

The sermon

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

Paul is giving correction. So we'll have three wrong ways to do spirituality.

Point 1: Wrong doctrine (1:3-4, 10-11)

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, - 1:3

What's meant by different doctrine?

Paul was given *"the stewardship from God that is by faith"* (1:4). Stewardship meaning a task, responsibility given to Paul by God.

in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. – 1:11

The gospel was entrusted to Paul by God. Substitute the word stewardship with gospel. God has given Paul the task of proclaiming a gospel that is received by faith. Paul was stewarding the gospel by writing this letter.

Gospel

What's the gospel?

There's a Creator God who created the world from nothing. He's holy. Untainted by sin and opposed to sin. He's spoken in his word, the Bible. Being God's creation, we answer to God. Not the other way around.

The first man, Adam, disobeyed. Bringing sin into the world. As a result, we're born with a sinful disposition. So we break God's commands. This makes us subject to God's judgment. But God is merciful to sinners. So God the Father sent God the Son (Jesus) into the world to die in the place of sinners. As a substitute. That whoever believes will be forgiven of sins and have eternal life.

The gospel calls for a response.

- 1) Believe that Jesus died to rescue you personally.

That your sins sent Jesus to the cross.

- 2) Confess your sins to God.

If you're wondering if you've sinned, measure your life against God's commands.

- 3) Ask for God's forgiveness.

Believe that you've sinned and God is merciful to sinners. Trust in Jesus' death on the cross. Not your own works.

- 4) Believe God's promise.

If you do believe let me know. And we'll help you take the next steps. If you want to learn more about Christianity let me know.

Sound doctrine

"different doctrine" is contrasted with "sound doctrine."

“Doctrine” = the content that we teach, a set of beliefs passed on by the apostles. These beliefs aren’t limited to the gospel and they will never disagree with the gospel.

“Sound” = healthy not sickly, true to the Bible. Sound doctrine is healthy for our souls.

How can I tell who’s a false teacher?

- 1) False teachers preach a different gospel.
 - a. Health and wealth

Health and wealth prosperity preachers are prominent today. Come to Jesus and he’ll make you healthy and wealthy. No confession of sin. No repentance. No self-denial. Just self-seeking. No hope in the world to come. Just your best life now. Personal well-being. Not salvation from sin. That’s a different gospel.

- b. Works righteousness

Another prominent one is works righteousness. If my good outweighs my bad, I’ll make it into heaven. If I do enough good, it will cancel out my bad. That’s trusting in ourselves, not Jesus. If I’m not as bad as Hitler I’ll be okay. That’s trusting that I’ll be okay because some sinners are worse than me.

Our deeds only earn us judgment. The gospel teaches only Jesus is worthy to take away our sin. Through faith we receive what we don’t deserve: forgiveness of sins, eternal life.

- 2) False teachers redefine terms.

Salvation becomes rescue from oppression and poverty, not forgiveness of sin. Faith becomes the power of positive thinking (I can speak things into existence), not trust in Jesus’ finished work on the cross. False teachers can speak like us. But they mean different things.

- 3) False teachers leave truth out.

Like the health and wealth teachers. No sin. No repentance. No final judgment.

- 4) False teachers (cults) emphasize a particular point to the exclusion of everything else the Bible teaches.

They narrow in on one verse taken out of context. At a former church there was a mother who hadn’t heard from her daughter in years. She got caught in a cult that separated parents from children. The cult forbid her from visiting her mother. The justification? Don’t know. I’m guessing Jesus’ words in Mark 10:29-30 that promised a hundredfold for leaving father and mother.

- 5) False teachers promote sin.

In the New Testament, false teachers used God’s grace to promote sensuality (Jude 1:4). Today in America false teachers endorse homosexuality.

Point 2: Wrong focus (1:4-7)

nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. – 1:4

A focus on “*myths and endless genealogies*” promoted speculation (guessing without evidence). Not a good thing.

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. – 1:5

Last week we covered this in depth. **Learning is for loving.** The aim of Bible teaching and Bible learning is love, not speculation. Love for God. Love for each other. Love for neighbor. Love for enemy.

Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, – 1:6

They swerved from truth into vain discussion. Vain meaning useless. Of no spiritual profit.

desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. – 1:7

Those wanting to teach in the church didn't understand God's law, yet they spoke with great confidence.

The church is in a bad place when teachers preach confidently with little clue about the meaning of the passage being preached.

What were they teaching?

There appears to be a Jewish flavor. They taught the law. The first five books of the Old Testament.

In Titus 1:14, Paul speaks of "*Jewish myths.*" Later in Titus 3:9, Paul mentions "*genealogies...and quarrels about the law.*"

Suggestions include:

- 1) Myths are falsehoods: legendary, fictional, not actual history.
- 2) Genealogies are family trees, bloodlines, ancestries.
- 3) There's numerous genealogies in the Old Testament law.
- 4) There were Jewish books written after the Old Testament that weren't accepted as Scripture.
- 5) These Jewish books contained mythical accounts of Old Testament people and their genealogies.
- 6) Myths and genealogies = fictional accounts of Old Testament people which in reality are speculations, not truth, not history.

What lessons can we learn here?

How we use our Bibles is a real issue.

- 1) God gave us this Bible to promote love.

If we aren't using the Bible to stimulate love, we're using the Bible incorrectly. As a church, we learn our Bibles to help us care for each other well.

- 2) God gave us this Bible to engage our hearts.

God is after right thinking and right desires. If our Bible study isn't producing sound understanding and godly desires that lead to practice, something is off.

- 3) God gave us this Bible to stimulate faith in him.

We study our Bibles to increase our confidence in God.

- 4) God didn't give us this Bible for speculation.

Be content with what God has chosen to reveal.

"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. – Deuteronomy 29:29

Focus on understanding what's revealed. Focus on practicing what's revealed. God's word is for loving God, loving people, and obeying God's commands. God's given us enough to obey. Let's be fixated on that.

Point 3: Wrong use of the law (1:8-11)

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, – 1:8

Law = first five books of Old Testament, including laws that regulated Israel's life as a nation.

The law is good. Rules are good. Obedience is good.

The law (and the Bible) can be used poorly.

understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient,

The law is for unsaved people, not believers. The just are believers.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." – **Romans 1:16-17**

The word "righteous" in 1:17 is the same word for "just" in 1 Timothy 1:9. The just live by faith. The just are believers.

So the law is for unsaved people. Why? The law shows us our need for a Savior.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. – **Romans 3:19-20**

The law "speaks to those who are under law." That's everyone. Jew and Gentile. Every mouth is stopped by the law. The law makes everyone ever born accountable to God. Accountable for what? Sin. The law never justifies. Why? Because the law shows us our sin.

When we measure our lives against the law we don't discover we're good people. No, if our hearts are open, we find that we're guilty sinners who deserve God's judgment. We're sinners who need a Savior.

Yes, the law gives believers commands to obey. But the law's primary design is to show us how utterly sinful we are.

Sin list

"lawless and disobedient...ungodly and sinners...unholy and profane"

General terms for sinners. People who see no value in God. No value in religion. No value in the Bible. They don't wake up in the morning thinking how can I obey God today? So they break God's law. They sin.

Now to specific examples.

Murderers

Taking the life of others.

Sexually immoral

This is the word *pornos* from which we get pornography. Any sexual sin deviating from God's design of sex between a man and a woman united in marriage. Sex between a man and woman not married to each other. Adultery. Prostitution. Same-sex relations. Anything outside God's design for sex.

Homosexuality

This I think is the defining issue of our day. This hits home for a number of you. I know that for some of you this isn't a theoretical matter. You're wondering how do I honor God when I have a homosexual in my life?

If you're struggling with same-sex attraction, our message isn't we hate you. Our message is God forgives and transforms sinners. Sinners like me. Sinners like you.

Like false teaching found its way into the Ephesian church, professing evangelicals now endorse homosexuality in America.

Some have argued passages like 1 Timothy 1:10 don't forbid homosexual acts in general. It only forbids male prostitution or uncommitted homosexual relationships. How shall we respond?

