

1 Timothy 1

An Outline

- I. Salutation (1 Timothy 1:1-2)
- II. Timothy Charged to Oppose False Teachers (1 Timothy 1:3-11)
- III. Paul's Testimony of God's Grace to Him (1 Timothy 1:12-17)
- IV. The Charge to Timothy Renewed (1 Timothy 1:18-20)

Issues for Discussion

1. **"Timothy, my true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:1-2)**

A Brief Background of the Epistle

A late first-century writing, *1 Clement*, suggests that Paul was martyred in Rome; however, it does not link his martyrdom to his imprisonment recorded in Acts 28. The fourth-century church historian, Eusebius, records that Paul was released from that imprisonment, continued his missionary work, and was martyred by the emperor Nero on his second visit to Rome. This report is not only supported by the Pastoral Letters (1,2 Timothy, and Titus) but by Philippians and Philemon as well, which, if we understand them to be written during the Roman imprisonment recorded in Acts 28, provide evidence that Paul expected to be released (Philippians 1:25, 26; Philemon 22). From this, we can surmise that Paul was imprisoned twice in Rome. He was released from the first around AD 62. Some years later he was martyred by Nero in AD 68. **It is likely that he wrote the two letters to Timothy during a fourth missionary journey (note, Acts records 3 missionary journeys before his first Roman imprisonment) during this period between AD 62 and AD 68.**

Timothy was a native of Lystra, a Roman colony in the province of Galatia. His father was a Gentile and his mother was a Jew (Acts 16:1). His mother and grandmother, perhaps Timothy himself, may have been converted during Paul's visit to Lystra on his first missionary journey (2 Timothy 1:5). From childhood, they had instructed Timothy in the Jewish Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:14, 15), and was likely influential in his conversion. When Paul returned to Lystra on his second missionary journey, some of the Christians called his attention to this young believer, and Paul decided to take him along on his journey (Acts 16:2, 3). At that time, Paul circumcised Timothy according to Jewish custom so that he would have no trouble when they were evangelizing Jews (Acts 16:2, 3). He also had the church elders lay their hands on Timothy to set him apart and equip him for ministry (1 Timothy 1:18; 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; 2:2).

Timothy traveled with Paul throughout most of his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 17:14, 15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4), and for part of the fourth. He seems to have become Paul's protégé, and Paul speaks figuratively of himself as Timothy's "father" (Philippians 2:22) and of Timothy as his "son" (1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 1 Cor 4:17; 2 Tim 1:2; 2:1). As Paul's coworker, Timothy served as Paul's representative in the churches of Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:2, 6), Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10), Philippi (Philippians 2:19, 23), and Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3).

Paul is often encouraging Timothy to boldness in spite of his youth (cf. 1 Tim 1:7; 4:12; 2 Timothy 1:8), even asking the church at Corinth to help him in this regard (1 Corinthians 16:10, 11). Paul wrote 1 Timothy in Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3). He left Timothy in Ephesus because of false teachers in the city (1 Timothy 1:3). Paul had established the Church of Ephesus early on his third missionary journey, spending about three years there (Acts 19; 20:31). At the close of that journey he warned the Ephesian elders that false teachers, some coming from the leadership itself, would plague the church (Acts 20:29, 30), and this letter to Timothy indicates that his prediction had come true (cf. 1 Timothy 1:6, 19; 4:1, 2; 6:3-5, 10). There is evidence that some of the false teachers either came from or moved into positions of leadership in the church (1 Timothy 1:7, 20; 2:12; 3:6; 5:19, 20; 6:3-5, 10), and the false teachers seem especially to have made inroads among some of the women in the church (1 Timothy 2:9-15; 3:11; 5:11-15).

Major Themes

This letter is noteworthy for its interest in church organization, particularly in its lengthy description of the qualification, role and discipline of elders (cf. 1 Tim 3:2-7; 5:7, 17-20) and of deacons (cf. 1 Tim 3:8-10, 12, 13). This letter also emphasizes sound doctrine (cf. 1 Tim 1:10; 3:9; 4:6; 6:3), with particular attention to salvation (cf. 1 Tim 1:13-16; 2:3-6). Finally, this letter has some noteworthy discussion on the role of women (2:9-15) and the care of widows (5:3-16).

