Introduction to 1 Timothy

BE A GOOD MINISTER OF CHRIST JESUS

Key Verse: 4:6

“If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.”

Author and place in Scripture

1 Timothy is the first of the three Pastoral Epistles: 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. All three letters were written by Apostle Paul.

Date and place of writing

The actual date and place of writing are unknown. But it seems that Apostle Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment, recorded at the end of Acts, and that, sometime before a second arrest and imprisonment, he wrote this letter. Scholars estimate that this was around A.D. 64.

Recipient and purpose of writing

This letter was written to Timothy. Timothy was from the Galatian town of Lystra. His father was Greek, and his mother Eunice was Jewish and a believer in Jesus (Ac16:1); his grandmother Lois also had become a devout Christian (2Ti1:5). So Timothy came to know the Scriptures from his infancy (2Ti3:15a). He was already a disciple of Jesus before Paul met him. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him to Paul (Ac16:2). It seems the body of elders in Lystra responded to prophecies made about young Timothy by laying their hands on him (1Ti1:18; 4:14). Paul also laid hands on him, and he received the gift of God (2Ti1:6).

Paul chose Timothy as his helper on his second missionary journey and had him circumcised so that he could be an effective helper in Jewish evangelism (Ac16:3). While traveling with him, Timothy gained an intimate knowledge of Paul, his teaching and lifestyle, and became convinced of the truths of the faith (1Co4:17; 1Ti3:9; 4:6; 2Ti3:14). Paul commended Timothy as someone who had a genuine interest in the welfare of others (Php2:20). Paul recalled his tears (2Ti1:4), which came from his shepherd’s heart for others. Timothy proved himself and served with Paul like a son with his father (Php2:22). Paul regarded him so highly that he included his name next to his own in the introduction to several of his other letters (Php1:1; Col1:1; 1Th1:1; 2Th1:1; Phm1:1). Paul considered Timothy his true son (1:2,18), coworker (Ro16:21) and brother (2Co1:1; Col1:1; 1Th3:2; Phm1:3; Heb13:23) and cared for him personally (1Ti5:23).

Timothy carried on the work of the Lord just as Paul did (1Co16:10). Paul sent him to various new churches to help with the ministry, such as in Berea (Ac17:13), Thessalonica (1Th3:2), likely Philippi (Ac19:22; Php2:19), and Corinth (Ac18:5; Ro16:21; 1Co4:17). Paul took Timothy with him on his journey to bring the offering from the Gentile believers to the saints in Jerusalem (Ac20:4). Timothy was with Paul as he wrote his letter to Philemon from a prison in Rome (Phm1:1). It is likely that after his release, when he went into Macedonia, Paul urged Timothy to stay in Ephesus to silence false teachers (1Ti1:3; 3:14). Sometime later, Timothy himself had even been imprisoned for the gospel (Heb13:23).

However, Timothy was still young (1Ti4:12) and seems to have been timid (2Ti1:7). In Ephesus the church had grown quite large, and it had many older and rich people (1Ti5:1,2,9,17; 6:17). Its influence spread throughout the whole region of Asia Minor (Ac19:10,20). Unfortunately, the false teachers in Ephesus like savage wolves began to disturb God’s work by teaching false doctrines (Ac20:29–30). Young Timothy had a daunting task to be a good minister of Christ Jesus there. So Paul wrote this letter to strengthen and build up Timothy as a pastor, to help him stop the spread of false doctrines and to teach the believers how to conduct themselves in God’s household (1:3; 3:15).

Background: the city of Ephesus

In Paul’s day Ephesus was the chief city of Asia Minor, a port city situated on its west coast, on the Aegean Sea (see map). In the first century it is believed to have been the second largest city in the Roman Empire, with about 500,000 people. It was located on an ancient east-west trade route and was a major commercial center. Its emporium was world-famous; it is reported that even Cleopatra shopped there. The city contained many wealthy people. There was also a large Jewish community doing business at Ephesus. People from smaller cities in Asia Minor regularly came in and out of Ephesus.

Ephesus was a religious center. It was famous for its Temple to the goddess Artemis (a.k.a. Diana), which was one of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World. Once a year the city hosted a great religious festival dedicated to this goddess. A eunuch priest served the goddess, helped by virgin women. In this social milieu, women in Ephesus tended to be revered and held a strong sway over men. Besides Diana worship, the city became a center for the cult of emperor worship.

