

1 Timothy

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Introduction

The epistles to Timothy and Titus are generally called the “Pastoral Epistles” and they are the only epistles in the New Testament addressed to individuals with pastoral authority. Philemon is addressed to an individual but he did not have pastoral duties. Although the early church accepted that the letters were written by Paul, some opposition to this began in the early twentieth century. However the majority opinion remains that Paul was the author as stated in the letters although he most certainly used a trusted amanuensis, which would account for some style and vocabulary differences between this text and other writings of Paul.

The place from which Paul wrote the letter is unknown. Some interpreters take the verse, *1Tim 1:3 As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines*, to infer that Paul left Timothy at Ephesus when he went to Macedonia and then wrote to Timothy from there. The date of the writing is also not known with certainty. Paul was supposedly martyred under Nero who died in 68. Most scholars think Paul was imprisoned in Rome in 59-61 and released sometime in 62 and executed between 64 and 67. It seems then that this letter was written in the middle 60’s. This is a very personal letter and the apostle was known to be very fond of Timothy, *1Cor 4:17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church*. The New Testament has surprisingly little to say about the ministry of the church so this letter is very important as it primarily concerns such activity. Bishops and elders are mentioned but it is generally agreed that these offices are the same as explicitly stated in Titus 1:5-7. The explicit duties of elders are not mentioned as Paul is primarily concerned about the character of the people in these offices rather than in their ecclesiastical duties. Unfortunately the church has often reversed this order of importance.

In this letter, Paul addresses six concerns:

1. The doctrine and maintaining it pure against false teachings.
2. The public worship of the church.
3. The pastorate of the church.
4. The local leadership of the church.
5. The social responsibilities of the church.
6. The attitude of the church toward material possessions.

Chapter One

1Tim 1:1-2 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope; ²to Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul begins by identifying himself as the writer and Timothy as the primary recipient of the letter. In nine of the thirteen letters written by Paul he states that he is an apostle of Christ Jesus. He also usually adds, as he does here, that occupying this office was at the command of God the Father and of God the Son. There was no intermediate such as a local church involved in this appointment. He thus puts himself on a par with the other apostles. Stating the involvement of God our Savior places his authority as an apostle in historical perspective meaning at the death and resurrection of Jesus. He then states that his appointment also involves the only hope that people have concerning life eternal with God, namely Christ Jesus. That hope will be realized at the second coming of Christ Jesus when history ends. Thus Paul is expressing the concept that a new era began with the resurrection of Jesus and such will end at His coming again. During that time Jesus rules from heaven,

Rom 8:34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Heb 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

1Peter 3:22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

Jesus has thus been ruling for about 2000 years and it is this time period that I interpret as the millennium although the actual word does not appear in the Bible. The word “thousand” does appear in the Bible but it is not taken literally.

Next he introduces Timothy as the original recipient of the letter. Since his name is Greek, Jewish law would have regarded him as illegitimate. To then establish Timothy’s authority in the church Paul needed to record that Timothy was born again as a child of God by the action of God. Paul can state this emphatically because he was involved in Timothy’s conversion and Paul knew firsthand of Timothy’s faithfulness in obedience to the gospel. We know more about Timothy from the writing of Luke:

Acts 16:1-3 And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, ²and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. ³Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

We see that Timothy's mother was a believer in Jesus Christ and that he was well thought of by fellow Christians in the area. Since it was well known that Timothy's father was a Greek, Paul circumcised him so that he could be an effective witness to the Jews. He ends the introduction by stating the three important aspects of anyone's rebirth into God's family. **Grace** is God's kindness in forgiving guilty and undeserving people. God's **mercy** is shown in His pity on those who cannot redeem themselves and **peace with God** is what people have forever both with God and with His people because of God's grace and mercy. He brackets both God the Father and God the Son as the single source of this rich blessing. Such blessings are only possible for those for whom Christ Jesus is their Lord.