2. **“Grace, mercy and peace” (1 Timothy 1:2)** – By grace, **they got** what they did not deserve, namely, His righteousness, adoption, and a glorious hope. By mercy, **they did not get** what they did deserve, namely, His condemnation and eternal judgment. Peace simply describes the result of receiving God’s grace and mercy, namely, a right relationship with God. These three elements encapsulate the most complete salutation in Paul’s letters (used only in 1 and 2 Timothy). Normally, Paul and Peter simply used the salutation, “Grace and peace...”
3. **“Command certain people not to teach false doctrines (literally “teach other doctrines”) any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies” (1 Timothy 1:3-11)** – After Paul was freed from his first Roman imprisonment, he and Timothy traveled again. Timothy was left in Ephesus while Paul traveled on to Macedonia. In Macedonia, Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Timothy) about the management of the Church in Ephesus. At the heart of that work was the charge for Timothy to deal with false teaching, which Paul himself had warned the elders in Ephesus about when he last saw them:

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears (Acts 20:29-31).

Myths, endless genealogies (1:4), misguided teaching about the Law (1:7), prohibition of marriage and abstinence from certain foods (4:3), godless myths and old wives’ tales (4:7), controversies and quarrels about words (6:4), godless chatter and the pursuit of special knowledge (6:20) – such doctrines – arose from legalistic Judaism, early Gnostic teaching and the practice of asceticism. None of them were in accord with the Gospel or biblical truth and Christian morality.

The sense I get is that certain people got tired of foundational truth. They get tired of hearing

the same Gospel story over and over again. So they got interested in obscure passages and hidden meanings and controversial issues. Paul exhorted Timothy to command these people to stop teaching these things and to **focus on what would advance God's work by faith**. Paul wrote that **the goal of this command to Timothy** was not to increase controversy, nor to stifle productive debate, but to promote LOVE, "which comes from a **pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith**" (1:5). These three items, involving the heart, the conscience, and one's faith, are all inward and personal and not subject to judgment by others. In other words, Paul encouraged teaching that does not stir the proud, selfish, and combative nature of our flesh, which non-biblical or extra-biblical teaching ("other teaching") tends to do. Paul encouraged what would strengthen faith through sound, clear, and well-established teaching.

It is interesting that the Church of Ephesus in the Book of Revelation suffered the same shortcoming Paul identifies here, namely, a lack of love. Jesus told the Church of Ephesus, "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first" (Revelation 2:4). Contrary to what some have taught, I believe the problem in Ephesus was not that they had forsaken their love for Jesus (e.g. their "First Love") but their love for one another. The romantic ideal of a "First Love" aside, the Church of Ephesus had become so doctrinally strict, they had forgotten the heart of the faith, namely, to speak the truth *in love* (cf. Ephesians 4:15; Galatians 5:6; John 13:34-35). In the same vein, Paul's warning to the Church in Ephesus was that some people were propagating strange teachings that elevated controversial speculations, which promoted arguments and division among them rather than pure, genuine, and faithful love. Steven J. Cole, the pastor of Flagstaff Christian Fellowship ([link](#)) shared this:

A story is told of an elderly man who ran a variety store. At one time it had been a prosperous business, but in recent years he had become obsessed with trying to keep the store neat and clean. He would spend hours arranging and rearranging the merchandise on the shelves, often refusing to unlock the doors for fear that the store would be thrown into disarray. The appearance of his store became the priority; selling merchandise became secondary.

That sounds crazy, but the same thing often happens among God's people. We get diverted from the true goal of the Christian life and busy ourselves with lesser things. Jesus clearly summed up the goal when He said that the two greatest commandments in God's law were to love God with all our being and to love our neighbor as we do in fact love ourselves ([Matt. 22:37-39](#)). Genuine love for God and others is the goal of the Christian life.

