

1 TIMOTHY

Authorship & Audience

From the first two verses of this letter, it is clear that Paul wrote to Timothy. The close relationship between Paul and Timothy becomes apparent from verse two where Paul describes Timothy as “my true child in the faith.” Elsewhere, Paul speaks of Timothy as “my fellow worker” (Rom. 16:21), but more often Paul discusses him in affectionate terms such as “my beloved and faithful child in the Lord” (1 Cor. 4:7). Paul met Timothy in Lystra, and from there, Timothy began traveling with Paul and working alongside him (Acts 16:1-2).

As part of Timothy’s working with Paul, he remained in Ephesus to lead this congregation that Paul helped begin (Acts 19). Paul seemed to have stayed in Ephesus for about three years, and he would later revisit the Ephesians elders (Acts 20:17-38) on his way to Jerusalem when he would be arrested. Paul also wrote the letter of Ephesians to this church. All those facts point to Paul being highly invested in this church. He wanted to see them succeed, and so he left Timothy there to continue the work he had begun.

While we do not know for sure, it is likely that this letter was written in the mid-60s.

Purpose

Paul explains his purpose in writing to Timothy in 3:14-15:

14 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

Paul writes this letter so that the church at Ephesus can know how to be the church. He instructs them on the importance of prayer (2:1-5), pastors (3:1-7), deacons (3:8-13), caring for widows (5:1-16), and how the wealthy should act (6:6-10, 17-19).

Undergirding all these practical issues is the fundamental issue of the importance of the church’s true teaching. As Paul says in 3:15, the church is “a pillar and buttress of the truth.” Paul clearly states what this “truth” is. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ, “who was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed in the world, taken up in glory.” This is a confession of the life and work of Christ. This gospel story is foundational to the church’s ministry.

The importance of adhering to the gospel is evident throughout this letter. Paul explains that he has left Timothy in Ephesus to counter false teaching (1:3), and he encourages Timothy to hold fast to the faith that was entrusted to him (1:18-19). The qualification that distinguishes an overseer (pastor) from a deacon is that an overseer must be “able to teach” (3:2). Again in chapter 4, Paul addresses the danger of false teaching, and concludes this chapter by exhorting Timothy, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching” (4:16). He must watch his life and doctrine. The elders who rule well should be honored, “especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (5:17). In the last chapter, Paul again warns against false teaching and calls up Timothy to teach the true gospel (6:1-5). Finally, Paul concludes with a call for Timothy to “guard the deposit entrusted to you” (6:20), which is the gospel message. The true gospel of Jesus Christ must be taught and proclaimed.

Application

First Timothy provides much practical advice about what we should do as a church, but even more than this, it reminds us that the church is built upon Christ Jesus. As the church, we are a pillar of the truth, and so we must continue to believe what the Scriptures teach about who Jesus is and what he has accomplished. We must keep believing the gospel, but this message does not stop with us: we also must proclaim it to others. As a church we must continue to be strengthened in what we believe, and then we are called to share this message of Christ with a world in need.

Discussion Questions

1 Timothy 1:3-6 | What does Paul warn Timothy about in these verses? Why would Paul be concerned about what is being taught in this church? What does Paul say in verse 5 is the goal of his charge? How does right doctrine lead to love?

1 Timothy 2:5-6 | How is Jesus a mediator between God and humans? Why do you think this verse emphasizes Jesus’s humanity rather than his divinity? What does Paul mean when he says that Jesus was a ransom?

1 Timothy 3:1-13 | “Overseer” in this verse refers to the office of pastor or elder in the church. What qualifications distinguish a deacon from a pastor? What from these lists of qualifications should be true of all Christians?

1 Timothy 4:16 | Why does Paul highlight both how Timothy lives and what he teaches as important for the salvation of his hearers and his own salvation?

1 Timothy 5:1-2 | How does Paul instruct Timothy to interact in the church? How can you apply these instructions in your own interactions at church?

1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19 | How does Paul's teaching on wealth challenge you? How are you tempted to look for security in your possessions or job rather than in the Lord? What is the antidote to trusting in wealth or ourselves?

Frequently Asked Questions

1 Timothy 2:4 | If God desires that all people be saved, why are not all people saved?

From the outset, the context of the letter demonstrates that 1 Timothy 2:4 does not mean that all people will be saved. In 4:1, 5:24, and 6:10, Paul shows that some people will reject the faith and face judgment. Jesus's own teaching in Matthew 25 reveals that there will be a final, enduring punishment for those who reject him.

