



It is one of the most unfortunate truths of the church that an unexpected many of its people feel unequipped for and intimidated by God's Word. Truth be told, they don't know where to start, how to make it through, exactly what they are supposed to get from their time in it and how to decipher useful application from it, say... for a normal Wednesday afternoon at the office or with the kids. What is worse, when it comes to the Bible almost all of us suffer under the monstrous cloud of guilt and fear that has steadily but quietly grown over our years in the church. We know we should spend time in it...but we sadly don't. We know it should have major impact on our lives...but we can't manage it. It seems too far above us, too far out in front of us, too scary of a subject to wander into.

Let's be honest about it.

This truth is much less scary, actually. In fact, the Bible is a wonderful contradiction in many ways. It has the untold depth which occupies brilliant minds for a lifetime and yet can be easily navigated by a grade-schooler. More ink has been spilled writing about the Bible than on any single piece of literature and yet its inherent beauty lies in even its most relaxed reading.

Picture a river wandering through a plain. Both wide and narrow, serpentine and straight, it brings life to the plain in myriad ways. The river is at times shallow enough for babies to enjoy without worry, yet at others it demands sobering respect with the loud cry of white waves, rapid descents and untold depths. So it is with God's inspired Word. For both the infant and experienced adventurer, it brings life in its own way, ever guided by the gentle, benevolent, unintimidating hand of God.

It is with this joy and adventure that we approach God's Word together. Come with us as we wade into the marvelous first letter from Paul to Timothy. The following pages are intended to be a helpful guide and encouraging partner for your journey.

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOL KIT:

One simple rule: Skip over what you don't need and get to what you do need. Come back for other stuff later or file it away for never. It's a tool. Use it where you need it.

## CONTENTS OF THE TOOL KIT:

- ❖ Background and Introduction to First Timothy
- ❖ Authorship and Date of First Timothy
- ❖ Purpose and Occasion of First Timothy
- ❖ The Person of Timothy
- ❖ The Big Idea of the Letter
- ❖ Hints for Reading Paul's Letters
- ❖ Outline of First Timothy
- ❖ Small Group Questions

## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The first and most obvious characteristic of this letter is that it was written to an individual. Although this is true, it must also be noted that Paul obviously desired and intended the letter to have a wider reading in the representative churches. This can be seen in the closing words of each letter, as "you" appears in the plural form. The point remains that First Timothy was written primarily to one person, which is dissimilar than most of Paul's letters which were written to aggregate church families. This fact also puts First Timothy in close relationship to both 2 Timothy and Titus, together referred to as the Pastoral Epistles because Timothy and Titus are instructed and encouraged as pastor/leaders. This designation is relatively new, and can be traced to no earlier than the eighteenth century. Only Philemon remains as a letter of Paul written to an individual, but in this case, not a pastor/leader.

Apart from the audience, the similar content and context of these three letters (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus) bind them together as a special collection. To quote the commentator Kümmel, all three Pastoral Epistles "presuppose the same false teachers, the same organization, and entirely similar conditions in the community. They move within the same relative theological concepts and have the same peculiarities of language and style." (*Introduction*, 367). They are cut from the same cloth. It would not take a long reading of these three letters to see this glaring similarity.



The grand Ephesian Celsus Library in Ephesus was built in 117 A.D. It housed the tomb of Gaius Julius Celsus Polemaeanus, the governor of the province of Asia



Roman-style Ephesian Theatre with main Arcadian Way thoroughfare in the background. Seating capacity in this theatre was 25,000.

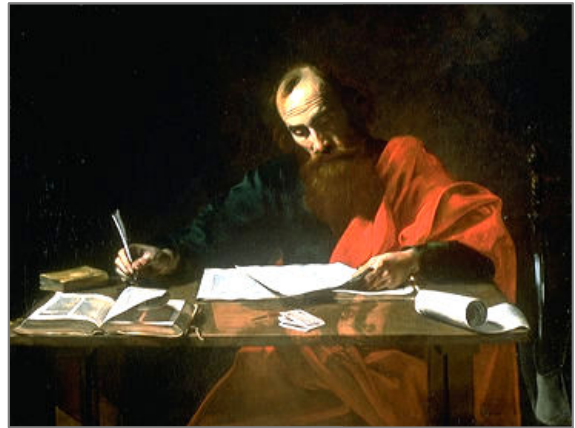
## AUTHORSHIP AND DATE OF FIRST TIMOTHY

The salutation of the letter clearly identifies Paul as the author. All three of these Pastoral Epistles were known and regarded both as Pauline and inspired (canonical) in the early church. Church fathers and early writings referencing these epistles attribute them to Paul, almost without exception. In fact, there were no serious arguments doubting Pauline authorship until nineteenth century German scholasticism. Even these are based largely on reconstruction and conjecture and have not been accepted by more conservative scholarship. It seems extremely unlikely, based on all the evidence, that Paul did not write the Pastoral Epistles, including First Timothy.

