

First Timothy 1

First Timothy is a book all pastors should be familiar with, but it is not just for pastors. We (all Christians) are ministers of the Gospel wherever we are. We all need to know precisely how the Church should function and this letter lays the groundwork. 1 Timothy 3:15 says, “Know how people ought to act in God’s household.” “God’s household” is the Church—the gathered people of God both during worship and throughout the week.

The Church of Jesus Christ—you and I—is a weighty calling!

Setting the background.

First Timothy is a letter written by Paul to Timothy, and graciously given for the good of all God’s people.

Author = Paul

Recipient = Timothy (Paul’s “son in the faith”)

Source = God

Written in the mid-60’s AD – 1st century AD. The church was in its infancy.

Why did Paul write this letter to Timothy?

Paul had already given this verbal assignment to Timothy and was now restating it in a letter. Paul knew the potential for a delay in getting to Timothy, so he sent his instruction ahead via this letter.

Paul in his final instructions to the elders in Ephesus in Acts 20:29–30 warned the church of the “salvage wolves” who would enter the church and cause trouble...even luring away disciples.

Acts 20:29–30 says, “I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following.”

His predictions didn't take long to come to fruition...about five years to be exact. False teaching is like cancer or like yeast in bread...it spreads quickly and needs to be completely removed.

Paul was in Macedonia...most likely released from house arrest in Rome and went into Macedonia...but we are not sure exactly where Paul was when he wrote this letter to Timothy.

Paul loved the people he ministered to, and he knew the importance of standing on the truth found in God's Word. He also knew the people needed to fix their hope on the Gospel.

First Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus are known as the *Pastoral Epistles*. They have a lot to say about the responsibilities of pastors in leading and ministering to the people. The letters are all similar but are also unique.

Why Timothy?

Timothy had traveled with Paul for thirteen to fourteen years. Timothy was now in his thirties which was still considered young. Timothy was also timid (2 Tim. 1:7) and frail (2 Tim. 5:23). Paul trusted Timothy but knew that Timothy would need his encouragement. We are the same today. We have many people we shepherd. They are trustworthy, but they need our support in this difficult world.

Paul stationed Timothy in Ephesus to combat the false teaching as well as lead the church in the concept of godly living.

Paul wanted Timothy to remain faithful in his calling as a minister of the Gospel.

Background of Ephesus.

Ephesus was a large, diverse, religiously complex, and flourishing city...kind of like a major metropolitan area in the United States.

Artemus' Temple was in Ephesus so the cult of Artemus (magic, sorcery, soothsaying) was very present.

Ephesus was not inherently Judeo-Christian. Not only did Timothy face difficulties within the cultural context, but he also met others as well.

The church in Ephesus may have been one of Paul's strongest church plants and our best model.

Six issues addressed in 1 Timothy:

1. Church's doctrine (1 Timothy 1:3–20)
2. Public worship (1 Timothy 2:1–15)
3. Church's pastorate (1 Timothy 3:1–16)
4. Church's local leadership (1 Timothy 4:11–5:2)
5. Church's social responsibility (1 Timothy 5:3–6:2)
6. Church's attitude toward material possessions (1 Timothy 6:3–21)

Church doctrine.

Problems with the false teachers' doctrine at the church in Ephesus:

- Preoccupied with myths, genealogies, and speculation
- Misused the law
- Immoral – they were forbidding marriage and certain foods
- Craved controversy and quarrels
- Used godliness for material gain.

All of these things were early seeds of the heresy known later as Gnosticism (salvation was through knowledge of one's origins). Gnosticism increased in the second century AD after the New Testament was written.

The false teaching in Ephesus had strong Jewish elements. These false teachers were teaching a "different" message than the apostles. "Different" here is the Greek word *heterodidaskaleö*. They were deviating from the norm of doctrine.

Before we dig into the main points of Paul's letter, let's remember a couple of things:

- (1) We need to remember that the Church was God's idea (1 Timothy 1:1–2). We need always to recognize this and to go back to this thought when we have a question about something or an idea. Jesus founded the Church by his life, death, and resurrection. Since Pentecost, He has continued to build the Church by His Spirit. Everything we do in the Church, the data we collect, new ideas, etc. matters little if we don't remember that what matters most is what the Lord has said about the Church.

(2) Always stay focused on the Gospel (1 Timothy 1:3–20). Anything that pulls people away from the Gospel must be addressed. If we lose the Gospel, we lose everything. Truth matters because truth taken out of context negates the need for God's Truth. Anything other than God's Truth results in death...eternal death. If we remove the Gospel from the message today, we remove the foundation on which the Church was built. If the Gospel never existed, we'd not need the Church.

1 Timothy 1:1–3.

First Timothy is authoritative. Paul declares his title in the greeting so as an apostle he should be listened to. Nine out of the thirteen New Testament letters designate his apostolic role. Jesus, Himself, appointed Paul as an apostle. It's not what was said that made it authoritative, but rather Scripture is what carries the authority. "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16) and "Men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

God's Word is inspired and inerrant, and is the solid foundation one needs to stand on in a culture which suppresses and opposes the truth of God's Word. One of the problems with postmodernism is there is no objective truth or universal/eternal truth. Everyone has their own truth. Most prized virtue is tolerance.

Paul's letter was a personal letter written to Timothy with instruction and urgency, and it was also encouraging. However, this letter wasn't just meant for Timothy. It would be used for the Church at large.

First Timothy is filled with hope. Verse one says, "God our Savior" and "Christ Jesus our hope."

In a letter dealing with some difficult issues, at the outset, Paul reminds Timothy, as well as all of us, that hope (Jesus) is the focus. Everything Paul says in 1 Timothy is in the context of the Gospel...grace, mercy, peace, and love of the Father.

