



# 1 Timothy

RBS  
1 Timothy 1:1-20

## Lesson 1: False Teachers, the Law, and the Gospel

*“The aim of our charge is love” (1 Timothy 1:5).*

*Doctrinal Focus: The law of God is good if one uses it wisely.*

Read 1 Timothy 1:1-20.

First Timothy is one of the thirteen letters of the apostle Paul contained within the New Testament. It is different than some of his other letters due to the fact that it was written to an individual, Timothy, rather than to a specific church (e.g. Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, etc.). Together with 2 Timothy and Titus, these letters have come to be known as the Pastoral Epistles because they were written by Paul and addressed to two younger pastors in order to provide guidance in their respective pastoral ministries.

The letter of 1 Timothy deals with many important and practical issues for the health and well being of the church. In fact, the apostle Paul clearly states the purpose for which he is writing—*“if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth”* (1 Timothy 3:15).

### Verses 1–2

The first two verses of the letter contain three elements common in Paul’s epistles: (1) author identification, (2) recipient identification, and (3) greeting. The author of this letter, or epistle, is the apostle Paul, the man saved and called by God to serve as the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 9; Romans 11:13; 1 Timothy 2:7). In addition to his name, Paul identifies the source of his apostolic authority, the very “command of God.” This statement provides the authoritative basis for Timothy and the Ephesian church to understand and obey the contents of the letter.

Timothy was a disciple, companion, and dear friend of the apostle Paul. His name is mentioned as many as twenty-five times in the New Testament—from the book of Acts all the way through to the book of Hebrews. Timothy was the son of a believing Jewish mother and a Greek father (Acts 16:1) who traveled with Paul on some of his missionary journeys (Acts 16:3), but frequently remained behind, as an ambassador of sorts, in order to follow up and reinforce Paul’s work (Acts 17:14–15; 19:22; 20:4; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10; Philippians 2:19; 1 Thessalonians 3:2, 6). The closeness of their relationship is exhibited by Paul’s inclusion of Timothy in his letters to the churches (Romans 16:21; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1), and the descriptions of Timothy as a brother (2 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 1:1), fellow worker (Romans 16:21), and beloved and faithful child in the Lord (1 Corinthians 4:17; cf. 1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 2 Timothy 1:2). It also appears that Timothy, like Paul, was imprisoned for a time for his ministry of the gospel (Hebrews 13:23).

Finally, this section concludes with a greeting to Timothy and the Ephesian Church, but a greeting of grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. By sending the greeting in this way, Paul once again reminds Timothy and the church that he is someone sent by God and who carries with him the authority and message of that source.

The Rafiki Bible Study Lessons in all forms is the property of the Rafiki Foundation, Inc. No portion may be reproduced or translated without the written permission of the Rafiki Foundation Home Office, U.S.A. ©, copyright© 2019 by Rafiki Foundation, Inc.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, copyright© 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

### Verses 3–7

The opening verses of the body of this letter quickly identify the reason for which Paul had written to Timothy. Timothy was to remain in the city of Ephesus in order to deal with the problem of false teaching in the Ephesian church.

The exact nature of the false teaching in Ephesus remains a mystery. However, there are several important clues about the more general nature of the problem. First, we know that this teaching was described as a “*different doctrine*” (1 Timothy 1:3), or a teaching not in line with Paul’s apostolic proclamation of the gospel. We also know from verse seven that this false teaching stemmed from an incorrect handling of the law of God. It is difficult to know exactly what Paul means by the law in this context. At the very least we may assume that Paul intends the Sinai or Mosaic covenant set forth in the Old Testament books, Genesis through Deuteronomy. However, it is also possible that Paul is making reference to the entire Old Testament. The characterization of this heresy as pertaining to “*myths and endless genealogies*” (1 Timothy 1:4) may suggest the interpretation of the book of Genesis as one of the possible points of controversy.

