

Module: The New Testament

Session 19 – 1 Timothy

Author

Paul. Some objections have been raised in recent years on the basis of uncharacteristic vocabulary and style, but other evidence still supports Paul's authorship.

Date of Composition

Around 62-66 AD.

Purpose and Audience

*“Timothy, my son, here are my instructions for you, based on the prophetic words spoken about you earlier. May they help you fight well in the Lord’s battles.”
(1:15)*

Instructions for Church Leadership

1 Timothy presents the most explicit and complete instructions for church leadership and organization in the Bible. This includes sections on appropriate conduct in worship gatherings, the qualifications of elders and deacons, and the proper order of church discipline. 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are known as the “pastoral epistles”, because they are not written to churches but to specific church leaders. They were written to two individuals, in specific times and circumstances, but there are lessons for us.

Who was Timothy?

Timothy's was one of Paul's converts. His father was Greek; his mother was a Jewish Christian (Ac 16:1). From his childhood he had been taught the Old testament (2 Tim 1:5; 3:15). Paul called him "my true son in the faith" (1:2), perhaps having led him to belief in Christ during his first visit to Lystra. At the time of his missionary journey Paul invited Timothy to join him, circumcising him so that his Greek ancestry would not be a liability in working with Jews (Ac 16:3).



Timothy helped Paul evangelize Macedonia and Achaia (Ac 17:14-15; 18:5) and was with him during much of his long ministry at Ephesus (Ac 19:22). He traveled with him from Ephesus to Macedonia, to Corinth (Ac 20:3), back to Macedonia, and to Asia Minor (Ac 20:1-6). He may even have accompanied Paul all the way to Jerusalem; if this was the case, he may have heard Paul's warnings to the Ephesian elders in Ac 20:18-35. He was with Paul during the apostle's first imprisonment (Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; Phm 1). His name appears in 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon.

During his fourth missionary journey, Paul had instructed Timothy to care for the church at Ephesus (1:3) while he went to Macedonia. When Paul realized that he might not return to Ephesus in the near future (3:14-15), he wrote this first letter to Timothy to develop instructions he had given his young assistant (1:3, 18), to refute false teachings (1:3-7; 4:1-8; 6:3-5,20-21) and to supervise the affairs of the growing Ephesian church (church worship, ch. 2; the appointment of qualified church leaders, 3:1-13; 5:17-25).

Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus were probably his last letters, written after many years of leadership in some of the first Christian communities (though not all). Called "pastoral epistles" by Paul Anton in 1726, and sometimes (erroneously) referred to as "church manuals", or "advice to young pastors", they give clear guidance to Timothy and Titus (experienced leaders in their own right) as they sought to identify those to whom the leadership batons should be passed in due course; all part of leaving a solid "legacy".



Structure

Greetings - 1:1-2

Warning against false teachers - 1:3-11

Paul's career and charge to Timothy - 1:12-20

Public worship - 2:1-15

Instructions for leaders - 3:1-16

Correction of false teaching - 4:1-5

Encouragement to Timothy to preach - 4:6-5:2

Widows, elders and slaves - 5:3-6:2

Warnings against false teachings and love of money - 6:3-10

Final instructions and blessing - 6:11-21

Key Issues

Christ

"our Savior and Christ Jesus, who gives us hope." (1:1)

"This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' " (1:15)

“Cling to your faith in Christ” (1:19)

“Christ was revealed in a human body, and vindicated by the Spirit. He was seen by angels and announced to the nations. He was believed in throughout the world and taken to heaven in glory.” (3:16)

Jesus Christ is presented by Paul as the Saviour of all who believe in Him. The entire Gospel and Christian movement are established on Him. Paul finishes by urging Timothy to work in the knowledge that Christ will come again (6:14-16).

