

# First Timothy

## Authorship

The traditional view of Pauline authorship is supported by the internal claims of the epistle (1:1) and strong external evidence. A number of objections to Pauline authorship have been strongly argued, but each is able to be answered in accordance with the information in the book itself.<sup>1</sup>

## Historical Setting

The writing of the Pastoral epistles must be fit into the framework of Acts or else within the context of a second imprisonment (the one supposed in 2 Timothy). Arguments have been set forth for both positions. Even taking the second imprisonment hypothesis as the best scenario, there is still little definite help in determining Paul's movements up to this time or his location at the time of writing. One may suppose that he was somewhere in Macedonia from the reference in 1 Timothy 1:3.

## Date

Assuming the second imprisonment scenario and Paul's death taking place in A.D. 67,<sup>2</sup> 1 Timothy (and Titus) could have been penned any time between A.D. 64 and 67.

## Original Readers

The letter is addressed to Timothy, Paul's true "son" in the faith. However, it has much in it that seems to be directed to a wider readership, specifically members of the assembly at Ephesus. Therefore, it could be called a semi-private letter written to Timothy but intended to be read by the whole church.

## Occasion

There is no explicit reason stated for Paul writing this letter. He mentions that he intends to come (4:13) but not in such a way as to make it a reason for writing. It may be argued that Paul is concerned with Timothy's ability to handle the difficulties presented by the false teachers mentioned and thus writes to direct his efforts and bolster his courage for the task. Since it seems to be more of a semi-private letter, intended to be read by both his young associate and the assembly, Paul's authoritative pronouncement on what to do with these problem teachers will further enhance Timothy's authority in carrying out his charge.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a fairly complete handling of the arguments for and against Pauline authorship see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. revised (Downers Grove: IL, 1990), 607-49.

<sup>2</sup> See Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 387. See also Guthrie, *Introduction*, 651.

## Theme Statement

By adhering to and teaching sound doctrine, Timothy will serve the assembly in its role as a support of the truth and will gain for himself a superlative experience of life.

## Outline

- I. Salutation: Paul emphasizes his apostleship in writing to Timothy, his true “son” in the faith. ....1:1-2
- II. Preface: Paul charges Timothy with a ministry of correction and edification. ....1:3-20
  - A. Timothy is to correct those teaching faulty doctrine. ....1:3-11
    - 1. It is a doctrine given to fanciful speculations on the law. ....1:3-4
    - 2. It is a doctrine that misunderstands the purpose of the commandment. ....1:5-11
      - a. The purpose of the commandment is love, from which some have strayed. ....1:5-7
      - b. The law is good if used to establish spiritual need. ....1:8-11
  - B. Timothy is to consider Paul’s life and ministry as a pattern for his own. ....1:12-20
    - 1. Paul received his special ministry in mercy by grace. ....1:12-15
    - 2. Paul had become a pattern of belief to the glory of God. ....1:16-17
    - 3. Timothy must exercise his special ministry in faith and a good conscience. ....1:18-20
- III. Body: Paul instructs on proper behavior in the household of God. ....2:1–6:2
  - A. Paul instructs on the proper conduct of those in the household of God. ....2:1–4:16
    - 1. The essentials of household conduct are detailed. ....2:1–3:13
      - a. It is the responsibility of men to pray. ....2:1-8
        - 1) They are to pray for all men for a quite life. ....2:1-2
        - 2) They are to pray for their salvation. ....2:3-7
        - 3) They are to pray in every place in holiness and unity. ....2:8
      - b. It is the responsibility of women to be in outer and inner submission. ....2:9-15
        - 1) They are to be discretely attired. ....2:9-10
        - 2) They are to learn in silent submission. ....2:11
        - 3) They are not to teach or usurp authority. ....2:12-14
        - 4) They are to raise godly children. ....2:15
      - c. It is the responsibility of elders to care for the assembly. ....3:1-7
        - 1) They must desire this good work. ....3:1
        - 2) They must be qualified for this work. ....3:2-6
        - 3) They must be commendable to this work. ....3:7
      - d. It is the responsibility of deacons to serve in the assembly. ....3:8-13
    - 2. The importance of household conduct is delineated. ....3:14–4:16
      - a. Such household conduct upholds the truth of the mystery of godliness. ....3:14–4:5
        - 1) Proper conduct supports the truth. ....3:14-16
          - a) The assembly is the pillar and foundation of the truth. ....3:14-15
          - b) The truth is God manifest in the flesh. ....3:16
        - 2) Improper conduct conceals the truth. ....4:1-5
          - a) It is characterized by demonic lying. ....4:1-2
          - b) It promotes false asceticism. ....4:3-5
      - b. Such household conduct must be taught and modeled. ....4:6-16

