

v11 “the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God”

- I wonder what keeps you awake at night worrying?
 - your sports team, your health, problems with a relationship,
 - for me it's the possibility of me or Christ Church, or both, going off the rails.
 - This whole book is written to make sure that doesn't happen, so we musn't be overly fearful. But it was a possibility then and now.
- I shared last time, called this series “Healthy Church.com”.
 - A healthy church is so key.
 - And we saw that the first key to health is your diet.
 - A healthy church needs healthy feeding from God's Word.
- The church in Ephesus was young, only a few years old,
 - yet it was in danger of losing its faith, its love, and its outreach
 - and some had already suffered shipwreck of their faith (graphic image v19).
 - so before he could get there, Paul sent Timothy to ensure that
 - **unhealthy teaching must be stopped**
 - **healthy teaching must be encouraged.**
 - And those were our two points last time. v3, v5.
- During the week I got an excellent email from one of you asking for a bit help on what False Teaching might look like, since we find it hard to see our blind spots. Thank you for those kinds of emails, they show that you are listening and thinking and asking for more application! I'll copy my response into the weekly news.
 - But Paul actually spells out some of the characteristics of the false teaching in our passage today.
 - And while we can't be certain to dot every i and cross every t of knowing exactly what was going wrong, here are 3 diagnostics that help us to watch out for teaching that will lead us astray whether we hear it on the internet, amongst Christian friends, or from this pulpit.

1) Unhealthy teaching starts with faulty motives...v5,6

- I wonder if you saw [the news](#) item a couple of weeks ago¹ about a lorry driver in China who followed a shortcut shown on his sat nav which took him up a steep narrow mountain road, and when he started to reverse down, his lorry lost control and ended up dangling over a massive precipice.
- I reckon there was something faulty with that sat nav, or something faulty with the driver. Fortunately no-one was hurt and after 3 days the lorry was recovered and the road reopened.
- But if your satnav is wrong, you can end up in a very dangerous place.

Paul says something similar about where the false teaching originates in v5.

¹ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10374979/Chinese-truck-dangles-edge-cliff-getting-lost-sat-nav.html>

- We saw last time that he commends 3 things.
They are at the heart of the Christian's navigational system.
 - **A pure heart.** moral purity at the control centre of the being.
 - **a good conscience.** rightly responding to the inner voice of reason with integrity
 - **a sincere faith.** holding to the faith, and trusting Jesus.
 - It seems that teachers had arisen whose personal moral compass had gone astray.
 - Rather than **purity**, they were perhaps after selfish gain
 - popularity
 - sexual immorality
 - or money. (materialism seems to be in view in chapter 6)
 - And rather than listening to their **conscience** when it started flashing on their dashboard to tell them they are doing something wrong, they suppressed their conscience.
 - And they no longer held onto the **faith** with integrity. They had to cross their fingers when they said the creed.
 - And Paul says v6 that when you leave these behind that's when you are in danger
 - "departed and turned"
 - or ESV "swerving from these have wandered away into vain discussion".
 - No wonder there is such an emphasis
 - in chapter 3 on elders being godly in character
 - and in chapter 4 on Timothy watching his life and doctrine.
- ▲ I remember talking to a friend who was part of a Cambridge church in the late 90s. His pastor's sermons started going a bit weird. Something wasn't right. And then it came to light that he was leaving his wife and 4 kids for someone else.
- We haven't yet looked at the content of the unhealthy teaching, though there were some clues last week, but when teaching goes off the rails, it's often because the teacher's heart has gone off the rails.
- ➡ Can I ask that you pray for your preachers!
 - My heart is deeply sinful, and I could so easily go astray in all sorts of areas. I'm not better than any of you, and one Aussie pastor says that becoming a pastor doesn't take you away from temptation, it opens up a whole load of new ones.
 - It's why I ask the wardens to keep me accountable, and why I've put them in touch with my two best friends who know everything about my life, and they can ask Emma anything about any area anytime.
 - Robert Murray Mc'Cheyne was a Scottish Pastor in Dundee who died when he was 30, but he rightly said "my people's greatest need is my personal holiness".
 - Please pray for your preachers.

Unhealthy teaching starts with faulty motives.

