

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

1 TIMOTHY

THEME

Author and Title

The first verse of 1 Timothy clearly states that Paul is the author, and this was universally affirmed until the nineteenth century. In the last 200 years a significant shift has occurred in biblical scholarship so that many today deny that Paul actually wrote 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, or Titus. Critics point to ways in which these three letters (the “Pastoral Epistles”) differ from Paul’s other letters in style, vocabulary, theology, church order, and the way in which Paul is portrayed. However, the differences in theology and church order, for example, are typically overstated based on a particular reading of Paul’s earlier letters, and based on the effect of reading these three letters as a unit rather than individually (as the rest of Paul’s letters are read). For example, some claim that the Pastoral Epistles picture a much more structured church with an emphasis on church officers (esp. elders and deacons) rather than the dynamic, Spirit-directed church in Paul’s other letters. This overstates the evidence of both groups of letters in opposite directions. Elders are mentioned as early as Paul’s first missionary journey ([Acts 14:21–23](#)), and Philippians is addressed to the “overseers and deacons” of the church in Philippi ([Phil. 1:1](#)). Furthermore, difference in style and vocabulary is not unusual for a creative mind, especially considering that these letters differ from the other letters in purpose, subject matter, and audience, these being the only ones written to coworkers.

Additionally, it is problematic to argue that these works were written under a false name since the early church clearly excluded from the apostolic canon any works they thought to be pseudonymous. While critics point to the common practice of pseudonymous writing in the ancient world, they usually fail to point out that this practice, though common in the culture, was not common in personal letters, and was categorically rejected by the early church (cf. [2 Thess. 2:2; 3:17](#); also *Muratorian Canon* 64–67; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.12.3). Tertullian (c. A.D. 160–225) wrote that when it was discovered that a church elder had composed a pseudonymous work, *The Acts of Paul* (which included a purported Pauline letter, *3 Corinthians*), the offending elder “was removed from his office” (*On Baptism* 17). Accepting as Scripture letters that lie about their origin is also a significant ethical problem. Thus, there is a

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good basis for affirming the straightforward claim of these letters as authentically written by Paul.

The title indicates that this letter was sent to Timothy ([1:2](#)), and its contents confirm that, chronologically, it precedes 2 Timothy.

Date

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Some critics have suggested that 1 Timothy does not seem to fit into the narrative of Acts. Others have responded that it could fit into the events in [Acts 20](#). However, the traditional position has been that Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment (the one mentioned at the close of Acts; see [Acts 28:16, 30–31](#)), did further mission work, and was then imprisoned a second time, leading to his execution. This reconstruction is supported by statements from *1 Clement* 5.7 and Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.22.2–8. First Timothy then would fit well during Paul's work between the two imprisonments. If Paul's arrival in Rome, as narrated in Acts, is dated about A.D. 59–61, then, allowing a couple of years for the imprisonment, he would have been released in about 62. If Paul was executed under Nero (d. A.D. 68), 1 Timothy would have been written somewhere in the mid-60s (cf. note on [Acts 28:30–31](#)).

Theme

The theme of 1 Timothy is that the gospel leads to practical, visible change in the lives of those who believe it. It is often thought that the theme is church order, but the discussion of church offices is simply a piece of the larger argument that the true gospel, in contrast to false teaching, will always lead to godliness in its adherents.

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

Paul wrote 1 Timothy in order to advise his young coworker Timothy concerning issues that were arising at the church in Ephesus. When Paul left Timothy in Ephesus, he had specifically charged him to deal with some false teachers in the church ([1:3](#)). Since Paul was then separated from Timothy and the church, he wrote back to him with further instructions. He hoped to return for a visit but wrote in the meantime to address the way in which Christians should behave ([3:14–15](#)). Throughout the letter Paul grounds Christian behavior in the gospel.

The false teachers are the primary occasion for the letter. The letter as a whole is bracketed by discussion of the false teaching (see [Outline](#)), and the positive instruction is crafted in direct contrast to the false teachers. The exact nature of the false teaching

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is unclear. It apparently involved speculation about the law ([1:7–11](#)) and asceticism ([4:1–5](#)). Paul's real concern is with the results of the false teaching—for example, promoting speculations ([1:4; 6:4](#)), arrogance ([6:4](#)), and greed ([6:5–10](#)). Paul addresses the content of the false teaching only in passing but focuses on the fact that true Christianity is evidenced by lifestyles shaped by the gospel. Those whose lives are not shaped by the gospel show that they have turned away from the faith ([1:6, 19–20; 4:1; 5:6, 8, 11–12, 15; 6:9–10](#)).

First Timothy is a clear call for the church to live out in tangible ways the ethical implications of the gospel.