Ephesus was also famous for its entertainment. It had the largest theater outside of Rome; it could seat 25,000. The city was famous for its systems of baths and its Roman aqueducts.

Background: the church in Ephesus

At the end of his second missionary journey Paul stopped by Ephesus briefly and left his close coworkers Priscilla and Aquila there (Ac18:19–21). Meanwhile, Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He spoke with great fervor and taught accurately about Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.[[1]](#footnote--1) Thereafter, when Paul arrived at the beginning of his third missionary journey, he encountered some disciples in Ephesus, about twelve men in all, who only knew John’s baptism. Paul helped them to receive the Holy Spirit (Ac19:1–7). In this way the church in Ephesus was born.

For the first three months Paul testified in the synagogue, but some Jews became obstinate and persecuted the Way. So Paul left them, took the disciples with him, and had discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, not in the synagogue once a week on the Sabbath, but daily in a public lecture hall, and focusing not on Jews but on Gentiles. This intensive Bible study went on for two years[[2]](#footnote-0), so that all the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord (Ac19:8–10). There was a great work of the Holy Spirit: extraordinary miracles through Paul; and, many people burned their expensive sorcery scrolls in repentance. In this way the word of God spread widely and grew in power (Ac19:11–20). The church became strong and healthy. Through God’s work in Ephesus, Paul was inspired to go and work in Rome (Ac19:21).[[3]](#footnote-1) Through Paul’s Ephesian ministry, other churches in Asia Minor were begun, including Colossae, Laodicea and Hieropolis (Col4:13,16). It is likely the other churches in Asia Minor mentioned in Revelation 2:1–3:22—Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea—were also begun (Ac19:10).[[4]](#footnote-2) During this time in Ephesus, scholars believe Paul wrote some very important New Testament letters: 1 & 2 Corinthians.

At the end of his third missionary journey (about A.D. 53) Paul met the Ephesian elders at Miletus to say farewell to them (Ac20:17–35). From his farewell speech we learn how Paul had served the Lord in Ephesus: 1) with great humility and with tears; 2) in the midst of severe testing from Jewish opponents; 3) preaching and teaching publicly and from house to house; 4) with the message that people must turn to God and have faith in our Lord Jesus; and 5) with a good example of do or die spirit (Ac20:24). He also encouraged the Ephesian elders to be good shepherds of God’s flock, remembering that it was the Holy Spirit who had made them overseers. He warned them about savage wolves who would distort the truth and not spare the flock. While living among them, he worked hard with his own hands to supply his own needs and to help the weak, teaching them the blessing of a giving life. Upon parting, the Ephesian elders expressed their deep love relationship with Paul their shepherd (Ac20:36–38). It shows that at this early date the Ephesian church was already a stable and mature ministry.[[5]](#footnote-3)

However, around ten years later in A.D. 62, when Paul wrote his Letter to the Ephesians from prison in Rome, we can see the beginnings of conflict between Jewish and Gentile believers there. He wanted them to recognize their spiritual unity in Christ and to see the church from God’s point of view. In his Letter to the Ephesians he used the word “mystery” seven times (1:9; 3:3,4,6,9; 5:32; 6:19) to teach that the true and most profound mystery is found in Christ himself (5:32). Soon after his release, he wrote this letter of 1 Timothy.

Background: false doctrines/sound doctrine

The city of Ephesus was full of all kinds of religious influences. As mentioned earlier, it was the center for Artemis/Diana worship, as well as for emperor worship and mystery religions. Paul was especially aware of the strong influence of false mystery religions in Ephesus. Asia Minor had been saturated with these religions for centuries, along with many superstitions associated with their secret rites and rituals. One major trend of mystery religions was acutely ascetic; another, heavily hedonistic. These mystery religions were deeply rooted in the people’s psyche and culture. People from other parts of the Roman Empire came to Ephesus to study about these mystery religions. The Ephesian church members included a large number of Gentiles, many of whom had been indoctrinated in these mystery religions. After coming to faith in Christ, they were doing well for the time being. But after Paul left and as time went by, some people from these mystery religions began to infiltrate the church to draw them back to their old belief system and lifestyle.

So throughout this letter Paul urges Timothy to put a stop to the spread of these false doctrines. He points out in 4:1 that they were things taught by deceiving spirits and demons. Both major kinds of mystery religions were influencing the Ephesian church: Mysterious ascetics were forbidding people to marry and from eating certain foods (4:3); mysterious hedonists were led by hypocritical liars who, after committing all kinds of sins secretly, had had their consciences seared as with a hot iron (4:2). Eventually they rejected and abandoned the Christian faith (1:19–20; 6:21).