It is also important to recognize that Paul’s purpose in writing is characterized as fatherly affection that desires to promote the health of the church through the work and ministry of Timothy. The Ephesian heresy has promoted speculation rather than faith (1 Timothy 1:4), along with error and vain discussion (1 Timothy 1:6). On the other hand, the goal of Paul is “*love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*” (1 Timothy 1:5). Paul has not come to attack those who disagree with him, but to restore those who have been led astray.

These few verses remind us about the importance of what he believes, and the impact doctrine can have on life. The way of false teaching is folly and death, but the orthodox gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the true source of wisdom and life, not just for this world, but for all eternity.

### Verses 8–11

In this next section, Paul reinforces the significance of the interpretation of the law of God as it relates to the Ephesian heresy. The opening statement is

perhaps shocking—the law of God is good! But it is only good if it is used lawfully (1 Timothy 1:8) and understood in light of the gospel (1 Timothy 1:11). How is this so?

First, we must understand for whom the law of God was intended. According to the text, the law was *not* set forth for the righteous or the just, but for the unrighteous and the unjust, that is, for those who are by nature law breakers (cf. vv. 9-10). It would be impossible to discover the nature and depth of our sin without the law. For example, how would we know that sexual immorality is wrong unless the law of God said, “do not commit sexual immorality”? Or how would we know that lying is sinful unless the law of God said, “do not lie”? In this way the law of God is good because it reveals the moral nature of God’s will for our lives. However, as the law of God reveals his good and perfect moral will, it also reveals the vile nature of our sin. For, “*all have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one*” (Romans 3:13).

Because the law of God reveals our sin, it also reveals our need for someone to save us from sin, and this, too, is a good function of the law. This is why Paul concludes this section with a statement about the “*gospel of the glory of the blessed God*” (1 Timothy 1:11). The good news of the gospel is that we are not saved by keeping the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ—the one who kept the law for us, and took upon himself the punishment that we deserved as law breakers. That is to say, “*for our sake he [God the Father] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The law of God is good because it reveals God’s will, shows us our need for a savior, and makes clear the power of God in our salvation as one who kept the law and so conquered sin and death for those who would be granted faith in Jesus Christ.

Finally, this section makes an important connection between doctrine (what we think) and life (how we live). Notice how the list of sins detailed in verses 9 and 10 are described as “*contrary to sound doctrine*.” The way in which we think will have a direct impact on the way in which we live. This is one reason why Paul is so intent on correcting

false teaching in the church. False teaching will lead to unsound doctrine and unsound doctrine will lead to unsound living—conduct not in line with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God. In order to make this point clear, Paul will use his own life as an example in the following section.

#### Verses 12–17

In this next section Paul works to explain how the gospel works in the life of a sinner. To do this, he uses his own life as an example. We will see Paul's sin, God's grace in Christ Jesus, and then an eruption in praise (doxology) as the proper response to this work of grace.

In order to demonstrate the power of the law, Paul identifies himself as a former blasphemer, a persecutor of the church (cf. Acts 7:58; 8:1, 3; 9:4), an insolent opponent (cf. Acts 9:1), and the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:13, 16). Notice how Paul does not shy away from these descriptions of his past life. Because he does not trust in his ability to keep the law as the means for gaining God's favor, he is free to acknowledge the fullness of his sin in light of the law. But Paul is not boasting in the law or his sin. Rather, he is using this confession as a platform to magnify the power of the grace of God's gospel.

