

Overview of the Book of 1 Timothy

WITHOUT trying, we model our values. Parents in particular demonstrate to their children what they consider important and valuable. "Like father, like son" is not just a well-worn cliché; it is a truth repeated in our homes. And experience proves that children often follow the lifestyles of their parents, repeating their successes and mistakes.

Timothy is a prime example of one who was influenced by godly relatives. His mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, were Jewish believers who helped shape his life and promote his spiritual growth (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). The first "second-generation" Christian mentioned in the New Testament, Timothy became Paul's protégé and pastor of the church at Ephesus. As a young minister, Timothy faced all sorts of pressures, conflicts, and challenges from the church and his surrounding culture. To counsel and encourage Timothy, Paul sent this very personal letter.

Paul wrote 1 Timothy in about A.D. 64, probably just prior to his final Roman imprisonment. Because he had appealed to Caesar, Paul had been sent as a prisoner to Rome (see Acts 25-28). Most scholars believe that Paul was released about A.D. 62 (possibly because the "statute of limitations" had expired), and that during the next few years he was able to travel. During this time, he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Soon, however, Emperor Nero began his campaign to eliminate Christianity. It is believed that during this time Paul was imprisoned again and eventually executed. During this second Roman imprisonment, Paul wrote 2 Timothy. Titus and the two letters to Timothy comprise what are called the "Pastoral Letters."

Paul's first letter to Timothy affirms their relationship (1:2). Paul begins his fatherly advice, warning Timothy about false teachers (1:3-11) and urging him to hold on to his faith in Christ (1:12-20). Next, Paul considers public worship, emphasizing the importance of prayer (2:1-7) and order in church meetings (2:8-15). This leads to a discussion of the qualifications of church leaders—overseers and deacons. Here Paul lists specific criteria for each office (3:1-16).

Paul speaks again about false teachers, telling Timothy how to recognize them and respond to them (4:1-16). Next, he gives practical advice on pastoral care to the young and old (5:1-2), widows (5:3-16), elders (5:17-25), and slaves (6:1-2). Paul concludes by exhorting Timothy to guard his motives (6:3-10), to stand firm in his faith (6:11-12), to live above reproach (6:13-16), and to minister faithfully (6:17-21).

First Timothy holds many lessons. If you are a church leader, take note of Paul's relationship with this young disciple—his careful counsel and guidance. Measure yourself against the qualifications that Paul gives for overseers and deacons. If you are young in the faith, follow the example of godly Christian leaders like Timothy, who imitated Paul's life. If you are a parent, remind yourself of the profound effect a Christian home can have on family members. A faithful mother and grandmother led Timothy to Christ, and Timothy's ministry helped change the world.

VITAL STATISTICS

PURPOSE: To give encouragement and instruction to Timothy, a young leader

AUTHOR: Paul

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE: Timothy, Paul's son in the faith

DATE WRITTEN: Approximately A.D. 64, from Rome or Macedonia (possibly Philippi), probably just prior to Paul's final imprisonment in Rome

SETTING: Timothy was one of Paul's closest companions. Paul had sent Timothy to the church at Ephesus to counter the false teaching that had arisen there (1:3-4). Timothy probably served for a time as a leader in the church at Ephesus. Paul hoped to visit Timothy (3:14-15; 4:13), but in the meantime, he wrote this letter to give Timothy practical advice about the ministry.

KEY VERSE: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity" (4:12).

KEY PEOPLE: Paul, Timothy

KEY PLACE: Ephesus

SPECIAL FEATURES: First Timothy is a personal letter and a handbook of church administration and discipline.

THE BLUEPRINT

1. Instructions on right belief (1:1-20)
2. Instructions for the church (2:1—3:16)
3. Instructions for elders (4:1—6:21)

Paul advised Timothy on such practical topics as qualifications for church leaders, public worship, confronting false teaching, and how to treat various groups of people within the church. Right belief and right behavior are critical for anyone who desires to lead or serve effectively in the church. We should all believe rightly, participate in church actively, and minister to one another lovingly.

MEGATHEMES

Sound Doctrine

EXPLANATION: Paul instructed Timothy to preserve the Christian faith by teaching sound doctrine and modeling right living. Timothy had to oppose false teachers, who were leading church members away from belief in salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

IMPORTANCE: We must know the truth in order to defend it. We must cling to the belief that Christ came to save us. We should stay away from those who twist the words of the Bible for their own purposes.

Public Worship

EXPLANATION: Prayer in public worship must be done with a proper attitude toward God and fellow believers.

IMPORTANCE: Christian character must be evident in every aspect of worship. We must rid ourselves of any anger, resentment, or offensive behavior that might disrupt worship or damage church unity.

Church Leadership

EXPLANATION: Paul gives specific instructions concerning the qualifications for church leaders so that the church might honor God and operate smoothly.

IMPORTANCE: Church leaders must be wholly committed to Christ. If you are a new or young Christian, don't be anxious to become a leader in the church. Seek to develop your Christian character first. Be sure to seek God, not your own ambition.

Personal Discipline

EXPLANATION: It takes discipline to be a leader in the church. Timothy, like all pastors, had to guard his motives, minister faithfully, and live above reproach. Any pastor must keep morally and spiritually fit.

IMPORTANCE: To stay in good spiritual shape, you must discipline yourself to study God's Word and to obey it. Put your spiritual abilities to work!

Caring Church

EXPLANATION: The church has a responsibility to care for the needs of all its members, especially the sick, the poor, and the widowed. Caring must go beyond good intentions.

IMPORTANCE: Caring for the family of believers demonstrates our Christ like attitude and exhibits genuine love to nonbelievers.