- 1) The lexical meaning of the word translated "***men who practice homosexuality***" isn't male prostitutes or uncommitted homosexual relationships.

BDAG (135), the leading Greek lexicon, written by theological liberals not Bible-believing scholars, gives the definition: "a male who engages in sexual activity w. a pers. of his own sex."

- 2) Romans 1:26-27

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. –

Romans 1:26-27

The action itself is sin. Not just specific instances (e.g., male prostitution and uncommitted relationships).

Both male and female homosexual acts are sin. Relations between the same sex are described as "*dishonorable passions...contrary to nature...shameless acts,*" exchanging and giving up "*natural relations...error.*" If we had time to examine the context of Romans 1 we'd find out that those who practiced homosexuality first suppressed truth revealed to them (1:18). They failed to honor and thank God (1:21). Because they disregarded God, God removed restraint. And homosexuality ensued. That's Paul's understanding.

God is able to communicate in an understandable manner. He has on this subject. This is a big deal because we're giving up our Bibles if we say sin is okay. Can you imagine Christians saying lying or kidnapping or having sex before marriage is okay? That's what professing evangelicals are doing with homosexuality. God's authority over faith and conduct is being disregarded.

The cultural climate

There's massive pressure on us to cave here. Whether it's being labeled bigots or hateful or ignorant or dinosaurs in the workplace. Or having family members calling you unloving, there's pressure on us to give up our Bibles. We don't want to be oddballs. We don't want to be shamed. We don't want relational disturbance.

When a Christian athlete won't wear a pride shirt on pride night, the world demands an answer.

When Christian singers are questioned about whether or not homosexuality is a sin, they freeze and won't give answer. Or they say they're for LGBT rights.

When Duck Dynasty's Phil Robertson was questioned, he said homosexuality was a sin without reservation and was suspended from his show by the network.

I can't think of a greater issue today where Christians are tempted to compromise. The fact of the matter is we're tempted to be ashamed of God.

So how should we answer if questioned?

1) Make the issue about God.

God's design for marriage and human sexuality is good. State this with confidence. God designed marriage between a man and woman for a lifetime. God confines sex to a man and a woman united in marriage. State this with clarity.

Whatever God says is right and just and leads to human flourishing. So God's design for sex is right and just and leads to human flourishing. The issue is really a matter of faith. Is God wise? Is God good? Does the God who created us know how we're supposed to live?

Speak well of God. It's not a matter of hating a particular group of people. It's a matter of loving God.

2) Make the issue about the gospel.

Make it about our response to God. Don't make it about homosexuality. Homosexuality is one of many symptoms of failure to repent and believe. Don't frame it as homosexuals are the worst of all sinners.

View the hard questions as opportunities to share the gospel. Share things like God is ruler, God is holy, the nature of sin (indifference to God, doing life our own way, rejection of God's word), forgiveness of sins, God's mercy, the cross, faith and repentance. Make these the issues. Share man's problem. Share God's provision. Explain how to respond to God.

If their response to God changes, their stance on homosexuality will follow.

3) Share with them what they're asking of you.

You're asking me to be a Christian who doesn't believe the Bible. You're asking me to be a Christian who disregards what God says. I can't do that.

4) Maintain the relationship to the best of your ability.

Verbally express your love and care. Be there for the long haul. Spend time with them when you can. Answer questions when they arise. They already know where you stand.

Request a Sunday school class on this topic open to any question and I'll make it happen. I have a more detailed paper I've handed out to several of you. We have resources to engage this issue in a God-honoring manner. If you're struggling here talk with me.

Enslavers

People who kidnap others to sell them in the slave trade. Sexual trafficking today. Slavery in the South during the Civil War was without question sin. Their slaves were kidnapped people.

Liars

Lying to a person or lying under oath on trial.

Good news

Sin is a reality. But there's good news. God forgives this sort of people if they turn to Christ. Murderers, homosexuals, slave traders can be forgiven. Because Jesus death is worthy to take away every sort of sin. If God forgives murderers, he'll forgive you. Do you believe this?