If God desires all to be saved, then how can it be true that some will not be saved?

From a biblical perspective, the answer cannot be that God is too weak to be able to be saved. The Bible clearly reveals the Lord as all powerful. He can do as he wills.

It seems then, that God's desire for all to be saved, is subservient to another one of his desires. One's overarching theology typically guides how one interprets this passage. From an Arminian perspective, God's greater desire is to preserve human freedom. While he desires all to be saved, some reject the gospel. From a Calvinistic perspective, God's greater desire is to reveal his glory through both judgment and salvation (Rom. 9:22-23), and so he has mercy on whom he will have mercy (Rom. 9:15; Exod. 33:19).

While the exact way to understand this verse may not be clear, what becomes clear in this context is that the gospel should be proclaimed to all people. This is not a gospel for only a certain group, but Christ died in order that people from every tribe, tongue, and nation could be redeemed.

1 Timothy 2:11-15 | There are two main questions that arise from these verses: (1) what does Paul mean by his prohibition on women's teaching and exercising authority in v. 12? (2) what does he mean by "she will be saved through childbearing" in v. 15? While the two questions are related, it will be helpful to begin by addressing them separately.

In this letter, Paul is instructing Timothy on "how one ought to behave in the household of God" (3:15). In this section of chapter 2, he is particularly addressing how men and women are to conduct themselves during the gathered worship of the church. Thus, in 2:8, he calls on men to pray but to avoid anger and quarreling. For women, Paul instructs them in 2:9-10 to dress modestly, rather than ostentatiously; they should be concerned with adorning themselves with good works rather than fine jewelry. These instructions are responses to challenges that have arisen in the Ephesians church but have application today.

As we turn to the more challenging verses of chapter 2, we need to keep in mind two key biblical affirmations about women and men. (1) Women and men are equal in value and dignity. God created both women and men in his own image, and as such all people are valuable in his sight. (2) Women and men serve complementary roles. In God's infinite wisdom, women and men are different, and God has designed these differences to work together for our good. As we consider differences, we always should return to the affirmation that women and men are equal in God's sight.

In 1 Timothy 2:11-15, Paul continues outlining what should be done in a gathering of the church and sets forth two limits on women's activity in the church. In v. 12, he explains, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man." These two limits are: (1) Women should not teach with the authority of a pastor, and (2) women should not lead with the authority of a pastor. The link between 2:12 and pastoral authority is the combining of the ideas of teaching and authority. According to the rest of this letter, teaching and exercising authority are what pastors are to do (3:2, 5; 5:17). Thus, in 2:12, Paul seems to be limiting the role of pastor to men. This accords with his list of qualifications for overseers in 3:1-7.

Negatively stated, the first portion of this prohibition is that women should not teach with pastoral authority. We should add at this point that men who have not been affirmed by the church as pastors also do not teach the church with pastoral authority. When a visiting speaker preaches on a Sunday morning, this does not carry the same weight with the congregation as when the pastor proclaims the Scriptures to them.

Positively stated, Paul encourages women to willingly listen to the biblical instruction of their pastors (2:11). This willing listening to biblical instruction seems to be the idea behind the terse phrase "she is to remain silent" (2:12), for we know that this cannot be an absolute prohibition since in 1 Corinthians 11:5, Paul outlines women praying and prophesying in church.

Also, we should note that the New Testament shows that women have an important role to play in instructing people in biblical truth. In Acts 18:26, Priscilla and Aquilla instruct Apollos. Timothy's mother and grandmother were central to his own instruction in the faith (2 Tim. 1:5), and in Titus 2:3-4 older women are to instruct younger women. Likewise, 1 Corinthians 11:5 shows that women have a prophetic role to play in the corporate worship of the church. More generally, all believers - women and men - are called to make disciples through evangelism and teaching all the Lord has commanded (Matt. 28:19-20). Similarly, in Colossians 3:16, Paul instructs all believers, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

To summarize 2:11-12, Paul is restricting the office of pastor / elder / overseer to qualified men (See 3:1-7), for the main priorities of a pastor are teaching and exercising authority. These are the very two things he limits women from doing in these verses. Paul roots these prohibitions against women teaching and exercising authority as pastors in creation and then the fall of Adam and Eve. In 2:13, he bases the commands on the creation order: "Adam was formed first, then Eve." Then in 2:14, he points to the fall, citing how Eve was deceived first.