Warnings against False Teachings

False teachers of the law gave long speeches about God's law, however, they did not understand the underlying purpose (and goal) of the law. And they did not know that they must love people, so they used the law to condemn others. In chapter 4, Paul writes about more false teachers. He warns Timothy not to listen to them. Instead, Timothy should teach people to trust God (4:9-11).

Christian Living

- pray for all people (2:1-8)
- dress modestly (2:9,10)
- Paul's views about the role of women in the church (2:11-15)
- how to treat older men and women, younger men and women, and elders (5:1-21)
- slaves (6:1, 2)
 - ↳ Commentators have pointed out that Paul did not command Christians to free their slaves; this does not imply he supported slavery. He was establishing a Christian community in a world that assumed slavery. The growth of Christianity was the single greatest contributor to the ultimate abolition of slavery in the Roman world. The key message here is love.

Christian Leadership

Experienced Christian leaders pass on eventually, and often little is left of their footprints; Timothy (in Ephesus) and Titus (in Crete) were no exceptions. The effectiveness of leaders can be evaluated by what (or whom) they leave behind. This is our challenge today.

The era covered by Acts was passing. The Christian community (coming together out of all classes and ethnic groups) was growing and needed workable structures, solid teaching, examples of Christian living and strong leadership. Opposition from the non-Christian community was ever-present, and would shortly peak in a fresh wave of persecution under the Roman Emperor Nero. There was no shortage of false and divisive ideas on the periphery of the church (promoted by Gnostics, Judaizers, syncretists, pagan religions/philosophies, heretics and others), that were trying to attach themselves to Christian teaching, like barnacles to the keel of a vessel. Leadership was not for the faint-hearted, or those who wanted it for their own ends. There were those who had influence and sought to get into positions of leadership for the wrong reasons. Their lives, motives and morals did not reflect what genuine Christianity stood for. Their doctrines were suspect or erroneous. Their methods belonged to the world. Others were godly, caring, effective leaders; they were often the first people that enemies of the church arrested during times of persecution; leadership in the Body of Christ was not a sinecure.

This was the context in which Paul (in prison at the time) set forth his criteria for those who should take the church to the next level, under God.



Effective Christian leaders are committed to advancing the mission in ways that also enable others to make their Kingdom contribution.



Clarifying Titles

“Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.” (1 Timothy 3:1 NIV)

It is important to say something about language. The Greek word used here is *episkopē*, or “overseer, office, charge, the office of an elder”. The term “Episcopalian” (rule by bishops) comes from the Greek. “Presbyterian” denotes rule by presbyters, or elders. There are variable structures of church government today.

Other versions say:

- “leadership in the church” (The Message)
- “the office of overseer (bishop, superintendent)” (Amplified Bible)
- “bishop” (New King James Version)
- “holding office” (Phillips)

It is not the job title (as useful as titles can be) that makes a leader, but the call of God. The Christian community needs pastoral leadership (another word for “pastor” is “shepherd”) that is committed first and foremost to Jesus Christ, then to reaching the world and discipling believers in the environment of the church.

The criteria for leaders are universal and apply regardless of church hierarchies or the actual title or job description used for the individual leader.

Selection Criteria and Responsibilities of Church Leaders

<p>Christian leaders recognize the call of God to the role (and the spiritual authority that comes with the office), and persevere in that call, even when it gets hard.</p> <p>Jesus never lost sight of His relationship with the Father, God’s plan for redemption and the reason He came.</p> <p>Leadership is not a right, it is a privilege. Too many leaders glory in power, position and perks, or become petty or pompous, and lose sight of that privilege.</p>	<p>1:1, 2, 12, 18; 2:7; 4:14</p>
---	----------------------------------

