



# MISUSES OF THE LAW OF GOD

"Two sorts of men should be...excluded from the gospel ministry; first, those who will not work; secondly, those who know not how to perform their work aright."

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## **DISCUSSION:**

- Bullet point the ways in which you can take something "good" and misuse it.
- Why is the misuse of anything such an easy thing to do?

## **LESSON:**

READ 1 Timothy 1:6-11.

Someone has well said, "The main thing is to see that the main thing remains the main thing."

Now, if someone was to ask you, "What should be the main thing or the central task of leadership in the church? What would be your response?"

- Some would say, "Evangelism! Evangelism is the main thing!" And there is no question that one of the main missions of the church is to preach the Gospel of Christ to the lost (*Matt.28:18-20*). But that's not the first thing that Paul told Timothy to do in setting the church in order.
- Someone else would say, "The main thing has to be worship and prayer!" This conviction is so strong among some that it has led to the formation of entire denominations like the Vineyard movement. I believe we all can agree on the fact that in church history, no church has made a significant impact on its community for Christ, who did not worship the Lord in spirit and truth (*John 4:24*) and seek God's power in prayer. However, that is not the first thing that Paul told Timothy to do in setting the church in order.

The first thing that Timothy is charged to do is to stop the false teaching which sought to pervert the Gospel, undermine the glory and authority of God, and cripple the health of the church. By implication, we can say that the central task of leadership in any church is to see that the teaching/doctrine is in line with the apostolic revelation, the word about Jesus—which Paul summarizes in these terms in verse 11, "According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted" (*Cf. Acts 20:29-30*).

When the doctrine of the church is in line with the revelation of God, then the church will be strong, healthy, and fruitful for God's glory. And this is why Satan seeks to undermine sound doctrine in the church by planting false doctrine. In this section, Paul reveals two things about the danger of false teaching and one

fact about the gold standard of all true teaching. Here is the outline of this section, and we will unpack the first point in this lesson.

1. False teaching always fails to edify. (vv.6-7)
2. False teachers misunderstand the nature and function of the Law. (vv.8-9)
3. The Gospel is the measure of the soundness of all teaching. (vv.10-11)

David Calhoun, in his history of Princeton Seminary, observes that on October 3, 1844, Dr. Archibald Alexander (the first professor chosen for Princeton Theological Seminary) preached at the installation of his son, J.W. Alexander, to the pastorate of the Duane Street Church in New York City. Taking his theme from 2 Timothy 2:15, Dr. Alexander described the preacher as a workman. Then he said, "Two sorts of men should be...excluded from the gospel ministry; first, those who will not work; secondly, those who know not how to perform their work aright." Such was the case of certain men in Ephesus.

The picture we get from 1 Timothy 1 is that the *Law is good*, but *difficult to teach* and *subject to misuse*. Just as it is hard to teach free will without denying free grace, or to teach free grace without denying human responsibility, likewise it is hard to give the Law its due and not seem to prejudice the Gospel, or to teach the Gospel and not prejudice the Law.

Let me begin with a brief overview of the main points of these verses. And then, we will unpack and dive into each with more depth to make sure that we have a good, tight, and clear grasp on the subject of the Law and its place in the church and the Christian's life. In these verses, three things are clear:

1. **The nature of the Law**—"but we know that the Law is good..." (v.8a). When we speak about the nature of something, we are saying what something is designed to do by God. God designed cows to moo by nature. He designed cats to purr and dogs to bark by nature. But what was God's design for the Law by nature? Paul says that we know that the Law is good (*kalos*); that is, it is that which is *intrinsically good* and *outwardly attractive*. When used properly, it is beneficial in its effect.
2. **The misuse of the Law**—"if one uses it lawfully" (v.8b). In other words, like many good things, God's Law can be misused or abused. For example, marriage is good—amen! But it can be misused and abused. For example: in some countries, marriage is not practiced for the purpose of partnership, pleasure, and protection, but to bind younger women in a lifetime of domestic servitude and sexual abuse. In Proverbs 18:22, Solomon said, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord." But a good thing can become a bad thing if it is not used for God's intended purpose. The same is true of the Law of God. And so, the Apostle corrects the ignorance of the false teachers in Ephesus by dropping some divine knowledge on them about the proper use of the Law.
3. **The proper use of the Law**—"realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for..." (v.9), then he gives three pairs or groups of sinners under which everyone is covered.
  - Group #1—the *lawless and rebellious* (those who live in defiant flagrance to the revealed will of God).
  - Group #2—the *ungodly and sinners* (those without reverence for God and whose impiety has no respect for His demands).
  - Group #3—the *unholy and profane* (those who are the opposite of what God is and those who hold to nothing sacred in their minds or their actions). These are vile and the irreligious.

These three groups signify opposition to God's Law, to God Himself, and to that which is *sacred*. The remaining litany of traits combine to show that man, in his sinful condition, has totally and completely broken and fallen short of all the commandments of God. This is why you and I stand in need of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God—the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

## HOW DO WE MISUSE THE LAW?

It is possible to use the Law incorrectly. This is to say that when the Law is used for something *other than that which God ordained* it, then it is being abused. Here are five common misuses of the Law.

