

# Off Target

1 TIMOTHY 1:6-11

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Last week, we started a new series on the book of 1 Timothy. We learned that Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, a younger preacher who was encouraged to continue serving the church in Ephesus, for the purpose of bringing that congregation back on target. The city of Ephesus was extremely immoral, and that immorality was taking its toll on the church. Just as Paul had warned a number of years earlier, they were drifting, so Paul writes this letter as a reminder.

Last week, then we looked at 1 Timothy 1:3-5 and the idea of hitting the target, and in that passage, we had a WARNING and a restatement of the GOAL. The warning comes in the form of a correction, that that Timothy is to instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines. They were teaching some things that were off target (myths, endless genealogies leading to speculations), and Paul has to remind Timothy to order these men not to do that. But instead of leaving it at a warning, Paul also gives a goal or an aim, and ***“the goal of our instruction,”*** Paul says, ***“is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”*** Our mission, then (our aim) is LOVE. Instead of chasing endless speculations, our goal is LOVE.

This morning, we continue with the next paragraph, as Paul builds on this warning in 1 Timothy 1:6-11. He gives us some more details as he describes these men who have missed the mark. Today we learn what these men were teaching. Notice, please, 1 Timothy 1:6-11,

***<sup>6</sup> For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, <sup>7</sup> wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. <sup>8</sup> But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, <sup>9</sup> realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers <sup>10</sup> and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, <sup>11</sup> according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.***

As we look at this passage, I want us to notice Paul’s description of those who miss the mark, of those who are off target.

I. **And we start in verses 6-7 with a description of those who are ARROGANTLY IGNORANT.**

And as we might imagine, being ignorant and arrogant at the same time is not a good combination. But if we think about it a bit, most of us probably know a few people like this - those who think they know it all, but absolutely do not! They are arrogant in their ignorance. So, there is a warning to us here - we are not to be arrogant and ignorant. But if we put ourselves in Timothy's place here, there is also a warning that we need to be aware of such people, and we need to protect the church from this.

And the danger is: These men have turned aside from the LOVE FROM A PURE HEART (in verse 5), and they have **"strayed"** (as some translations put it). Literally, they have missed the mark. Literally, they are off target. Or, as the NASB puts it, they have **"turned aside."** They have swerved. They have wandered. They are not where they need to be. And in a sense, their wandering is completely irrational. Most of you know that my sister is a therapist out in Port Angeles, Washington, about two hours straight west of Seattle, in the Pacific Northwest. And you also know that she volunteers for search and rescue through the local sheriff's office. Yesterday, she was headed out to the site of a helicopter crash, to retrieve the pilot's body. This is in the mountains. This is in the wilderness. I called her yesterday morning, and she said she only had two minutes to talk, she had just arrived at the staging area. She said that the FAA had come in to help with the investigation, and that they were coming along to the crash site. She said that she would also stick around to escort them back out, so that she didn't need to go out on another mission tomorrow! She didn't trust the FAA not to get lost in the wilderness! But I called to ask her about something she had mentioned before: That those who get lost in the woods will often make some very irrational decisions, many times as the result of hypothermia. She mentioned one mission where they were searching for a woman, and they found all of her clothing neatly folded just off the trail. And some time later they found her body in the woods, some distance away. And the theory is: As hypothermia set in, she was no longer thinking clearly, so she took off her clothing, left it neatly just off the trail, and continued wandering. She had another case where a woman actually burned her clothing. Thankfully, she was later found alive, but it's hard to imagine getting lost and actually burning your clothing. That is not a rational decision. But that is apparently what happens many times when people get lost. They get off the trail, they panic, they make worse and worse decisions that make no sense whatsoever, and sometimes they are never found. And that seems to be what Paul is warning about here. These men have **"turned aside."** They have missed the mark. They have wandered off of the trail.

They have missed the goal of love, and they have turned aside to **"fruitless discussions."** They talk, and they talk, and they talk, but those discussions haven't led to actual fruit. Those discussions have done no good. Those discussions have not caused anybody to be more loving than they were before.

They want to be **"teachers of the Law"** (that's the pride part of it) - they want to be seen as knowledgeable, they want people to come to them for help with the hard questions, they love explaining things - but in reality, these men have no idea what they are talking about! They are arrogant in their ignorance.

So, how do we combat this? Well, we make sure that we are NOT ignorant! Especially when it comes to the Law. And this is where we get back to the quiz we passed out before our service started a bit ago! If you weren't here, we had a pop quiz! And the challenge was: Take about two minutes to write out the Ten Commandments. In some ways, the Ten Commandments pretty much summarize the Law of Moses. The Ten Commandments are incredibly important in the history of God's people. Here in our own nation, we have had extensive debates politically over whether the Ten Commandments should be posted in public places. Many religious groups teach that we are still under the Ten Commandments in some way or another. But the question is: Do we actually know the Ten Commandments?