Key Themes

1. The gospel produces holiness in the lives of believers, and there is no legitimate separation between belief and behavior. Thus, those who profess faith but do not demonstrate any progress in godliness should question their spiritual state.	1:5; 2:8–15; 3:1–16; 4:6–16; 5:4–6, 8; 6:3–5, 11–14, 18–19
2. Worldwide evangelization is essential and is rooted in God's own evangelistic desire.	1:15; 2:1–7; 3:16; 4:10
3. One key evidence of reception of the gospel is proper behavior in corporate worship (evangelistic prayer, unity, modesty, and submission).	2:1–15
4. Church leaders should be people whose lives are shaped by the gospel.	3:1–13; 4:6–16
5. Appropriate honor is a key element in how Christians should relate to one another in the church.	5:1–6:2
6. The created order (e.g., wealth) is good and is to be appreciated, though not worshiped.	4:4–5; 6:17–19
7. It is important to labor for the purity and preservation of the gospel.	1:3–7, 18–20; 4:6–16; 6:2b–3, 12, 20–21

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History of Salvation Summary

God's plan brings the blessings of Christ's salvation to people partly by means of the church and its ministries. (For an explanation of the "History of Salvation," see the [Overview of the Bible](#).)

Literary Features

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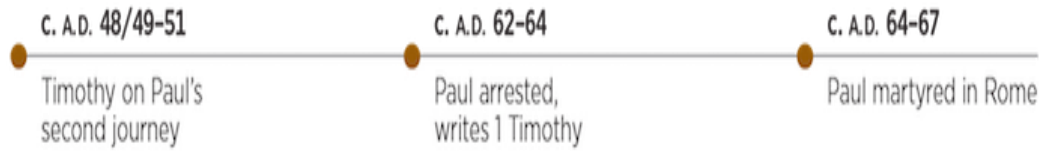
The general form of 1 Timothy is that of a NT *epistle*, and 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus have been called more specifically "Pastoral Epistles" because each one is a letter written to someone who has pastoral leadership responsibilities. The letter gives advice on the issues of church life on which the recipient needs guidance and encouragement—though Timothy was not actually one of the pastors of a church but was Paul's liaison who implemented Paul's instructions to the churches. The resulting letter is occasional, meaning that the author of the letter addresses the specific situations in the recipient's church that need attention. The Pastoral Epistles are not theological treatises in which Paul systematically explores topics of his choice. Paul takes up the topics in this letter because they are the topics that have been raised. Finally, near the end of the opening chapter, Paul labels his remarks up to that point as "this charge" that he has committed to Timothy. It is helpful to regard the entire letter as a formal, authoritative charge—a list of duties that Paul is challenging and directing Timothy to perform.

The stance of the author is that of a friend and father in the faith expressing personal concern over the well-being of a younger church leader and the church in which he ministers. The overarching concern of the letter is to combat false teaching and false teachers. Accordingly, there are detailed contrasts between good and bad spiritual leadership in the church.

Additionally, this letter provides the most complete summary in the Bible of a pastor's ministry and spirituality. There are also lists of spiritual qualifications for officers in the church, as well as advice about caring for people with special needs, such as widows and servants. Three times Paul says that a statement he makes is "trustworthy" ([1:15](#); [3:1](#); [4:9](#)).

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Timeline



The Setting of 1 Timothy

c. A.D. 62–64

Paul likely wrote 1 Timothy during a fourth missionary journey not recorded in the book of Acts. Writing from an unknown location, Paul wrote to Timothy at Ephesus to instruct him on how to lead the church there. Ephesus was a wealthy and highly influential port city in the Roman province of Asia, renowned for its temple of Artemis (Diana).



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Outline

- I. Salutation ([1:1-2](#))
 - II. Confronting the False Teaching ([1:3-20](#))
 - A. The charge to deal with false teachers ([1:3-7](#))
 - B. Proper use of the law ([1:8-11](#))
 - C. Paul: an example of the effect of the true gospel ([1:12-17](#))
 - D. Restatement of the charge to deal with false teachers ([1:18-20](#))
 - III. Descriptions of Gospel-Shaped Living ([2:1-3:13](#))
 - A. Corporate prayer and issues arising from it ([2:1-15](#))
 - B. Qualifications for overseers ([3:1-7](#))
 - C. Qualifications for deacons ([3:8-13](#))
 - IV. Purpose of Writing: Behavior in the Church ([3:14-16](#))
 - V. Identifying the False Teaching ([4:1-5](#))
 - VI. How Timothy Should Be Shaped by the Gospel ([4:6-16](#))
 - VII. How Specific Groups in the Church Should Be Shaped by the Gospel ([5:1-6:2a](#))
 - A. Respectful dealing with church members by age and gender ([5:1-2](#))
 - B. Honoring widows ([5:3-16](#))
 - C. Honoring elders ([5:17-25](#))
 - D. Honoring masters ([6:1-2a](#))
 - VIII. Confronting the False Teaching Again ([6:2b-21](#))
 - A. False teachers and greed ([6:2b-10](#))
 - B. Timothy's behavior in contrast ([6:11-16](#))
 - C. Charge to the rich ([6:17-19](#))
- Closing exhortation to Timothy ([6:20-21](#))¹

¹ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 2321-2324). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.