

First Timothy

Paul writes three letters addressed to two individuals. Paul wrote first and second Timothy to his coworker and close friend Timothy. He wrote a third letter to another coworker and close friend named Titus. Together, these three letters are different from Paul's other letters that he wrote to a specific church or group of churches. These letters give us insight into how Paul worked and taught about church leadership.

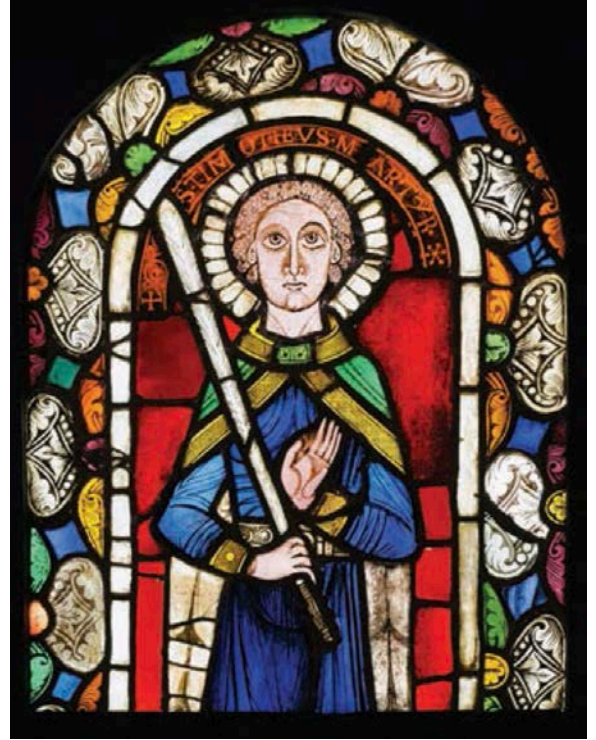
Writer: The Apostle Paul

Date of writing: Between 62-66 AD

Original Audience: Timothy, a coworker of Paul

The Reason for the Letter: Paul has left Timothy in charge of a challenging situation in the church in Ephesus. In Ephesus, false teachers led some house churches away from the true faith. Paul writes to Timothy to encourage him to oppose that false teaching and stand firm in the faith. Paul also gives instructions for the church about worship, church leaders, and correct conduct for believers.

The Main Message of the Letter: After an opening greeting (1:1–2), Paul urges Timothy to stop those who teach false doctrines and to promote faithful instruction (1:3–11). Paul shares his own story as a former blasphemer saved by Christ Jesus as a testimony of God's mercy (1:12–17). Next, the letter encourages fervent prayer, especially for those in authority (2:1–4), and gives other instructions for worship in the church (2:5–15). Then, Paul provides a summary of qualifications for church leaders (3:1–15). Paul then gives further warnings about false teachers (4:1–5), along with praise for Timothy's behavior and ministry (4:6–5:2). This leads to specific advice concerning widows (5:3–16), elders (5:17–20), and slaves (6:1–2), along with more personal instructions to Timothy (5:21–25). Finally, Paul returns to the topic of false teaching for the third time and talks about the corrupting influence of money (6:3–10). Paul concludes with commands for Timothy to be faithful (6:11–16), some advice for the wealthy (6:17–19), and a final charge for Timothy to do the work entrusted to him faithfully (6:20–21).



Outline of First Timothy:

1. Greetings, then opposing false teachers (1:1–20)
2. Instructions on worship (2:1–15)
3. Qualifications for overseers and deacons (3:1–16)
4. Standing against false teaching and charge to Timothy (4:1–16)
5. Managing the household of God (5:1–6:2)
6. Flee falsehood and fight for the faith (6:3–21)

Who Was Timothy?

Timothy was the son of a gentile man and a Jewish woman. He lived in the town of Lystra, and his mother was a believer, but his father was not (Acts 16:1). Paul recruited him as a companion for his second missionary journey, and he circumcised Timothy not to offend the Jews (Acts 16:3)). Toward the end of that journey, Paul sent him to Thessalonica to strengthen the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:2). Timothy rejoined Paul in Corinth, bringing him good news about the Thessalonian church (Acts 18:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:6). He worked with Paul in Corinth for some time (2 Corinthians 1:19). Later, he accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey and was with Paul during his extended stay in Ephesus (Acts 19). After that, Paul sent him once again to Macedonia (Acts 19:22) and repeatedly to Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10). Timothy later spent a winter with Paul in Corinth, from which Paul wrote the letter to the Romans (Rom. 16:21), and then went to Troas, where Paul spent a week with him on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4–5). We can see from all this that Timothy was a close friend, coworker, and traveling companion of Paul. Paul trusted him to carry out the ministry. The two letters addressed to Timothy add other minor details: his mother's name was Eunice, and his grandmother, also a believer, was named Lois (2 Timothy 1:5). He was young in comparison to Paul (1 Timothy 4:12; 5:1), he suffered from frequent illnesses (1 Tim. 5:23), and he had received a spiritual gift through prophecy and the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

To Timothy or the Churches in Ephesus?

Paul addresses the letter to Timothy, but some passages seem like they are for the whole church in Ephesus. For example, the final words of the letter are, “Grace be with you all,” which indicates Paul intended for Timothy to read some sections to the whole church. So, why not write the letter to the entire church? As you read through First Timothy, consider what Paul says about the false teachers. It seems that these false teachers were local elders who had accepted some ideas that were incompatible with the true Gospel of grace (1:11-17). In other letters, Paul makes it clear that the false teachers came from outside (2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians). However, there is no indication the false teachers are outsiders in Ephesus. Paul has already excommunicated two of them, clearly insiders (1:19-20). Several years before writing first Timothy, Paul predicted this very thing would happen (Acts 20:17-35). In warning the Ephesian churches against false teaching, Paul said, “even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). Paul might have written to Timothy because some of the elders in Ephesus wouldn't have allowed the letter to be read. Some parts of the letter are specifically for Timothy and others for the churches in Ephesus.

Like all letters, it is best to read or listen to the whole letter from beginning to end. Then go back and reread each chapter and discuss the following questions:

1. What do you learn about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?
2. What do you learn about people?
3. How can we obey Paul's teaching?
4. Who can I share this letter with?

