



1 Timothy

This is a letter addressed to Timothy in Ephesus from Paul who has left Ephesus for Macedonia. Paul intends to return but isn't sure when this will be possible so, in the meantime, has sent instructions to Timothy about what he should do in his absence. The letter is addressed to Timothy, but Paul is talking to more than just him when he offers guidance on a number of subjects. A strong theme in the letter is the character of those who are in leadership positions and true and false teaching.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 16 mins
Short of time? Just read 1.1-20; 3.1-16; 6.2-21



Genre

Letter



Anything tricky?

1 Timothy contains two notorious pieces of teaching: one on women and teaching in 2.8-15 and one on homosexuality in 1.10. There are many different interpretations of these passages and people often disagree about what they are saying. If you are meeting in a book group you may want to decide at the start whether you are going to talk about them or whether you will decide to concentrate on what the rest of the book says.



Inspiring quotes

⁵ For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, ⁶ who gave himself a ransom for all.

(1 Timothy 2.5-6)

Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.

(1 Timothy 3.16)

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

(1 Timothy 6.10)



About the Author

1 Timothy 1.1 gives its author as the apostle Paul.

1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are widely viewed by scholars not to be by Paul despite their introductions. The reason for this is a different style of writing (i.e. different words used and sentence structures) and a different focus.

1 Timothy is particularly focussed on church order and leadership which suggests that it is written to later church communities whose concerns have passed beyond the immediate questions of who Jesus was and what he had done for them, onto questions of how churches relate to each other.

You might like to think about authorship as you read and ask whether the 'voice' of the author sounds similar to what you know of Paul from elsewhere.

What do we know about him?

Paul is probably the best known of all the early Christians. Before encountering Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, he was a zealous Pharisee who sought to maintain the purity of Judaism. After his experience on the Damascus road, he turned his zeal to proclaiming Jesus Christ among the

Gentiles. This brought him into conflict with some other early Christians, not least Peter, who thought that followers of Jesus Christ should convert to Judaism. He travelled around the Roman Empire (though primarily in Asia Minor – modern-day Turkey – and Greece) proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and founding communities of Christians as he went. He also wrote a large number of letters, 13 of which are preserved in the New Testament. 1 Timothy has traditionally been thought to be one of these.

Timothy, here not the author but the recipient of the letter, was born in Lystra in Asia Minor of a Jewish mother and Greek father. Acts 16.1-3 recounts his meeting of Paul in Lystra and of Paul's desire to take him with him on his journeys. Paul often sent Timothy to communities that he had founded to take letters to them and so that he could report to Paul about what was going on, as indeed he did with the Thessalonians (see 1 Thessalonians 3.2 and 6). Two letters in the New Testament (1 and 2 Timothy) are reputed to be letters of encouragement from Paul to Timothy in Ephesus. Christian tradition identifies Timothy as the first Bishop of Ephesus.



About the times

As mentioned above, this letter feels as though it is written to a more mature Christian congregation who have begun to ask questions about order, leadership and authority, as well as how to tell which teaching is reliable.

Those who think it is by Paul would date it to between ad 61 and 64; those who think it is not by Paul would date it much later towards the end of the first century ad.

What were people feeling?

The letter suggests that the recipients of the letter – including Timothy – were feeling a mixture of confidence about their faith, but anxious about how Christian community might work.



How is it structured?

1.1-2	Introduction
1.3-20	The need to oppose false teachers
2.1-15	Instructions on prayer, worship and discipleship
3.1-13	Expectations of bishops and deacons (or overseers and servants)
3.14-16	The reason why Paul is writing
4.1-5.2	The duties of ministry
5.3-6.2	The importance of order
6.2-21	True and false teaching and a final blessing



What kind of Book is it?

A letter. There are various features that mark it out as a little different from other the Pauline letters, one of these is that it is addressed to one person (i.e. Timothy) not a whole community (like Galatians or Thessalonians). You don't have to read for long before it becomes clear, however, that this letter is not just written to Timothy.



Look out for...

Notice that one of the strands that runs through the book is the danger that comes from deviating from true teaching. As you read, reflect on how you might be able to tell the difference between true and false teaching.

Also look out for Paul's instruction to bishops and deacons – in these he is laying out the characteristics of good leadership. Ask yourself what you think makes for a good leader, does it match what Paul says? In your view has he missed anything?

You may or may not want to ask yourself what you think Paul means in 1 Timothy 2 about women and silence.



What could this mean for me?

Think about your church today. How much of its order and leadership would Paul recognize do you think?



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- You can decide whether or not you want to talk about Paul's attitude to women in 1 Timothy 2! If you decide to do it, you may be some time!
- Discuss leadership – what do you think Paul's vision of leadership was and how much do we live up to that vision in our churches today?
- There is a strong emphasis on true and false teaching in this letter – how do you think we tell the different between the two in practice?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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