

The right and wrong use of the Law

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1 Tim 1:1-11

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Introduction

Bishop Martin Breytenbach in the greeting he brought at the start of our Centenary Conference said that for the most the church had misunderstood the Great Commission. What Jesus said was not, go and make church goers, but go and make disciples.

Matthew 28:19 Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.

The request that many people are making to have a mentor or to be in an accountability relationship comes from a God given stirring to grow and go deeper as followers of Jesus. I sense within Christ Church an increased hunger for teaching from God's word that is not just academic and theoretical but teaching from God's Word that will change lives.

While they help inform us and educate us, the truth is that we will not make disciples by laying on courses that people attend. We will make disciples as we choose to deliberately and strategically sew into the lives of others. As we take time and put effort into explaining Jesus' instructions and applying them in real life situations. It will be as we share our walk with God with others, and as we study the scriptures together and ask, not only, "What does this mean?", but "What must we do?", that we will make disciples.

The question I want to ask of everyone who is a member of Christ Church is, who are you discipling? In whom are you investing time and effort? Whose growth and maturity in Jesus has God put on your heart?

If God hasn't spoken to you about this then something is wrong.

There has not been a Great Commission Update release which says,

"Jesus was incorrect when he commanded you to make disciples. Should read: Go on courses, read books, listen to sermons and attend to you own growth. Putting time into the lives of others is an optional extra for the professional clergy and others who have time. Run this through your system and reboot."

That is a virus that has crept into the church operating system and it needs to be cleaned out.

Jesus gave a command, "Go and make disciples". It could not be clearer.

I was struck by fact that Jesus said,

John 14:12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. They will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

If we are following the discipleship model that Jesus had we will want to see those we disciple going further than we have, and doing greater things than we have. We will be striving to see them do more than we have been able to do.

I want to see that spirit in us as a church - investing in making disciples, in raising the bar that so those who follow us will be doing more, doing greater things than we have ever done.

Now it is with this heart for making disciples in mind that I want us to look at Paul's letter to Timothy. It gives us a window into the very warm, personal pastoral relationship that Paul, the great apostle, had with his young protégé. My prayer is that as we go through this letter God will instruct and stir in our hearts a desire to do what Paul did – to invest in others and seek ways to see them grow in their walk with Jesus.

Lets start.

Note first the warmth and intimacy of this relationship.

Paul affectionately addresses this letter to

"Timothy, my true son in the faith".

In 1 Cor 4:17 he refers to him as

"my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord"

and when he writes to the Philippians (2:22) he says of him

"Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel".

Timothy, the son of a Jewish Christian mother and a Greek father, was converted under Paul's preaching at Lystra on the first missionary journey (about A.D. 47). He had matured so well as a Christian that only two years later (A.D. 49) he was ready to become an apprentice to the great apostle. He became one of Paul's most trusted helpers, so that Paul could write

"I have no one else like him, ..."

Timothy was still **comparatively young** when Paul writes this letter to him. Paul says,

1 Tim 4:12 “Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young.”

He was **temperamentally shy**. Paul urges the Corinthian church (1 Cor 16:10) to ensure that when Timothy comes to them to see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with them.

¹⁰When Timothy comes, treat him with respect. He is doing the Lord's work, just as I am.

¹¹Don't let anyone despise him. Send him on his way with your blessings when he returns to me.

And Timothy was **physically in poor health**. In 5:23 Paul refers to his frequent illnesses.

²³Don't drink only water. You ought to drink a little wine for the sake of your stomach because you are sick so often.

So Timothy is young, shy and frail.

Does this disqualify him from being in charge of churches in and around Ephesus? Not at all.

Paul says to him

2 Tim 2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

It was no doubt a thrill and honour for Timothy to be discipled by Paul and entrusted with the care of this important church. It was clearly a delight for Paul to see this young man grow and mature in his walk as a follower of Jesus and leader in the church.

I can identify with that. Nothing gives me so much delight and fulfillment as seeing people grow in their walk with Jesus and step into new places of obedience and faith, stepping up to the responsibilities entrusted to them.

So we are looking at a pastoral letter that Paul writes to his young protégé Timothy his true son in the faith.

What is the context?

It appears that Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment of two years, recorded at the close of Acts, and that he made another visit to Ephesus. There he discovered some stuff happening in the church that

needed some extended attention. So he left Timothy as pastor of this important church to attend to these problems.