From this discussion of Adam and Eve, Paul takes us to the most challenging verse in these passages: "Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control" (2:15). While our attention is first drawn to "saved through childbearing," I think it's worth noting that Paul transitions from the singular 'she' at the start of this sentence to the plural 'they' at the end. Who is this 'she'? In 2:14, Paul is discussing Eve, and so it seems that this 'she' in v. 15 is Eve. I would suggest that there's a connection here between this verse and Genesis 3:15 where the Lord promises Eve, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." From the rest of Scripture, we know that Eve's offspring that crushed the serpent was none other than Jesus Christ. While the serpent had deceived Eve, her Son would defeat him. John Stott draws the connection between Paul's teaching on women's roles in the church and this allusion to Gen. 3:15:

"So then, even if certain roles are not open to women, and even if they are tempted to resent their position, they and we must never forget what we owe to a woman. If Mary had not given birth to the Christ child, there would have been no salvation for anybody. No greater honor has ever been given to woman than in the calling of Mary to be the mother of the savior of the world."

Salvation has come to the world through Eve's offspring. Paul then switches to 'they' to connect this to women generally: "if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control." This is a call for women to continue to persevere in their faith.

Danny Akin extrapolates from these verses, "Paul was possibly saying that God has created women uniquely, and their responsibilities are uniquely good in the church, in marriage, and in bearing children. All of this should be embraced in faith and love and holiness."

Building upon Dr. Akin's insight, I would add that part of the problem facing the church in Ephesus as well as the church today is that what men do is seen as normative. In other words, we live in a society that has set men and their responsibilities up as the normal and ideal toward which all people should aspire. Here, Paul wants us to see that there are things that women can do that men cannot. And one of them - bearing children - is vitally important to all human life on earth. Without women, we would not exist. On top of that, Paul points to the spiritual component of child-bearing: it was through Mary's giving birth to Jesus that salvation came to the world.

Women and men were made by God to do different things. We buy into an anti-biblical and sexist lie when we exalt what one gender can do over another. In his infinite wisdom that is beyond our finding out, God has made us different and for different but complementary purposes. All of us - women and men, boy and girl - if we are trusting in Christ for our salvation are called to embrace our role in the body of Christ for the good of the church and the glory of God.

1 Timothy 4:10 | What does Paul mean that God "is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe"? There are several options for how to understand this passage. (1) Salvation in Christ is offered to all people, but it is only those who believe who receive it. (2) Some would understand "all people" to be "all kinds of people," so that this passage means both Jews and Gentiles can be saved. (3) "Savior" here has a different meaning than in the sense of final salvation. Soter has a broader range of meaning than just savior in the final, eschatological sense. It can also speak of one who preserves. In this sense the verse would be saying that God's common grace extends to all people. As believers who "toil and strive," we can trust in him.

The main decision that has to be made in interpreting this passage splits options 1 and 2 from option 3. That question is: does Paul talk about God as savior as a reference to what they endure as they toil and strive? Or, Does Paul discuss God as savior because of the goal of why they toil and strive? If Paul is focusing on what they're enduring, then option 3 seems best. If Paul is focusing on why they're enduring - because of the promise for the life to come (v. 8) - then it seems that v.10 has in mind salvation in the sense of being reconciled with God. I would give the slightest edge to option 3, but this is an interpretation to be held loosely.

What is clear from the rest of Scripture is that Paul does not have in mind universalism, which is the teaching that all people will receive salvation regardless of whether or not they trust in Christ in this life. One of the key principles we must use when studying the Bible is that the clearer passages of Scripture should be used to interpret the less clear. We cannot read a verse in isolation but must look at the context of the passage in its paragraph, book, and ultimately the whole of Scripture.

2 TIMOTHY

Authorship & Audience

Second Timothy is another letter that Paul wrote to his “beloved child” Timothy (1:1-2). The content of the letter reveals that Paul is imprisoned, and most likely, this was his final imprisonment in Rome while he was waiting to be executed. Such a scenario puts the dating of this letter to be AD 64-65. This is Paul’s last letter that we have in the New Testament. As in 1 Timothy, Timothy is serving the church in Ephesus.

Purpose

Paul writes Timothy to continue to stand firm in his faith. In many ways this letter is a call to persevere. As this is Paul’s last letter to Timothy, his personal care and affection for his protege are evident throughout. Paul also highlights the faithfulness of God and the importance of proclaiming salvation in Christ. Additionally, Paul asks for Timothy to come visit him soon before his death.

