

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity, October 4, 2020**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)  
Hymns: 280, 295:1-2, 289, 288, 644.  
Lessons: Psalm 1, Ephesians 5:1-21, Matthew 22:34-40.  
Sermon Text: 1 Timothy 1:3-14.  
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Paul continues his letter to Timothy – and to us – talking especially about Law – God’s Law. But we must remember the goal of Paul’s teaching ***“is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”***

Everything that a Christian, a child of God does must be done in love. God plainly tells us both in the Old Testament and the New Testament ***“love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”*** Leviticus 19:18 (NIV) Jesus repeats that when reminding the rich young man of the commandments he claimed to obey: ***“love your neighbor as yourself.”*** Matthew 19:19 (NIV) When asked ***“which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”*** Jesus replied: ***‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”*** Matthew 22:36-39 (NIV)

With that reminder, as we continue to look at the first chapter of Paul’s first letter to Timothy we must remember

**“THE LAW IS GOOD IF ONE USES IT PROPERLY.”**

1. Some who want to be teachers of the law of God have wandered away from the faith.
2. We remember what the Law of God seeks to accomplish,
3. And we remember that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is what really saves.

Paul tells us that ***“Some have wandered away from ... love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith ... and turned to meaningless talk.”*** The really sad thing is that such people ***“want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.”***

They wandered away. And isn’t that the most common way people leave the truth of God’s Word? It is a wandering away. It is rarely a sudden, blunt ‘I’m done right now with God’s Word.’ Those who have learned God’s Word and then turn away usually show a wandering away, and not an immediate all at once ‘I don’t believe’ or ‘I don’t want to hear God’s Word.’

How can this happen?

We listen to others and then pick up what they are really teaching us. It may be the sheer repetition – we hear again and again that ‘God’s Word isn’t true’. They may disagree or disapprove of what we say about our faith, our religion, the teachings of our church. There may be mocking of what God says. There may be mocking of you because of your beliefs.

But all these things – and more – lead to your questioning God’s Word. And the questioning can lead to rejecting the things that God says. Those who don’t agree with your Scriptural belief can present us with some false ideas which seem reasonable and believable but they really contradict what God says in his Word.

We forget what we’ve learned – in Catechism Instruction, in sermons, in Bible classes, from our reading the bible – and we gradually replace it with ideas that seem good and reasonable. Unscriptural ideas creep into

our thinking and our lives, things that have no meaning for our salvation and things that actually take away our salvation through what Jesus Christ did for us.

Things that lead to wandering away include substituting things and ideas for God's Word and being misled by the false and sometimes very sentimental, logical ideas that the world offers.

We must always be alert, as you heard last week, for false teachers, false teaching and misleading ideas. The end result may be eternal damnation just for listening to and reading such ideas!

Paul then talks about the proper use of the Law. ***"We know that the law is good if one uses it properly"*** that is, if one uses it lawfully. He wrote in Romans: ***"So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good."*** Romans 7:12 (NIV)

He then goes on and makes reference to the commandments, one after another. He doesn't use the exact words we are accustomed to and have memorized, but he speaks of sins against the Law of God.

He begins by saying ***"that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels."***

This states a general principle that is true of all law. Even governments make their laws for the wicked. How often haven't you heard and even thought that if people were good, and did what is right, there would be no need for written laws. The law does not exist for a good, a righteous person. Even in the unbelieving world, a good person may sometimes do what is good and right and not do what is wrong, wicked, and harms others. If everyone were good, we would need no laws whatsoever. If love were the only thing in everyone's heart and words and deeds, there would be no need for laws.

Unfortunately, ever since Adam and Eve first sinned, first disobeyed God, first thought and did what they knew was contrary to God's will, every human being is not, by nature, among the 'righteous' in God's sight. God had not written down his Law for Adam and Eve. They had God's will, God's law written in their hearts. This is sometimes called 'natural law'. And they broke the one command of God recorded in Scripture: Don't eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden.

Now let's look at God's Law, as summarized by the Ten Commandments in that light: ***"law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels."*** God then lists thirteen words for lawbreakers – for sinners. This is not just for the wicked who do such things, but for all of us, whose hearts are often filled with these things.