Three things to note about Ephesus at this time that will help us understand what Paul writes:-

First the **Temple of Artemis** was situated there and by this time it has a female priesthood with sexual activity part of the worship. It dominated much of the religious and economic life of the city.

The church had to be a radical alternative to the worship and life style of the Artemis cult. A tough call.

This context is important as we read later on what Paul says about women leading and teaching inappropriately. We will get to that in due course.

Secondly upper class Ephesian culture emphasized **the importance of respectability** using the same term "*eusebeia*" as Paul's key word "godliness". It seems that Paul deliberately uses this same word and redefines it.

Paul wants the church and its leaders to be respected in the community, but only because of a counter-cultural godliness derived from the gospel.

Thirdly Roman culture in this period was undergoing a revolution in the public role of women. "**New women**" were emerging who flouted traditional values concerning dress codes in public and in particular sexual behaviour. Roman men had always exercised the right to promiscuity. The "new women" movement was insisting on the same right to sexual freedom for women. This was counter to both Roman respectability and to Christian godliness.

This was something of what was going on in society at that time in Ephesus.

So Paul is now writing the first of two letters to Timothy as he shoulders the responsibility of pastoring the churches in and around Ephesus and addressing the problems which had arisen and caused Paul concern.

In essence the problems arose from **false teaching, inappropriate living** and **bad leadership**.

In the passage we are looking at tonight he addresses false teaching.

And we read about wrong use of the law, and then right use of the law. I want to look at each of these and then draw out some practical applications for us in our context.

When Paul left Ephesus previously (as recorded in Acts 20) he said (vs. 29)
That savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

That is exactly what had happened. But who were they and what were they teaching?

Paul describes them in 1 Tim 1:7 as those ...
who want to be teachers of the law.
 who are (verse 3)
teaching false doctrines.

Now remember that Paul was good Jewish Rabbi. He loved the law. He prized it and he urged the study of it on the church.
 He wrote to the Romans and said ...

Rom 7:12 The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

He says here to Timothy (verse 8) that ...

The Law is good if you use it properly.

So clearly there is a right and wrong way to use the law.

You know that the Hebrew word behind the Greek word that Paul uses for law is *Torah*, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. So here when Paul uses the term law (NIV) it most likely refers to the Torah – Geneses, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy – but the principles we glean here we can apply to how we treat the whole of Scripture the Old and the New Testaments.

First he speaks about the wrong use of the law.

Verse 4, Timothy is to command false teachers

not to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.

In chapter 4 verse 7 he further describes these myths as ...

godless myths and old wives tales.

and in 2 Tim 4:4 as ...

an alternative to the truth.

Without going into all the detail, there was speculation and fanciful interpretations of passages particularly Genesis looking for hidden meaning and secret truths that only “the informed” (those in the know) could see and understand. It was creating an “us” and a “them”.

Does that happen in the church today? You bet, all too easily.

And do we have people still coming up with fanciful interpretations and discovering of secret truths - the Da Vinci Code and The Gospel of Judas of the day – yes we do.

Added to this there was an overlay of a false teaching about asceticism.

1 Tim 4:3 They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.

What ever they were on about, the fruit they produced is what concerned Paul. The consequences of what was taught obstructed faith and love.

Verse 4 They promoted controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith.

Verse 5 The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Controversial speculation raises doubts, not **faith**.

And meaningless talk and finding secret truths that only the in formed and in group understand militates against **love** which comes from a pure heart and good conscience and sincere faith.

So here are two practical tests we can apply to all teaching.

The first is the test of faith: Does it promote faith God in line with the teaching of the Bible that we are saved by faith not by human effort, secret formulas or fanciful myths, or what ever else.

The question we need always to ask is “Where is the cross?”

Does this teaching bring us back to the foot of the cross, to the place of surrender and faith in the completed work of Jesus on the Calvary that brings salvation to human kind?

Remember the cross!

The second is the test of love: Does it promote unity in the body of Christ, and if not (because truth can sometimes divide) is it irresponsibly divisive?

Unity is such a key aspect of what God loves and blesses.

Psa 133: How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

It is not unity at all costs. Tolerate anything. Never draw a boundary. Unity comes from truth, not truth from unity.

So the test is, is this teaching building people up in love and if there is division is the heart of the love of God clearly in evidence and shining ever brighter?

I think of Jesus encounter with the rich young ruler in Mark 10, who asks about what he must do to inherit eternal life. It ends with the man going away sad because he can't accept Jesus' teaching. But Mark records (vs 21) very poignantly, that

“Jesus looked at him and loved him”

Faith means we receive it from God.