1Tim 1:3-7 As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, ⁴nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. ⁵But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, ⁷wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.

In chapter one Paul refers to three types of people:

1. The false teachers and their misguided use of the law (3-11).
2. Himself as formally a persecutor of Christ but now as His apostle (12-17).
3. Timothy and urges him to fight for the truth (18-20).

Since this historical setting cannot fit within the chronicles of the church as stated in Acts, it is assumed that Paul was released after serving two years in house arrest in Rome, Luke then left Paul (Acts 28:30-31), and Paul resumed his travels. Paul tells Timothy to remain in Ephesus to teach the church proper doctrine. Paul writes considerably about the need for Timothy to confront people who were teaching false doctrines and such a need is prevalent today also. One of the main tenets of postmodernism is pluralism, which posits the independent validity of every religion. Every religion is stated to be culturally conditioned so that the "truth" of every religion is valid even if there is conflict among the various doctrines of the religions. In essence there is no actual truth but every "truth" is valid for the individual even if such conflicts with the "truths" of other people. You may have your truth and I may have my truth even if they are in contradiction. The highest virtue is a tolerance that accepts that truth is relative to the worldview of each individual. The only allowed intolerance is an attitude toward those who assume that there are absolute guidelines for good and evil. Thus some acts may be viewed by one culture as evil even if another culture views them as good. According to this widespread philosophy there is then no such concept as absolute truth. No follower of Christ Jesus can adopt such a

philosophy for He said that He was the truth, He came to bear witness to the truth, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and the truth will set us free (John 14:6; 18:37; 16:13; 8:32).

Paul warned Timothy of those who were teaching strange doctrines. The Greek word translated “strange” can mean different and, in context, he means some teachings that were different from the true gospel message. Paul also similarly warned the Galatian and the Corinthian churches:

Gal 1:6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;

2Cor 11:4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.

The world hates true Christian doctrine for it excludes all other religious teachings. There is an important world leader who says that he has chosen Christianity because he likes the teachings of Jesus Christ better than any other teachings. He does not say that the teachings of Jesus are the only true teachings and I doubt that he has deeply studied those teachings to discern His truth. One cannot say that Jesus was a great teacher just based upon those teachings that the person likes. Jesus said that He and the Father are one and that there is only one way to the Father, nobody can know the Father except through Jesus, and that only those whom the Father draws to Jesus will come to Him:

John 10:30 "I and the Father are one."

Matt 11:27 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.

John 6:44 "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

If anyone truly studies the teachings of the Biblical Jesus he has to come to the conclusion that Jesus was either insane, deluded, or the Son of God as He said that He was. It seems that this worldly leader has read some of what Jesus taught and liked it but he thinks that all religions lead to the same god and so all of the truths of all religions are true to those who follow those religions even though there are obvious contradictions. If someone studies those religions enough to see the contradictions, he could just think that nobody has all details perfectly understood and such problems will be better understood later. Such a person could be a “cultural Christian” without faith to see the truth of Jesus Christ and just accepting that truth according to human understanding is relative to the worldview of each person. With such a post-modern attitude this leader can think that there can be peace between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity without any basic changes in their “truths”. But Christianity teaches the truth and any teaching that is contrary to those teachings is wrong.

Paul also urges Timothy to not “pay attention to myths and endless genealogies”. Referring to myths means legends or fables that he will later consider:

1Tim 4:7a But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women.

Titus 1:14 not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.

2Tim 4:4 and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

“Genealogies” refers to the pedigree of the patriarchs of Genesis and probably means that the false teachers were saying that they are “royal Jews” and were using such to justify their teachings which may have been used to try to add Jewish customs such as circumcision to Christianity. The verse in Titus above certainly states that these false teachers were practicing synchronism (the blending of concepts from different religions, such as Judaism and Christianity). All such teaching gives rise to speculations rather than to mining the truths of the gospel from the teachings of the apostles. Today also people are prone to speculate on matters such as the date of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Such speculations also cause controversies that contribute nothing to the stewardship of the gospel message, which is obtained by faith given by God to His people.