Evidence from within the letter seems to intimate that Paul was enjoying freedom to travel and minister to multiple churches. As Timothy was either first separated from Paul or read this letter for the first time, Paul was on his way to Macedonia (1:3). This brings us to another hotly debated topic regarding both date and authorship. If Paul did in fact write these letters, when did he do it? Does the account in Acts speak to this timeline or does Paul write these letters after the events recorded in Acts, that is post-Acts 28. Although there seems to be little corroboration between the historical details in the Pastoral Epistles (i.e. a visit to Crete, wintering in Nicopolis, etc.), there is in fact nothing in Acts that explicitly contradicts the possibility of such corroboration. There is much left out of the account in Acts, as even a quick reading will show.

Furthermore, Acts 28 ends not with a foreboding shadow of death and martyrdom but with a relatively positive outlook on Paul's future. Luke records that Paul "*stayed for two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him...*" (Acts 28:30). Notice "*stayed*" is in the completed aorist tense. Luke also notes "*two years,*" a specific period of time, which alludes to an ending to this house arrest. Although it is beyond the account of Acts, Paul was very likely released from this Roman imprisonment and enjoyed several years of further travel and freedom (perhaps even to Spain, Romans 15:24) before he was imprisoned a second time and martyred under Nero (died in AD 68). And though the writing is not of the same class as Holy Scripture, the early church account of *1 Clement* (written about AD 96) records just this scenario. This period of time seems to be the best historical period to see Paul's authorship of the three Pastoral Epistles.

The personal letters 1 Timothy, Titus and 2 Timothy, if written in that order, seem best to span the time in between Paul's first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:11ff; 2 Tim 16-17; perhaps AD 59-60 for two years) and into his second imprisonment (perhaps AD 65-66), which led to his martyrdom. If Paul was killed around AD 68, as it is usually dated, this puts the likely writing date of First Timothy in the early to mid 60's AD.



epistles.  
oulogne, c. 1600

## PURPOSE AND OCCASION OF FIRST TIMOTHY

Churches everywhere, given enough time, generally fall into trouble. These troubles vary widely but generally speaking fall into two wide categories: doctrinal and conduct. These two issues are significantly related as we tend to live like we think, and behave like we believe. The church atmosphere of Ephesus into which Paul is writing seems to be struggling with exactly these things: false teaching and false living.

### ***False Teaching***

Although we do have some mirror-reading detail, Paul does not seem interested in describing the false teaching. After all, the Ephesian church knew it well. They did not need a description. However, we do understand this argumentative teaching to incorporate myths (1:4), genealogies (1:4), fruitless discussions concerning the Law (1:6-7), a morbid love of controversy (6:4) and arguments related to an understanding of “knowledge” (6:20). The background for this teaching cannot be understood apart from the cultic and religious background of Ephesus, Asia Minor and the larger Roman Empire. Ephesians lived as part of a very specific social, political and religious culture. This fact influenced everything they did and, most importantly for First Timothy, the specific flavor of unbiblical and unchristian teachings that plagued the church.

### ***False Living***

The false teaching manifested itself in false living (3:14-15), immorality and impurity, especially related to leadership and conduct within the church family. We see that some specific difficulties included lack of faith (1:19), forsaken conscience (1:19), blasphemy (1:20), immodesty and materialism (2:9ff), a love of money (3:3; 6:10, 17ff), false asceticism (4:2-5), false accusation of elders (5:1, 5:19), abuse and neglect of widows (5:3ff), habitual and open sin (5:20, 24) and some semblance of partiality and favoritism (5:21-22). If we are honest, these vices are a perennial stain for the body of Christ in every place, in every age.

Because the occasion of First Timothy revolves around these two reasons – false teaching and false living – the encouragement and guidance contained within it are still very relevant for us today. In our own way, the 21<sup>st</sup> century church still struggles with false teaching and false living. Our enemy is alive and well and is still very active in his bid to steal, kill and destroy. It would seem that these two areas are some of his favorite targets for the body of Christ.