Application

One lesson we can learn from Paul in this letter is what it means to suffer and to die in a way that honors Christ. To the end of his life, he focuses on the spread of Christ through his own proclamation of the gospel and by encouraging Timothy to continue to make his life all about Christ. In this letter, we also see the high priority Paul placed on making Christ known. He emphasizes that Timothy must continue to teach the true gospel of Christ despite false teachings and temptations to soften the message. He must endure in the hard work of gospel ministry. We, too, should heed Paul’s call to hold fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ, to work hard to make him known, and to endure in the faith.

Discussion Questions

2 Timothy 1:8-14 | Why might Timothy be tempted to be ashamed of Paul and of the gospel Paul proclaimed? Where are you tempted to be ashamed of the gospel? What encouragement does Paul give to keep trusting in Christ?

2 Timothy 2:1-2 | What is Paul calling on Timothy to do in these verses? Who are people in your life to whom you can entrust what you have learned of Jesus Christ? What would this look like?

2 Timothy 2:3-6 | What do these three metaphors of the soldier, athlete, and farmer teach us about working for Christ? How can you apply those lessons to your life?

2 Timothy 2:8-9 | What does Paul mean that God's word is not bound? Why is that good news for us as we share our faith?

2 Timothy 3:1-9 | Where are you tempted to appear godly but in reality you are denying God's power?

2 Timothy 3:12 | Who is included in this "all"? What does that mean for what we should expect? How can we meet such persecution with grace, mercy, and love?

2 Timothy 4:1-5 | How do these verses apply to your own life? What would it look like for you to live out these verses?

TITUS

Authorship & Audience

Paul wrote this letter to Titus, whom he had left in Crete to continue to put the newly-formed church there in order (1:1, 4-5). The most likely date for this letter is the mid-60's. Paul mentions Titus several times in 2 Corinthians and also in Galatians 2:1, 3 and 2 Timothy 4:10. From all these references, it becomes clear that he was a coworker with Paul who traveled with him throughout the Mediterranean world to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Purpose

Paul left Titus on the island of Crete so that he “might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town” (1:5). Through their missionary endeavors, there was a gospel movement on this island where many came to faith in Jesus Christ. These new believers were organized into churches in their towns, and now Titus has been left to help discipline these believers and develop leadership within the churches. Paul writes this letter to help address some of the concerns that had arisen in Titus's ministry on Crete. Throughout the letter, Paul emphasizes that there is an indissoluble link between what one believes and how one behaves. Faith and works go hand-in-hand. True, biblical teaching will manifest itself in godly living.

Application

This letter helps us catch a glimpse of Paul's vision for what a church should look like. As he instructs Titus to put the churches into order and to appoint elders, we see some of the key issues Paul believes must be addressed in a church, including the selection of elders / pastors and the way discipleship should be done in the church. Also, this key theme of how biblical doctrine will result in godly living is a teaching that is highly relevant for today. Generally speaking, we are far too adept at segmenting our lives, so that our faith comes to have little to no bearing on how we live. While we are saved by faith alone, following Christ has ethical implications that must be lived. We need to challenge ourselves to live in accord with what we believe.

Discussion Questions

Titus 1:1 | Why does Paul emphasize that this truth “accords with godliness?” How are believing the gospel and living a godly life connected?

Titus 1:16 | In this paragraph, Paul is rebuking false teachers. What is Paul's criticism of them in 1:16? Where in your life do you see that you are denying your profession of God by how you live?

Titus 2:11-14 | Does "salvation for all people" mean that all people will ultimately be saved? Why not? What connection does Paul make between salvation and everyday life? Do you normally consider the impact your faith in Christ has on how you live each day?

Titus 3:1-8 | How does Paul describe salvation in this passage? What is the connection between God's free gift of salvation and good works?

1-3 JOHN

Authorship & Audience

These letters were written by the Apostle John; that is John the son of Zebedee who followed Jesus. While John does not mention himself in these epistles, the strong similarities in language and content between these letters and the Gospel of John indicate that he was the author. Furthermore, the strongest and most reliable accounts from early church history point to the Apostle John as the writer of these three letters.

The intended audience of 1 John is not clear. What we can deduce from the letter is that John is writing to a church for whom he cares deeply. In 2 John, the letter is addressed to the “elect lady,” which is his way of referring to a particular church. John writes the third epistle to “Gaius,” but we do not have a clear picture of who this is.

Purpose

In 1 John, John addresses false teaching that has come into the church. In this letter, he affirms that Christ did indeed physically come to earth and that forgiveness can be found in him. John emphasizes that following Christ entails right belief and right behavior. However, these two alone are not all of what it means to follow Christ, for there is a third essential component: love. Robert Yarborough helpfully explains, “True godliness in John’s conception consists of a third integral element: deep-rooted devotion of the heart to God: This is love.”