The goals of the apostolic message are

1. Love from a pure heart.
2. A good conscience.
3. A sincere faith.

The truth should lead to love of each other because Christians love Jesus. The only pure heart is one that has been given by God as a new heart:

Ezekiel 11:19 "And I shall give them one heart, and shall put a new spirit within them. And I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,

Except for sociopaths, everyone has a conscience. But a good conscience must be developed based upon the goodness of God and not the perceived goodness of the world. The Biblical concept of faith is that it is a gift of God that then allows us to believe the unbelievable truths about Him, to trust Him totally, and to obey Him. The world uses the word “faith” but meaning only “believe” and that is not Biblical. Every time a worldly person uses “faith” it only means with confidence based upon experience such as having faith to take a plane trip or to sit in a chair.

Some people in the church at Ephesus had turned aside from the pure teaching of the apostles and taught their own versions of the truth. These discussions have no fruit for they do not promote love and do not glorify God or build up the church. Their teachings actually promote controversies and disunity in the church. It is terrible to not understand what you are saying! These people either did not fully understand their message or what they were confidently saying. People can be sincere and be wrong! Since Paul states that they want to teach the law it

does seem that they were trying to add keeping the law and Jewish traditions to Christianity. Telling others what they must do in addition to the gospel certainly reveals that these “teachers” did not understand what they were advocating for salvation is only by God’s act of grace:

Eph 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, that no one should boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

1Tim 1:8-11 But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers ¹⁰and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, ¹¹according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.

Paul wants Timothy to understand that the problem with the people teaching the law was not that the law was bad but that it must be used lawfully. He then makes the point that the law serves no salvation effect with sinful man as he then clearly makes the point of one use of the law for mankind. Luther and Calvin made similar points concerning the law. Calvin stated that there were three uses for the law:

1. It clarifies mankind’s relationship to Holy God and the fact that nobody can keep the law and thus be acceptable to God. It then drives people to their knees before God to seek His mercy. It is thus punitive.
2. It restrains evil to some extent and thus protects the world from unharnessed evil. It is a deterrent.
3. It serves as a guide to Christians as it teaches us some of the character of God that should be reflected in the life of every Christian. Calvin called this the principal use of the law. It is educative.

Luther somewhat neglected this last purpose of the law as he emphasized the first two but in reverse order to that of Calvin. Luther then saw the principle use of the law “for the restraint of the uncivilized”¹. In the context of these three uses of the law, Paul is then referring to the second use of the law although it can imply the other uses as well. When he states that the law is not for the righteous he means those who have been made righteous before Holy God through double imputation². He is then saying that nothing can be added to that work of God to make us righteous before Him. But the law does serve the second purpose as it is for those he describes in the remainder of the verses:

¹ Luther’s Works 26, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Concordia, 1963), pp. 274-275, cf. pp. 308-310.

² 2 Cor 5:21.

1. Lawless and rebellious. People with no regard for the civil authorities or others in authority such as parents.
2. Ungodly and sinners. The ungodly believe in no god or other authority. A sinner is someone who sins habitually with no repentance.
3. Unholy and profane. These people are totally devoid of any piety and reverence.
4. Killers of mother and father. Maybe referring to Ex 21:15.
5. Murderers (sixth commandment).
6. Immoral men. This refers to adultery, the breaking of the seventh commandment.
7. Homosexuals. The Greek interpreted here only appears here and in 1 Cor 6:9. It refers to Lev 18:22; 20:13.
8. Kidnappers. Some translate this as slave traders and is the most heinous kind of stealing.
9. Liars (ninth commandment).
10. Perjurers (ninth commandment).
11. Whatever else is contrary to sound teaching. This can include the tenth commandment concerning coveting, which is not included in the list. It actually includes anything that is contrary to the gospel.