2) Unhealthy teaching misapplies part of the Bible... v7-10

- Another alarming point (don't worry, point 3 is much more positive as will be next week's sermon!) is the fact that these false teachers seem to be (MIS)using the Bible.
- It's not that they avoid the bible, they teach it, but they teach it wrongly!
- It's not just in churches that close their Bibles that false teaching spreads.
 - It's in churches that teach the Bible.
- Oh yes the Bible is preached every week, but it's totally misused.
 - Just like Satan used the Bible to tempt Jesus.
- And in particular in Ephesus they are misusing **the law**.
- I've called this sermon "in trouble with the law".
 - v7. These teachers *"want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm"*.
 - The law is the 10Commandments, or the first 5 books of the Bible
 - These guys have gone on some sort of tangent misteaching and misapplying God's law with great confidence but they are clueless.
- They haven't given the right medicine to the right people in the right way.
 - wrong medicine- it should be the gospel not the law
 - wrong people- they are giving it to believers not unbelievers
 - wrong way- they are confident when they don't know what they are talking about!
 - ▲ It's like a quack doctor doing his rounds in the hospital being adamant that the pills he is prescribing is the perfect wonder drug, when they are for the wrong people, and he's never done a day of medical school in his life to know the difference. Very dangerous.
- So what exactly were they teaching from the Law?
 - Last week we saw that it involved myths and endless genealogies.
 - Possibly looking at the family trees in the OT and working downwards to establish their own pedigree.
 - Possibly turning to literature outside the Bible that embellished the law with all sorts of fanciful projections.
 - Possibly some kind of legalistic insistence on a bunch of rules.
 - We don't know all the details. But we know it led to speculations.
 - They were misusing the law.
- So is there something wrong with the 10 Commandments?
 - (Have they been upgraded, or no longer apply?
 - Do we no longer need to love God and love our neighbour (which is how Jesus summed up the law)?)
 - No as Paul says multiple times in Romans 7, a useful passage for cross reference, the Law is good, but you have to use it properly.
 - It is a wonder drug but when used in the right way.
 - The law has to be used properly. Literally "lawfully".

- There are at least three proper uses of the law in the New Testament. Let's look at these briefly, though do come back to me afterwards if you need.

1) THE LAW CONVICTS UNBELIEVERS...

- First, and this seems to be what Paul majors on here. it's good to use the law with non-Christians to show them their sin.
- Look at the three couplets in v9.
 - "lawbreakers and rebels
 - the ungodly and sinful,
 - the unholy and irreligious".
- As a non-Christian reads through the 10Commands to love God and love neighbour, she is convicted by the Holy Spirit of her rebellion. It's a mirror that points out the dirt.
- Maybe this is you. You are new to church circles. And you feel like all you are hearing is a list of standards that you can't keep.
- Well praise God, he is showing you how you need Jesus.
- Don't turn to the law to save you, as if becoming a better person will make you acceptable to God. (we mustn't then stay with the mirror of the wall, and think that now it will get us clean if we use it to scrape us clean. No we go from the law to Christ who washes us clean).
- More on this next week.

2) THE LAW RESTRAINS EVIL IN SOCIETY...

- Paul gives a list of sinners in the rest of v9 and v10
- He seems to be giving examples of how the 10 Commandments can be broken.
- Sometimes in extreme ways
 - Commandment 5, honour your father and mother. Some kill their parents v9.
 - Commandment 6 don't murder
 - Commandment 7, don't commit adultery, some are sexually immoral or practice homosexuality v10.
- *(let's just pause on that for a moment...it is not sin to be tempted. This focuses on practice not orientation... Some of us are attracted to the opposite sex, some are attracted to the same sex. If you are gay, you are most welcome in our church, and we'll seek to help you to stay pure, like we hope you will help those of us who are heterosexual to stay pure. Do talk more afterwards if it would help.)*
 - Commandment 8- Don't steal, by kidnapping and selling people (slave traders).
 - Commandment 9- Don't give false witness- liars and perjurers
- He's going through some or all of the 10commandments as they are broken in individuals lives and in the wider society.
- And the New Testament outlines another proper use of the law (and it's not really explicit here, but 2:2 touches on it) that the law has a restraining effect.
 - This is particularly true of the law in society.
 - Murder is wrong, Trafficking is wrong. And so having laws of the land built on the 10commandments which take murderers off the streets is very helpful in curbing the decay of society.
- If the law is like a **finger** that points to our sin, so that we might come to Christ It's like a **bridle** that holds back society from running out of control.
- Also...