## THE PERSON OF TIMOTHY

We first meet the young Timothy in Acts 16. As we piece the many bits of information on Timothy together, there emerges a relatively high-definition portrait of this exceptional man. He is from the small city of Lystra, and seems to already be a believer and “disciple” when Paul arrives based on a strong upbringing in the faith (2 Timothy 3:14-17). He is the son of a Jewish mother named Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5; believing grandmother named Lois) and a Greek father, perhaps not a believer based on the tone of the text (contrastive “but” as an introduction to the phrase either refers to Jew



Byzantine style art of Paul and Timothy. Notice the age impression of Timothy and the gift of a book.

vs. Greek or believer vs. implied nonbeliever).

Timothy also earned and enjoyed a great reputation among the church in the area of his hometown (Acts 16:2), so much so, in fact, that Paul desired to take him as a companion on his mission. From this point on he is a faithful and constant cohort to Paul in various cities and contexts (Acts 16-20; Romans 16:21; 1 Corinthians 4:17ff; 2 Corinthians 1:1, 19ff; Philippians 2:9ff; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:2ff; and possibly even Hebrews 13:23). This close relationship is perhaps best seen in Paul's descriptions of Timothy as "*my true child in the faith*" (1 Timothy 1:2) and "*my beloved son*" (2 Timothy 1:2). It may be that there was no one closer to the apostle Paul than the young Timothy.

## THE BIG IDEA OF THE LETTER

As mentioned above, the church at Ephesus had some big problems. Paul placed the mantle of leadership and authority on the young Timothy and directed him to be a courageous and wise shepherd for the Ephesian church. The main passage of the letter seems to begin in 4:6 and run through the end of that chapter. Here we see Paul's encouragement to the person of Timothy and his guidance for the Ephesian church come together. It is this text that forms the most personal and heart-felt touch in the entire letter. The big idea of the letter falls to two audiences. To Timothy: Lead, teach, shepherd and suffer well. To the Ephesian church: Renounce false teachings and immoral living. These two big ideas can be seen in every passage in the letter.



Byzantine icon of the Apostle Paul

## HINTS FOR READING PAUL'S LETTERS

Life in the West in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century holds an invisible sway on all of us. We are all held captive by our time, culture and heritage although many of us are unaware. Whether beneficial or harmful, our cultural baggage colors our reading of literature and art that is outside of this same culture. When it comes to written literature in the Roman Empire of the Christian Ancient Near Eastern culture, then there are many things we will not easily understand. To help us manage this surmountable obstacle, consider the following hints when you read Paul's amazing letters in the New Testament.

Do your best to read Paul's letters as:

- **Personal correspondence**—Each letter was written in a personal way, whether intended for an individual like the Pastoral Epistles and Philemon or whole church families. None of Paul's letters were written to a faceless and nameless crowd located in a non-specific place. Everything was and is personal.

- **Ancient documents**—It was written in a different time period, in a different culture and in a different language, all ancient. We therefore must work hard to overcome figures of speech, references and customs that are alien to us.

- **Occasional documents**—It was written for a specific purpose, responding to a specific need or addressing a specific issue. This is a very important fact. To understand each letter's occasion is vital.

• **Written documents**—Duh. But we must remember that these letters were physical material documents, created to be read, reread and studied. They were created with care, accuracy and in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God.

• **Oral documents**—Many of Paul’s letters, if not all of them, were intended to be *heard*. Hearing is very different than reading and it may be worth your while to *listen* to it as well.

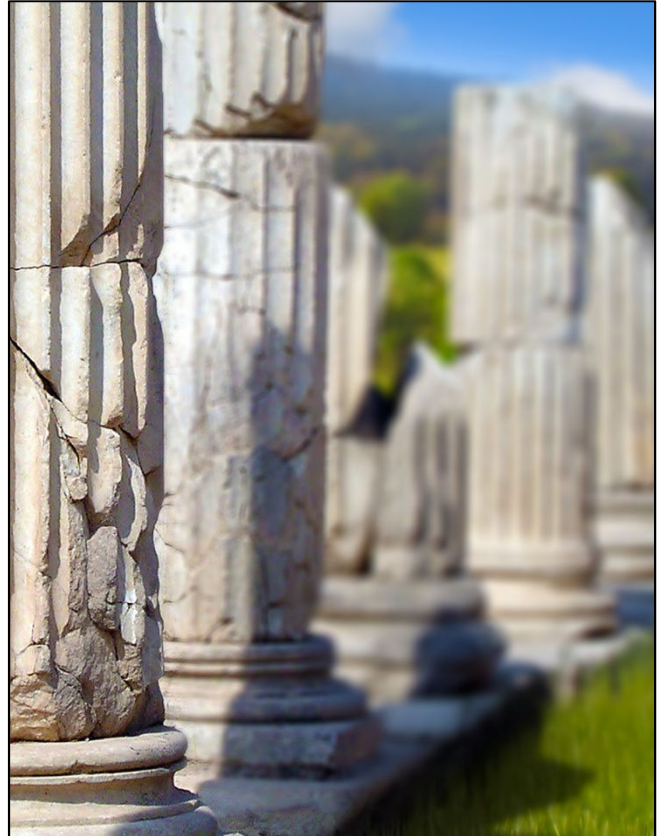
• **Mirrored texts**—This means that the letter mirrors the original situation and setting. The language of the letter reveals important clues about purpose.

