

# 1st Timothy

Most commentaries place the writing of 1 Timothy after the close of Acts, after Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> Roman imprisonment, and before the 2<sup>nd</sup>, in the range of 62-66 AD. However, the circumstances of the writing in 1:3 correlate very well with Acts 20:1. Furthermore, the instructions given to Timothy suggest Ephesus was a church without elders or deacons (3:1ff), while Acts tells us that Paul met with the Ephesian elders on his journey from Macedonia to Jerusalem (Acts 20:17). Paul indicated a desire to return to Ephesus and participate in appointing leaders there in 3:14, but knew he might not make it, as indeed happened when he determined to sail past Ephesus in his hurry to reach Jerusalem. It is consistent with the content of 1 Timothy to conclude that Paul sent Timothy to Macedonia (Acts 19:22, 1 Corinthians 16:10-11), expecting him to return to Ephesus. Timothy did complete the trip as mentioned in 1 Corinthians, "with the brethren" from Macedonia, who were subsequently with Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). When Paul abruptly left Ephesus, not quite ready to appoint elders, he left Timothy there for some final teaching, directing, and appointing of leaders. Then Timothy caught up with Paul in Macedonia, where they together wrote 2 Corinthians.

Paul describes Timothy in various ways in his various letters. Here, it is "my true child in the faith." Timothy's father was a Greek who apparently hadn't wanted Timothy to be circumcised (Acts 16:1ff) and in terms of the Christian faith Paul became a father to him, with all the affection that implies.

Some corrections remained to be made in Ephesus when Paul left for Macedonia, including some who were misdirected in their teaching, focusing on ideas that were distractions rather than upbuilding, 1:3-7. Being a teacher in the church calls for some maturity and perspective and the right motivations.

Paul's assertion about "the law" in 1:8 refers to the Old Testament, as also in 2 Timothy 2:14-15 and 3:15-17. The commandments as overviewed in 1 Timothy 1:9-10 are substantially derived from the 10 given at Sinai, with contextual emphasis on a broader but consistent message about "adultery" and applying "you shall not steal" to stealing human life and freedom by enslaving others, and clarifying, "don't bear false witness" as

not lying or misrepresenting anything.

Paul's expression of gratitude to Jesus in 1:12 is one of several prayers addressed to the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament (as also in Acts 1:24, 7:59, 2 Cor. 12:8). Paul's gratitude to the Lord was especially in view of his former overt hostility to Christ and his people, and using himself as an example Paul asserted that anyone can be forgiven and receive the gift of eternal life by believing in Jesus.

Paul's reference to "prophecies" about Timothy (1:18) must have been ceremonial blessings/utterances when Paul selected Timothy as a traveling companion in Acts 16:1-3, as also referenced in 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6-7. Neither the prophetic words nor the laying on of hands of the elders in Lystra and of Paul assured Timothy's continuance or success, he had to work at being faithful and utilizing what God gave him, as do we all.

The reference to fierce discipline of two blasphemers in 1:20 is stated similarly to 1 Cor 5:4-5.

Chapter 2:1-4 urges prayers for everyone, and as also in Romans 13 the role of human rulers is highlighted as useful and necessary for the peace that allows the gospel to flourish, and rulers are within the realm of God's provenance. If we want upright rulers, prayer and the sort of lives described here in 2:2b are what please God and facilitate his will.

2:4 is echoed in 2 Peter 3:9-10.

Jesus unique role as mediator (recall John 14:6) is highlighted in 2:5-6. Jesus is our spokesman and representative before God, and makes God's will known to us.

2:8-15 particularly focuses on the assemblies of the churches. "Every place" in v8 refers to places where Christians come together, where men lift up holy hands in prayer. The posture isn't really the point, the holiness is, but the posture is completely appropriate. "Likewise" there is no specific standard of dress for Christian women in 2:9, but direction for emphasis and overall intention and demeanor based on modesty, self-control, godliness, good works, and quiet submissiveness. There is always pressure on women to focus on outward appearance rather than the beauty of a godly heart.

2:12-15 affirm the same principles found in 1 Cor 14:34-35, for Sisters to let the Brothers do the public teaching in the churches. Paul's warrants include again teachings that go back to the beginning, Genesis 2-3, so we're not glimpsing something relevant only to a particular place and time, but God's design principles and human nature, including sin in the equation. The reference to childbearing in v15 reminds us of Genesis 3:15 and Galatians 4:4. Not only is "childbearing," particularly the virgin bearing a child, central to the gospel, it is uniquely feminine. Only a woman can bear a child. Not all women are mothers, or ought to be, but all women ought to celebrate the uniqueness of being feminine creatures as designed by God, with capabilities men do not share.

