

1 & 2 TIMOTHY TITUS, PHILEMON

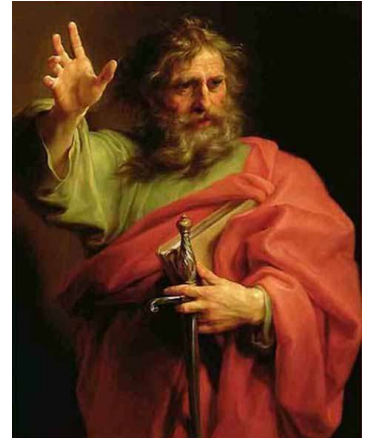
1 Timothy

Date of composition: A.D. 65

Chapter 1

Paul defines his calling as the divine will of God. Accordingly, Paul begins his letter by identifying himself as an “**apostle of Christ Jesus**,” signaling that his letter has apostolic authority (1:1).

Paul tells Timothy—his traveling companion and co-missionary—to “**remain in Ephesus**” to counter the false teaching and speculation that is disturbing the faith of the new Christians (1:3). Timothy is to teach what is true and what is false, because love is the goal of correct teaching and preaching. For Paul such love is the manner of gospel living; and any rejection of the gospel is a misunderstanding of the Old Testament and the purpose of the law that God intends. Paul is criticizing the false teachers and their use of the Old Testament as a kind of “refuge;” that mere study of the law will not produce the love that marks genuine faith. In fact, Paul points to his own experience of once having been a zealous persecutor of the same faith. Paul tells how God stepped in and showed him great mercy in “**appointing me to his service**” (1:12).



Chapter 2

Timothy is to instruct the Ephesian church to re-engage in prayer—despite opposition from unbelievers—and support Paul’s own mandate to take the gospel to the whole world. Timothy is also to assure the Christians that, although Christ’s return is delayed, the Church will not try to ensure its longevity in a hostile world by adopting the ways of the world. Indeed, the Christian life is meant to challenge society. For there is only “**one mediator**” (2:5) who accomplishes the universal plan of God: only Jesus Christ, “**himself a man**,” is qualified to relate both to God and man.

Home churches

Christian worship celebrated in the reception room or atrium of a house was open to anyone. Only a family’s bedrooms and dining rooms were considered private spaces. Since early Christian worship gatherings were essentially public, Paul was concerned about the reactions of observing outsiders (1 Corinthians 14:23).

A greater challenge for Paul is the “new Roman woman” who is exercising freedoms and opportunities that far exceed those of the traditional Greek woman (2:11-12). Contraception and abortion, although condemned as an offense against traditional values, has become increasingly widespread. While married women wear a long, draped garment, a woman’s pattern of dress, hairstyle and behavior have become signs of a kind of first century “sexual revolution.”

In fact, years earlier Emperor Augustus issued legislation against such unconventional behavior. Women of the upper class are expected to adopt modest and traditional hairstyles. They are not adorn themselves with excessive luxury and ostentation. They are also discouraged from excessive public engagement. Here Paul uses the story of Eve’s deception and sin to justify

prohibiting such women from teaching the faith because their behavior could endanger the Church's reputation.

Chapter 3

Regarding the need for leadership positions in the Church, Paul wants to make sure that godly people are selected to occupy them. Such leaders or overseers must be able to withstand assaults from opponents inside and outside the church. Deacons, who assist the overseers, must be deeply committed to **“the mystery of faith”** (3:9).

Chapter 4

To neutralize the threat posed by the false teachers and their clever arguments, which includes their call for the forbidding of marriage and the abstention of certain foods, Paul seeks to demystify the movement by simply calling it evil.

Generally, Paul's letters often address the issues of sexual relations and rules about foods as the Church tries to understand how to live in the last days. As such, Paul recalls the Book of Genesis to affirm the sanctity of marriage and the overall wholesomeness of foods against those Greek-speaking Jews who claim to have a secret knowledge (*gnosis*) of the way to salvation (4:3-4).

