

The Centrality of The Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] That's fine. So the key verse, verse 15, I'm just going to read that one more time. This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost. And if you remember that we're looking at one Timothy because our denomination has adopted as its new vision statement to have a healthy gospel church in every community in Scotland. And it's an ambitious vision. It's an exciting vision as we see the gospel need in our own community here in Carloway as we see the need across Scotland.

But the question is what does that look like on the ground? That's what we've been thinking about. What does it look like for Carloway Free Church to be a healthy church? And more importantly, what does the Bible teach us about that? What does the Bible teach us about our identity and our mission? And it's all those questions that make the book of one Timothy so irrelevant.

Paul is writing to his right hand man Timothy. Remember we saw who he's left in Ephesus. And he's instructing Timothy and the church in Ephesus about how to live as a healthy church.

And we saw the start of that in our overview, looking at the centre of the book in chapter 3, verses 14 to 16. And there, do you remember, Paul reminds them of the identity and purpose of the church? The identity that the church is the household of God, God's people. And the mission that there is to be a pillar and buttress of the truth, holding up and holding out the gospel.

And last week when we looked at verses 1 to 7 of chapter 1 though, we saw that the reason that Paul is writing to Timothy at this time is that that mission of holding up and holding out of the gospel was at risk of being undermined by false teachers. And they had come in and they were undermining the truth. And we saw how the truth can be so subtly distorted, how easy it is to be distracted from the truth. The devastating effect of that, how it led to some people making shipwreck of their faith. They left a church instead of a church that was building one another up, we saw that they were arguing, they were quarreling. Instead of being a light, being a lamp on a stand proclaiming the truth, we saw that mission was at risk of toppling. And this morning we'll zoom in as it were to see that a big part of that distortion was a wrong understanding of law and grace. We'll talk about what those terms mean in a bit in a second. But the question then for Timothy, as he's faced with this false teaching, was what should he teach? How do we respond to that kind of teaching? In the face of false teaching, what is the true gospel? And how do we preach it? How do we explain it? How do we proclaim it? And brothers and sisters, we need to know that answer as well. If we're going to be an effective witness, if we're going to live as God's people should live, and if we're going to be able to guard our hearts, if we're going to be able to teach our children the gospel faithfully, if we're to be able to not lead one another astray, we need to know what the true gospel is. We need to understand the relationship between law and grace that they seem to have got so badly wrong here. So our aim this morning is that we'll see that a healthy church holds up and holds out the gospel of grace. And we're going to look at that under two headings. First, the law is useful. Second, but salvation is by grace alone. So it's really just a sentence split into two. The law is useful, but salvation is by grace alone. So first point then, the law is useful. Last week, we saw that the troublemakers in Ephesus were people who desired to be teachers of the law. So if you look at verse seven in your Bibles, you'll see that they desired to be teachers of the law. They were saying things about which they didn't know, understand, and they were making all these confident assertions. And that resulted in the abuse of the law. And I imagine it would have been really tempting for Timothy to hearing all this, to think, all right, we're going to have nothing to do with the law. If it leads to people making shipwreck of their faith, we're going to have nothing to do with this. And you know, that's, it's a common response to the misuse of the law. When people have sat, maybe have grown up in a church that where the teaching can be quite legalistic, where they've, where they've been hurt by a misuse of the law, an easy response is, well, the law is totally bad. We want nothing to do with that.

[4 : 46] But notice what Paul does say. Look at in verses eight and 11. First of all, he says, now we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully. You know, there was, and then in verse 11 in that he explains the law and says in verse 11, it's in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which I have been entrusted. So the law isn't enough, isn't on its own anti gospel. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. And so what he says in the New Testament doesn't contradict the old, the law accords with the gospel. That's Paul's point. The question though, then is what is a right use of the law? If the law is an anti gospel, what is the right use of the law? And very simply, Paul tells Timothy that the law shows us our sin.

