

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO TIMOTHY

1:1–3. Background of Paul's First Letter to Timothy

Many scholars have concluded that Paul did not write the pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus) due to distinct vocabulary and stylistic differences in the Greek, themes that seem to fit better in later historical contexts, and some inconsistency of details concerning travel and companions when compared to Luke's narrative in Acts. However, stylistic differences are not a failsafe means to determining authorship (for example, the use of scribes may account for some differences). Additionally, much of the distinct vocabulary in the pastoral Epistles may be due to their treatment of topics not addressed in the other letters, and many of the topics associated with later historical contexts also appear in Paul's undisputed letters. Some of the passages in the pastoral Epistles are classically Pauline, and the travel and companion differences with Acts can be explained if the pastoral Epistles are referencing unrecorded journeys of Paul in the East after his initial imprisonment in Rome (where Acts ends) and prior to his death in Rome years later. If this is the case, then these epistles are a window into the last years of Paul's life. First Timothy and Titus were likely written while Paul traveled during his final years, but 2 Timothy appears to have been written during Paul's second imprisonment in Rome just prior to his death. Until more explicit or conclusive evidence is amassed, there is no need to abandon tradition concerning authorship.

Timothy became one of Paul's missionary companions when Paul was traveling through Lycaonia (part of the province of Galatia) during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:3). Timothy served with Paul in Philippi and Thessalonica during that second journey and during Paul's third missionary journey in Ephesus, Corinth, Macedonia, and Troas as well (Acts 20:2–5; Romans 16:21). At some point after Paul's release from his first imprisonment in Rome, Timothy appears to have traveled with him back to Ephesus. Paul mentions that he had instructed Timothy to remain there to minister and correct false teachings (1 Timothy 1:3). It is while Timothy is in Ephesus that Paul wrote this letter to him.

Paul calls Timothy his *gnēsio tekno*, “lawful [or true] son” (1 Timothy 1:2). This term typically means that one is in fact a legitimate born child in wedlock. That Paul adds *en pistei*, “in faith,” is likely meant to make this a strong metaphor referencing Paul as the father of Timothy’s conversion or spiritual birth. Paul conveys similar ideas in 1 Corinthians 4:15 and Galatians 4:19.

Paul’s use of *Theou Sōtēros hēmōn*, “God our Savior,” in 1 Timothy 1:1 is noted by scholars as being unique among Paul’s writings. The title Savior is used in the Old Testament for Jehovah.¹ It is also a title for Hellenistic and Roman rulers and for the Greek god Zeus, and it was used in the mystery religions of the day, so Paul may be trying to appeal to (or rival) Greek and Roman understanding by applying such a title to God.² In this moment, Paul seems to apply the title to God the Father rather than to the Son (see parallel in verses 1 and 2), possibly reflecting an understanding that the Father is truly the author of salvation, albeit accomplished through the Son.

1:3–7. Teachers Should Teach the Plan of God and Develop Charity in Their Students

Paul admonishes Timothy to correct any who *heterodidaskalein*, “teach other things, doctrines” (1 Timothy 1:3). *Heteros* is “other, of a distinct kind,” as opposed to *allos*, “other, of the same kind.” Paul uses both in Galatians 1:6 to refer to those who have abandoned Christ for *heteron euangelion*, “another or different gospel,” while emphasizing in the very next line that he did not mean *allo*. They abandoned Christ because they experienced doubt due to those who desired (*metastrepsai*, “to pervert, corrupt”) the gospel (Galatians 1:7). To prevent corruption of the gospel, Paul’s instruction is that teachers avoid *mythois kai genealogiais aperantois*, “myths and endless genealogies” (likely Paul’s generic terms for false, unrevealed ideas [compare 2 Timothy 4:4] and unresolvable rabbinic disputes over the law [compare Titus 3:9]). According to Paul, these things cause *ekzētēseis*, “speculations, controversies.” Rather, teachers should focus on *oikonomian Theou*, translated in the KJV as “godly edifying” but often translated as “the plan [administration] of God” or “God’s redemptive plan” (see, for example, NASB, CSB, NAB, NET). So, anchoring teachings in God’s plan as revealed with the end goal of developing *agape*, “charity,” in the student is what a teacher should do (1 Timothy 1:4).

