

Introduction to 1 Timothy

Where is it in the Bible?

First Timothy is the fifteenth book in the New Testament and is found between 2 Thessalonians and 2 Timothy. It is the first epistle addressed to a person and, together with 2 Timothy and Titus, is considered a Pastoral Epistle because it gives advice concerning the pastoral care of churches.

Who wrote it?

The salutation (1:1) and church tradition identify Paul as the author of this epistle. However doubts about this have been raised because the events described in it do not fit with other information about Paul's career. In addition, some of the terminology found in the letter is more common in documents from the second century, and some of the words found in the letter are not found anywhere else in the undisputed letters of Paul.

When was it written?

Dating the letter is very complicated due to the questions about who wrote it. Those who feel that Paul wrote it must deal in some way with the facts we have about his career from his other letters and the book of Acts. There are three possible scenarios¹:

- There are gaps in our knowledge of Paul's career that account for the situations covered in this letter. According to this theory, Paul wrote 1 Timothy when he was in Macedonia and Timothy was in Ephesus sometime between 52 and 56.
- Paul had a "second career" after everything that is described in Acts. This presupposes that Paul was released from prison by the Romans. As in the first scenario, Paul would have written from Macedonia to Timothy in Ephesus, but the letter would have been later, probably between 63 and 66.
- Paul did not write 1 Timothy and the situations described in the letter are literary devices. Those who hold this view feel the letter was written in the late first or possibly the early second century.

What is it about?

First Timothy "is primarily about leadership in the early church: it exhorts its readers to resist false teaching, hold on to the faith as delivered, exhibit good conduct, and order the church in such a way that all of this can be accomplished."²

¹ This discussion is adapted from Mark Allen Powell, *Introducing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 402-404..

² Arland J. Hultgren at <http://www.enterthebible.org/newtestament.aspx?rid=15>

How is it structured?

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. Warning Against False Teachers (1:3-11)
- III. God's Grace to Paul (1:12-17)
- IV. Timothy's Charge (1:18-20)
- V. Instructions for Worship (2:1-15)
 - a. Community Prayer and Witness (2:1-7)
 - b. Men and Women at Worship (2:8-25)
- VI. Qualifications for Church Leaders (3:1-13)
 - a. Overseers (Bishops) (3:1-7)
 - b. Deacons (3:8-13)
- VII. Ways to Deal with False Teaching (3:14-4:16)
 - a. Purpose (3:14-16)
 - b. Description of False Teaching (4:1-5)
 - c. Dealing with the Problem (4:6-16)
- VIII. Instructions about Various Groups in the Church (5:1-6:2a)
 - a. The Church as a Family (5:1-2)
 - b. Widows (5:3-16)
 - c. Elders (5:17-25)
 - d. Slaves (6:1-2a)
- IX. Further Exhortations (6:2b-19)
 - a. False Teachers (6:2b-10)
 - b. The Good Fight of Faith (6:11-16)
 - c. Those who are Rich (6:17-19)
- X. Final Instruction and Blessing (6:20-22)

What are some things to look for?

- **Offices in the Church:** It seems that at the time 1 Timothy was written there were at least three fixed offices in the church: bishop, elder, and deacon. There are particular qualifications and behavioral expectations described for those who hold these offices. However, the duties of each office and the relationships between them are not clear. These are still major issues in ecumenical conversations between Christian bodies.
- **Problematic Texts:** There are a number of verses in 1 Timothy which have presented challenges for interpreters over the years.
 - Does "women" in 3:11 refer to the wives of the deacons or to female deacons? If the latter, how does this fit in with 2:8-15? What is the most appropriate way to handle the attitude expressed toward women in these verses from chapter 2?
 - Who does "all" refer to in 4:10? Jews and Gentiles? Or everyone, regardless of whether they are believers?
 - Do you think 6:1-2 support slavery as an institution?