

*Dear
Timothy...*

A STUDY OF
PAUL'S FIRST LETTER
TO TIMOTHY



Dear Timothy...

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME

Welcome to our study of 1 Timothy!

Each week we will look at a passage of 1 Timothy and seek to understand its meaning and then apply the principles we learn to our lives!

Before we dig into specific passages, we must first get an overview of the entire book. In order to understand the message of individual passages in the book of 1 Timothy, we must have the characteristics of the entire book in mind. This week will help us understand the who, what, when, where, and why of entire book of 1 Timothy so that we can be more effective with our study in the weeks to come!

DIG IN

Read the following excerpts from the *Life Application Commentary* and the *ESV Study Bible*.

AUTHOR

Paul: the great apostle and missionary of the church.

The first line of this letter to Timothy names Paul as the author (1:1). Paul and Timothy probably met on Paul's first missionary journey (Timothy accompanied Paul on his second journey) when Paul preached at Lystra (Acts 14:6-7). Timothy's grandmother and mother had come to faith first and had been a great influence on him (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15). Their faithful witness and instruction in the Scriptures prepared Timothy also to follow Christ. In addition, Timothy must have seen Paul stoned at Lystra for his faith, dragged out of the city and left for dead, and then return to life after the prayers of the believers. All of these factors must have had a profound effect on Timothy, convincing him that Jesus was, in fact, the promised Messiah. Paul calls Timothy his "child" or "son" (1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Timothy 2:1), implying a relationship as Timothy's spiritual father.

Beyond leading young Timothy to Christ, Paul became Timothy's mentor, bringing him along as a fellow missionary and appointing him to a leadership position in the church. Ever since meeting in Lystra, Paul and Timothy were close, as friends, brothers in Christ, and partners in the ministry. In fact, Paul's last known message is his second letter to Timothy, in which he asks Timothy to visit him in prison as soon as possible (2 Timothy 4:9). Paul's letters to Timothy stand as a powerful witness to the close relationship these men enjoyed as Paul gave Timothy encouragement, guidance, and strong instruction.

OCCASION

False teachers and potential divisions at Ephesus and a possible delay in Paul's arrival to the area.

Having been released from his first Roman imprisonment and apparently on his way to Asia Minor, Paul traveled to the island of Crete and left Titus there to finish organizing the churches (Titus 1:5). Then Paul went to Ephesus, where he was joined by Timothy, who evidently had returned from Philippi (Philippians 2:19-23). Paul and Timothy discovered that heretical teachers were spreading false teachings, just as Paul had predicted would happen (Acts 20:29-30). These false teachers were preying especially on women, new believers who were enjoying unprecedented freedom in Christ to study the Bible and be involved in worship. As he left Ephesus, Paul left Timothy behind as his representative to reorganize the church there (1:3). Evidently Paul had planned to see Timothy again, where he could have instructed him in person. But Paul was delayed, so he wrote his instructions in the epistle we know as 1 Timothy (3:14-15).

1 Timothy Overview

FOCUS	DOCTRINE	PUBLIC WORSHIP	FALSE TEACHERS	CHURCH DISCIPLINE	PASTORAL MOTIVES
REFERENCE	1:1 ————— ———	2:1 ————— ———	4:1 —————	5:1 —————	6:1 ————— 6:21
DIVISION	PROBLEM OF FALSE DOCTRINE	PUBLIC WORSHIP AND LEADERSHIP	PRESERVE TRUE DOCTRINE	PRESCRIPTIONS FOR WIDOWS AND ELDERS	PASTORAL MOTIVATIONS
TOPIC	WARNING	WORSHIP	WISDOM	WIDOWS	WEALTH
	DANGERS OF FALSE DOCTRINE	DIRECTIONS FOR WORSHIP	DEFENSE AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS	DUTIES TOWARD OTHERS	DEALINGS WITH RICHES
LOCATION	WRITTEN IN MACEDONIA				
TIME	c. A.D. 62–63				

SETTING

Ephesus and the surrounding area.

