

237 Guilt by association?

My friend of many years, 'Pete', who is unhappy about my teaching about gay sex, has very helpfully focused my thinking. Pete says that it's not our place to tell people **outside** the church what's right and wrong, but **within** the church it's important for leadership to maintain sound doctrine, and (the case in point) see that sexual immorality is not condoned. He gave me various scriptures, but his key one was 1 Tim 1:10 (I'll add part of v9 – my bold):

*We also know that law is made ... for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and **perverts**, for slave traders and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine*

(That's the NIV, but the single Greek word translated 'perverts' is softened somewhat in other translations to 'those who practice homosexuality'. Others have 'menstealers' and 'sodomites'.)

Even people **outside** the church would agree wholeheartedly with Paul – that's a list of clearly immoral acts; indeed, they are all against UK law. Well, all except one, although until the 'swinging 60s' that was illegal too (1967). Interesting.

But in my wrestling with Scripture these past years, I have often seen that things can look very different if you pull back the focus from a single verse. This was most notable to me with Romans 1 (yes, sorry, I know I've mentioned this ad nauseam), where Paul's point – the hammer blow falling in 2:1 – is 'Don't be judgemental!' But Pete takes that point totally; he's not being judgemental at all, but is making a discernment about what he thinks the Bible actually teaches.

So broadening the focus, here is the context (vv 3-11):

3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may **command certain men not to teach false doctrines** any longer ⁴nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work – which is by faith. ⁵**The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.** ⁶**Some** have wandered away from these and turned to **meaningless talk**. ⁷**They** want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. ⁸We know that **the law is good if one uses it properly**. ⁹We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is **contrary to the sound doctrine** ¹¹**that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God,** which he entrusted to me.

What is Paul's overall concern? What is his 'command'? Don't allow any false doctrine.

What is the goal of that doctrine? Love – he wants churches to live together in loving relationship, based on 'a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith'.

What is working against that command to love? Meaningless talk that 'some' are engaged in.

What are 'they' doing? Teaching about the (Old Testament) law.

What's wrong with that?! The law is for pointing up wrong (see the attached list).

So why is it wrong to discuss the law? It's wrong if you don't focus your study of the law.

Focus on what? Focus on how the law is fulfilled by Jesus, how it shows us 'the glorious gospel' – that's the purpose of the law.

So as I see it, the whole purpose of the passage is not to determine whether a specific action is wrong. Rather, it's about living together in love and having gospel-shaped doctrine, and it's about not mishandling the law.

I'm no New Testament Greek scholar, so could someone who is, tell us how the Greek word translated 'perverts' fits into Paul's list of heinous crimes, please? Thanks.

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