

Salutation and a Warning Against False Teaching

1 Timothy 1:1-4

1 Timothy 1:1-4: *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope, ²To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. ³As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, ⁴nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.”*

Background Notes

The apostle Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus are often called the “Pastoral Epistles” of the New Testament. They cover the “pastoral” or “shepherding” responsibilities in the churches that Timothy and Titus served. Spiritual leaders in local churches today should study the Pastoral Epistles, because these books of Scripture give the spiritual qualifications for pastors or “shepherds” within the church, and principles for the pastoral care of the believers.

The apostle wrote this letter to Timothy, who was serving the Lord and His people in Ephesus. Ephesus was one of the major cities of the Roman world, and Timothy was helping to build up the local church there.

The theme of 1 Timothy is “Church Order.” If any of you are involved in planting a new church, this epistle is a handbook for setting up a church, as we'll see.

In verse 1 Paul reminded Timothy that he was an apostle of Christ, according to the commandment of God. This statement was not made to let Timothy know who was in charge, but rather to grant Timothy the authority he needed to direct the church at Ephesus. Remember, this was a personal letter to Timothy - but it would also be read publicly in the church at Ephesus.

In the last verse of the letter, Paul says *“grace be with you.”* The “you” is plural, showing that this letter would have been read to the whole gathering of believers at Ephesus. So the Christians in Ephesus would know in no uncertain terms that Timothy had the authority of the apostle Paul behind him - and that Paul's apostolic authority was not self-appointed; it was commanded directly by God.

In verse 2, Paul referred to Timothy as his “true child in the faith.” The main idea here indicates tenderness and endearment. There was a genuine spiritual father-son relationship between Paul and Timothy. It was more than just a

student-teacher relationship, or an apostle-disciple relationship. The phrase does not necessarily mean that Paul led Timothy to Christ, but it may include that possibility.

Timothy is first mentioned in Acts 16, when Paul came to Timothy's hometown during his second missionary journey. Acts 16:1-2: *"Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium."* So it appears that Timothy was already a Christian when Paul returned to Lystra and Derbe on his second missionary journey. Timothy may have become a believer when Paul first visited this region in his first missionary journey.

Timothy had a godly mother, Eunice, and godly grandmother, Lois, who taught him the Hebrew Scriptures when he was a child. 2 Timothy 1:5: *"When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also."* And 2 Timothy 3:15: *"And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ."* Lois and Eunice may have led Timothy to the Lord, as well as teaching him the Scriptures.

Timothy joined the apostle Paul in his missionary travels (Acts 16). He was probably in his late teens or early twenties. After his three missionary journeys, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and imprisoned in Caesarea on the coast of Israel. He then appealed his case to Caesar, and was sent to Rome. This would have been in the late 50s and early 60s AD. All during this time, it seems that Timothy was either with the apostle Paul or on missions at Paul's direction.

From his house arrest in Rome (his "first Roman imprisonment"), Paul wrote the four letters that are often called the "Prison Epistles": Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Timothy is mentioned in the salutation of Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, indicating that he was with the apostle Paul during the time of his house arrest in Rome.

Most likely Paul was released from that "first Roman imprisonment," and then undertook further missionary travels. During this time, he visited Ephesus and left Timothy there to help pastor the church. Sometime later, probably from Macedonia (v3), Paul wrote this first letter to Timothy to encourage him, and to remind him of his responsibilities. One of Timothy's responsibilities at Ephesus was to refute the false teachers.

Doctrinal Points

1. False teaching is controlled by silencing.

Verse 3: *"As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine."*

Even in the 1st century, false doctrine was beginning to be a problem for the early Church. The false teaching of Judaism said that salvation wasn't by faith alone in Jesus Christ - that following the works of the Mosaic Law was also essential for salvation. And the false teaching of what later became known as Gnosticism denied that Jesus was fully God (as well as other false teachings). These false teachers and their false teachings had already penetrated into the early Church.

How was Timothy to deal with these false teachers? He was to **stop** them - and he was to **silence** them. With the apostle's authority, he was to silence them by telling them to stop their teaching. Only the doctrine taught by the apostles - contained in the emerging New Testament Scriptures - only the apostles' doctrine was to be taught in the churches.

The apostle's doctrine was what characterized the early Christians. Acts 2:42: *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."*

How should leaders deal with false teaching in the local church today? The same way! The elders and church leaders should silence the false teachers and their false teaching. The local church is not a democracy or an organization where everyone gets equal time to share his or her opinions and teaching. The church is where **biblical doctrine only** is taught! No other doctrine should be taught or tolerated.

Heresy infiltrates God's people when false teaching is not stopped and silenced. Church leaders are responsible to control false teaching by silencing false teachers.

2. False teaching is characterized by squabbles.

Verse 4: *"Nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith."*

The "fables and endless genealogies" mentioned here is probably a reference to the extra-biblical writings that were embraced by the "Judaizers," who taught that keeping the Law of Moses was required for salvation. During the inter-Testamental period, a number of non-Scriptural books were written. Some of these apocryphal writings contained Jewish legends, fables and long genealogies. These writings are known today as Old Testament apocryphal and "pseudepigraphal" writings. (Don't let those terms throw you! The point is that these writings are **not Scripture** - even though they are sometimes included in some Bibles.) The Judaizers who embraced these writings were considered false teachers, and one result of their false teaching was disputing, wrangling, and squabbling.

This is still true today. When anyone goes beyond sound biblical doctrine and begins to teach what the Bible does not teach, the speculative false teaching will result in disputes and squabbles. When true teaching and biblical doctrine are taught in the local church, the believers are built up and strengthened in their faith (v4).

Verse 4 doesn't mean that there isn't room for discussion about the interpretation of different passages of Scripture, for example. Be sure to discuss the **Bible** - not just human literature or speculative teaching.

For example, a discussion of the miracles of the Lord Jesus that are recorded in the Bible will result in edification and growth in faith. However, fruitless discussion of whether Jesus could have gotten sick, or whether He could have hit His thumb when He hammered a nail, will only result in disputes - because it goes beyond sound biblical teaching. Such speculative discussions can even destroy happy fellowship among believers. Going beyond what God has given to us in His Word can easily lead to false teaching, and even to heresy. False teaching is characterized by squabbles and disputes.

Practical Application

When was the last time you wrote a follow-up letter?

1 Timothy is really a "follow-up letter" from the apostle Paul to Timothy, his true son in the faith. The letter reminded Timothy of his responsibilities, and it also encouraged him in the faith. After all, Timothy was Paul's disciple.

We, too, have a responsibility to disciple Christians who are younger in the faith than we are - and part of that responsibility is follow-up. If that young believer goes away to college or to live in another location, it may be our special responsibility to write follow-up emails or letters to them.

In fact, that's how Growing Christians Ministries got started! "Devotions for Growing Christians" were originally written as "follow-up letters" of biblical teaching and encouragement, and were sent back to our Young Life disciples when we moved to another location for seminary studies.

Another example: One summer when I was directing the spiritual life of a Christian camp, I had to leave the camp midway through the summer. I left the responsibilities with a younger Christian man that I had helped to disciple. A couple of weeks later, I wrote him a follow-up letter to remind him of his responsibilities and to encourage him in the faith, as he continued this vital aspect of the camp ministry.

I need to write more follow-up letters - and you need to write more follow-up letters as well! When was the last time you wrote a follow-up letter?