Second John continues to emphasize these three key markers of the Christian life. Those who follow Christ must love one another (v. 5), obey his commands (v. 6), and continue to believe the true gospel (v. 9-11).

John addresses a single individual, Gaius, in 3 John. John commends him for his care and hospitality of traveling Christian workers. As this brief letter closes, John recommends Demetrius to Gaius (v. 12). The letter commends Gaius and also serves as a letter of recommendation for Demetrius.

Application

The three-fold description of followers of Christ as those who believe, obey, and love continues to challenge believers today that the call of Christ carries over into all our lives. Scripture must shape our beliefs, actions, and affections.

The danger of false teaching is a recurring theme throughout these letters. Today, there exist some who would claim to proclaim Christ but reject or twist his teaching. These letters remind us of the need to listen and to read diligently, and to compare all that we hear to the truth of God's Word to us in Scripture.

Third John highlights the importance of showing hospitality to traveling Christian workers. One particular modern-day application is that the church should care for missionaries and extend hospitality to them as we are able.

Discussion Questions

1 John 1:1-4 | Why does John emphasize the physicality of Jesus's coming in these verses? Why is it important that Jesus was completely human? What difference does it make that Jesus redeemed us in body and soul and that everlasting life with him will be in the new creation?

1 John 1:8-10 | How do these verses offer great hope for us as believers? What does our forgiveness cost?

1 John 2:4-6 | How strong does John make the connection between what we believe and how we live? How does this challenge you in your own life?

1 John 2:10-11 | According to John, what marks us as Christians?

1 John 3:11-18 | Why is love for other believers a mark that we have been redeemed? What is the difference between pointing to love a sign of salvation and saying that it is the cause of salvation? Why is such a distinction so important?

1 John 4:1-6 | What does it mean to “test the spirits”? Why does John encourage his readers to do that? What danger is lurking that he wants us to avoid?

1 John 5:1-5 | What marks of a true believer does John highlight here? Where do you find yourself to be in line with John’s list? Where do you see the need for growth in these areas in your life?

2 John 5-8 | What aspects of the Christian life does John highlight in these verses?

3 John 5-8 | Why does John commend Gaius? What would it look like in today’s world to care for traveling Christian workers as Gaius did?

Frequently Asked Questions

1 John 2:18, 2:22, 4:3 & 2 John 7 | Who is antichrist?

When we think of “antichrist,” we usually expect a single figure who will appear just before the return of Christ. However, when we examine John’s use of the term, it is far from clear that this is what he has in mind.

Only in John’s epistles do we find the term antichrist in the Bible. Four times John speaks of antichrist: 1 John 2:18, 1 John 2:22, 1 John 4:3, and 2 John 7. In looking at these passages, we’ll see that John is far more concerned about warning the church about false teaching than he is in identifying a particular person.

When we first come to antichrist in John’s writing, we see that he expects not a singular figure but many. “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 1:18). There is not just one antichrist but many. In fact, later in this same letter John will write, “Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.” Not just one, but every spirit that denies Jesus is antichrist.

The other aspect to note here is the timing. John says that antichrist has already come. We're right to expect antichrist in the last days, but for John and the other New Testament writers, we already are living in the last days. The death and resurrection of Christ is the dividing line of history. On the other side of the empty tomb, we live in the last days. Thus, John writes, "It is the last hour" (1 John 2:18).

The defining characteristic of antichrist is the denial of true, biblical teaching. In 1 John 2:22, John explains, "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son." He continues the same stream of thought in 1 John 4:3, "Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already." This same notion carries over to 2 John 7, where John explains, "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist." Antichrist is one who denies the incarnation of Jesus, his messianic identity, or that he is one with the Father.

John's concern is not with identifying a solitary end-times figure, but he warns the church in his day and ours about the dangers of false teaching. Those who deny that Christ has come in the flesh are antichrist. John's strong warning should alert us to the danger of false teaching. We are prone to view ideas and theology as inconsequential: what really matters is if people love God and others. John shows us in these letters that our beliefs have powerful consequences. If we reject the truth of Scripture, particularly about Jesus Christ, we will reject the moral implications of that truth. Following Christ means that we live according to his will, love God, and believe in accord with Scripture.

**Copyright © 2017 by John D. Morrison
Published by Lakewood Baptist Church
2235 Thompson Bridge Rd
Gainesville, GA 30506
Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are
from the ESV© Bible
(The Holy Bible, English Standard Version©),
copyright © 2001 by Crossway.**