The law is like a mirror or an X-ray. If we were doing, we were doing a children's talk and get a big standing up mirror and we could, we could have it there. We could look at it and say, what do we see when we see ourselves? God gives us his law so that we can look into it, when we hear it read, when we hear it taught, and it shows us what we're truly like. As we see God's law, it exposes the ways we stepped over the line. It exposes where we've fallen short of God's standards. It exposes where we've broken his rules. And I don't know whether you noticed, but verses nine to ten in some ways is Paul giving a rough repeat of at least some of the 10 commandments. So let's just, let's just read that again and have a think. How does this, this God's law act as a mirror to our sin? So verse nine, 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, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality in slavers, liars, perjurers, or whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine. Now every one of us has broken part of God's law there, at least part. And if we don't think so, we only need to be, we only need to be reminded of Jesus's words that whoever lusts in their heart has committed adultery, or whoever hates his brother and sister actually, they are liable for judgment because they've committed murder in their heart. The law exposes our sin, it shows us the sinners that we truly are.

And so the law reminds us that we cannot come to God because of our sin. So that's the right use of the law. In summary, you might say the law reminds us of the human problem of sin.

However, the false teachers have twisted the law and they've made it part of the solution. You see, let's think about the abuse of the law now. The law is a mirror that shows us our sin, but what it's not is a mirror that shows us when we're good enough for God. And that's what they had started to treat it like. So verse nine, Paul says, understand this, that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and disobedient. The law isn't a mirror that we examine ourselves in each day until we see if we're presentable enough for God. And some days we think, oh, I've had a good day. I think, you know what, I can come into God's presence. And other days we think, haven't done well. That's not for me today. However, I think that's how it might have been being used in Ephesus and how we can sadly use it as well. In Ephesus, it seems that obedience to God's law was being used as a condition to come to Christ. And while that's not explicit in the passage, we can, that seems to be hinted at because Paul goes to town pointing out that he was a sinner and the worst of sinners when Christ saved him. He deliberately shows the open offer of the Gospel rather than how the false teachers seem to have made it conditional. So people were being told, perhaps, in effect that, or they were made to feel at least, that they had to sort out their lives in order to come to Christ and be saved. And let me just illustrate that. If you have kids, or grandkids, you might, who like to go and play outside and get all mucky, you might stick some rules on the back door or at least give them some rules. You know, you have to take your shoes off before you come in. Maybe you have to hang up your jacket. You have to leave your sticks and weapons and bugs and all that stuff by the back door. I mean, it's a wonder. I wasn't given rules like this actually. And those rules might be good rules to stop the house getting mucky.

The problem is that we can think that, like the muddy child, we can't come in, come to Christ, until we clean ourselves up. And we make obedience almost a requirement for coming to Christ.

[9 : 55] The point is though here, obedience is not a requirement for coming to Jesus. That's a type of legalism. Now, legalism is completely wrong. And you might hear that word, and I don't know what we think of when we hear, think of the word legalism. We probably think of, oh, you have to, someone say you have to earn your salvation or you have to do x, y and z in order to be a Christian. And its root legalism is a denial of everything that Jesus has done, because it's saying that actually we can do something.

However, legalism can be a lot more subtle than just you have to do x, y and z. And I suspect it's the more subtle version that we see here because Paul doesn't call it out like he does in Galatians, when he just says you foolish Galatians. And we see that massive contrast there.

Let me just give you an illustration of what this kind of subtle legalism might look like. Now, I want you to imagine your two, I don't know, a child to your nephew or niece who started university in Glasgow, and you over lunch you ask them about their faith. And they say, well, you know, I want to be a Christian. I just, I'm not sure I'm there yet. You know, they say they believe in Jesus. They believe that he died to save sinners. But they're not sure that they're ready to come to God yet. They say, well, look, you know, I know I need to repent and I'm working on that.

But I'm not sure I've turned away from sin yet. There's still so much that needs to change. But I don't feel like I could call myself a Christian, even especially when my life looks so different to all those other godly men and women at church or people I look up to.

Now, I don't know whether that resonates with anyone. But what, but that little story I've made up, that's a that's a subtle form of legalism. That's someone who's been ensnared into thinking that repentance is a work we must accomplish that we that we're required to do before we come to Christ.