1:8–17. The Law Is Good, Designates Sin, and Sets the Stage for Mercy

Any thought that Paul believes law is pointless because of faith in Christ needs to consider this passage and others wherein Paul defends the law as good and expects his readers to establish it in their lives.³ Christ said that He did not come to “destroy the law” of Moses; rather, He came to fulfill it (see Matthew 5:17; 3 Nephi 12:17). Although the law of Moses comes to an end in Christ, Jesus renewed and repackaged it as part of His gospel fullness (see 3 Nephi 15:2–10). In other words, the principles and truths of the law

of Moses were preserved and repackaged as commandments in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the true followers of Christ are to keep them (John 14:15).

As Paul teaches here and elsewhere, the law or commandments of God are what designate sin. In other words, without the law there would be no sin.⁴ Because of the law, Paul's own sins were made known, but he obtained forgiveness through the mercy of Christ—a pattern of hope that he puts forth to all who believe (1 Timothy 1:13–16). Paul recognizes that it was his ignorance due to unbelief that was at the root of his sin of persecuting the faithful, but God is merciful to the ignorant who repent as they come to greater understanding (compare Numbers 15:27–29; Alma 9:16–17). Such should give hope to us all.

1:18–20. Paul Reiterates His Charge

Paul returns Timothy to the *parangelian*, “charge,” that he had asked him to do at the beginning of his letter (“thou mightest charge [*parangeilēs*] some that they teach no other doctrine” [1 Timothy 1:3]). As the basis for his charge, he appeals to the “prophecies which went before on thee.” This can be a reference to the spiritual inspiration related to Timothy's callings (see Acts 13:1–3; Articles of Faith 1:5) or to the divine revelations in general given to the Church—truths that Timothy can use to combat the false teachings creeping in.

Paul mentions specifically two members of the Church who have suffered a metaphorical shipwreck because they abandoned faith and good conscience—namely, Hymenaeus and Alexander. These are likely the same individuals Paul references in his later epistle as those who opposed Paul and taught falsely that the general resurrection had already occurred, undermining the faith of some believers (see 2 Timothy 2:17–18; 4:15–16). That they were “delivered unto Satan” by Paul may have reference to their being severed, by means of excommunication, from their covenants and thus the protection from the accusations of Satan through Christ's Atonement (compare Doctrine and Covenants 78:12; 104:9–10).

2:1–7. Followers of Christ Should Act in Ways to Save All

Paul here outlines two main things that the members of the Church can do to assist the Lord in His work to save all and bring all to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3–4):

(1) Paul requests that *deēseis*, *proseuchas*, *enteuxeis*, and *eucharistias* (“entreaties,” “prayers,” “intercessions,” and “thanksgivings,” respectively) be made for all people and leaders (verses 1–2a). Paul's words here suggest that the members should view themselves in the likeness of Christ, acting as an intermediary and appealing to God in behalf of all people. The word *deēseis* suggests seeking for a specific need or benefit for someone. *Proseuchas* is used for prayer generally but in a list such as this might have a more specific meaning of coming before God or bringing someone before God for His blessing. *Enteuxeis* suggests appealing to God for someone who is suffering difficulty, and *eucharistias* represents the idea of

expressing gratitude to God. All the words are plural, suggesting the repetition of these among individual members or the collective expressions of all the members together.

(2) Paul explains that as a result of their prayers for others, they live an *ēremon*, “quiet,” and *hēsychion*, “tranquil,” life among others (verse 2b). An *ēremon* life does not necessarily mean a disconnected life but one undisturbed by the turbulence of outside forces. A *hēsychion* life is also quiet but in the sense of being still or having a divine inner calm. Paul relates their lives of quiet and tranquility to the principles of godliness and honesty, suggesting that inner peace comes from good Christian conduct, and this would be an influencing force in their effort to offer salvation to all in the world.