Paul further commends the public reading of the Scriptures so as to call the people back to their God and their identity as the people of the covenant. Now regular public reading of Scripture is being heard by Jews and non-Jews. New realities are being absorbed into the still-emerging story of Israel's salvation. For example, the significance of the Exodus is not “cancelled” by the gospel, but its meaning is prolonged until it reaches its fulness on Easter morning. Until then, the Exodus was the central, defining event of Israel's salvation; now Christ's Resurrection is the new center.

As Paul recalls his own ordination to sacred ministry, he is telling both Timothy and the leadership in Ephesus that his co-worker is duly authorized to represent the apostle and take the appropriate action in Ephesus (2 Timothy 1:6).

Chapter 5

Within Judaism the synagogue leadership provides for the needs of widows (Deuteronomy 10:18). The young Christian Church also shares this concern. However the issue is that younger widows who apparently are exhibiting the same liberated lifestyle as the “new woman,” are also receiving support. Not only does this add to its financial strain, but such questionable behavior threatens the Church's reputation. Therefore Paul gives instructions that young (or wealthy) widows should not to receive such financial help but should rather re-enter an appropriate marriage.

“Do not muzzle an ox while it's threshing.” An ox was driven over a threshing floor to separate the grain and chaff with its hooves. A muzzle on the ox prevents it from eating grain while it is working. It is more sensible to let the animal eat while it works. Here, the working “oxen” are those who are laboring in the gospel ministry and require material support for their ministry.

Regarding slaves, the gospel's teaching on freedom and equality affirms the dignity of first-century slaves. At the same time Paul acknowledges the social institution that currently exists. Insubordination, especially in the case of a Christian slave under a pagan master, puts God's name at risk of being slandered or maligned. The social tension created by believing slaves who are disobedient might wrongly be attributed to the gospel by the unbelieving slaveowners or by outsiders who are observing the Church through critical eyes. The Church will either be honored or dishonored based on the behavior of those who associate themselves within God's household.

As Paul closes his letter, he addresses Timothy as **“O man of God”** (6:11). It is a call for Timothy to pursue a life that exhibits genuine godliness and compassion for those in error. Indeed, Paul's closing prayer is that all will work and live in full awareness of the Lord's presence among them.

2 Timothy

Date of composition: A.D. 67

Chapter 1

Second Timothy was likely the last of Paul's letters. Imprisoned in Rome, Paul knows that his earthly life is soon coming to an end, and his concern is for the churches, and in particular for Timothy.

As such, Paul's second letter to Timothy is a solemn charge that Timothy fight for the gospel. As he begins with "by the will of God," Paul wants to leave no doubt about his apostolic authority. Now Timothy is responsible for guarding it and entrusting it to others. The road ahead will be fraught with suffering, but Paul encourages Timothy to be strong and to fight the good fight.

Here Paul recounts negative and positive models: the defection of his followers in Asia, and the loyalty of those who brought food to Paul while he was in prison. For Onesiphorus (from Ephesus) this was no slight matter because by helping Paul he ran the risk of being regarded as an accomplice to a "criminal."

Through it all Paul is convinced that the Lord had chosen him to bring to fruition the Old Testament mission within a world divided by race, gender, and socioeconomic differences. Therefore Paul's demand that Christians remain loyal to him is actually to demand their loyalty to the God of the covenant.

Chapter 2

Paul continues the theme of suffering for the faith and Timothy's responsibilities by using the example of a soldier's priorities, which are to take precedence over other activities. Likewise an athlete accepts the stresses and strains of body and mind for the contest at hand. And finally a farmer's hard work exemplifies both a soldier's single-mindedness and an athlete's discipline. In all, Christ makes heavy demands on those who follow him. Finally, Paul points to his own sufferings for the gospel.