The false doctrines mentioned in 1 Timothy can be categorized as follows:

1. Godless myths, endless genealogies (1:4) and old wives’ tales (4:7);
2. Meaningless talk (1:6), godless chatter (6:20) and quarrels about words (6:4);
3. Misuse of the law (1:7–10), forbidding marriage and abstaining from certain foods (4:3);
4. Godliness as a means to financial gain (6:5);
5. False knowledge (6:20), which seems to be a form of nascent Gnosticism.

In contrast to false doctrines, Paul repeatedly mentions in this letter about “the truth”: “come to a knowledge of the truth” (2:4); “the deep truths of the faith” (3:9); the church is “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (3:15); those “who know the truth” (4:3); “the truths of the faith” (4:6); and “robbed of the truth” (6:5). This truth is not an abstract or mysterious knowledge but sound Christian doctrine (1:10–11; 4:16). In essence, this is the gospel: God is our “Savior” (1:1; 2:3; 4:10); he wants all people to be “saved” (2:4); and he sent Christ Jesus into the world to “save sinners” (1:15).

To have this truth, Paul urged Timothy to hold on to faith and a good conscience (1:19). Then he would be a good minister of Christ Jesus for the church (4:6). Also, to encourage the spread of the truth and prevent the spread of false doctrines, Paul charged Timothy: 1) to appoint only deacons who held onto the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience (3:9), as well as spiritually mature overseers (3:2–6); 2) to honor only godly widows and elders (5:9–10,17,19); 3) not to show partiality (5:21); 4) not to be influenced by love of money (6:10). In this way he encouraged Timothy to fight the battle well (1:18), the good fight of the faith (6:12).

The sound doctrine mentioned in 1 Timothy can be categorized as follows:

1. Who God is: our Savior (1:1; 2:3); Father (1:2); the Glorious and Blessed One (1:11); “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God” (1:17; 2:5a); “the living God” (3:15; 4:10); the Creator (4:3,4); God who sees us (5:21; 6:13); “God the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see” (6:15–16); our Hope (6:17); our Provider (6:17).
2. Who we are: we are all “sinners” (1:15). Because of this truth, we are or can potentially turn out to be: “lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, those who kill their fathers or mothers, murderers, sexually immoral, homosexuals, slave traders, liars and perjurers” and live in all kinds of ways “contrary to sound doctrine…” (1:9–10a); we are also “blasphemers, persecutors, violent, ignorant, unbelieving” (1:13; cf. 3:3); we become angry and get involved in disputes, dress inappropriately for people who profess to worship God, become rebellious toward spiritual authority (2:8–13); we tend to be maritally unfaithful, intemperate, lacking in self-control, given to drunkenness, quarrelsome, lovers of money [see also 6:10], poor managers, conceited, pursuing dishonest gain, malicious talkers (3:2–11); we can be hypocritical liars (4:2); we can be lazy and irresponsible, overcome by sensual desires, idlers, busybodies, talk nonsense, slanderers, follow Satan, show partiality and favoritism (5:8–21); we can be disrespectful, full of envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, have a corrupt mind engaged in constant friction with others, be robbed of the truth, think that godliness is a means to financial gain, be full of foolish and harmful desires, and engage in godless chatter (6:1–10,20).
3. Who Jesus is/what he does for us: he is “our hope” (1:1); he is our Lord who gives us grace, mercy, peace, strength, entrusts us with the gospel, and appoints us to his service (1:2,12–13); he pours out grace, faith and love on us (1:14); he came into the world to save sinners (1:15); he has immense patience and gives eternal life to those who believe (1:16); he is the only Mediator between God and us (2:5); he gave himself as a ransom for all people (2:6); he appoints people as heralds, apostles and teachers (2:7); he gives us great assurance and an excellent standing when we serve well (3:13); “he appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory” (3:16), and he is “the mystery from which true godliness springs” (3:16); he nourishes us on the truths of the faith (4:6); he sees us (5:21; 6:13); he gave us “sound instruction and godly teaching” (6:3); he made a good confession before Pilate (6:13); he will appear again in God’s time (6:14–15a);
4. View of created things: everything God created is good and should be received with thanksgiving (4:4); God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment (6:17);