2:9–15. Paul’s Instructions to Men and Women

In relation to his instruction in 1 Timothy 2:1–7, Paul admonishes men and women to act accordingly. He draws upon his earlier counsel concerning prayer in verses 1–2a to admonish the men *proseuchesthai*, “to pray,” *en panti topō*, “in every place,” using the more general term for prayer but most certainly wanting them to keep in mind all the various approaches he mentioned in the earlier verses. Paul adds that they should pray *epairontas hosious cheiras*, “lifting up holy hands,” without *orgēs*, “anger, ill-feelings,” or *dialogismou*, “disputation,” toward others. This is the only occurrence of lifting up hands for prayer in the New Testament, but it appears in earlier sources, often in the context of temples.⁵ Paul is likely echoing Jesus’s teachings that one should not be angry but should be reconciled toward others before approaching the altar in prayer (compare Matthew 5:22–24). Why does Paul give this counsel only to the men and not to the women in this moment? That Paul sometimes uses *en panti topō*, “in every place,” to refer to the local meeting places of the Church⁶ and addresses the men in plural can suggest that his counsel is specifically geared toward public prayers in Church settings, for which the men have chief responsibility to lead in their community.

Paul’s earlier reflection about living a “quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and humility” is the backdrop for Paul’s counsel to the women (1 Timothy 2:2b). He begins by stating *hōsautōs*, “likewise,” which suggests that for Paul, the counsel he gave to the men is similar to the counsel he is now giving the women. This is important because Paul can appear in his letters to say things that seem prejudiced against women but that upon closer inspection turn out to be admonition to both men and women equally. For example, his counsel that wives should submit themselves to their husbands is balanced by his counsel to husbands to love their wives and give themselves for them as Christ did for the Church (Ephesians 5:22–25). In fact, Paul began his admonition by stating that they all should give thanks “always for all things unto God . . . submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:20–21). Humbly submitting to one another is a Christian virtue for both men and women. Likewise, Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:8–9 seems to argue for the primacy of man over woman based on the Creation, but then Paul immediately counters, “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman

without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman, but all things of God” (1 Corinthians 11:11).

Paul’s teachings to Timothy are similarly balanced when taken as a whole in context. Just as the men should pray in humble submissiveness, devoid of anger or disputation toward others, Paul’s counsel to the women in 1 Timothy 2 is that they likewise should conduct themselves with *aidous*, “modesty,” and *sōphrosynēs*, “self-control,” as opposed to the excess portrayed in verse 9. Additionally Paul counsels that they should receive instruction *en pasē hypotagē*, “in all submissiveness,” and *en hēsychia*, “in tranquility” (this word, translated as “silence” in verses 11 and 12 of the King James Version, is the same root used earlier in verse 2b) as opposed to directing or usurping authority over the man—likely referencing one called to lead in the Church. Though Paul’s admonitions are addressed specifically to men and women separately, the overall message in its full context is that all should be tranquil, peaceable, and easily entreated with respect to others.

The final verses appear to argue that women must be submissive to men because Eve was second formed and the one who was deceived in the Garden of Eden, not Adam (verses 13–15). Such an interpretation has given justification to oppressive behaviors of men toward women for centuries. Rather, Paul is arguably using the tradition of Adam and Eve to represent humankind’s dependence on Christ to bolster his view that Christians generally (note his shift to “they”—see also the Joseph Smith Translation) should be humble and nurture their faith, love, and holiness in company with *sōphrosynēs*, “sobriety, self-control” (verse 15; the same word is used in verse 9, and this is the main thrust of his admonitions). Just as Adam was the first created in the garden, Jesus is the firstborn of the Father. Just as Adam was not deceived but willingly gave his life to save Eve in the garden, so Christ did not give into temptation but willingly gave His life to save humankind. Just as Eve was “deceived” (verse 14) and must rely on Adam’s co-fall and their resultant seed (Christ) for salvation, so humankind is deceived and must rely upon Christ’s condescension for salvation. It is this reliance or dependence on Christ that should compel the Christian to humility and self-restraint, as Paul has emphasized throughout this chapter.