[12 : 03] I mean, take the phrase repent and believe or repent and come to Christ. We hear that phrase. We say that phrase. But what does it mean to repent? What is the relationship between repenting and believing and coming to Christ? Your repentance is the act of turning away from sin. You might explain it as turning 180 degrees. We turn away from sin. We turn to Christ. The problem comes though when we make repentance and belief and order of actions. And we say that to believe and come to Christ, we first have to repent. Now, let me just explain what I mean. That's not saying we don't repent, but when we make it an order of actions, the problem comes that we're saying, okay, well, how repentant do I need to be? Have I truly turned away from sin if I'm still sinning? And we think, well, I can't believe and trust in Christ because I'm not sure I'm really repentant. And actually, we end up to try to measure our repentance. We can end up actually just equating repentance with obedience and seeing God's law and thinking I have to true repentance is following God's law. And only then can I come to Christ. The problem is, then we'll never get there. That however hard we try, we're never going to be repentant enough. And if we think we can be, then we've just made repentance a work in order and part of our salvation. My point is that it can legalism can be really subtle.

There are true things we need to repent and believe, but we can turn true things. They can be twisted even without us realizing it. And as a result is that someone can spend years aware of their sin and knowing that Christ died for sinners and sit and try to fight sin, but not having the means to do it because they think they can't come to Christ until they've adequately repented.

But that isn't even the end of it. You see, it's possible for someone to repent and believe. And then they still feel like that person in my story in your Nick Nisuanef you, that they think, how can I call myself a Christian? Because my life looks nothing like those men and women in the past who I look up to. I still, I'm still so aware of my sin. Well, my life looks nothing like these Godly men and women who I know in church. But again, that's a wrong way of thinking.

That too is making obedience a requirement as if we have to earn the right to call ourselves Christians. Now, let me just be clear. A Christian isn't someone who lives a certain way.

If that's how we define a Christian, then we've fallen into a subtle form of legalism. A Christian isn't someone who lives a certain way. A Christian is someone who is in Christ.

[15 : 05] There's a massive difference. One is dependent on ourselves. One is dependent on who Christ is. Legalism is deadly. And my friends, can I ask you whether you're here in person or whether you're listening online? Have you fallen into the devil's trap? Have you been caught up in Iscene thinking that you need to clean yourself up in order to come to Christ?

That isn't the truth. That's a lie. That's not the Gospel of Grace that we believe. That's not the Gospel of Grace that saves us, or that Christ proclaims. The law is a mirror that shows us our sin.

What it isn't is a mirror that shows us when we're good enough. It isn't a mirror that shows us when we're repented enough. It isn't a mirror that shows us when we're Christians. We're that that shows us when we're good enough.

It isn't a mirror that shows us when we're repented enough. It isn't a mirror that shows us when we're Christian enough. The law shows us our problem. Yes.

And it will show us our problem all our life. But only the grace of Christ is the solution. That's where the law should drive us. And with our second point, salvation is by grace alone.

[16 : 28] Grace is the word that the Bible uses to describe God's unmerited favour. Grace is at the heart of salvation from start to finish.

And we see that in Paul's testimony, don't we, in 12 to 17. Thomas helpfully took us through how Paul became a Christian. And now in the face of legalistic teaching, Paul says, you know, this is a fine time for me to speak about how God saved me.

He tells the story of God's grace from start to finish to remind us that salvation is by grace alone. Let's just read those amazing words again, shall we? Paul says, I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he has judged me faithful, appointing me to his service.

Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor and an insolent opponent, but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord Jesus overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

[17 : 54] To the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. See, the false teachers might have used God's law like a catwalk to display how outwardly great they were.

They used the law as a mirror to admire themselves, to gather followers around them to create a crowd of lawkeepers. What does Paul do in contrast?

He shows himself, he makes himself as a showcase of God's grace. Paul's point is that it's all about God, it's not about me. Do you know, I just love the way he highlights, he highlights, just, he highlights that.

He doesn't list how he has kept the Lord, does he? He lists all the ways he's broken it. He says I'm a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolvent opponent. Twice he says he's the worst of sinners.

He doesn't speak about himself as worthy of serving God, but as unworthy. He doesn't list his achievements, he lists Christ's achievements. He says the grace of the Lord overflowed from me.