The law is thus ineffective to achieve salvation from the wrath of God³ so we are not “under it” in that sense⁴. But the law still has the purpose number three above for those who are justified. Verse 11 completes the sentence of verse eight: *But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.* The law condemns but the gospel justifies and Paul clearly states that he has been entrusted with the gospel to bring its message to those needing it.

1Tim 1:12-14 *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service;¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief;¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.*

Paul now makes a very personal statement about his past and the mercy God showed him even though he was a direct enemy of Jesus. He gives three related blessings toward him:

1. He states that Jesus gave him the strength to do his assignment for without such he could not be successful.
2. He was not saved and given his service because God saw that he was inherently trustworthy and faithful but because Paul was given faith and the strength to be faithful.

³ Rom 8:3; John 3:36.

⁴ Rom 6:15; 7:6; 8:1-2.

3. The Greek word for service, diakonia, is a generic word but in context Paul is referring to his service as an apostle of Christ Jesus.

Paul then reminds Timothy of what he had been. He describes his past, how he received mercy, and why God showed him mercy. His blasphemy was his speaking evil of Jesus Christ and also as he tried to force his disciples to blaspheme⁵. His words could be considered blasphemy, his actions against the church showed persecution and his thoughts revealed his violent intentions against the church. He was thus a violent man in his actions against the church. He then describes how he was shown mercy for there was no hope for a person with such open hostility toward the church and Jesus Christ. He persecuted the church intently and tried to destroy it⁶ but he did not know that he was persecuting Christ⁷. His actions were in ignorance as he thought that he was serving God to the best of his abilities⁸.

To this mercy he also adds grace for such is needed to heal the accusations of people and the devil's disciples: *2Cor 12:7 And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me-- to keep me from exalting myself!* Many people have falsely interpreted this "thorn in the flesh" but since it is from a messenger of Satan it undoubtedly is the accusations from Satan reminding him of his past hostility toward Jesus as he tries to reduce the effectiveness of Paul. Also Paul reveals that God gave him grace to face this situation: *2Cor 12:9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.*

1Tim 1:15-17 *It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. ¹⁶And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. ¹⁷Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

The law condemns sinners but the gospel of Jesus Christ gives them salvation. Paul writes that such is trustworthy and deserves the full acceptance of anyone reading his letter. Jesus also spoke of this reason of His coming into the world:
Luke 19:10 "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

⁵ Acts 26:9, 11.

⁶ Gal 1:13.

⁷ Acts 9:4.

⁸ Acts 23:1.

John 3:15-16 that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. ¹⁶"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

John 12:46 "I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness.

What does Paul mean when he states that he **is** foremost of all sinners? Some have used this to preach that Christians are still sinners but that cannot be true for Paul has already condemned such in verse 9 when he says that the law is for the ungodly and sinners. Proper hermeneutics and definitions must be used to interpret any scripture verse. I just used context in comparing verse 15 with verse 9. A sinner is defined as someone who habitually sins with no repentance. Certainly Christians still sin and the third use of the law is for that problem with the remaining sin nature. But if someone is a sinner the wrath of God still abides on him. A person cannot simultaneously be a saint and a sinner. So what does Paul mean by using the present tense in verse 15 to describe himself? Certainly he does not mean this description in a scientific, literal sense for he has not compared himself to every person in the world who has committed sin. When anyone is convicted by the Holy Spirit that he is a sinner in need of the mercy of God for salvation, he immediately gives up any comparison with anyone else in the world who has sinned. That awareness of our sinful state before Holy God causes us to realize that any sin before God is unforgiveable apart from the mercy of God so that we can only think of ourselves as being totally sinful. This awareness of what we **were** before God applied His mercy to grant us forgiveness remains with us for the remainder of our life so that we can still say that we **are** foremost of all sinners **toward whom God showed mercy**. So Paul is stating that of all the sinners toward whom God shows mercy he ranks himself at the top of the list. He minimizes himself again in *Eph 3:8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ*, but he does say that he **is a saint**. This awareness causes us to give total glory to God and so no boasting of our good works is possible. But to think of ourselves as **still** sinners is to take away the credit due to God for what He did in granting us forgiveness and purity before Him. So Christians are saints and not sinners to the glory of God. We still sin and are involved in progressive sanctification under the direction of the Holy Spirit but, praise the Lord, we are saints and are free of any condemnation from God (Rom 8:1).