A side note: That Eve declared herself as being deceived and Paul seems to concur should temper Latter-day Saint zeal in celebrating her decision to usher in the Fall of humankind as simply wise and brave (Genesis 3:13; 1 Timothy 2:14). Such ignores her own admission. While the Fall of humankind is a necessary part of God’s plan, necessity does not always justify the means (otherwise one might praise Joseph’s brothers for selling him into slavery, a fortuitous act that brought about Israel’s salvation from famine, or honor Judas for his brave actions that led to the necessary crucifixion and death of Christ). Even if Eve fully understood and made a brave and wise choice to initiate the Fall, the simple fact that she was hearkening to the words of Lucifer, a false Christ, as she deliberated her choice was something of a deception that needs to be reckoned. Both Adam and Eve are certainly worthy of love and honor, but it must be acknowledged that their necessary step into the Fall brought sorrow, misery, and woe as the scriptures say (see, for example, Genesis 2:17; Moses 6:48). While experiencing the bitterness, sorrow,

and death of a fallen world gives one the ability to fully comprehend sweetness, joy, and life, it must also be acknowledged, as Adam and Eve do, that the sweetness, joy, and life are only made possible through Christ's deliverance from the Fall (see Moses 5:9–11; 6:55–56). So while the necessity and perhaps even bravery and wisdom of Eve and Adam's step can be acknowledged, what we must celebrate is our deliverance from it through Christ.

3:1–7. Paul's Advice for Bishops

The writings of Paul often include direction concerning the order of the Church.⁷ Paul here outlines some qualities he expects bishops to have and seems to recommend that any man with such qualities should desire to serve in this capacity because such work is “a good work” (1 Timothy 3:1).

Episkopēs, “bishop,” is a noun meaning “a visiting, an overseeing,” suggesting care in relation to personal visitation (verse 1). That it could also describe an office can be seen through the usage of its root in Acts 1:20 and in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) of Numbers 4:16 and Psalm 109:8.

Anepilēmpton, “blameless,” means simply “of good character, or above reproach” (1 Timothy 3:2). *Plēktēs*, “striker,” carries the meaning of being physically contentious (verse 3). *Proistamenon*, “rule,” derives from *pró*, “before,” and *hístēmi*, “to stand,” meaning “one with a preset or established character” (verse 4). In other words, in his own house the bishop should be a good model or rule (standard) that his children willingly follow. *Neophyton*, “novice,” means literally “newly planted”—that is, a recent convert (verse 6). Those that are *exōthen*, “without,” likely refers to those that are outside the membership of the Church—in other words, bishops should have a good reputation in the community at large (verse 7).

The counsel that a bishop be “the husband of one wife” in verse 2 has been interpreted in various ways: (1) a bishop should be married, (2) a bishop should never be married more than once his entire life, (3) a bishop should not practice polygyny, and (4) a bishop should be emotionally and sexually faithful to his wife. Number 1 is a possibility. Number 2 is unlikely given Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7:39. Polygyny was a practice among some Jews of Paul's day, so number 3 is also a possibility. The phrase “the wife of one man” is used in 1 Timothy 5:9 to refer to a widow's fidelity, so number 4 is also a possibility.

3:8–13. Paul's Advice for Deacons

The reference to *diakonous*, “deacons” (a term that generally meant “servant,” commonly rendered “minister”), just after reference to bishops echoes Paul's pairing of these two offices in Philippians 1:1. Many of the qualities of a deacon overlap with those of the bishop, including being above reproach, not being an alcoholic, and having an honorable home life with his wife and children. Some differences in the list of qualities may speak to the different functions of office. For example, there is no mention of deacons needing to be “apt to teach,” “take care of the church of God,” or be gentle in their interpersonal relationships,

likely due to a bishop's role as overseer and director in the Church. Further, there is no prohibition against recent converts being a deacon, though they should be "proved" in some way (1 Timothy 3:10).

Semnous, "grave," means "serious, dignified" (verse 8). *Echontas to mystērion*, "holding the mystery," likely means keeping or preserving the plan of God that is hidden from the world but has been revealed to the Christian community by Him. Exactly what a deacon must do to keep or preserve the plan is not indicated, but living it (similar to the meaning of the phrase "keep the commandments") is a good possibility.