Characteristics of 1 Timothy

1. Paul wrote this letter personally to Timothy, with affection and concern;
2. He repeatedly mentions false teachings/teachers (1:3; 4:2; 6:20);
3. He frequently uses the words “command” (1:1,3,5,18; 4:11; 6:14,17,18), “urge” (1:3; 2:1), and “charge” (5:21; 6:11,13); God commanded Paul; Paul commanded Timothy; as Timothy obeys, he is endowed with God’s authority to teach and lead the church;
4. 1 Timothy proclaims Christ as the only mediator (2:5) and based on this, it urges prayer for all people to be saved (2:4).
5. 1 Timothy begins and ends with doxologies to God and contains a unique poem/hymn about Christ (1:17; 6:15–16; 3:16). God himself and his Son Jesus Christ are alone to be praised by all people. Knowledge of God himself and of his Son Jesus are the source of true godliness;
6. Paul uses the words “godly” or “godliness” often (2:2; 3:16; 4:7,8; 6:3,5,6,11), in contrast to the ungodliness that comes from false doctrines;
7. 1 Timothy teaches the right view of the church (3:5,15; 5:16,17). The church is not a building, but a dwelling place for the living God, God’s household, and the pillar and foundation of the truth in this lost world—a place where the truth is preserved and proclaimed. The church is not a place to seek personal gain or welfare, but to worship God and serve the needy;
8. The letter contains three “trustworthy sayings” (1:15; 3:1; 4:9). Paul intended Timothy to fully accept and disseminate these sayings among the believers as the deep truths of God. In these sayings we can find a progression, from personally receiving the grace of Jesus, to aspiring to the noble task of being an overseer, to training oneself to be godly. To do so, we must appreciate the value of godliness in both the present life and the life to come, and have hope in God who can help us (4:7b–10);
9. 1 Timothy includes much practical instruction for pastors on how to manage both one’s personal life and ministry and God’s household: making a prayerful environment (2:1–15); upholding godly church workers and appointing new deacons (3:1–13); managing people and church resources without partiality or favoritism (5:1–6:2);
10. 1 Timothy uniquely contains some extensive teaching about money (5:18; 6:5,9–10,17–19). Money should be used without partiality to support those working for God, and for God’s people who are really in need. We should not try to use the Christian faith to obtain financial gain. We should not love money, but be rich in good deeds, generous and willing to share it.

Themes

The major theme of the letter is to be a good minister of Christ Jesus. Paul explains *how* to do so: 1) hold on to faith and a good conscience; 2) pursue godliness; 3) manage God’s household without partiality or favoritism, and with clear principles. Paul also explains *why* we must grow to be good ministers of Christ Jesus. It is because we are serving in God’s household. Through his household, God wants all people to be saved. We can save both ourselves and our hearers when we persevere in the life and doctrine of a good minister of Christ Jesus (4:16).

Purpose of our study

Mainly we pray that through this study God may help each of us to grow as good ministers of Christ Jesus, and also, raise our young people as good ministers of Christ Jesus.

In our relativistic world, many people have lost the deep truths of the faith and plunged into all kinds of false doctrines, bearing the bad fruit that results. Through this study we would like to learn how to hold on to faith and a good conscience, so that we may grow in these truths of the faith and in God’s love, and proclaim them in our time.

In our time the word “godliness” has taken on a negative connotation. Many have given up on pursuing it and even think it is unattainable. Moreover, many who do want to pursue godliness do so only as a personal goal. 1 Timothy illustrates that godliness should be the key part of every believer’s life, and that it is meant not only for personal growth, but also for building up God’s household. What’s more, it is in the context of the church of the living God, God’s household, that personal godliness can be developed. Through this study we would like to learn how it is possible for us to actually grow in godliness.

Outline of 1 Timothy

I. Paul’s greeting to Timothy (1:1–2)

II. Commands concerning false teachers (1:3–11)

A. Prevent people from teaching false doctrines (3–4)

B. The goal is love (5)

C. Meaningless talk in the guise of the law (6–7)

D. The law upholds sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel (8–11)

III. The Lord’s grace poured out on Paul (1:12–17)

A. The Lord considered Paul trustworthy (12)

B. The Lord’s grace for a wretched sinner (13–14)

C. Fully accept that Christ Jesus saved me, the worst sinner (15)

D. The Lord’s purpose in showing mercy: to help others believe (16)

E. Doxology (17)

IV. Fight the battle well (1:18–20)

A. Recall the prophecies about you (18a)

B. Hold on to faith and a good conscience (18b–19a)

C. The tragedy of those who reject faith and a good conscience (19b–20)

V. Public worship (2:1–15)

A. Pray for all people (1–8)

1) For all in authority (1–2a)

