

Subject: *The Overlooked Key to Evangelism*

Scripture: *1 Timothy 1:1-11*

Have you ever thought, “There must be a key to reaching lost people for Christ?” There is a key, but it is a rusty key because it hasn’t been used. Keys have a way of getting lost, and this key was lost around the turn of the 20th century. It is a biblical key. Jesus used it. So did Paul and James and Stephen. The Pharisees didn’t hide this key, but they bent it out of shape so it wouldn’t do its work. Satan hates this key, so he has misused it, twisted it, and hidden it from the church because he knows what it can do. What is this overlooked key in evangelism? It is God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments. It is the useful key Paul says in 1 Tim. 1. It was designed primarily as an evangelistic tool. It is the key of knowledge. Paul wrote, “I had not known sin, but by the law. It is the life-changing key. *Psalms 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.*

We share the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ and salvation and people don’t seem to care. That’s because they don’t understand the bad news of sin. The gospel is for sinners. We try to give people the cure without showing them why they need the cure. We tell people about God’s love, but we forget to tell them about God’s law. If we preach “Jesus died on the cross for your sins,” to the lost person it will be foolish and offensive because “the preaching of the cross to them that perish is foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:18), and it is offensive because in his mind there are a lot of people worse than him.

But if we first show him God’s law and allow the Lord to prick his conscience and show him his sin, when we share the gospel it won’t be foolish and offensive, but it will be “the power of God to salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

Suppose someone said, “I paid your fine in court so that you can go free.” That wouldn’t mean a thing if you didn’t know you were guilty and had to pay a fine. But suppose he said, “A police officer caught you driving 55 in a 35 mile zone and on top of that you were speeding in a school zone, but I paid your fine in court so that you can go free.” That would make sense and you would appreciate what that person did for you.

Charles Spurgeon said: “I do not believe that any man can preach the gospel who does not preach the Law. The Law is the needle, and you cannot draw the silken thread of the gospel through a man’s heart unless you first send the needle of the Law to make a way for it.”

1. We must realize the existence of God’s law

The world operates on the basis of certain laws. There are three kinds of law:

- ✓ Natural law – laws that govern the physical world (for example, law of gravity)
- ✓ Civil law – laws that govern human life
- ✓ Moral law – laws that govern the spiritual world

We often speak of “law and order.” They go together. Where there is no law, there is no order. These laws exist whether a person wants to admit it or not. A person may refuse to believe in the law of gravity, but that doesn’t eliminate the law. A person may not believe there is a law against robbery, but that doesn’t eliminate the law. A person may not believe in God’s moral law, but that doesn’t eliminate the law.

The existence of law means there is someone who made the law and enforces the law. God is the law maker and the law enforcer. His law can’t be changed, altered, amended, or annulled. You can ignore it, but you can’t remove it or replace it. On our

vacation we went to workout at a gym where the Ten Commandments were prominently displayed on a wall.

2. We must understand the purpose of God's law

God's law has a 3-fold purpose:

- ✓ To reflect God's character – The nature of the law reveals the nature of the lawgiver. **Romans 7:12** *Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. The law is perfect and holy and good, just as God is perfect and holy and good.*
- ✓ To restrain sin – Imagine how life would be without laws. How fast would people drive if there was no speed limit? How many people would pay income tax if there were no tax laws? Laws keep us under control.
- ✓ To reveal sin – This is precisely the point that Paul makes in First Timothy. God's law is like a mirror to show us our sin. It is like an MRI to show us our sinful heart. The law exposes our sin. It is like a broom that stirs up dust on a dirty floor. The dirt is already there, but the broom exposes it. The law not only reveals our sinful actions; it reveals our sinful affections, our attitudes and our thoughts. Jesus said it's not only wrong to commit adultery, but it's wrong to lust. Jesus said it's not only wrong to murder someone, but it's wrong to hate someone in your heart.
- ✓ 1 John 3:4 *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*
- ✓ Romans 3:20 *Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.* The law requires perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience, which is not humanly possible.
- ✓ Romans 7:7 *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

3. We must accept the verdict of God's law

All of us are guilty because we have broken God's law. We feel guilty because God convicts us that we have broken His law.

- ✓ We are guilty – **Romans 3:19** *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.* The word "know" means to know with absolute certainty. This is not speculation, but settled fact. No man can perfectly obey God's law. Every mouth is stopped. The law keeps a person from justifying himself. He says, "Well, I sin but it's not as bad as some people." "Well, I know I'm not perfect, but who is?"
- ✓ We are guilty of breaking all of God's law – **James 2:10** *For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* The law is all connected. We said it is like a mirror, and when a mirror is broken in one place, we know the whole mirror is broken.

- ✓ Our guilt drives us to God's grace – **Galatians 3:24** Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. The law doesn't help us, but leaves us helpless.

This brings us to the most encouraging news of the gospel. God made a way for us to be saved and free from the curse of the law (death). **Galatians 3:13** *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.* Jesus took the punishment of our sin for breaking God's law.

Additional notes:

Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*, 210-212

The false doctrine that Paul addresses in 1 Timothy was a misuse of the Law, Ten Commandments. The false teachers did not understand the content or purpose of God's Law. Paul listed 14 kinds of people who were condemned by the law. The lawful use of the law is to expose, restrain, and convict the lawless. The law cannot save lost sinners; it can only reveal their need for a Savior. Paul focused on five of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:

Number 5: "Honor thy father and thy mother" ("murderers of fathers...mothers")

Number 6: "Thou shalt not kill" ("murderers...manslayers")

Number 7: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" ("whoremongers...")

Number 8: "Thou shalt not steal" ("menstealers," kidnappers)

Number 9: "Thou shalt not bear false witness" ("liars...perjured person")

It is the "glorious gospel" that saves lost sinners. Paul had experienced that power (Rom. 1:16), and he had been entrusted with the ministry of the gospel (1 Thess. 2:4). Law and gospel go together, for the law without the gospel is diagnosis without remedy; but the gospel without the law is only the good news of salvation for people who don't believe they need it because they have never heard the bad news of judgment.