Or we could end up with a wild, lawless lifestyle where everything goes. What we believe affects the way that we live and the way that we act. Ultimately it determines where we will spend eternity. We need to make sure that we are tuned into truth that comes from God. We need to

make sure that what we believe is rooted in the Bible that God has given to us. We need to study it and match up what we hear others say about it with what it really proclaims.