3:14–16. The Importance of the Church in Upholding Truth

In the absence of Paul's quick return to Ephesus, the qualities of leaders that Paul has just outlined can help Timothy know how he too should "behave . . . in the house of God" (verse 15). Paul then speaks of God's house as "the church of the living God" and the *stylos*, "pillar," and *hedraiōma*, "ground, foundation, base," of the truth. Using such structural terms suggests strongly that the Church members have the responsibility of upholding or supporting the truths that God has revealed to them.

Paul concludes this section by reminding the Saints of the greatest truth they should uphold—the *eu-sebeias mystērion*, "mystery of godliness," who was *ephanerōthē*, "revealed" (the counter to *mystery*), in the flesh, even Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate revealed example of godliness after which the Christian community, leaders, and Timothy himself should pattern themselves.

4:1–5. Beware of Those Things That Will Lead Some to Apostasy

Paul references a truism, revealed by the Spirit, that some will depart from the faith because they give heed to *planos*, "seducing" or "deceitful, misleading," spirits and the "doctrine of devils" by means of the "hypocrisy of liars" (verses 1–2). Given the context of Paul's earlier warnings to Timothy, Paul is likely speaking of those who promote, under the influence of bad spirits and demons, speculative and false teaching rather than those grounded in revealed truths. Paul adds that these teachers do this because their conscience has been seared or branded, likely referring either to their numbness in spiritual matters or to their being captive (branded) to false spirits. Some of the false teachings include prohibitions against marriage and certain foods as inherently evil. Both are gifts from God meant to be received with thanksgiving.

4:6–11. The Benefits of Spiritual Exercise

Paul's seeming repudiation against asceticism (for example, bodybuilding) in verse 8 is more likely just his way of emphasizing the importance of spiritual exercise. In other words, physical exercise on its own profits a person very little with respect to eternal things. It is the spiritual exercise "unto godliness" that is profitable for everything, having promise in this life and the life to come (verses 7–8).

4:12–16. Neglect Not the Gift That Is in Thee

Timothy's young age, estimated to be in the thirties, should be of no concern; rather, his speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity will be a *typos*, “example, pattern,” for believers to follow.

Arguably Timothy has a gift relative to reading, teaching, and understanding the scriptures that he should not neglect and that was confirmed through his calling (verses 13–14). Paul exhorts him to meditate upon these and give himself wholly to the doctrine therein, and consequently his own profiting thereby (including salvation) will affect others around him (verses 15–16).

5:1–2. Attitude Toward Others

One way to categorize Paul's counsel to Timothy in 5:1–6:2 is its focus on relationships and care between Church members and with respect to the Church itself. Paul's advice that Timothy respect Church members as if they were his own family is a good overarching consideration in all matters (verses 1–2).

5:3–16. Care for Widows

As a representative of the Church, Timothy should honor, by taking care of, those who are *ontōs*, “truly,” widows, meaning those who are *memonōmenē*, “desolate, left alone” (verses 3, 5; compare verse 16). In contrast, Timothy should expect that widows with children or grandchildren will be cared for by their progeny first, as recompense for raising them (verse 4). Those who refuse have denied the faith and are worse than an unbeliever (verse 8).

Widows who are sixty years or older, do not have family, and have lived faithfully can be put onto a list for receiving Church aid (verses 9–10). Apparently, those who were added to the list made a *pistin*, “faith, pledge,” of some kind to serve God (verse 12). As a result, Timothy is told not to put young widows on the list, for they will likely desire remarriage at some point, which will cause them to break their pledge (verse 12). Further, young widows fully supported by the Church without any responsibility may turn to idleness and gossip, so Paul suggests their focus be on remarrying and raising a family to avoid the reproach (verses 13–14). Again, widows with family should be cared for by them so that the Church can focus on those who no longer have families to care for them (verse 16).

5:17–18. Honoring Church Elders

That Paul mentions elders who “rule well” and “labor in the word” suggests he is talking about Church officers and not just older men (verse 17). Faithful leaders should be considered worthy of honor, though specifics are not given on what this would actually look like. Perhaps Paul is not concerned so much about how this is accomplished but more so about the gratitude that Timothy and the members generally should have toward those who lead well and work hard in their service.

