

# THE FIRST LETTER TO TIMOTHY

## **Pastoral Epistles**

The three letters, First and Second Timothy and Titus, form a distinct group within the Pauline corpus. They differ from the other letters in style and content. All three suggest they were written late in Paul's ministry. Their aim is specifically to correct doctrine and give instructions and advice about the organising and governing of the churches.

The three letters are addressed to Paul's most loyal followers and to those who shepherd the churches. They were first named "Pastoral Epistles" in the eighteenth century because they all are concerned with the work of a pastor in caring for the community or communities under his care.

## **Background to the Letter**

Timothy, whom Paul converted, was of mixed Jewish and Gentile parentage (Acts 16:1-3).

Sometime before Paul arrives in Lystra from Derbe during his second missionary journey, Timothy's mother, Eunice, his grandmother, Lois (2 Tim 1:5), and he became Christians (Acts 16:1-3); perhaps when Paul visited the city during his first missionary journey (Acts 14:8-20).

After his conversion, Timothy was the apostle's companion on both the second and the third missionary journeys (Acts 16:3; 19:22) and was often sent by him on special missions (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor 4:17; 1 Thes 3:2). He is described as the administrator of the entire Ephesian community (1 Tim 1:3).

The letter instructs Timothy on his duty to restrain false and useless teaching (1 Tim 1:3-11; 4:1-5; 6:3-16) and gives principles regarding his relationship with the older members of the community (1 Tim 5:1-2) and with the presbyters (5, 17-22). It gives rules for aid to widows (1 Tim 5:3-8) and their selection for charitable ministrations (1 Tim 5:9-16) and also deals with liturgical celebrations (1 Tim 2:1-15), selections for the offices of bishop and deacon (1 Tim 3:1-13), the relation of slaves with their masters (1 Tim 6:1-2), and obligations of the wealthier members of the community (1 Tim 6:17-19). This letter also reminds Timothy of the prophetic character of his office (1 Tim 1:12-20) and encourages him in his exercise of it (1 Tim 4:6-16). The central passage of the letter (1 Tim 3:14-16) underlines the motivation that should guide Timothy in his ministry: to preserve the purity of the church's doctrine against false teaching that started circulating among Christians.

## **Author and Date of the Letter**

From the late second century to the nineteenth, Pauline authorship of the three Pastoral Epistles went unchallenged. Since then, the authorship of these letters has been questioned. Most scholars sustain that Paul could not have been responsible for the vocabulary and style, the concept of church organization, or the theological expressions found in these letters. Some other scholars believe that these letters are written by a follower of Paul, that they are based on traditions about Paul in his later years, and that they include actual fragments of genuine Pauline letters.

It must be noted that the ecclesiastical hierarchy and its organisation are in the Pastoral Letters in a stage of evolution which is not very different from that of Paul's time.

If Paul is considered the more immediate author, the Pastoral Letters are to be dated between the end of his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:16) and his execution under Nero (A.D. 63-67); if they are regarded as only more remotely Pauline, their date may be as late as the early second century. In spite of these problems of authorship and dating, the Pastoral Letters introduce us into the early Christian life.

## **The Main Divisions of 1 Timothy:**

1. Address (1 Tim 1:1-2)
2. Sound Teaching (1 Tim 1:3-20)
3. Problems of Discipline (1 Tim 2:1-4:16)
4. Duties toward Others (1 Tim 5:1-6:2a)
5. False Teaching and True Wealth (1 Tim 6:2b-19)
6. Final Recommendation and Warning (1 Tim 6:20-21)

## **Main Themes of the Letter**

### **Paul's Order to Timothy to Confront False Teachers**

Paul urges Timothy to defence of the true faith against false doctrines that contradict the true gospel of Paul and his disciples which had been the foundation of the Christian communities' faith. Then he instructs Timothy on how to oppose false teachers, telling him to order these men not to spread false doctrine and not to devote themselves to myths and genealogies. Paul affirms that the law is good if used properly; the law is not made for good men but for lawbreakers. The scope of the law is to restrain whatever is contrary to sound teaching.

### **Paul as the True Teacher**

A doxology of Paul's gratitude to God for his own conversion and call to be an apostle of Christ. Paul's conversion and total dedication to his ministry is the object of thanksgiving to God and is an example for Timothy and for all Christians. Paul spells out more clearly that the task of Timothy is to fight against error in the Church. In this regard he speaks of two people who have failed: Hymenaeus and Alexander, two leading members of the Church whom Paul had to expel from the fellowship for deviating from sound doctrine.

### **Christian Behaviour at Worship**

Christians are called to be exemplary citizens and complete Christians. The true Church that Paul presents is the one fully open to all and which sees Christian life fully compatible with good citizenship in the world. Every human being is to be included in the prayer of intercession and thanksgiving since God desires to save everybody. Timothy receives guidance on how a person ought to behave in the church. Men should lift holy hands in prayer and women should be clothed in good deeds rather than in luxury and fashion.

### **Leadership for the Community**

Paul speaks of the quality needed in church leaders: bishops (overseers) and deacons in their different roles in the church. These bishops are not as we know them today, rather they were the senior leaders in the local church. The deacons were assistants with a call to help and serve. Both bishops and deacons have to be people of Christian maturity, integrity and responsibility witnesses of Christian life.

### **The Mystery of Christ and the Church**

The whole point of Paul's letter is that the truth of Christ is revealed to the Church and if the Church lives to her calling, she will counter false teaching by sharing and showing the gospel of Christ.

### **The Goodness of Creation**

Paul describes the wrong beliefs and practices of the false teachers: they forbid marriage and demand abstinence from certain foods. Paul rejects their teaching about restrictions on diet, since nothing is to be rejected because God's creation is good, provided that it is received with thanksgiving. Paul instructs Timothy to counter these false teachings, and to avoid profane myths and tales; he is also to train himself in godliness, for godliness is valuable in every way.

### **Exhortations to Timothy**

The duties of Timothy and therefore of all the leaders are: respect of elders, support and care of the true widows who depend on God fully. Timothy is to teach in season and out of season, to follow Christ and seek after virtues such as piety, loving service, perseverance and gentleness.

---

### **Paul in his own words**

First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our saviour, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, Himself human, who gave Himself as ransom for all. *Timothy 2:1-6*