And yet we in the church often get caught up with the trivial and neglect the crucial. We strain the gnat and swallow the camel, to use Jesus' phrase ([Matt. 23:24](#)). We argue some abstruse point of theology but shred relationships. We get caught up with church programs but neglect the people the programs are supposed to help. We serve on committees but ignore the hurting person in our midst who needs our love. We focus on knowing the Bible but forget that the goal is to change our lives, not to fill our heads.

4. **"The law is made not for the righteous" (1 Timothy 1:7-11)** – Paul honed in on one major problem with these "certain people" in the church. They "wanted to be teachers of the law, but they did not know what they were talking about or what they so confidently affirmed (1:7-8).

Paul characterized them as both ignorant and falsely self-assured. Contrary to their wrongful understanding, Paul explained the truth about the Law, that is, the Mosaic Law. It was not made for believers but unbelievers, not for those declared righteous in Christ but for those who have a fearful expectation of judgment because they have failed to keep the whole law (Hebrews 10:26-28). These people followed the same false premise of the Judaizers, who taught that righteousness could be attained by keeping the Law. But Paul wrote,

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin (Romans 3:20).

Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith (Galatians 3:11).

This was the entire argument of Paul's letter to the Galatians. The Law was only temporary until the coming of Christ and salvation through faith in Him (Galatians 3:23-25). The Law simply revealed man's sinfulness and inability (Romans 7:7-13). This was the "proper" understanding and use of the Law. It was meant to identify and judge mankind in its unrighteousness. Paul took some representative sins, likely those that were prevalent in Ephesus, to cover the two main areas of the Law of Moses (Ten Commandments): (1) Sins against God: "lawbreakers and rebels, the godless and sinful, the unholy and irreligious;" (2) Sins against man: "who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave-traders and liars and perjurers." Steven J. Cole breaks down the parallels between Paul's list and the Ten Commandments:

1 Timothy 1:9-10	Ten Commandments
Lawless and rebellious	1. No other gods
Ungodly and sinners	2. No idols
Unholy and profane	3. Not take Lord's name in vain
	4. Keep Sabbath
Kill fathers & mothers	5. Honor parents
Murderers	6. No murder
Immoral men, homosexuals	7. No adultery
Kidnappers/slave stealers	8. No stealing
Liars and perjurers	9. No false witness
Whatever else is contrary	10. No coveting

The law was given for "whatever is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me" (1:10-11). In other words, the law was given for those who did not possess the Gospel of Christ, who is "the glory of the blessed God" (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4-6). The law was given for unbelieving lawbreakers, not for believers for whom the Law had been fulfilled in Christ (cf. Romans 8:1-4).

The Law brings conviction of sin, revealing in us the terrible sinfulness of our sin (cf. Romans 7:13). It drives us to recognize our need for a Savior (Revelation 7:24). If you do not know that

you are sick, you will never seek out a physician. If you do not realize that you are dying, you will never pursue the cure. The purpose of the Law was to help all of us recognize that (1) all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23; Isaiah 53:6), and (2) the wages of sin is death and judgment (Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27), but (3) the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23), who died to pay for our sins (Romans 5:8), so that by trusting in Him, believing that He died for our sins and rose again, we will not be condemned for our sins but receive eternal life in Christ Jesus (John 3:16; Romans 8:1; Romans 10:9).

5. **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst” (1 Timothy 1:12-17)** – After Paul argued that the Law was meant for the ungodly and sinful, he immediately described himself as the chief of the ungodly and sinful, “a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man.” Yet, this is totally contrary to his depiction of himself in Philippians 3:4-6,

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

But in 1 Timothy 1 he described himself as the “worst of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15-16). He was this way because his zeal was on the wrong side of God. He did not view or use the Law properly. Rather than allowing the Law to convict him of His sinfulness and drive him to faith in Christ, he justified himself in his self-righteousness and covered his guilt by zealously persecuting the Church.

But God sovereignly and literally stopped him on the road to Damascus, blinding him and directing him in a different direction – not as a persecutor of Christians but as a preacher of the Gospel (cf. Acts 9). God saved him because he acted “in ignorance and unbelief.” Even though Paul just rebuked those wanting to be teachers of the Law, saying that they did not know what they were talking about or what they so confidently affirmed, Paul was in this very same position at one time. But God saved him from his ignorance and unbelief. God showed him abundant mercy, “along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” So, Paul could then testify,

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith (Philippians 3:7-9).