1)	Timothy must instruct the assembly in the truth.....	4:6
2)	Timothy must exercise himself to godliness.....	4:7-10
3)	Timothy must dedicate himself to the ministry of the word.....	4:11-16
B.	Paul instructs on the proper conduct toward those in the household of God.....	5:1-6:2
1.	Young and old must be treated appropriately.....	5:1-2
2.	True widows must be supported financially.....	5:3-16
a.	She must have no supporting family.....	5:3
b.	She must be devoted to serving God not pleasure.....	5:4-7
c.	(Widows must be cared for by family).....	5:8
d.	She must meet character qualifications.....	5:9-10
e.	She must not be a young widow.....	5:11-15
f.	(Widows must be cared for by family).....	5:16
3.	Elders who rule well must be doubly supported.....	5:17-25
a.	The laborer in oversight and the word is worthy of support.....	5:17-18
b.	Their discipline must be handled carefully.....	5:19-25
4.	Masters must be treated with respect.....	6:1-2
IV.	Summary admonition: Godliness as opposed to gain is the right goal.....	6:3-19
A.	The proud disputer thinks of godliness as a means to material gain.....	6:3-5
1.	He does not consent to the wholesome words of Christ.....	6:3
2.	He wrangles over words for personal gain.....	6:4-5
B.	The contented person does know godliness as great gain.....	6:6-10
1.	He knows that material things are temporal.....	6:6-7
2.	He knows what it takes to be content.....	6:8
3.	He does not make wealth his pursuit.....	6:9-10
C.	The man of God gains what is a true and lasting life.....	6:11-16
1.	He will pursue righteousness.....	6:11
2.	He will overcome by faith and lay hold of eternal life.....	6:12a
3.	He will maintain his confession of Christ.....	6:12b-16
D.	The rich person must choose what type of wealth to pursue.....	6:17-19
V.	Concluding Charge: Timothy must guard the faith as a sacred trust.....	6:20-21

### Theme Statement

By adhering to and teaching sound doctrine, Timothy will serve the assembly in its role as a support of the truth and will gain for himself a superlative experience of life.

### Theme Development

In the dual roles of apostle and spiritual father, Paul writes to his long-time associate in the gospel, instructing and encouraging him to carry out his god-given ministry in the word on behalf of the church at Ephesus. Timothy has spent two years in Ephesus with Paul and is now responsible for guiding the church through the challenges presented by a certain brand of false doctrine.

#### I. Salutation: Paul emphasizes his apostleship in writing to Timothy, his true “son” in the faith (1:1-2).

Paul writes as an apostle to his son, a feature common to all three of the so-called “Pastoral” epistles. This is doubtless designed to encourage the individual recipient while at the same time bolstering his

credibility with the whole church.

## II. Preface: Paul charges Timothy with a ministry of correction and edification (1:3-20).

Paul begins immediately with the specific charge regarding false teachers, unlike most other letters in which Paul prefaces his instruction with thanksgiving and praise. Timothy and Paul's relationship does not require such cushioning.

### A. Timothy is to correct those teaching faulty doctrine (1:3-11).

Paul's first concern is to put a stop to the type of doctrine that arose from a typical Jewish practice of "fanciful, allegorical speculations on the law which can be found in rabbinic literature"<sup>3</sup> (1:3-4). This type of teaching always obscured the true goal of the ministry of the word which is "love from a pure heart, from a good conscience and from sincere faith." Torah now has the purpose of revealing sin as a prelude to reception of the gospel (1:8-11).

### B. Timothy is to consider Paul's life and ministry as a pattern for his own (1:12-20).

As an example of the rule of grace, Paul uses his own experience as an example of God's merciful provision of eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (1:12-17). Rabbinic speculation had not, nor could it have, produced such an experience. This is the pattern that Timothy should follow, and not those whose faith has been shipwrecked (1:18-20).

## III. Body: Paul instructs on proper behavior in the household of God (2:1-6:19).

Since such false doctrine will ultimately take root in the assembly, it is the life and conduct of the assembly that Paul now begins to address. This division does not become obvious until 3:15 where Paul says that his objective is to instruct in proper household conduct.

### A. Paul instructs on the proper conduct of those in the household of God (2:1-4:16).

Four broad, and yet significant, areas of responsibility are covered in Paul's instruction. First, men (males) are to pray in such a way that the church will be in the best position to fulfill its mandate of proclaiming Christ (2:1-7). Holiness and unity are requisites to the effectiveness of this ministry, and are the church's responsibility in every place it exists (2:8).