• **Interactive documents**—Paul is very often interacting, even quoting his audience, as a way of making his argument. The Corinthian letters are the best examples of this feature of Paul.

• **Logical documents**—Paul writes with a logical argument which always demands change, transformation and application. It is very important to track the logical argument in each letter.

• **God’s Word for you**—even though the letter is all of the above, it is a living and active Word for you, now, in your situation. It is ancient and occasional but still relevant; personal but also just for you; mirrored and interactive yet still perfectly suited to your life by the Holy Spirit.

Although it is difficult to keep all of these in mind each time you read, occasional reminders of these important ideas will serve you well.



## OTHER RESOURCES

If you are interested in more study on this subject or others, I would highly recommend two websites for students of all levels. Dr. Tom Constable from Dallas Seminary has a tremendous website that contains FREE PDF documents of his stellar (and regularly updated!) study notes on every book of the Bible. Dr. Constable writes and thinks from a free-grace perspective and his notes are extremely helpful. You can gain access to all of them on the *Study Notes* tab at his website: [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com)

The [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org) website also has hundreds of articles and topic discussions easily searchable by biblical book or topic. As with any reference and especially any website, read critically.

## OUTLINE OF FIRST TIMOTHY

- 1:1-2 – Salutation
- 1:3-20 – Paul’s command to Timothy
  - 1:3-7 – Charge to Timothy related to False Teachers
  - 1:8-11 – The Law
  - 1:12-17 – Paul’s Example
  - 1:18-20 – Charge to Timothy repeated
- 2:1-15 – Prayer for all and Conduct of Women
  - 2:1-8 – Prayer
  - 2:9-15 – Instructions for Women
    - 2:9-10 – Adornment and Good Works
    - 2:11-15 – Teaching and Ruling
- 3:1-16 – Elders and Deacons
  - 3:1-7 – Elders
  - 3:8-13 – Deacons
  - 3:14-16 – Basis for Instructions
- 4:1-16 – Apostasy and Discipline
  - 4:1-5 – Apostasy and False Asceticism
  - 4:6-16 – Discipline for the Minister**
    - 4:6-10 – Teach and Train**
    - 6:11-16 – Example of Conduct**
- 5:1-6:2 – Duties toward Others
  - 5:1-2 – Exhortation of Others
  - 5:3-16 – Widows
  - 5:17-25 – Related to Elders
  - 6:1-2 – Related to Slaves
- 6:3-10 – Final Warnings
  - 6:3-5 – False Teachers
  - 6:6-8 – Godliness with Contentment
  - 6:9-10 – Love of Money
- 6:11-16 – Final Exhortation to Timothy
- 6:17-19 – Instructions for the Rich
- 6:20-21 – Final Charge to Timothy



## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The discussion questions below presuppose that as a group you would have spent some time on each passage either individually or collectively. The questions will not explicitly lead you through the steps of methodical bible study methods: observation, interpretation, correlation and application. These steps are an essential first step in any study of the Biblical text. If you are a small group leader, encourage your group to work hard on these steps on their own. Otherwise, work the steps as a group when you meet. Come to the discussion questions at the end. For some great helps on basic bible study methods see *Living By The Book* by Howard Hendricks, *Methodical Bible Study* by Traina or *Basic Bible Interpretation* by Roy Zuck. Any of these will be worth your time and money.

The **individual passage questions** below are kept intentionally small for manageable small group discussion. Hopefully they spur on other related questions from the group. They also follow the sermon pericope outline for alignment if you so choose (this is one of my favorite silly words, *pericope* (purr-i-co-pee), it refers to a section of writing, like a paragraph or group of paragraphs).

The following “**starter**” questions can be asked for each pericope to prime the discussion. Amend these with the specific questions for each section below.