[19 : 01] Christ came into the world to save sinners, it's his perfect patience. He doesn't speak of himself either as an example for others. We know that Paul at other times says imitate me.

But here Paul says look, don't think of me as an example of a question. He says look at me as an example of what Christ has done. Paul is there not for us to look at Paul.

Paul is there for us to look at Christ. And that is why Paul concludes in verse 17 by saying not to praise of Paul, but to the praise of God.

Because it is all a work of Christ. His point is simple. He is nothing and Christ is everything.

His salvation is a result of Christ's mercy and grace. And his life as an apostle is a result of Christ's mercy and grace. In other words, we are saved by grace and we live by grace.

[19 : 59] And I just want to think about those two things a little bit more now. Because we need to remember both those things. First we are saved by grace alone. God saves us not when we are sufficiently obedient, but while we are still sinners.

Verse 15 is the heart of the Gospel, isn't it? Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost. We don't clean ourselves up to come to Christ.

We come to Christ with all the filth and the stench on us. We come to Christ draped in the dog poo bags as it was. Paul didn't clean himself up.

Paul came as he was to Christ. He tells us in verse 13 he was a blasphemer, persecutor, insolent opponent. And notice what he doesn't say then in verse 14. He doesn't say, so I repented and turned away from my evil ways and the grace of Christ overflowed for me.

No, he says God had mercy on him. In all his ignorance and unbelief, and God poured out his grace on him then. It's like Paul says in Romans 5 that while we were still weak, Christ died for the ungodly.

[21 : 14] While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were enemies of God, Christ reconciled us to God. As we were hearing the kids talk, the point is that no one is too bad to receive God's grace.

God takes us as we are, not as we should be. It's all about what Christ has done. If Paul can, if God can save Paul, then he can save you too.

It means he can save me. It means he can save the kids in there. Whatever life they live, whatever life that you have lived, God's grace is enough for anyone and everyone.

I just love how expansive the language is. Paul doesn't just give us a pithy gospel summary. He says, the grace of the Lord overflowed for me. Grace isn't like a little wet flannel to rub off the rest of the sin after we've cleaned ourselves up most of the time.

It's like a fire hose that God directs at us and does everything for us to make us clean. Well, verse 16, Paul speaks of the perfect patience of God.

[22 : 31] God doesn't give us X number of chances to turn to him and repent, and if we send its three strikes and we're out, it's never too late for us to turn to God and receive his grace.

You might agree with verse 15. You might have heard the gospel many times and you might say, yeah, that is a trustworthy saying. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. But here's my question.

Can you say the next part? Will you say the next line of whom I am the foremost? Will you say Christ Jesus died for me?

Because you can't because Christ has done everything needed so that you can't. There's nothing else that needs to happen between... There's no, I don't know, a month of stuff you have to do or years that you have to live a certain way.

Right now, even, you can say, and that includes me, because Christ has done everything. Salvation is by grace alone.

[23 : 45] That affects the way that we think that we come to Christ. But that should also affect the way that we speak of Christ as a church. Yes, the law tells us how to live. And it's very easy when we see a society around us who has that are so departed from God's law to think, what they need to know is hear how God wants them to live.

And just true, the law tells us how God wants us to live. The law tells us, you know, if everyone followed God's law, society would be better. However, we're only preaching half a gospel if we only tell people God's law.

We're only giving people the diagnosis. So can I just challenge you to never speak of one without the other? To never comment on the state of society without also speaking of the hope that we have in Christ.

The law is the diagnosis, but we're saved by grace alone. That's what we need to know. That's what other people need to know. If we're going to be able to hold out the gospel as we should as a church, we need to hold out the gospel of grace.

We need to hold out not just the diagnosis, but the solution, which is Christ. So we are saved by grace alone. We live now by grace alone.

[25 : 04] And Paul is a wonderful example of both salvation and also living by grace. So verses 12 to 14 are essentially Paul saying that his life as an apostle is because of Christ's mercy and grace.

I thank the Lord who has given me strength. It's he who has judged me faithful. Again, his life as a Christian is all about God's grace. However, I think sometimes we forget that we also live by God's grace.