Part of Timothy's "job" might include appointing elders (3:1ff overseers, shepherds) for the church(es), and deacons. No doubt Timothy already knew the principles, but Paul reminded him (and therefore us) in writing the qualities such men must have to serve as required. Being an overseer means taking on a job, a task. A noble task, but a task nonetheless, as described in Acts 20:28ff or 1 Peter 5:1ff. The qualities described pertain to character and way of life, a mature and consistent Christian man. Generally, an elder whose children are "submissive" (3:4) will probably be older and more mature than a deacon whose children are "well managed" (3:12), but the faithful character of each is quite similar, and that of their wives (3:11) as partners in the faith is very important as well.

Paul stated his desire to return to take care of matters personally in 3:14, but the narrative in Acts indicates that didn't work out, and he later blessed the Ephesian elders along the way to Jerusalem.

God's house or household in 3:15 views the church as God's family and/or temple, also referenced as the pillar or primary support of the truth. God's church is essential, to say the least.

Note the themes of the gospel highlighted in 3:16, probably a song or bit of a song sang in the churches in those days.

Paul reminded/warned Timothy (and us) of trends that were already underway in 1 Timothy 4:1-5. This is not "signs of the end" but things to watch out for in every generation of these last days in which Christians live (note Hebrews 1:2). Various false teachers have regulated marriage or

forbidden it, various false teachers have provided dietary rules, whereas God has given humanity leave to enjoy the bounty of plants and meats readily available, and good if received with thanksgiving.

Note the emphasis in 4:7-8, particularly of personal import to Timothy whose father was a Greek, but principles for all of us who live in the flesh. Know what matters most.

Timothy was young, but still had a responsibility to be mature and an example in his conduct (4:11ff). Note the importance of the public reading of scripture in 4:13. Yes, it is public reading that is emphasized.

Laying on of hands was practiced in ordaining elders and sending evangelists (4:14, 5:22).

Again, a specific directive for Timothy the evangelist in 5:1 still guides the attitudes Christians in generally should have for one another, across the generations and sexes.

The segment on widows (5:3-16) doesn't deal with incidental assistance for those in need, but perpetual support for widows who met particular criteria and probably spent their time in service to the church as much as they were able. Generally, there is an emphasis on families being responsible for their own, especially in 5:8, 16. We also see a commentary on human nature that idleness is not good (5:11-15). The qualities of a widow who would be supported full time by the church in 5:9-10 have some parallels to the qualifications of elders and deacons in 3:1ff. The description of certain "good works" in v10 is noteworthy.

Another glimpse of the role of elders in 5:17-22 highlights some who (probably like James in Jerusalem) spent their full time in service to the Lord and the church. Paul cited the same scripture in v18 that he cited in 1 Corinthians 9:9 when he affirmed that the church needs to support the preachers of the word. Some elders were among those who labor in "the word" and teaching and ought to be supported by the church in their work. Rebuking an errant elder calls for even more discretion than correcting other brethren, because (v19-21) such a rebuke affects everyone in the church. The best way to avoid such problems is to carefully consider those appointed (v22) before appointing them.

Wine has a medicinal role. Apparently Timothy normally chose to drink only water, perhaps in view of teaching in 1 Corinthians 8-10 and Romans 14, but wine in appropriate doses can benefit the body, as suggested in 5:23.

6:1-2 echoes messages about masters and slaves in Ephesians 6:5ff and Colossians 3:22ff. The emphasis here is on a testimony about the Lord, and harmony in the body.

Once again in 6:3ff there is reference to aberrant teachers (as formerly in 1:3ff, 4:1ff). Some people love to “stir the pot” and that’s not good. Some people see the church as a means to influence or income, which again is deplored. In fact, Paul emphasizes the seduction of the pursuit of wealth as a serious temptation in 6:5b-10 and 6:17-21. Wealth can be a means to a good end, if used as a tool for the help of others and the glory of God, but can easily become an idol leading to all sorts of sins.

What matters most is highlighted in 6:11-16, being like Jesus in fighting the good fight and upholding the truth. What Paul urged Timothy to do in 6:12 he later affirmed as his own life story in 2 Timothy 4:7.

The admonition to protect what the Lord has given to you (6:20a) will be echoed in 2 Timothy 1:14.