I would love to know your score. I promise not to harass you or humiliate you. But I will share the answers up here if you would like to check your work. These are paraphrased for the sake of time and space:

1. No other gods but God.
2. No idols.
3. Don't take God's name in vain.
4. Keep the Sabbath Day.
5. Honor your father and mother.
6. No murder.
7. No adultery.
8. No stealing
9. No false witness (lying)
10. No coveting.

I don't know how all of you did on this. Hopefully we all got 100%! And the extra credit is that these are found in Exodus 20. But there is a lot of ignorance about the Ten Commandments out there. Surveys have found that 85% of Americans believe the Ten Commandments are in some way binding on us today (they are not), but only 15% of all Americans could name only five of them. That's among Americans in general. Less than half of protestants and Catholics could name even FOUR of the Ten Commandments. Many people today, then, are also ignorant of this Law that Paul refers to in verse 7. That opens us up to trouble. Certain men have swerved away from the goal of love, and they are making confident statements concerning this Law about which they know almost nothing. And if we don't know it either, then we are opening ourselves up to a heap of trouble.

The idea is: These men started well, but like those who get lost in the woods, one very small bad decision leads to another, and it ultimately ends in disaster. They have turned aside to fruitless discussions. They are arrogantly ignorant. They sound so intelligent, they might even write long papers defending their positions, but they leave a trail of spiritual destruction behind them. Many of us have seen this for ourselves. Names and faces might even come to mind. They are ignorant in their arrogance. They have turned away from the goal of love; they have turned aside to these fruitless discussions. And this is the first warning. This is the first description of these men.

## II. As we continue in verses 8-10, we find a MISAPPLICATION OF LAW.

And we need to be clear (because Paul is clear in this passage) that the Law itself is not bad. In fact, he straight up tells us that the Law is good. And I personally appreciate what the translators of the NASB have done here with the capitalization of "**Law**" - not because there are any caps in the original text (there are not) - but because what they have done seems to clarify what Paul is saying here. In the NASB, at least, the formatting helps us understand that the first reference seems to be to the Law of Moses, "**...we know that the Law**" [the Law of Moses] "**is good, if one uses it lawfully.**" He then continues in verse 9 with what seems to be a reference not to the Law of Moses in particular, but to law in general. And so the word "**law**" in verse 9 is not capitalized. I think there's a good reason for that. It goes back to what was really challenging the church at this time as certain men were coming in and trying to make Gentiles basically convert to Judaism before they could obey the gospel. We aren't told that this is the specific issue here, but it does seem to fit, because these men were in some way misusing or misapplying the Law of Moses. They were using the Law (the Law of Moses) unlawfully. And one of the main ways this happened back then was for people to force it on those it never really applied to. There were certain men who were trying to force circumcision on the Gentiles. Paul, of course, addresses this in much greater detail in Romans, and Galatians, and Ephesians, and Colossians, and

some of his other letters. For now, though, he just makes the point that there is a place for the Law (the Law of Moses), but it needs to be handled **“lawfully.”** It needs to be handled appropriately.

He then seems to shift to a discussion of **“law”** in general, and he makes the point that **“law”** is intended for those who break laws! We might say that a fence is not intended for me (who is content in staying on my own property), but the fence is intended to enforce my property line - for a burglar who might try to get in or for my dog who might try to get out! In perhaps a slightly similar way, law in general is for those in danger of doing what the law prohibits. If I am a careful driver, always paying attention, always driving in a safe way, always aware of children crossing the street, then (in a sense) the speed limit does not apply to me (because I will never break it). But as it is, I do need that law! I need the reminder! I need that radar speed sign that says, “The limit in this school zone is 20, but you are going 28!” I need it to flash! I need to be told that what I am doing is against the law. When we flew to Germany to see my brother and sister-in-law, my brother-in-law picked us up from the airport in Frankfurt, and as soon as we got up to highway speed, his car started mooing. I had no idea what was going on, but when I asked him, he laughed and explained that he had set his TomTom GPS to sound an alarm whenever he went 5 MPH over the limit, and he could pick the noise it made. Sometimes we need the reminder! Law, in general, is simply a reminder of a limit of some kind.

He then goes on to list some of the more popular sins. Law, in general, is for those who need a reminder concerning what is wrong. The law is intended for the lawless and rebellious, he says. The law is for the ungodly and sinners. The law is for the unholy and profane. The law is for those who kill their parents, for murderers. The law is for those who are sexually immoral, for homosexuals. The law is for kidnappers and liars. Law, in general, is for liars and perjurers, for those who lie under oath. He then tacks on at the end, **“...and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.”** But let’s not imagine that these are just sins that other people commit. I look at this list, and I can see myself in there. And sometimes I need to be told (in scripture) that my behavior does not measure up, that we do not measure up to the sinless perfection God expects.