- 1. The Law is misused when it is used to discourage brokenhearted sinners.** This is why the Law and the Gospel must be preached together.
  - The Law addresses men as members of *the old creation*. Grace makes men new members of *the new creation* (2 Cor.5:17).
  - The Law manifests *the sin that is in man*. Grace manifests *the mercy that is in God*.
  - The Law demands *righteousness from man*. Grace brings *righteousness to man*.
  - The Law sentences *the living man to death*. Grace brings *dead men to life*.
  - The Law speaks of *what man must do for God*. Grace tells us *what God has done for man*.
  - The Law brings *the knowledge of sin*. Grace brings *the remedy for sin*.
  - The Law brings *the will of God to man but gives no power to obey*. Grace gives man *a desire to do the will of God and gives him the power to obey*.
  - The Law testifies to *God's righteousness*. Grace supplies and imputes *His righteousness*.
- 2. The Law is misused when it is used to oppose Christ, grace, or the Gospel.** In John 1:17, we read—*"For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ."* This verse contrasts what was *given* by Moses and what *came* by Jesus Christ. Grace and truth were not merely *given* but *came*, in all their fullness and glorious perfection, in *Christ*. Grace and truth were not *given* to Christ—they were *His own essential perfections*. There is no conflict between the Law and Christ—*Christ came to fulfill the Law*, and in doing so, He fulfilled all righteousness. And in His death, He endured sin's penalty (Matt.3:15; 1 Pet.3:18).
- 3. The Law is misused when it is taught as having the power to sanctify.** A.W. Tozer was a student of the life and ministry of A.B. Simpson, founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance. He tells the story of a time when Dr. Simpson was invited to preach at a Bible conference in England on the assigned topic, "Sanctification." When he arrived, he discovered that he was to be on the platform with two other Bible teachers. All three of them had been given the same topic—"Sanctification."

The first speaker used his time in making clear his position that sanctification meant ERADICATION. *"The sanctified person has had his or her old carnal nature removed, as you would remove a weed from your garden—eradicated."*

The second speaker arose and set forth his view that sanctification meant the SUPPRESSION of the old nature. *"The 'old man' will always be there," he said, "and your victory is to sit on the lid and keep him down and beat him at his own game. He must be suppressed."*

This was not an easy situation for Dr. Simpson, scheduled to be the third and final speaker. He told his audience that he could only present CHRIST HIMSELF as God's answer. *"Jesus Christ is your Sanctifier, your*

*sanctification, your all and all. God wants you to get your eyes away from the gifts, the formulas, the techniques. He wants your gaze to be on the Giver, Christ Himself. He is your Lord; worship Him" (Cf. 1 Cor.1:30).*

4. **The Law is misused when it is used merely as ammunition in unfruitful and unprofitable disputes.** This is what we find that was going on at Ephesus.
5. **The Law is misused when men are taught to look to it for justification.** When this happens, the Law becomes a burden too heavy to bear, and ultimately a curse to the man who seeks justification by his efforts at keeping the Law (*Rom.3:19-20*). Man's fundamental abuse of the Law is to put it in opposition to Christ for justification and to regard Law-keeping as an alternative way to acceptance before God. The Apostle Paul said to the Romans that man, in his sinfulness and error, "*not knowing about God's righteousness,*" is guilty of "*seeking to establish his own*" (*Rom.10:1ff*).

The Law and Christ are not *partnering* in the matter of a sinner's justification, nor are they equally *joined* together, for the Law is subordinate to Christ. When men are taught to look to the Law for justification, it **destroys the nature of grace**. Justification by grace alone through faith alone is the foundation of Christianity and is completely exclusive of the merits of any good works.

- **Romans 4:4-5**—Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. <sup>5</sup> But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.

This would include man's attempt to keep the Law in his sinful condition, and any works done by the believer through the indwelling grace of God.

When men are taught to look to the Law for justification, it **denies the sufficiency of Christ**. Jesus Christ would be no Savior if works were the basis of righteousness. True righteousness, "*which is through faith in Christ,*" is set by Paul over and against his "*own righteousness derived from the Law*" (*Phil.3:9*) and is called "*the righteousness of God*" (*Rom.10:3; 2 Cor. 5:21*).

When men are taught to look to the Law for justification, it **dismisses the Glory of God**. God's personal perfections and wisdom are seen in the fact that He "*justifies the ungodly*" (*Rom.4:5*).

The goodness of the Law is experienced only as it is put to *proper use* and when it is seen in *proper relation* to the end for which it was given. The Law is good "*if one uses it lawfully*" (*1 Tim.1:8*). But it becomes anything but good when misused.

## **APPLICATION:**

THE COMMANDMENTS and CHRIST—Identify one example of how Christ appropriately uses the Law.

THE COMMANDMENTS and THE CHRISTIAN—Ask yourself:

- Of the five misuses, which one are you prone to exercise?
- In your own words, how does this lesson correct your view of the proper use of the Law?

What is your takeaway from this lesson?

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