- ❖ How have you experienced God’s presence or His working in your life this week?
- ❖ Did you spend some time this week in First Timothy?
- ❖ How does this specific text fit into the theme and purpose of First Timothy?
- ❖ What about this specific text particularly impacted you?
- ❖ What about this specific text did you not understand?

The following “**finishing**” questions can be asked at the end of each study.

- ❖ How am I going to apply what I’ve learned in my everyday life?
- ❖ What convictions have I noticed in my study of this specific text?
- ❖ What commands are there for me to obey?
- ❖ What encouragement appears in this text that can comfort me in times of trouble?

## INDIVIDUAL PASSAGE QUESTIONS

### 1 Timothy 1:1-2

How is Christ Jesus “our hope”? How is Christ Jesus YOUR hope?  
In verse 2, Paul is praying grace, mercy and peace *for* and *to* Timothy.  
How should the church give grace, mercy and peace from God to the world?  
How do you give grace, mercy and peace?

### 1 Timothy 1:3-11

How do the dual goals of “instructing not to teach...” (v.3) and “love” (v.5) fit together?  
Describe the situation in Timothy’s church in your own words. Describe these bad teachers.  
What does Paul say about the Law and how does this apply to us now?

### 1 Timothy 1:12-20

Why does Paul use his own testimony as an example for Timothy?  
What does it mean for you to “fight the good fight” (v.18)?  
How do we often confuse “bad fights” with “the good fight”?  
How could you “shipwreck your faith” in your current life-stage?

### 1 Timothy 2:1-8

What is the logic and argument of these verses?  
What is the connection between prayer, a quiet life, the gospel and Paul’s calling?  
What is the difference between entreaties, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings?  
Why should we pray like Paul commands men (all people) to pray in v.8?  
**MEMORIZE:** This week memorize **1 Timothy 2:5-6.**

### 1 Timothy 2:9-15

What is your initial reaction to this passage about women?  
What would a mirror-reading of this text provide as we ascertain Paul’s purpose here?  
Why does Paul not allow a woman to exercise authority over a man?  
What does verse 15 mean?

### 1 Timothy 3:1-7

What is Paul’s purpose in this list of qualities/characteristics/attributes?  
Why the extra emphasis on “managing his own household” in verses 4-5?  
What does Paul mean by “reproach and the snare of the devil” in v.7?

### 1 Timothy 3:8-16

How does this list align with and differ from the previous list for elders?  
Do the “women” in v.11 refer to Deaconesses or the wives of Deacons? Other options?  
What do verses 14-16 add? These seem to realign Timothy to Paul’s intended purpose.

### **1 Timothy 4:1-5**

What is Paul referring to by “the Spirit explicitly says...”?  
Why kind of lifestyle are these bad teachers advocating? Why?  
What is Paul’s corrective to this lifestyle?

### **1 Timothy 4:6-5:2**

What can we ascertain from Timothy’s struggles by Paul’s instruction here?  
How are you “showing yourself an example” of what a believer in Christ Jesus should look like?  
How is your “progress” (v.15) in your spiritual life and service through your gifts “evident to all”?  
How are we suppose to “pay close attention to” ourselves and our teaching like Timothy?  
**MEMORIZE:** This week memorize **1 Timothy 4:7-8.**

### **1 Timothy 5:3-16**

What does a mirror-reading of this section provide by way of background and occasion?  
What do you make of Paul’s tough statement in v.8?  
Describe in your own words the lifestyle commanded of these women.

### **1 Timothy 5:17-6:2**

Why would Paul instruct Timothy not to hastily accept an accusation against an elder?  
What does this passage say about church discipline and the handling of sin?  
What does 5:24-25 add? How do they support Paul’s argument?

### **1 Timothy 6:3-10**

How does the modern church in America resemble the characteristics of v.4-5?  
How do you resemble these qualities?  
What role does “contentment” (v.6) play in the argument of v.3-6?  
What is a good understanding of v.10 in context? What is a bad understanding of v.10?

### **1 Timothy 6:11-16**

How do you “flee these things” in your current life situation? How do you protect yourself?  
How do you “pursue” the qualities that Paul describes in v.11?  
How is Paul’s charge to Timothy in v.13-16 relevant to you today?  
**MEMORIZE:** This week memorize **1 Timothy 6:11-12.**

### **1 Timothy 6:17-21**

How can riches serve us poorly as Christians? How can riches be a blessing?  
What does v.19 imply about “life”?  
What was “entrusted” to Timothy? What is entrusted to you? How do you “guard” it?