Three main points of 1 Timothy 1.

1. Guard the Gospel
2. Celebrate the Gospel
3. Fight for the Gospel

1. Guard the Gospel (1 Timothy 1:3–11).

This was the top priority Paul was instructing Timothy on despite everything else that was taking place within the church and within the culture. Paul wasn't asking Timothy or the church at Ephesus to do anything to gain God's favor. God-honoring obedience is always rendered in the context of a loving relationship made possible by the Gospel. Without fully embracing, understanding, or believing the full Gospel, one can never do enough to gain salvation and further, our efforts to be obedient to gain favor would be in vain because we would have no standard of measure.

We guard the Gospel by the way we use God's Word (God's Law).

How not to use God's Law:

- Do not add to its demands (extrabiblical writings, myths, genealogies)
- Do not add extra rules that are not in God's Word
- We must not think the Law saves

The wrong use of the law was producing arrogance and ignorance among the teachers. 1 Timothy 1:7 mentions “confident assertions” about stuff they didn’t understand causing confusion and deception among those who heard.

Note to our current and future generations: Know what is and isn’t in the Bible!

All of us need to be on guard and know when something false is being taught. We do this by reading and studying God’s Word.

How to use God’s Law:

- Illustrate God’s restraint of sin (His patience)
- The Law shows God’s condemnation of a sinner. If we had no measure, we would not need Him
- Show God’s will for the saved

The Law’s role was to curb sin in the life of the unbeliever (1 Timothy 1:9). A right use of the Law also produces responsibility by those who teach (1 Timothy 1:4). Right preaching of the Law also produces love among those who hear. Sinners hear the love of Christ instead of only condemnation with no hope (1 Timothy 1:5). The Law of God is ingrained in our hearts whether we’ve ever read the Word of God or not.

“Even Gentiles, who do not have God’s written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God’s law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.” (Romans 2:14–15)

Remember, this was the early Church. The new believers were recent converts from either Judaism or paganism. They had no long family lineage of Christianity at this point. They were “learning on the fly.” Some were bringing their Jewish laws, and some were bringing their pagan rituals and idols and mixing them with the Gospel. The Gospel cannot be added to. It’s saved by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8).

When we are “saved” we are born again. The Lord removes the things we once desired or did as we continually surrender to Christ as Lord and Savior of our lives. What we do at that point doesn’t earn us our salvation (it is a guarantee at the moment of confession), but our response (what we do) is a result of His love overflowing in us to others so they can come to know the Gospel in the same way.

There was already a doctrine agreed upon by which all teaching could be tested and judged so whatever the false teachers were teaching varied from this agreed upon doctrine.

Two practical tests to apply to all teaching:

- 1) The first is the test of faith...Is it from God in agreement with apostolic doctrine rather than merely man’s imagination?
- 2) The second is the test of love...does it produce unity within the Church body?

All teaching should promote the glory of God and the good of the Church.

2. Celebrate the Gospel (1 Timothy 1:12–17).

As we guard the Gospel, we also celebrate the Gospel. Paul's testimony in verses twelve through seventeen celebrated his salvation and God's grace. He reiterated what the Lord had done for him. So, too, must we. There is power in our personal testimony not only for those who hear but to God as we lift praise to Him.

The content of the Gospel is true and trustworthy. The offer of the Gospel is universal. The essence of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ came to save sinners. The application of the Gospel is personal. Does your testimony end up in triumphant praise as Paul's did in verse 17? In the middle of his letter to Timothy, he had a little worship service.

3. Fight for the Gospel (1 Timothy 1:18–20).

Paul encouraged Timothy not to remain neutral. Not only must we silence the false teachers, but we must also feel the weight of their influence and speculations. We need to fight for the Gospel within the Church. Sometimes drastic measures are necessary. As was the case with Hymenaeus and Alexander who were two elders in the church. Hymenaeus and Alexander were two people who were excommunicated for rejecting "faith and conscience" (1 Timothy 1:19 and 2 Timothy 2:17). They were blasphemers and straying in their doctrine. Hymenaeus may have been the same heretic who taught the resurrection already took place.

We must also fight for the Gospel in our lives. Paul warned Timothy that he must remain obedient, steadfast, and not allow unconfessed sin to lead you astray. The Church is engaged in a spiritual war, and all its members need to put on the Armor of God (Ephesians 6:10–18) at all times including the sword of the Spirit which is God's Word.

Paul knew without a doubt that the Gospel is the only thing that unites the Church and the only thing that will sustain the Church in difficult days. He wanted to pass along his knowledge to the one he was mentoring and promoting to a post in Ephesus.

Application.

Ask yourself these questions:

1. How do you guard the Gospel? Do you know the Gospel? Are there pastors and leaders today leading people away from the true Gospel? How?

- Commit to knowing the Word of God.
- Preach the Gospel to yourself every day so it is at the forefront of your mind as you go about your daily business and encounter those who need to hear the hope and love of Christ.
- The Gospel in nine English words..."Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

2. How often do you remember your testimony?

- Does your testimony lead you to worship?
- Is His grace always on your mind and in your heart? His grace saved you. Are you sharing His grace with others? Not a works based grace, but a faith-based grace.

3. What do you do when you see a church leader wandering? What do you do when you feel like you are wandering?

- Learn from other's mistakes. Pay attention to those who fall so that you may not succumb to those same things.
- Stay near to God so that you cannot be easily led astray.
- When you feel tempted or prone to wander, return to the basics of the Gospel. Stay true to it and dig into God's Word.