At the same time Paul again warns Timothy against engaging in the same tactics of his opponents. With gentleness and tolerance is how Timothy should respond in confrontational situations. The possibility of repentance and conversion should be open to all, including false teachers such as Hymenaeus and Philetus. Timothy's love and kindness will promote the possibility of repentance.

Thus Timothy must focus on cleansing himself from what is dishonorable so that he can be a vessel for honorable use. In a wealthy household the containers for "honorable use" are the gold and silver vessels. Those which are for "dishonorable" or everyday use are vessels of wood and clay. In other words, those called by God—i.e., Timothy—are those who pursue a holy life and abstain from sin.

Chapter 3

Paul extends the contrast between the false teaching of his opponents with a list of vices that profile the worst sinners. In the strongest terms the opponents are considered no better than pagans in opposition to God. The names Jannes and Jambres represent Moses' archenemies who countered the displays of divine power before Pharaoh with tricks of their own, and later instigated the Golden Calf rebellion. But as with Pharaoh's magicians, so also these rebels' days are numbered.

Chapter 4

However much suffering Paul might endure, the pattern of suffering encompasses the whole community of faith. In his own suffering Paul offers himself as an example to his younger

successor. Paul even measures the value of his death more positively than negatively. The only negative aspect of Paul's death is the possible vacuum it would create in the mission to the Gentiles, which is the reason for Timothy's commission. For Paul, the whole of life is an intense struggle against the opposition in which spiritual power must be matched by personal commitment and resolve: **"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race"** (4:7).

As his letter comes to a close, Paul takes a last opportunity to deal with matters of personnel and logistics, and to write a few personal notes. This allows Paul to maintain contact with his co-workers in the churches, organize the movements of his people in various places, and report briefly on their whereabouts. Such information will be useful for mission workers on the move.

To overcome any reluctance in Timothy, Paul urges, **"Do your best to come to me soon"** (4:9). Lastly Paul singles out one man, Alexander the metalworker, who has been a recalcitrant leader of such heresies (2 Timothy 2:18). In the end, Paul is concerned for the friendships that he has made over the years, and desires that these friends know of his continued feelings for them in these hardest of times.

Titus

Date of composition: approximately A.D. 65

Chapters 1-3

Titus, a former Gentile and fellow missionary, is now on the Mediterranean island of Crete as Paul's delegate. Crete is thoroughly Romanized, displaying the kind of self-indulgent behavior typical of pagan society. The people show little interest in the pursuit of the virtues. Cretan women enjoy far more legal privileges and domestic freedoms than Greek women in Athens. Such observations quickly turn into criticism of Christian households which endangers the church's public reputation. Titus' role is to be the authoritative role model.

Titus is given instructions to appoint elders who are upright. He is to instruct the people to be sensible; for men and women of all ages have their parts to play in the church. And Titus is to encourage good deeds which will belie the charge the Cretans are **"liars, evil beasts, (and) lazy gluttons"** (1:12).

In short, the Letter to Titus is a guide for setting up order in the local church of first-century Crete. In this effort Titus is to use a combination of positive, corrective teaching and (whenever necessary) authoritative disciplinary methods to refute and therefore "silence" the opponents. For there is always the hope that the rebellious teachers can see reason. The intention is to turn them back, not throw them out (1:13).

Paul reiterates the instructions he had given in 1:10-16—a reminder that the Christians have an obligation to remain loyal to the state. Titus is to avoid engaging the rebellious teachers on their own terms. Instead, Titus is to engage them with sound teaching and a godly demeanor.

Philemon

Date of Composition: A.D. 55

Philemon is a church leader in Colossae (southern Turkey). Philemon owns a slave, Onesimus, who has run away and somehow meets Paul in his travels and is converted to the faith. Onesimus stays with Paul and assists him while Paul is in prison. But Onesimus is still the property of Philemon, and so Paul writes a brief note that Onesimus carries with him back to his master to smooth things over. In the light of Christian charity, Paul asks that Philemon to treat Onesimus not as a slave but as a brother and forgive him.