The gospel had come to Ephesus through Apollos, an outstanding orator and young believer (Acts 18:24). But when Paul visited the city for the first time (on his third missionary journey), he found many who had an incomplete faith, having received only the “baptism of repentance” (Acts 19:4). So Paul told the Ephesians about Jesus (Acts 19:5). They responded to his teaching and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6). Paul stayed and ministered in Ephesus for more than two years, first in the synagogue, and then in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8–10). After a riot ensued, instigated by Demetrius the silversmith, Paul gave final words of encouragement to the believers and left for Macedonia (Acts 19:23–20:1). A few months later, before leaving the area, Paul met with the Ephesian elders at Miletus. During this meeting, Paul warned the Ephesian elders about false teachers who would try to draw believers away from the truth (Acts 20:28–31). After a time of challenge and prayer and an emotional farewell, Paul sailed to Jerusalem (Acts 20:13–21:1). Paul had a very warm and close relationship with the church at Ephesus, and he was concerned for their spiritual well-being.

Although nothing more is said about Ephesus in the book of Acts, Paul probably visited the city after his release from his first Roman imprisonment. During this visit (with Timothy), he discovered that a number of spiritual problems had arisen during his absence. Paul and Timothy stayed in Ephesus for a while to teach and to straighten things out. When Paul had to leave for Macedonia, he left Timothy there as his representative to lead the church (1:3).

The area surrounding Ephesus probably had a number of young churches, not just one, with each church led by an elder. Thus Paul did not appoint Timothy as the “elder,” “bishop,” or “overseer” of the churches, but rather as his representative, carrying his apostolic authority to order worship (2:1–15) and appoint elders and deacons (3:1–13).

AUDIENCE

Timothy and the church at large.

Timothy was born and reared in Lystra in Lycaonia. Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and grandmother Lois were devout Jews who had come to faith in Christ (Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:5), but his father was a Greek. Evidently the father was not a Jewish proselyte or a convert to Christianity, since Timothy had not been circumcised (Acts 16:3). Timothy’s mother and grandmother had carefully taught him the Old Testament Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15), so he was open to the gospel when he heard Paul preach on his first visit to Lystra (Acts 14:6–7).

Because of Timothy’s growth in the faith and his spiritual gifts, Paul chose him to become a partner in spreading the gospel on the

second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3). Paul also may have seen Timothy as one who was free from the prejudices of many Jews—Timothy had a mixed family (a Jewish mother and a Greek father). To avoid a problem with the Jews in the area, Paul circumcised Timothy before they left (Acts 16:3). Paul also ordained Timothy at this time (4:14).

Although Paul trusted Timothy completely and expected him to be a strong leader in the church, Paul also was very aware of Timothy's weaknesses. Timothy was very young and, evidently, was shy and hesitant. So Paul warned him against being intimidated by his opponents and their teachings (4:12; 2 Timothy 1:5, 7; 3:10; see also 1 Corinthians 16:10-11). In addition, Timothy may have had stomach problems (5:23).

As requested, Timothy left his family in Lystra to travel with Paul. On that journey Timothy helped establish the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Acts 16:1-17:14). When Paul left Berea early to go to Athens, he left Timothy and Silas behind. But Paul sent word for them to join him as soon as possible (Acts 17:13-15).

Soon after Timothy arrived at Athens, Paul sent him to Thessalonica to strengthen the faith of the believers there (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2). Later, Timothy rejoined Paul at Corinth and helped establish that church (Acts 18:5). The Bible doesn't say whether Timothy traveled with Paul from Corinth to Ephesus and then to Caesarea, Jerusalem, Antioch, and back to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19:1). We do read, however, that Timothy worked with Paul at Ephesus (Acts 19:22). Then Paul sent him (and Erastus) to Greece to minister to churches there and to prepare the way for a possible visit by Paul, while Paul stayed at Ephesus (Acts 19:22; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10). Before Paul left Ephesus, however, Timothy rejoined him (Romans 16:21; 2 Corinthians 1:1). Then they traveled together to Macedonia, to Achaia, back to Macedonia, and on to Asia (Acts 20:1-5).

MAP

Ephesus was a wealthy and highly influential port city in the Roman province of Asia, renowned for its temple of Artemis (Diana).



KEY IDEAS

SOUND DOCTRINE

(1:3-11; 4:1-10; 6:3-5)

Paul's first challenge to Timothy and the Ephesian believers was to combat the false teachers who had infiltrated the church. Paul warned Timothy about these heretics three times in this letter. After each warning, Paul exhorted Timothy to cling tightly to the faith, to be strong, and to live rightly (1:18-19; 4:9-16; 6:11-21).