3) THE LAW DIRECTS A RESCUED PEOPLE...

- This isn't explicit in the verse.
- But having listed a lot of law-breaking activities, Paul says that these things are contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel.
- The law shows us what ungodly behaviour doesn't go with the gospel.
- While we are not saved by works, we are saved for works, and the law educates us on what God's will is.
- In fact when the 10 commandments were given (in Deut 5 and Exodus 20) they start with the words. *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery"*.
 - They are given to a rescued people
 - And in this regard the OT and the NT are saying the same thing.

So do you see these teachers were totally misusing one part of the Bible. Rather than using the law for its proper purposes, they were using it for bad purposes.

One commentator says *"Paul's point is relentlessly clear: if you are going to proclaim law in this dark, diseased world, do it as an entrance to preaching the gospel. These men were sitting around with a small group of self-righteous believers, weaving endless teachings into an imagined ladder to high spirituality"*².

➡ So my application. **Beware of rule based superiority**

In 6:20 Timothy is told to turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge. Christianity is not a competition to be more clever, but to know Jesus.

We mustn't pile heavy rules onto new Christians as means to be the superkeen or the in-crowd. We must stick with the truth of the gospel and godliness **Beware of rule based superiority**

It's a silly example, but I remember at university everyone in the Christian Union wore the same clothes. Probably most students in the 90s wore re-dyed jeans. But it could easily have become a subtle law. Keen Christians wear certain types of clothes, or

When the Bible is twisted into a list of rules, you can be sure that something has gone wrong.

And when the time comes for you to choose your next church, without being a heresy hunter, do check not whether the Bible is opened and read, because even the most liberal churches teach the Bible. But do they teach it appropriately. Text in context to make the point the Bible is making.

But rather see if it's being taught rightly- Rather than a bunch of rules to make you feel good about yourself. "conforming to the gospel", and that leads us to our final point.

² Kent Hughes & Bryan Chapell, "1 & 2 Timothy & Titus" p38.

3) **Unhealthy teaching bypasses the gospel of God....**

- We will only touch on this briefly, because we will have a whole sermon next time.
 - We want healthy teaching about grace that accords with the GOSPEL. (the word at the end of v10, sound doctrine is the word healthy from which we get the word hygienic).
 - It's tragic that the teachers in Ephesus had so quickly, and so subtly moved away.

- ▲ A £2 coin is not a big coin, but if you hold it close enough to your eye you can block out the sun. The teachers had become so enamoured with their law-teaching that it had eclipsed the Son of God.

- They were treasuring their rules, their knowledge, their high spirituality, their speculative theology. It may even have had a financial component.

- But in doing so, they'd wandered from the gospel.

1. **They'd wandered from the gospel of grace**

The wonderful good news of grace. They'd turned it into rules.

In doing so...

2. **They'd wandered from the gospel of God**

Again and again in this book Paul has to preach God to them. He breaks out in praise with verses like v17 *"now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever"*.

If you stick with the gospel of Jesus, your focus won't be on how good you are at keeping rules, but rather how good God is at keeping you!

3. **They'd wandered from the gospel of Paul.**

"Which he entrusted to me"

The true gospel is the one that you find in the apostles' teaching.

The false teachers may be thinking, well I can preach whatever interpretation of the Bible I like. And Paul reminds Timothy that there is a right and a wrong,

- True teaching that conforms to the gospel
 - It doesn't just start with the good news of Jesus as the ABC.
 - It forms the XYZ and everything in between.

- ➡ We are going to take communion now. **Use it to drink deeply of the good news.**

- v15. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst".

- Jesus loves you.
- He died for you.
- He offers himself to you.
- He paid off all your debt.
- Look at the bread- he actually died in your place.
- Look at the wine- he shed real blood to take God's wrath.
 - Thank him, worship him, honour him in your life. Let's pray.