Likewise, the women of the assembly have requisites of behavior, beginning with such apparel as will foster prayer rather than distract it (2:9-10). With respect to verbal ministry, women are restricted from participating in the gathered assembly of the Lord's Supper due to the divine judicial restrictions enjoined as a result the creation and the fall (2:11-14). However, she can be delivered from such restriction through the raising of godly children who will then become assets to the assembly, verbally if they were boys (2:15).

---

<sup>3</sup> Zane C. Hodges, "1 Timothy," (unpublished class notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1973), 1.

Two specific groups are addressed as being of crucial importance to the health and proper functioning of any assembly, the elders and deacons. As a plurality of Spirit selected men (cf. Acts 20:28), elders must exemplify the highest spiritual and moral qualities as well as demonstrate their ability to rule. No area of major fault is allowed in one who would shepherd God's flock (3:1-7).

Official servants of the assembly must also meet certain qualifications, which seem to be appropriately representative of the truth of the incarnation, namely, that Jesus Christ came not to be served, but to serve (3:8-10).<sup>4</sup> Women are allowed to serve in this official capacity, since it is not a "church office" of leadership, but a practical ministry of care for the saints that is in view (3:11). Women have unique roles to play in such ministry. Male deacons who are married must have their homes in order (3:12). All those who serve well as "servers" have the confidence of knowing that they have become like Christ (3:13).

The importance of proper conduct in the assembly lies in the role that each church plays in supporting the truth of the mystery of godliness, the incarnation of Jesus Christ (3:14-16). All that he was, is, has done, and is doing in the world, is uniquely and powerfully declared when the church is functioning according to apostolic pattern. Any departure from such behavior, no matter how well intended, will do harm to the manifestation of the truth (4:1-5). Therefore, such household conduct, and the truth about Jesus Christ that it represents, must be taught and modeled by Timothy, who must strictly discipline himself to such an exercise (4:6-16).

#### B. Paul instructs on the proper conduct toward those in the household of God (5:1–6:19).

All believers play a part in the representation of the truth of the mystery of godliness. Therefore, all have responsibilities to the other members of the assembly, to treat them with the dignity, respect, and honor due the children of God. All members should be honored as beloved family (5:1-2). Widows should be taken care of by the assembly if they have no families and are not young enough to remarry (5:3-16). Elders are worthy of financial support for their labor in spiritual oversight and the word (5:17-18). If they must be disciplined it should be with utmost caution, but without partiality when warranted (5:19-25). Servants should honor the great Servant by honoring their masters (6:1-2). These responsibilities, if consistently carried out, will positively adorn the person of Christ.

#### IV. Summary admonition: Godliness as opposed to gain is the right goal (6:3-19).

In this final section Paul returns to a discussion of the heterodox teachers. Their motives are exposed and appropriate warnings delivered.

---

<sup>4</sup> This understands "mystery of the faith" as referring to the "mystery of godliness" in 3:16, which clearly relates to the incarnation.

A. The proud disputer thinks of godliness as a means to material gain (6:3-5).

Though given to great displays of argument the false teachers are in reality driven by their own prideful greed. They are destitute of the truth and must be avoided.

B. The contented person does know godliness as great gain (6:6-10).

On the other hand, there is a true godliness to be pursued, one that displays a contentment with respect to material things. The love of money does not control them.

C. The man of God gains what is a true and lasting life (6:11-16).

When spiritual qualities are pursued, and the struggle of faith is accepted, the believer lays hold of that experience of life which is unfading and ultimately unailing. One thing that may forfeit such an experience is failing to maintain an open confession of Jesus Christ. Timothy has confessed in this way and is being challenged to hold fast to that confession in light of the magnificence of the Person who is its object (6:15-16).

D. The rich person must choose what type of wealth to pursue (6:17-19).

Riches are another threat to the pursuit of a superlative life experience. Trust in wealth competes with faith in God and leads necessarily to impoverishment with respect to good works. It is only the latter that can be stored up with eternal value.

V. Concluding Charge: Timothy must guard the faith as a sacred trust (6:20-21).

Paul's final warning to his son in the faith is to guard what has been entrusted to him by avoiding the vain kinds of verbal ministry that ultimately destroys faith. Grace is the only way to keep such a charge.

#### SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Guthrie, Donald. *The Pastoral Epistles*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series. London: Tyndale Press, 1964.
- Kelly, J. N. D. *The Pastoral Epistles: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*. Black's New Testament Commentaries. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963.
- Litfin, A. Duane. "1 Timothy." In *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: Scripture Press Publications, Victor Books, 1983.