The exact nature of the heresy is unclear from the text, but Paul referred to endless genealogies (1:4), a strain of legalism (4:3), "unhealthy interest in controversies" (6:4 NIV), and teaching for personal, financial gain (6:5). Paul urged Timothy to combat the false teachings by confronting the false teachers (4:6; 6:12) and by having nothing to do with them or their ideas (4:7). Paul also urged Timothy to have love (1:5; 6:11), a sincere and strong faith (1:5, 19; 6:12), a clear conscience (1:5, 19), and a godly life (4:7; 6:11). The greatest weapon against heresy is sound doctrine (1:10; 4:16; 6:3)—holding to the truth and living it. Sound doctrine is also high on the list of qualities needed in elders and deacons (3:9).

PUBLIC WORSHIP

(2:1-15)

Beyond the issue of false teachers, Paul's next area of concern for church life was worship. Paul began by emphasizing the necessity and centrality of prayer. Prayers should be made for everyone, including "kings and all those in authority," because God wants everyone to be saved (2:1-4 NIV). In fact, all Christians, wherever they gather, should pray together (2:8).

Next, Paul discussed the conduct of women in worship. Evidently the actions of some women had been disruptive. Paul explained that although they were enjoying new freedom in Christ to study the Bible and to worship with men, women should not rush into leadership or flaunt their freedom (2:9-15). In both issues (prayer and women in worship), Paul's focus was unity. The implication is that there were potential or real divisions in the Ephesian church that threatened to disrupt worship.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

(3:1-16)

Paul gave specific instructions concerning the qualifications for church leaders so that the church might honor God and operate smoothly. Again, the fact that this section has such prominence in the letter seems to imply that less than qualified men were leading the various congregations (or were aspiring to be leaders). In fact, it is likely that the false teachers were former and current leaders in the church. As Paul's representative and with apostolic authority, Timothy was to make sure that church leaders had spiritual maturity, specific spiritual gifts, sound theology, a solid family life, and a good reputation.

CARING CHURCH

(5:1-20; 6:1-2, 17-19)

Jesus told his disciples that the world would know that they were his followers by their love for each other (John 13:35). The greatest witness the Ephesian believers could make for Christ in their world would be as a caring church. But the command to love must result in specific actions. So Paul outlined for Timothy the way the church should treat older men (5:1), younger men (5:1), older women (5:2), younger women (5:2), widows (5:3-6, 9-16), and church elders (5:17-20), and how slaves should respond to their masters (6:1-2). In addition, Paul encouraged Timothy to challenge rich members to invest their wealth in helping others (6:17-19).

PERSONAL DISCIPLINE

(4:11-16; 5:21-25; 6:6-16, 20-21)

Paul knew that it took discipline to be an effective church leader. Timothy, like the elders, had to guard his motives, minister faithfully, and live righteously. Paul told Timothy to do what God has called him to do despite his young age. In fact, Timothy should set an example of spirituality and right living (4:11-12). Paul also told Timothy to diligently exercise his spiritual gifts, preaching, teaching, and leading (4:13-16). As God's man and Paul's representative, Timothy must keep himself pure, avoiding worldly temptations, especially the love of money (5:21-25; 6:6-10). Finally, Paul urged Timothy to be disciplined by keeping his eyes on Christ (6:11-16) and refusing to become sidetracked by endless, empty discussions (6:20-21).

Purpose of 1 Timothy

To encourage and instruct Timothy about the organization of a local church and to help him deal with false doctrines.

Although 1 Timothy is addressed to one individual, undoubtedly the contents of the letter were meant for the church at large. The epistle is filled with exhortations for the whole church, not just personal matters. Paul warned about false teachers (1:3-7; 6:3-10), gave instructions for worship (2:1-15) and how to deal with various groups in the church (5:1-21), and explained how to choose elders and deacons (3:1-13). Paul gave special instructions about how women should behave in the church because they were susceptible to the false teachings and because many were flaunting their new Christian freedom (2:9-15).

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

From your reading, answer the following questions:

1. What are some characteristics of Paul and Timothy?
2. What were the circumstances of those to whom Paul wrote (Timothy and the church in Ephesus)?
3. What are the key ideas of the book of 1 Timothy? Explain each purpose in one sentence.
4. Spend some time in prayer asking God to speak to you through this study of 1 Timothy.