In 1 Timothy 1 Paul expressed this testimony in this way:

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life (1 Timothy 1:16).

Jesus displayed patience so that Paul might be saved. Jesus displayed patience so that people who would believe in Him might be saved. Peter expressed it this way:

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead **he is patient with you**, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).*

It does not matter whether you are the most righteous among men or the worst of sinners, Jesus can and will save you according to His sovereign will and purpose. We are to understand that the patience referenced here and in 2 Peter 3:9 is not a conditional patience, as if God may run out of patience with His elect if they don't trust in Jesus after two or three attempts. It is the patience of God's unswerving purpose, which was established before the creation of the world and unfolds throughout human history and will be accomplished at His appointed time. It is the patience that says that everyone who has been chosen for salvation will be saved before the end comes. God will not foreshorten His plan due to haste or impatience.

Paul ends with a glorious praise of God, which he consistently does after acknowledging God's sovereignty (cf. 1 Timothy 6:16-17; Romans 11:28-36; Ephesians 3:20-21):

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen (1 Timothy 1:17).

6. **"I am giving you this command" (1 Timothy 1:18-20)** – This is now the third time Paul used the word "command" (*parangelia*, 1:3, 5, 18). In other words, the same "command" was in view throughout this chapter as from the first, namely, "**command** certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies" (1 Timothy 1:3-4). It was the problem of false teaching, or literally, "strange teaching," that was in view throughout this chapter. The goal of this command was to promote "love" (1:5). The reason for this command was so that Timothy might "fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience" (1:18-19), unlike two named individuals, "Hymenaeus and Alexander" (1:20).

"Giving" (Gk. *Paratithemi* = "entrust") – This word is also used in 2 Timothy 2:2, where Paul gives the aim of discipleship, namely, **replication**: "And the things **you** have heard **me** say in the presence of many witnesses **entrust to reliable people** who will also be qualified to teach **others.**" Paul → Timothy → Reliable People → Others.

"in keeping with the prophecies made about you" – Paul encouraged Timothy with the remembrance that he was ordained both by Paul and the elders and through prophetic utterances and the laying on of hands (cf. 1 Timothy 4:4). In other words, Timothy had a divine commissioning and gifting; therefore, though he was relatively young (1 Timothy 4:12), he was not to be intimidated by the people he was tasked to confront.

This text lines up well with the mission of our class, namely **to encourage each other to become all that God has created, called, and gifted us to be**. This was what Paul was doing for Timothy.

"that you may fight the battle well" – This is a reminder that church is NOT to be seen as a crew ship but a battleship! We engage in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-17) as good soldiers of Christ (2 Timothy 2:3-4), taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

“handed over to Satan” – This is tantamount to exclusion from Christian fellowship (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5; Matthew 18:15-17), a disciplinary measure with the goal of leading them to repentance (e.g. 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 may describe the repentance of the excommunicated sinner of 1 Corinthians 5). Hymenaeus and Alexander were named because they had likely been warned more than once and now suffered the discipline of excommunication from church fellowship. Notice how Paul counseled discipline for a similar matter to Titus:

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned (Titus 3:9-11).

Now, Hymenaeus was mentioned again in 2 Timothy but with a different culprit, namely, Philetus:

Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some (2 Timothy 2:16-18).

While we always love to hear about repentance and restoration, there are some who go from bad to worse. Whatever bad teaching led to Hymenaeus being excluded from the church, it was magnified years later in his collusion with Philetus to propagate the false teaching that the resurrection had already taken place. As Paul wrote, such people “will become more and more ungodly.”

Discussion Question

Evaluate your ministry. Do you understand the goal of your ministry? Do you have a proper perspective of the Law, your sinfulness, and God’s exceeding, exceeding grace toward you? Are you finding confidence in God’s design, calling and gifting in you so that you are empowered to faithfully serve Him?