Love means it builds up the church.

The ultimate criterion we use to judge any teaching, and this is important in our making disciples who can do this, is ask the question,

“Does it promote the glory of God and good of the church?”

“Does it increase faith in Jesus redeeming act on the cross, and does it strengthen the bonds of unity in the church?”

These false teachers in Ephesus did neither. They promoted speculation and controversy.

Second Paul speaks about he right use of the law

Paul says of the false teachers of the law (verse 7)

that they don't know what they are talking about.

In contrast Paul reminds Timothy of that they do know.

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

Verse 9: We know that the law is made for... law breakers.

As we look at the Hebrew Scriptures we can see three different functions of law or Torah.

First there is the **punitive** dimension of Torah. It prescribes punishment for wrong doing. If some one transgresses in this way, this is the punishment they should receive.

Lev 7: 21 If anyone touches something unclean ... and then eats any of the meat of the fellowship offering belonging to the LORD, that person must be cut off from his people."

Second there is the **deterrent** factor where the law acts as a restraint on evil doers. The law says to the one contemplating a wrong or harmful evil act, “Don’t do that because if you do this is what will happen to you!”

*Lev 19:16 "Do not go about spreading slander among your people.
"Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the LORD.*

And very often is added “*who brought you out of Egypt*” – for which read “*Remember what happened to the Egyptians - don’t mess with me!*”

Thirdly there is the **educative** aspect where the law instructs us in the ways God wants us to live. You want to know how to live in a way that pleases God? Well this is how you live. This is what you do.

*Deut 4: 39 Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.
40 Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time.*

In this context in which of these three ways does Paul refer to the law?

On first glance it looks like number two – the deterrent factor.

In verse 9 he says the law is made for law breakers. It acts as a restraint on would be evil doers.

But as we read through to the end it is clear that Paul sees the law being educative and punitive as well. The Law is useful to other than law breakers.

Clearly in Paul’s mind the Law had a punitive function. In Romans he writes about how the Law brings condemnation but that this serves to high light the gift of salvation in Jesus. This punitive aspect of the law drives us to the cross. It makes us aware of our need of mercy. It brings Paul to the place where he says in Romans 7,

I have failed. Wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ!

He is driven back to Jesus – back to the cross.

Looking at verses 9 and 10 we can see that Paul restates the 10 commandments.

The first four commandments refer to our relationship with God, don’t they, and he begins by speaking about things that break our relationship with God, being ...

ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious;
and then about our duties towards one another.

Those who kill father and mother are obviously not keeping the 5th commandment to “honour father and mother”.

Murders are obviously breaking the 6th commandment, “You shall not kill”, while the sexually immoral and those practicing homosexuality are breaking the 7th commandment.

Slave traders are guilty of the most heinous form of stealing (the 8th command)

and liars and perjurers break the 9th.

And to round it off he adds, (verse 10)

and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

This link between the *Ten Commandments* and “*sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel*” is important. The moral standards of the gospel do not differ from the moral standards of the Torah. The Ten Commandments still apply!

The command is make disciples and teach them to obey. To obey what? Everything I have commanded you.

So for us as Christ Church at this time when we are being reminded of the importance of discipleship and of Jesus command to go and make disciples, we look at Paul’s instructions to Timothy and in these opening verses we are reminded to make right use of the law.

It is **punitive** – it reminds us that there is a penalty to pay for disobedience. Who will rescue us? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is a **deterrent** – it warns us – don’t go there.

It is **educative** – it tells us how we should live.

That is the right use of the Law - the Word of God.

So as you read the Bible – don’t look for hidden meanings and follow speculative interpretations – just ask God what are you saying to me about the way I am living right now?

So what is God saying to you tonight?

Is God drawing you back to the cross?

Is he warning you about something in your way of life or heart attitude?

Is he teaching and instructing you about what will be pleasing to him?

Those are the questions we ask as we seek to make disciples and study the Scriptures together.

Lord, search my heart as I search your word.
Lord, is there is anything in me that needs dealing with now?
Lord, thank you that there is no longer condemnation.
Thank you for the cross. Thank you for your forgiveness.
Teach me your ways.

Psalm 119

9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

10 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.

11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

12 Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees.

13 With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.

14 I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

15 I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

16 I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.

Introduction: Who most effectively disciplined you? Share briefly with the group.