<p>If you do so, you will lose sight of the purpose for which you are called - to love and serve God and people, and show them how to live (1:5)</p> <p>The gifts that God has given are not to be taken for granted or treated lightly. We are to protect what God has given us. We do not earn them, nor are they our personal possessions; they are entrusted to us by God, by His grace, for His reasons.</p>	
<p>Identify and deal with false doctrines that emerge in the church.</p> <p>The earliest challenges facing the church were false leaders and doctrines, that sought to undermine the simplicity of the Gospel, hence the urgency of some of the New Testament epistles.</p> <p>The Christian life, at both individual and corporate levels, involves conflict, between God and Satan, the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world, and between ideas. The Christian leader must know the truth well enough to be able to discern between truth and falsehood, and deal with them. (Chapter 6 goes into considerable detail.)</p>	1:3-7; 4:6; 6:3-5
<p>Be a person of prayer. Spend time with God - often.</p> <p>Paul encourages Timothy to prioritize prayer. After many years of ministry leadership he recognized the danger of prayer being pushed aside in the ‘busyness’ of church life. The leader is a pray-er first and foremost. R.A. Torrey wrote, “Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God’s infinite grace and power. All that God is, and all that God has, is at the disposal of prayer.” Prayer helps us to see and do the will of God - and helps release faith necessary for it to come to pass. It is prayer that gives us strength to do His work (1:12)</p>	2:1-8
<p>Be a person of good Christian character:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above reproach • faithful to his wife * • temperate, self-controlled • lives wisely • respectable, good reputation • hospitable, willing to have guests in his home, generous • able to teach • not a heavy drinker • not violent, but gentle • not quarrelsome • not a lover of money • able to manage his own family well and see that his children obey him (in a manner worthy of respect) • not a recent convert • be of good reputation with people outside the church 	3:1-7

<p>* The epistles speak to ministry in terms of a single gender; we know that the call of God to leadership across the Body of Christ today comes in many shapes and forms; where women are in positions of leadership the texts should be applied to their circumstances. Likewise, there are some in Christian leadership who are not married.</p> <p>“Character” says it all. Preserve your integrity and reputation at all costs.</p> <p>The verses that follow (vs 8-10, 12-13) apply many of these same requirements to those who hold the function of “deacon” (helper, servant) in the church. Character and credibility apply at every level of leadership. Before being placed in positions leadership they were to be tested.</p>	
<p>Pursue godly character.</p> <p>Christian leaders exercise influence over the church. One of the prerequisites to being in the role is a desire to live out the character of Jesus. Pride, selfishness and wrong ambition sometimes get in the way. We need to examine our hearts and let the Holy Spirit show us where we need to change, so that our personal lives depict that of our Saviour.</p> <p>The passage also warns against getting involved in fruitless and spurious argumentation, that detract from the work.</p>	4:7
<p>Set an example for other believers in terms of hard work, good speech, personal conduct, godly love, faith; purity, right living, endurance and gentleness.</p> <p>If a leadership position is just a title, you will quickly be disappointed because leadership requires a lot of energy, a thick skin, involves heavy demands, lots of personal challenges, long hours (usually unrecognized by others), thankless tasks, being misunderstood judged and ignored, giving help and advice that often falls on deaf ears or ungrateful hearts.</p> <p>Paul says that there will be those who turn away from the faith, but he encourages Timothy that this is the very reason that we strive. A called leader doesn't back off because of a lack of results but is stirred to see breakthroughs. It is a beautiful thing to see the leader's hard work reflected in lives being changed.</p>	4:11, 12; 5:22; 6:11
<p>Grow spiritually (and evidently to others). Leaders need to be growing continually, as should all Christians.</p>	4:15, 16
<p>Be devoted to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.</p>	4:13; 5:17