2) That we may live peaceful, quiet lives (2b)

3) God wants all people to be saved (3–4)

4) Only one God and one mediator, Christ Jesus (5–6)

5) Paul appointed as an apostle for the Gentiles (7)

6) All men should pray without anger or disputing (8)

B. Instructions for women (9–15)

1) Dress modestly and do good deeds (9–10)

2) Learn in quietness and full submission (11–12)

3) Reasons to be quiet (13–15)

VI. Qualifications for leaders of God’s household (3:1–16)

A. Overseers (1–7)

1) Desire the noble task (1)

2) Godly character and able to teach (2–3)

3) Manage one’s family well (4–5)

4) Not a recent convert (6)

5) A good reputation with outsiders (7)

B. Deacons (8–13)

1) Worthy of respect (8,11)

2) Keep hold of the faith with a clear conscience (9)

3) Be tested (10)

4) Manage one’s family well (12)

5) The outcome for serving well (13)

C. The church of the living God (14–16)

1) Proper conduct in God’s household (14–15)

2) Jesus, the spring of godliness (16)

VII. Be a good minister of Christ Jesus (4:1–16)

A. Characteristics of false teaching (1–2)

B. Correct false teaching with God’s creation truth (3–6)

C. Avoid fruitless superstitions and myths (7)

D. Train yourself to be godly (8)

E. Because we have put our hope in the living God (9–10)

F. Set an example for other believers (11–12)

G. Publicly read, preach and teach God’s word (13)

H. Develop your gift (14)

I. Be diligent and give yourself wholly, to show your progress (15)

J. Watch your life and doctrine closely and persevere in them (16a)

K. The fruit of a good minister (16b)

VIII. Instructions for widows, elders and slaves (5:1–6:2)

A. How to treat older and younger men and women (5:1–2)

B. Discretion in helping true widows of the church (5:3–7,9–10)

C. Help men to support their own families (5:8)

D. Help young widows to remarry and serve a family (5:11–15)

E. Help women support widows (5:16)

F. Support and protect exemplary elders (5:17–19)

G. Publicly rebuke elders who are sinning (5:20)

H. Absolutely no partiality or favoritism (5:21)

I. Paul’s personal care for Timothy (5:22–23)

J. Have patience and discernment about people (5:24–25)

K. Help slaves/employees show respect for masters/employers (6:1–2)

IX. Pursue godliness (6:3–21)

A. The mentality, influence and motivation of false teachers (3–5)

B. Godliness with contentment (6–8)

C. Warning about love of money (9–10)

D. Flee from all this and pursue godliness (11) E. Fight the good fight of the faith (12)

F. Keep the good confession that Jesus is the Savior King (13–14)

G. Doxology (15–16)

H. Commands for rich Christians (17–19)

I. Guard the gospel (20–21)

1. Priscilla and Aquila invited Apollos to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately (Ac18:26). When he wanted to go to Achaia, the believers encouraged him, and he became a great help there (Ac18:27). [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. It was the longest period to date on his missionary journeys that Paul stayed in any city. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
3. A riot in Ephesus occurred because so many people were repenting that the silversmiths who made idols were going out of business. They stirred up persecution against Paul and the believers as a foreign religion. They bragged about their great goddess Artemis and her image, which they believed they had to protect because it fell out of heaven on them, and they worried she would be robbed of her divine majesty. This violent riot lasted for many hours, to the point of embarrassment, when the city clerk urged them to use the Roman court system for any grievances and dismissed them (Ac19:23–41). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
4. In Revelation 2:1–7 the Risen Jesus commends the Ephesian church for their deeds, hard work, perseverance, intolerance of wicked people, testing false apostles, endurance of hardship for his name and not growing weary. But he rebukes them for forsaking their first love. He calls them to remember the height from which they had fallen, to repent and do the things they did at first. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
5. Centuries later, the Ephesian church had a strong spiritual influence, especially concerning Christian doctrine, to all the churches throughout the Roman Empire. The Third Ecumenical Council of the early Christian Church met in Ephesus in A.D. 431 with 700 bishops from around the Empire, with leaders from four large churches. It was to settle the dispute with the Nestorians over their view of Christ, and it condemned Pelagianism. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)