

#15. The Letters to Timothy

1. First and Second Timothy are Paul's correspondence to Timothy, a young apostolic pastor whom Paul left in authority at Ephesus.
2. **Author and date** - Paul wrote the first letter from either Rome or Philippi in 64AD, probably just before Paul's final imprisonment in Rome. Most scholars believe Paul was released from his first imprisonment in about 62AD, then travelled freely until about 64AD. It was about this time that Nero began his persecution of Christians, resulting in the execution of Paul, Peter, and many others. The second letter may have been written as late as 67AD.
 - Timothy's name means *one who honors God*.
 - Paul had sent Timothy to pastor the church in Ephesus in order to counter the false teaching that had arisen there (1 Timothy 1:3, 4). We know that Timothy was very close to Paul, and was considered the Apostle's own "Son in the Faith" (1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Timothy 1, 2). Yet Timothy's great strength of character and faith are also attributable to his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15), who raised him to honor the Old Testament Scriptures.
 - It is probable that Timothy was the first *second generation* Christian mentioned in the New Testament. Both letters are fatherly/apostolic advice given in order to help Timothy remain effective in his pastoral work in Ephesus. We know from the epistle to Hebrews (13:23) that Timothy himself was imprisoned at some point, but we do not know exactly when or where.
3. **Paul's emphasis** is about what Timothy needs to do to successfully complete his pastoral assignment at Ephesus. Using their personal relationship as a starting point in 1 Timothy, (1:2), Paul gives a warning about false teachers (1:3-11) and urges Timothy to remain strong in his own personal faith (1:12-20). In chapters 2 and 3, the apostle gives advice concerning the conduct of public meetings and the appointment of elders and deacons. The remaining portions of the first letter deal with inter-church relationships and the need to live above reproach.

In the second letter, Paul reaffirms his affection for Timothy, and urges him to remain steadfast, doctrinally sound, and focused on Christ (chapters 1, 2). He warns Timothy (chapters 3 and 4) of dangerous unsound teaching, of his need to remain clear-headed, and to be on the alert for false teachers.

Paul is fully cognizant that his days are numbered, and he relates this clearly to Timothy (4:6-8).

4. Key Chapters

- In 1 Timothy, chapters 3 and 4 are invaluable in helping us understand the role of deacons and elders.
- In 2 Timothy, the fourth chapter is key since it is there we find Paul's closing thoughts before going to be with Jesus.

5. Key Verses

- **1 Timothy 4:6-10 NIV** "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. ⁷Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. ⁹This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. ¹⁰That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe."
- **2 Timothy 3:1-5 NIV** "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ²People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people."
- **2 Timothy 2:15, 16 NIV** "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. ¹⁶But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness."

6. Key People

- **Timothy** - probably became a convert after Paul's first missionary visit to Lystra (Acts 16:1-5). Timothy had already been trained, at least in the Old Testament scriptures by his mother and grandmother. By the time of Paul's second journey, Timothy was considered mature enough to join their missionary team. Since Timothy was of mixed parentage (a Jewish mother and a Greek father), Paul asked him to become circumcised in order to not unnecessarily offend the Jewish audiences they were sure to encounter. Timothy also served as Paul's liaison to the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians 4:14-17) and to the congregation in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3, 4). He was also Paul's assistant to many other places throughout the ministry of the great apostle.
 - Philippians 2:19-22 NIV "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I

also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²²But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.”

- Timothy also served Paul in Berea (Acts 17:14), Athens (Acts 17:15), and accompanied Paul on his trip back to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4).
- **Paul** - the aged apostle has been accompanied by young Timothy for years. He is nearing the date of his own execution at the hands of Nero. Timothy is approaching middle age. Paul is confident leaving the work in the hands of this young apostle-pastor.

7. Key Place

- **Ephesus** - Ephesus was a center of travel and commerce. Situated on the Aegean Sea at the mouth of the Cayster River, the city was one of the greatest seaports of the ancient world. Three major highways intersected at Ephesus.
 - **The Temple of Artemis (Diana)** - was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The foundation and one column remains of this temple which once measured 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, and 60 feet high. Paul's ministry in this city was considered a threat to Diana's temple (Acts 19:27). According to secular historian and Harvard graduate Ramsay MacMullin (who taught at Yale University from 1967 until 1983) John the Apostle entered the Temple of Diana years after Paul's ministry there, and upon the command of The Holy Spirit, prayed this prayer: "O God...at whose name every idol takes flight and every demon and unclean power: now let the demon that is here take flight in thy Name!" At that moment, the Altar of Diana split into pieces and half the Temple itself fell to the ground! (*Christianizing the Roman Empire: 100-400AD*, by Ramsay MacMullin, page 26). Paul's evangelism and John's pastoral/apostolic ministry combined to bring down the cult of Diana of Ephesus.
 - **The Agora (Marketplace)** - This market area is known as the *Square Agora* because of its dimensions (360 feet square). It arose in the Hellenistic period and was surrounded on all sides by arched shops about 40 feet deep. It is located next to the harbor and was the city's main commercial center. It is probable that Paul worked here with Priscilla and Aquila in their tent-making business.
 - **The Town Theater** - with a capacity of 25,000 people, this theater was built in the Hellenistic period and was renovated by several Roman emperors. Designed for theatrical performances, later alterations allowed gladiatorial contests. When Paul was accused of damaging Diana and her temple, the mob gathered together in this theater (Acts 19:23-41).