<p>Public ministry is one of the defining features of Christian leaders (though this is not always the case). Preachers/ teachers need to have a solid grasp of what they declare, and seek to ensure that they teach <i>all</i> that is necessary.</p> <p>The church is always in need of good, Biblical teaching that has depth, speaks to peoples’ lives and helps them grow as Christians in their (variable) personal circumstances, not just “at church”.</p> <p>Spiritual leaders who teach in this age of technique need to be aware that it is not skills, knowledge or charisma, airs, graces or showmanship that convey and reveal truth imparted by preaching, but the Holy Spirit who opens hearts. “Great” preachers can fall into sin and out of public ministry; our reliance must on the grace of God, to do His work.</p>	
<p>Watch your life and doctrine (what you believe) closely. Paul encourages Timothy both to teach and be an example.</p> <p>Teaching should always be accompanied by practical application. If not, then it becomes mere philosophy, contestable ideals, dogma and creed in a marketplace that demands equality for all beliefs - and expects people to keep their beliefs private.</p> <p>It is essential that leaders “practice what they preach”. When Christian leaders share, they don’t just offer information, they present truth; who they are in real life will colour the way people receive what they say.</p>	4:16
<p>Be able and willing to work hard and direct church life.</p> <p>Church leadership usually involves a lot of meetings, oversight of teams, visitations, counselling, sorting out difficult issues, denominational functions, message preparation, administrative duties, and many other public obligations. Add to this, the personal responsibility of family and home life. And the need for the leader to have time to grow personally, maintain a Spirit-filled life, study, pray, develop new friendships, witness, exercise, overcome temptation and spiritual attacks, maintain equilibrium, and (so it seems) model patient sainthood.</p> <p>Who among us is capable of this? Leaders truly need to be sure of the call of God and reliant on His grace.</p>	5:17
<p>Be able and willing to deal with sin in the church, starting with sin at the leadership level. This takes courage, but if the head is sick the illness will flow through to the rest of the body.</p>	5:20
<p>Be free of favouritism, partiality, or taking sides. The New Testament church grew amid a stratified society, where class and manipulative power structures were important. The first part of this chapter shows how the Gospel breaks these down.</p>	5:21



Christian leadership involves both a calling from God and a high level of obedient commitment. The bar is set high for personal standards and the witness of the leader's life. The level of accountability is also high, for the Christian leader guides lives, with eternal consequences. None of us is naturally equipped to do this, but if we have a mandate from God to do so, He will be our sufficiency. The casualty rate among Christian leaders is far too high; this is coupled with a reluctance on the part of many who are called to surrender to God's will and get involved in Christian service because of the cost involved.

God grant us Spirit-filled, Christ-centred leaders, old and new, to pastor, lead, teach, warn and encourage the Body of Christ, so that the people of God can be all that He wants in our generation and beyond.

Are *you* called to be a Christian leader, to influence the lives of others, for eternity? Let God search your heart and teach you how to be an authentic servant leader who will help build the Body of Christ and glorify Him. Meditate carefully and prayerfully on the requirements outlined in 1 Timothy.

Other Themes

Other themes of 1 Timothy include:

- the use and misuse of the Law (1:7-11)
- warnings against false doctrine
- instructions for prayer (2:1-8)
- roles of women in the church
- the treatment of widows, elders, masters, youth, and church members in general (5:1-5:20).

For those not called into specific leadership roles in church (though we all exercise some degree of "leadership" in people's lives), the book is still immensely practical. Every follower must contend for the faith and avoid false teaching. Every follower must stand firm and persevere. These are pivotal to discipleship. More will be said about this under 2 Timothy and Titus.

For Reflection:

- *"true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. So, if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content."* (6:6-8; also 6:17-19)

- *“the love of money is the root of all evil” (6:10)*
- *“Never speak harshly to an older man, but appeal to him respectfully as you would to your own father. Talk to younger men as you would to your own brothers. Treat older women as you would your mother, and treat younger women with all purity as you would your own sisters.” (5:1, 2). If we observe this, we will never have issues with ageism or sexual temptations.*
- *How to grow: “Do not neglect the spiritual gift you received through the prophecy spoken over you when the elders of the church laid their hands on you. Give complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone will see your progress. Keep a close watch on how you live and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you.” (4:14-16)*
- *“guard what God has entrusted to you” (6:20)*