Paul's former status as a sinner and law-breaker is contrasted with the work of God in his life. His salvation was an act of God's mercy (1 Timothy 1:13) and grace through faith and love in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 1:14), not the work of the law. Additionally, as the chief of sinners, Paul's testimony demonstrates that no one is beyond the saving grace of the living God in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 1:16). In fact, the sinfulness of Paul's past

life serves to magnify the power of God's grace through the gospel. The law clearly identifies our sin and justifies our death, which in turn magnifies the power of God's grace through faith in Christ, who came into this world for the very purpose of saving sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).<sup>1</sup>

The reality of Paul's past sin, and the testimony of the power of the gospel of God's grace, causes Paul to conclude this section with an eruption in praise, a doxology. This response to grace through faith in praise is not something to be overlooked in light of the larger context of 1 Timothy. Recall that the false teachers in Ephesus promote speculation (1 Timothy 1:4), vain discussion (1 Timothy 1:6), and do not understand the law (1 Timothy 1:7). On the contrary, Paul demonstrates that a proper understanding of the law in light of the gospel will promote praise and worship (1 Timothy 1:17).

#### Verses 18–20

In this final section of chapter 1, Paul encourages Timothy to fulfill the duties of his calling to which God had called him in prophetic word. He is to fight the good fight, or "*wage the good warfare*" (1 Timothy 1:18). The imagery here is one of battle and military service. Timothy is to consider himself a soldier of the gospel (cf. 2 Timothy 2:3-4) in the army of God. As such, Timothy is to fight this fight by "*holding faith and a good conscience*" (1 Timothy 1:19) in opposition to the condemnation of the conscience brought about by the law. Those who reject faith and cling to self-righteousness through the law are condemned and so "shipwreck" their faith. Those who persist in this state may be excommunicated from the church community with the ultimate hope of restoration (1 Timothy 1:20).

#### Notes

1. The expression "The saying is trustworthy" occurs only five times in the New Testament, and it is unique to the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8). In each case Paul is making an important point, most of which relate to the person and work of Christ (all except the one located in 1 Timothy 3:1).

#### Recommended Commentary

1 Timothy by Philip Ryken (Reformed Expository Commentaries)



# 1 Timothy Lesson 1

## Questions for Discussion

---

Read 1 Timothy 1:1-20.

1. First Timothy was written by Paul in order to help Timothy instruct the Ephesian church as to how they should conduct themselves as a church, the very household of God. If you had to write a letter describing the conduct of your own church, what issues would it include? Is there anything you personally can do to change the conduct of your church? If so, what? If not, why not?
2. The apostle Paul expanded the scope of his ministry by training younger men like Timothy. He made disciples. Like the apostle Paul, and in obedience to the great commission, one of the most important roles of the local church is to make disciples, and by extension, to be a disciple. From whom are you learning? Who are you training as a disciple of the Lord?
3. The danger of false teaching and the distraction of vain trivialities (i.e., endless myths and genealogies) will remain a constant concern for the local and global church until Christ returns. What sort of false teachings have you observed in either the local or global church? How did you identify such teachings as false?
4. If you have had the unfortunate situation where you encountered what appeared to be false teaching in the church, how was it dealt with? With the apostle Paul, the motive of his correction was "*love that issues from a pure heart*" (1 Timothy 1:5). How can we approach difficulties in the local church with the same type of spirit?
5. What is one way in which you have observed sound theology to result in sound living in your own life?
6. How do you normally think about the Old Testament law of God, or the relationship between the law and the gospel? Do you naturally resonate with Paul's affirmation that the law of God is good?

7. According to this passage, for whom did God intend the law, and how is it to be used rightly?
  
8. How does the law of God make the gospel of Jesus such good news?
  
9. Why did Paul use his own life as an example to demonstrate how the law and the gospel work together?
  
10. What is the good news of the gospel?
  
11. According to verse 17, what is the only fitting response to understanding the law in light of the good news of the gospel?
  
12. What is the relationship between the law and the gospel, between the Old and New Testament, between the Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant? Why is this issue such an important and fundamental concern for the Christian life?
  
13. According to verse 19, how is Timothy to fight the good fight of the Christian ministry? What are his weapons? How are we fighting the fight of our own ministries? Are we using the weapons that God has provided (cf. Ephesians 6:10–20), or are we using the methods and employments of the world?