8. Key Themes

- **Sound Doctrine** - Christians seldom understanding the value of sound doctrine. In Protestant circles, doctrine tends to be seen as something that divides rather than unites. In truth, however, sound doctrine holds true Christians together. We may differ on non-essentials, but the core of the Gospel is non-negotiable. It does make a difference what you believe (see ***The Essentials***, by Stephen Chitty). The idea of ***Truth*** is repeated throughout the pastoral letters (1 Timothy 2:4, 7; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5; 2 Timothy 2:15, 18, 25; 3:7, 8; 4:4; Titus 1:1, 14).
 - **Church Leadership** - As the second generation of Christians was emerging, Paul gave guidelines for the selection of elders and deacons. Character trumps ability. Elders were to be men of character and Christian conduct (1 Timothy 3:2, 3, 4-7), with the ability to lead as a father (3:2; Titus 1:5, 7, 9). He must be fully committed to the doctrine of the church (1 Timothy 3:2; 10; Titus 1:9).
 - **Relationships within the church** - Timothy was commissioned to build a family, not a business. His end result was to be an organism, not an organization.
 - **Holy Living** - is the result of personal disciple and moral fiber. We should live as Christ lived (1 John 3:1-3). This Holy Living is key in overcoming apostasy.
 - **False Doctrine** - not only is false doctrine *wrong*, it is also *deadly*. It spreads throughout the body like a cancer, therefore it must be aggressively rebuked and corrected. Contrasted with false doctrine is ***Truth*** (1 Timothy 2:4, 7; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5; 2 Timothy 2:18; 25; 3:7, 8; 4:4), ***God's Word*** (1 Timothy 4:5, 6; 5:17; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2:9,15;4:2) and ***Sound Doctrine*** (1 Timothy 1:10; 4:6,13; 5:17; 6:1, 3; 2 Timothy 3:10,16; 4:3).
 - **Faithfulness** - at the end of the day, celebrities and trends will come and go. It is faithfulness that impacts people, ultimately anchoring them to Christ Jesus.

9. The Contents of 1 and 2 Timothy

- **First Timothy**
 - **Greetings to Timothy (1:1, 2)**
 - **Be On Guard Against False Doctrine (1:3-20)**
 - Examples of False Doctrine (1:3-11)
 - Paul's Testimony of Sound Doctrine: Grace at Work (1:12-17)
 - Paul's Reminder of Timothy's Call (1:18-20)

- **Advice For The Church (2:1-3:16)**
 - The Importance of Prayer (2:1-8)
 - Paul's Insights About Women (2:9-15)
 - Concerning Those in Leadership (3:1-15)
 - A Moment of Praise for Messiah (3:16)

- **Advice On Dealing With False Teachers (4:1-16)**
 - The Prophetic Warning About False Teachers (4:1-5)
 - Suggestions for Teachers of Truth (4:6-16)

- **Advice For Church Leaders (5:1-6:2)**
 - How To Treat Parishioners Who Are In Error (5:1, 2)
 - The Care of Widows (5:3-16)
 - The Conduct of Elders (5:17-20)
 - Personal Advice to Timothy (5:21-25)
 - Advice for Slaves (6:1,2)

- **Advice on Being A Faithful Shepherd**
 - The Peril of False Teaching (6:3-5)
 - The Peril of Loving Money (6:6-10)
 - Advice On Being A Man Of God (6:11-16)
 - Advice On Handling Money (6:17-19)
 - Advice on Staying Faithful(6:20,21)

- **Second Timothy**
 - **Paul's Greeting and Thanksgiving (1:1-5)**

 - **Encouragement from Paul to Timothy (1:6-18)**

- Encouragement (1:6-11)
- Examples (1:12-18)
- **Word Pictures of A Faithful Servant (2:1-26)**
 - Paul's Own Example (2:1,2)
 - A Soldier (2:3,4)
 - An Athlete (2:5)
 - A Farmer (2:6,7)
 - The Example of Jesus (2:8-13)
 - A Workman (2:14-19)
 - A Vessel (2:20-23)
 - A Servant (2:24-26)
- **Standing Against Apostasy (3:1-17)**
 - The Reality of Apostasy (3:1-9)
 - The Stand Against Apostasy (3:10-17)
- **Preaching God's Word Faithfully (4:1-5)**
 - The Divine Call to Preach (4:1, 2)
 - The Need for Preaching (4:3-5)
- **Closing Comments by Paul (4:6-18)**
 - Paul's Awareness (4:6-8)
 - Paul's Needs (4:9-18)
- **Paul's Farewell (4:19-22)**

Worth noting about Paul's Letters to Timothy

- The allusion to *the lion* in 2 Timothy 4:17 is a reference to Nero in particular or the empire in general.
- The second letter to Timothy is not the first letter Paul has written while in chains. He wrote to the Philippians, the Colossians, the Ephesians, and to his friend Philemon while in the same condition. The difference is that he expected a soon release from those circumstances. In 2 Timothy, he clearly expects to be executed (Paul was executed by Nero in 67AD).
- The first epistle is more instructional, while the second is more personal. This is probably a result of a change in Paul's circumstances. If the letter was written as late as many scholars think (early 67AD), then it was penned a matter of weeks before his death. Church historians and leaders such as Tertullian and Eusebius give support to the tradition that both Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome under Nero, at about the same time. Peter was crucified upside down, stating that he was not worthy to die as Jesus did. Paul was beheaded, since as a Roman citizen he could not be crucified.

When reading 1 and 2 Timothy:

- Remember that Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus are called the *Pastoral Epistles* because of their emphasis on advice for pastors who were serving in difficult circumstances.
- Though the letters are to Timothy, it becomes clear that Paul is writing to the church as well. This is the same pattern we see in the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. This was intended to give greater authority to Timothy and Titus in the eyes of the congregation.
- Although Paul warned that false teachers would be from "without and within" (Acts 20), the situation Timothy faced seemed to be a defection of local leaders in Ephesus. It should be remembered that in most New Testament churches, there were larger meetings in public halls as well as meetings in individual homes. This was common in the earliest days of the church (Acts 2:42-47).