Some have looked at this passage and have tried to say that Paul is simply making a distinction between the “moral law” and the “ceremonial law,” that he’s only talking about the Law of Moses here, and that the Law of Moses is in some way still binding on us today. But what makes this ridiculous is that Moses never really makes this distinction. In fact, the Ten Commandments don’t even make this distinction. Mixed in with the Ten, we have “keeping the Sabbath,” which is clearly ceremonial. And what we don’t have in the Ten are the explicit commands to love God and to love our neighbor. The point is: The moral and ceremonial are tightly woven together throughout the Law of Moses and cannot be separated. And that’s why I believe Paul is making a contrast here (with capital Law and lower case law) - the Law of Moses is good if we use it lawfully, and then he goes on to explain the value of law in general. If we use the Law of Moses, we need to apply it properly.

One thing that really irritates me is when people go to the Law of Moses as a primary source to prove that something like homosexuality is wrong. They will put a passage like Leviticus 20:13 on a meme (as if that’s how we need to address this issue), but the passage says, **“If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death.”** There are at least two cautions here. First of all, are we really advocating the death penalty? If we are using the first part of the verse as being something that applies today, are we willing to enforce it with what is called for in the second half of the verse? But then also, we might read the surrounding chapters, and we find a similarly serious prohibition by going back a few verses to Leviticus 19:19, where the people were told not to wear a garment that is made **“of two kinds of material mixed together.”** Or we could go to Leviticus 19:27,

***“You shall not round off the side-growth of your heads nor harm the edges of your beard.”*** The next verse talks about how it’s a sin to have a tattoo. If we use the Law of Moses to prove something, let’s be careful, because the same law would also make it a sin for me to trim my beard, or to have a tattoo, or to wear this cotton polyester blend. In truth, an issue like homosexuality is clearly addressed here in 1 Timothy 1 but also in Romans 1 and in Matthew 19 where Jesus himself clearly said that we were made male and female and that marriage, from the beginning, has always been intended for one man and one woman for life. The point is: The Law of Moses is good, but it needs to be applied accurately and carefully.

Unfortunately, certain men in Ephesus were misapplying the Law. They were taking the Law of Moses (given by God to the Jewish people exclusively), and they were forcing it on Gentiles that it never applied to. They were using the Law of Moses unlawfully.

So if we aren’t subject to the Law of Moses, does that mean we don’t have any law, that we don’t have any rules to follow? Of course not! Even in this passage, Paul outlines a number of sins, doesn’t he? We have a number of lists like this in the New Testament, telling us what NOT to do, telling us what sin looks like in the Christian age. By the way, tattoos, and beard trimming, and cotton-polyester blends are NOT condemned under the New Covenant! So, if we are not subject to the Law of Moses, what Law are we under, well...

### III. ...from the end of verse 10 into verse 11, we find that the **GOSPEL** is our **STANDARD**.

So, he gives us this list of sins to avoid and basically tells us to stay away from, ***“...whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.”*** ***“Sound teaching”*** is the gospel message, the good news, the words passed along to us by Paul and the other apostles and New Testament authors. Our aim is Jesus! I love how one writer said that, “The gospel is not just the message that people outside the church need to hear; it is the message that people inside the church need to live.” And in this good news, we have behaviors to follow and avoid, and we also have a description of what God did for us. We have an offer of forgiveness. ***“Sound teaching”*** is teaching that is healthy; teaching that is good. And the soundness of the teaching is directly tied to whether it can be found in the gospel (in the 27 books of the New Testament). False teachings lead to endless speculation, but sound teaching leads to love and to spiritual health and maturity - if we accept it, if we decide to live by it. The gospel, then, is our standard; it is our authority. Everything we hear, and do, and even think needs to be judged in light of the gospel.

### **Conclusion:**

In addressing this first issue up here, the gospel keeps us informed, and the gospel keeps us humble. We remember that we have been saved, not because we are so good, but because Jesus is so good! The only boasting we can do is in the cross.

And then in terms of the second concern up here, the gospel allows us to apply the Law properly. We are not subject to the Law of Moses, but the Law did bring us Jesus - and so we appreciate it, we study it, we learn something about God in it, but we are not saved by it.

And then, in terms of this last thought up here, the gospel keeps us motivated. The gospel keeps us on target. The gospel is our authority, our standard. Here at this congregation, we don’t have a creed or a headquarters

or any hierarchy outside this local church. It's just us and the gospel. This is who we are. We are a church of Christ; a congregation, a group of people belonging to Jesus.

And so, our mission as a church is to get the word out - telling the world about Jesus and what he did and continues to do, explaining that we respond to his message of forgiveness with faith and just simple, trusting obedience. We trust and obey. We turn from sin and allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, for the forgiveness of sins. If you'd like to study further, let us know. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can come talk to me right now as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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