This is very plainly first of all the use of the Law of God that we have come to know as a curb. As a curb, it hinders or prevents to a certain extent the open outbreaks of sin in the world. Because of fear of punishment, it helps to keep order in the world and encourages outward decency. The wrong use of the law is to teach that it earns heaven.

Some of these words point more directly to one commandment or another, but all point to every human, that is, to every sinner. Remember, this was written by a man who knew his Old Testament well, who admitted that ***"I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee."*** Acts 23:6 (NIV)

The law was made for the lawless, ***"for lawbreakers"***, for the ***"rebels"***, those who rebel against God and everything that is good and proper and 'lawful'. The rebellious, the unruly, the uncontrolled, the disobedient need to be told that they are rebelling, fighting against God and disobeying him.

Then ***"the ungodly and sinful, the unholy"*** are mentioned. These five words we have just mentioned: ***"lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy"*** are general words for sin, but also suggest breaking the first two commandments, the commandments which say "You shall have no other gods" and "you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God", that is, "thou shalt not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."

When we remember the Third Commandment about the Sabbath day, and not despising preaching and God's word, but regarding it as holy and gladly hearing and learning it, we see the word ***"irreligious"***, meaning those who are indifferent, or opposed to, or hostile to religious faith. That's the breaking of the Third Commandment. The King James Version even uses the word "profane", an English word that traces its origins back to a Latin word which means the things done outside the temple. And if something is outside the temple, it is not religious even in pagan societies, it is not honoring the god of that temple.

When we see the words ***"those who kill their fathers or mothers"***; we see the Fourth Commandment. It is not just failing to honor them, but doing the ultimate injustice, the ultimate sin to them.

The Fifth Commandment is plain with the word **“murderers.”**

The Sixth Commandment is plain when we read the words **“adulterers and perverts.”** Paul’s words here include all sexual immorality, including homosexuality, and so the broad word **“perverts”** is very appropriate. We must think not only of those who commit such sins, but also those who pervert the Word of God to claim that God does not condemn homosexuality.

The next word, **“slave traders”**, is the only use of this word in the New Testament. We see a reference to the Seventh Commandment “You shall not steal” when the Greek word means just what it says in the New International Version: **“slave traders”**. Other English words used to translate this word are ‘kidnappers’ and the word ‘menstealers’, which is found in the King James Version. The word is used in Greek for one who kidnaps a free man and makes him a slave; and for one who steals the slaves of others and sells them.

The Eighth Commandment is plain when we see the words **“liars and perjurers.”** A perjurer is especially one who lies under oath, an oath made to confirm what they claimed is the truth.

When Paul writes that the Law is written **“for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me”** we see a reference to every other sin that isn’t mentioned here. And of course, we remember the Ninth and Tenth Commandments not to covet, which is a sin of the heart. People can’t see coveting, but they can see the results of coveting. Paul in his other letters also has some very specific catalogs of sins, but the list here seems to follow the list of the commandments handed down on Mount Sinai.

We mentioned the use of the Law as a curb, but in God’s Law, even here, we see the law as a mirror. While we may claim to be free from some horrible sinful deeds, we are certainly not free from such horrible, wicked thoughts and attitudes, and yes, even words which break these commandments. As a mirror the Law shows us our sins and our need of a Savior.

After reminding us of the Law of God and specifically beseeching and urging Timothy to admonish and correct those who do not use the Law of God properly, he reminds us of the ultimate purpose of his – and Timothy’s – ministry to proclaim, to teach, to preach **“the glorious gospel of the blessed God.”**

He says that this Gospel was entrusted to him as an ambassador of Christ. For this he says **“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”**

Paul and Timothy knew who they are and what they were saying and doing.

We learn from Scripture that those who are washed clean in the blood of the lamb are those who are truly righteous before God. And those who believe that truth shall have eternal life.

For Paul, the strength he needed came from **“Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

For us, too, the strength we need for our daily lives comes from Christ Jesus. Because he forgives our sins, we receive that righteousness of God through believing that. God’s law then becomes a guide, a straightedge, a measuring stick, a pattern, something we as Children of God want to do to please our loving Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. From it we learn how God wants us to think and to talk and to live.

God showed us his mercy. His grace was abundantly poured out on us, too, just as it was on Paul and Timothy.

May the faith and love that comes to us from Christ guide us in all we do! Amen.