5:19–25. Discipline for Church Elders

Any accusation brought against an elder should be accompanied by two or three witnesses, and if it is found that the elder has sinned, Timothy should *elenche*, “rebuke, expose,” him before all (verse 19). This not only serves to dissuade others from sinning likewise but also protects the Church from unknowingly being led by a false or excommunicated leader (verse 20). Timothy should take extreme care to execute this duty (so much so that Paul charges him in the presence of God, Christ, and angels to do so) and to show no partiality or favoritism in such matters (verse 21). He should also not reordain men too quickly, minimizing the seriousness of the sin and thereby becoming associated with it (verse 22). Let the good works and repentant character of the man fully be known first (verses 24–25).

Verse 23 appears to be an aside or personal note to Timothy concerning his physical health—namely, that to aid his stomach and other infirmities, Timothy should not reject a little wine for medicinal purposes. Perhaps Paul felt that the burden of dealing with the sins of Church leaders might manifest itself via physical ailments in Timothy.

6:1–2. Slaves’ Attitudes Toward Their Masters

Paul is not condoning the institution of slavery here but simply addressing the Christian attitude of those who are caught up in it. He counsels slaves who are members of the Church to be respectful of their masters, and such an example will prevent anyone from thinking ill of God and His teachings (verse 1). And those whose masters are also Christian should not be disrespectful to their masters because everyone is now brothers and sisters (that is, truly equal and siblings as children of God). Rather, these slaves should take the higher road and serve them more because their masters believe and are also loved.

6:3–19. Beware Teachers that Focus on Wealth

Paul concludes this letter to Timothy by returning to the topic at the beginning—namely, teachers who are not focused on the words of Christ or promoting a godly life but who are *nosōn*, “unhealthy,” about questions and disputations. This can lead to strife and *hyponoiai ponērai*, “evil suspicions,” among other ills (1 Timothy 6:3–4). Paul focuses on a particular teaching about which he is concerned: those who believe that “godliness is a means to gain” (verse 5).

While such a teaching might seem consistent with God’s promise that those faithful to God’s covenants and commandments will prosper in the land (see Deuteronomy 6:1–3; 28:1–8), Paul seems to reject the idea that personal wealth is the objective of godliness. Rather, Paul views godliness itself, with contentment in the things we have, as being the great gain one should seek (1 Timothy 6:6–8). Those that focus on wealth as the end goal are easily tempted and led astray from the faith (verses 9–10). Paul tells Timothy himself to focus on righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness, fighting the good fight of

faith, and laying hold on eternal life (verses 11–12). Such things are what he should seek until Christ comes again (verse 14). Likewise, the rich should trust not in riches but in the living God, and they will be rich in good works and “ready to distribute,” or in other words, they will be generous in giving of their wealth, and lay hold on eternal life (verses 17–19).

6:20–21. Paul’s Closing Remark

Paul concludes his letter with a simple request that Timothy keep or guard the *parathēkēn*, “deposit,” avoiding “empty babblings,” “opposing arguments,” and those things that are “falsely called ‘knowledge’” when in fact they are not. This is likely meant to draw Timothy back to the general theme in the letter of false teachings, and it suggests that the deposit that Timothy should guard is the pure teachings of the gospel of Christ.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Deuteronomy 32:15; Psalms 24:5; 25:5; 27:1, 9; Proverbs 29:25; Micah 7:7; Isaiah 12:2; 25:9.
- 2 See G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 11 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2003), 7:1003–10021.
- 3 Compare Romans 3:31; 7:12–14, 22, 25.
- 4 1 Timothy 1:9; compare Romans 7:7–8; 2 Nephi 2:5; Alma 42:17–22.
- 5 Compare Psalms 28:2; 134:2; Isaiah 1:15.
- 6 See 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; compare Malachi 1:11.
- 7 See, for example, 1 Corinthians 12:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13; 1 Peter 5:1–5.

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Source: *New Testament Insights: 1 Timothy*, by John S. Thompson