We might remember that we're saved by God's grace, but I think we might forget the second part. But I think we can think, okay, yes, God pours out his favor on us to save us.

However, then we can think that we can fall out of God's favor by what we do. Or that somehow we must maintain God's favor. And again, this is a subtle form of legalism that can creep into the Christian life.

And I think partly that it can be done, it can be due to a wrong understanding again of God's law. We saw the law shows us our sin and drives us to Christ. But the law is also instructions about how to live as God's people.

[26 : 12] As true Jesus reiterated in the Sermon of the Mount, he gives, as a word, guidance for kingdom living as he expounds the law.

The law instructions about how to live. The problem is that we can treat the law as conditions by which we remain in God's favor.

We can act as if Jesus got us into the courtroom of the king, but we've got to somehow, you know, tiptoe around, make sure we don't break anything, that we don't fall out of the king's favor. We can act like God's got a naughty list and a nice list.

And if we're not careful, we can slip into the naughty list. And who knows, you know, is maybe God going to exile us later? But that's just to completely, you know, that's to make it as if Christ takes us into God's presence and then when we're left there to try to sort ourselves out, to try to stay at a certain standard.

When we see the law this way as well, it just distorts our understanding of God. You know, God becomes then a policeman, a parole officer, just waiting for us to mess up.

[27 : 19] God's law, of course, we're never going to be able to say we delight in God's law like the psalmist does because God's law is going to become a shadow on us, a burden, a weight on our shoulders about how we must live to please God.

Otherwise, we're going to fall out of his favor. But that's to divorce God's law from God himself, to divorce the words of God from the one who speaks to them.

It's to forget that the one who tells us how to live is our father. We remain in his favor not because of how we live, but because of how Christ has lived, but because Christ lives.

He has fulfilled the law on our behalf. We come to live permanently in God's presence, never to be exiled, never to be thrown out of God's presence, because Christ has cleansed us of sin and clothed us in righteousness.

Brothers and sisters, we continue as we began in grace. What does that mean? Let me just give one implication. It means that as a Christian, a Christian isn't someone who obeys God.

[28 : 30] I've said that before, but I'll say that in a grand again. A Christian isn't someone who obeys God. A Christian is someone who is in Christ. Our identity remains in what Christ has.

Our identity doesn't suddenly shift to what we continue to do or have done. Of course, we should be seeking to put sin to death, but obedience is the fruit of grace.

It's not the root of grace. We shouldn't be motivated by fear of judgment. We shouldn't be motivated by fear of death. We shouldn't be motivated by fear of death.

We shouldn't be motivated by fear of death. We shouldn't be motivated by fear of judgment. We should remember that everything happens as a result. We're motivated by the love of our Father, who has called us into His presence, who has sent us out, delighting that we should be His children, and the instruments by which He brings this gospel of grace to the world.

We live by grace. There's so much more we could go on and say about how that should impact our relationships. Be a pillar in buttress of the truth. Well, then, grace, in God's perfect patience, should define us.

[29 : 45] God relates to us in perfect patience. God relates to us with overflowing grace. So our relationships should be the same, shouldn't they? God doesn't measure us on how well we keep the law.

And so that's not how we should measure ourselves. That's not all right. Otherwise, we're just acting completely differently to God. If we keep thinking that other people are measuring us on how well we keep God's law, then, of course, we're going to start thinking that actually our identity is in how well we live, and how well we obey.

God doesn't measure our identity based on how well we live, so we shouldn't measure one another. And we shouldn't think that other people measure us that way. Otherwise, we're going to slip into that subtle legalism.

And I hope we can explore that more in future weeks, and as we go through on Timothy, just see what a grace-filled life looks like. We need to draw to a close now, though.

In summary, grace should be at the heart of the life of the church and at the heart of the message of the church. A healthy gospel church holds up and holds out the gospel of grace.

[31 : 03] We are saved by grace, and we live by grace. There's nothing that we have done. There's nothing that we can do or are doing.

There's nothing that we will do. Christ has done everything. And His perfect patience and His overflowing grace, Christ came into the world to save sinners.

And that's why, to Him, be all the praise, to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God. Be honour and glory forever and ever.

Amen. Let's pray.