So why was Paul shown mercy? The only answer is because God is merciful although He does not show such mercy to everyone. Paul mentions two reasons for God showing him mercy. **One** is because of his past ignorance (1 Tim 1:13). He is not saying that such unbelief required God to show him mercy for if God were required to show mercy due to any reason it would not be mercy. But if his opposition to the church had been premeditated based upon knowledge of the Son of God then his actions would have been blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and thus unforgivable: *Matt 12:31 "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men,*

but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. The Old Testament similarly differentiates between sins done openly and defiantly and those done unintentionally⁹. But if one sins in ignorance, he must still repent of those sins when they are revealed to him:

Acts 3:17-19 "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. ¹⁸"But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. ¹⁹"Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;

The **second** reason is because this mercy would serve as an example to others for as long as the world exists before the Second Coming of our Lord. The salvation of Paul remains one of the strongest demonstrations of divine grace as a witness to everyone as he states in verse 16. The conversion of Paul still stands to offer hope to even seemingly hopeless cases. Paul seems to still be saying "Don't despair that you cannot be saved. If God had mercy on me, the chief sinner, he can have mercy on you." Every person who has been the recipient of such mercy and grace should have the same outlook on life and pray for the salvation of even someone who has lived a life of sinful debauchery.

In recognition of the extreme mercy and grace God showered on him, Paul gives a spontaneous doxology to God as King, the sovereign ruler of everything visible and invisible. He then gives four characteristics of Him:

1. He is eternal beyond all dimensions of time.
2. He is immortal so is beyond decay and death.
3. He is invisible so all that can be observed by humans in their pre-glorified body is His glory that is displayed in creation¹⁰ and in the Son¹¹.
4. He is the only God. Especially today, many people say that all religions lead to the same god but there is only one God and He is the One revealed by Jesus Christ.

1Tim 1:18-20 This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, ¹⁹keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. ²⁰Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.

⁹ Num 15:22-31.

¹⁰ Rom 1:20.

¹¹ Col 1:15.

Paul now commands Timothy to fight the good fight and to keep faith and a good conscience. We are not told the details of the prophecies but they probably concern his ordination that will be addressed in chapter four. It was Timothy's ordination that set him apart for his ministry and gave him the worldly authority to exercise it. The good fight is probably to defend the true gospel message and to defend it against those who distort it as Paul mentioned earlier in verses 3-7. Faith is the gift of God that must be exercised to maintain a good conscience that is based upon the Word of God. Real faith is a gift of God:

Rom 12:3 For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Such a gift can never be lost but people can be self-deceived to think that they believe some aspect of God and thus think that they have a God-given faith. Those whom God has given faith will continually exercise it to build their conscience accordingly. Paul is thus urging Timothy to use his faith to develop his conscience that will guide him in his entire ministry. Without real faith a person can be deceived to maintain un-confessed sin and their false faith will not survive. They can then become like the two men mentioned here by Paul and also Demas in 2 Tim 4:10. When he writes that he has delivered them to Satan he is undoubtedly referring to the act of excommunication. To be taken away from the church and sent into the world is to be sent into Satan's domain. Paul uses similar language in dealing with incest in the Corinthian church¹² and then explained his meaning¹³. The purpose of such drastic action is to be taught not to blaspheme as he states in verse 20. If they then repent they can be brought back into the church.

¹² 1 Cor 5:5.

¹³ 1 Cor 5:13.