

Through the Bible Book by Book

New Testament

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FIRST TIMOTHY

Theme: The first Epistle to Timothy is the first of those known as the Pastoral Epistles (the others are Titus and II Timothy), so called because they are addressed to ministers for the purpose of instructing them in church government.

The Epistle we are now studying was written to Timothy, Paul's faithful companion and disciple. It was written after the apostle's release following his first imprisonment.

His movements after this event cannot be traced with certainty.

- It is believed that he visited Spain. Romans 15:24.
- He then sailed to Miletus and came to Colosse. Philemon 22.
- From there he went to Ephesus where he left Timothy to take charge of the church, which was imperiled by false teaching. I Timothy 1:3.
- Passing north, Paul came to Troas where he took ship for Macedonia. I Timothy 1:3.

From Macedonia he wrote the Epistle to instruct Timothy concerning his duties and also to encourage him, for the young man was of a sensitive and retiring disposition, and consequently inclined to be backward in asserting his authority.

We shall sum up the theme as follows: The qualifications and duties of the Christian minister, and his relation to the church, the home and the world.

Why Written: To instruct Timothy in the duties of his office, to encourage him, and to warn him against false teachers.

When Written: Probably in Macedonia during the interval between Paul's two imprisonments.

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I. Sound Doctrine. Ch. 1.

1. Salutation (1:1, 2).
2. Timothy's special work at Ephesus (vv. 3-11).

He was to contend for sound doctrine. The church was menaced by the following errors:

(a) Gnosticism (v. 4). The theories and endless genealogies of Gnosticism (genealogies of celestial powers and of mediating angels) simply led to useless speculation.

(b) Legalism (vv. 5-11). The object of Paul's charge ("**the end of the commandment**") is to teach love springing from a pure conscience and genuine faith (v. 5). But some have swerved from the principle of love as the ruling power in the believer's life. They have been teaching justification by the law, although they have no qualifications as teachers (vv. 6-7). They are ignorant of the fact that the law was not intended for those in whose hearts it is written; but its purpose is to awaken the conscience of sinners (vv. 8-11).

3. Paul's testimony (vv. 12-17). The chief of sinners has become the chief of saints; the blasphemer has become the preacher; the destroyer of the church has become its builder. Unto him, the chiefest of sinners was mercy shown, in order that he might be a living example of God's mercy.

4. The charge to Timothy (vv. 18-20). The exhortation of verse 5 is repeated, enforced by two facts:

(a) The reminder of the prophecies that had been uttered at his ordination (v. 18; compare Acts 13:1, 2).

(b) The warning drawn from the doctrinal shipwreck of two teachers whom Paul had excommunicated (vv. 19, 20).

II. Public Prayer. Ch. 2.

1. For whom to pray. Christians are to pray for all men, especially for kings and those in authority. vv. 1-7.

2. The attitude of men and women in public prayer. vv. 8-15.

(a) The men are to pray, lifting up hands unsullied by sin, and having hearts free from secret grudges and unbelief. v. 8.

(b) Women are to dress modestly, adorning themselves with good works rather than with gaudy apparel (vv.8-10). Women are to observe the God-appointed order of the sexes; namely, that the man is the head of woman, and the one exercising authority in the home and in the church (vv. 11-14).

Generally speaking woman's sphere of activity is in the home rather than in the ministry (v. 15).

Note that in order to have a well balanced interpretation of verse 12 it is necessary to bear in mind the following two facts:

(1) The emphasis in verse 12 seems to be on the woman's usurping of authority over the man; i.e., taking to herself an authority that God has not given her.

(2) Paul is speaking in general terms and particularly of married women. Other scriptures show plainly that God, in particular cases grants a ministry to women. Exodus 15:20,21; Judges 4:4; II Kings 22:14; Joel 2:28; Acts 21:8, 9; Romans 16:1; I Corinthians 11:5; Philippians 4:3.

III. Ministerial Qualifications. Ch. 3:1-13.

1. Necessary qualifications for bishops (vv. 1-7).

The local churches of Paul's time, instead of being ruled by one pastor, were governed by a group of elders or bishops (overseers). Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5, 6, 7; I Peter 5:1-3; Philippians 1:1. This was evidently the best arrangement for those days.

Later, one of the elders was appointed to a place of leadership over the others, and finally each local church came to be governed by one elder or overseer, in co-operation with deacons. This change was perfectly permissible because the New Testament does not lay down a hard and fast system of church government. It sets forth fundamental principles and then allows every church to organize itself according to the needs of the particular age and land.

2. The necessary qualifications for deacons (vv. 8-13). The deacons were those entrusted with the temporal affairs of the church, such as the handling of funds, etc.

IV. False Doctrine. 3:14 to 4:11.

1. *The purpose of Paul's instructions is now mentioned in the verses that form the key to the Epistle* (vv. 14, 15). It is that Timothy may know how to act in all matters pertaining to the house of God, which is the church of the living God and the repository of the truth.

2. *The mystery of godliness* (v. 16). The foundation of this truth of which the church is the guardian, is the mystery of godliness, which mystery comprises the following fundamentals of the Gospel:

(a) Christ's incarnation: "**God was manifest in the flesh.**"

(b) Christ's resurrection: "**justified in the Spirit.**" (Compare Romans 1:4.) The world by crucifying Christ declared Him unrighteous; God, by raising Him from the dead declared Him righteous (justified Him).

(c) Christ's manifestation: "**seen of angels.**" I Corinthians 15:5-8.

(d) Christ's proclamation: "**preached unto the Gentiles.**"

(e) Christ's acceptation: "**believed on in the world.**"

(f) Christ's exaltation: "**received up into glory.**"

3. *In contrast to the mystery of godliness, Paul mentions the mystery of ungodliness (4:1-5).*

In the last days there will be an apostasy from the faith (v. 1). In Paul's days this apostasy was represented by the Gnostic heresy.

"The special error herein attacked is the Gnostic heresy; and seven features of this false doctrine are apparent in the pastoral Epistles: The claim to superior knowledge, insight, illumination; a spurious religion with profitless and barren speculation; a practical lawlessness; cauterizing the conscience with a hot iron; an allegorical interpretation of Scripture, explaining away the resurrection, etc.; an empty form of godliness in which words took the place of works; a compromise between God and Mammon reducing godliness to a matter of worldly gain; a pretense of superior sanctity that licensed even flagrant sins by profession of a pure motive."

4. *Timothy's attitude toward erroneous teaching (vv. 6-11).*

He is to avoid those religious theories and speculations that teach a fruitless asceticism. Bodily exercise (in a religious sense), such as fasting and abstaining from certain foods, has a limited temporal value; but godliness is profitable for all things both in time and in eternity (vv.7-11).

V. Pastoral Instructions. 4:12 to 6:2.

1. *Instructions relating to Timothy himself 4:12-16.*

2. *Instructions relating to different classes in the church:*

(a) Old and young men and old and young women (5:1, 2).

(b) Widows (vv. 3-16).

It was the custom of the early church to care for destitute widows (Acts 6:1). Timothy is instructed to see to the support of those widows who are needy and who are of blameless character (vv. 3-8).

Many commentators believe that another class of widows is mentioned in verses 9, 10; namely those who took service with the church as deaconesses and who pledged themselves to devote themselves to different forms of charitable service. The younger widows were to be refused for they would in many cases break their agreement with the church and marry (vv. 11-16).

(c) *Elders (vv. 17-25).*

Those elders who governed well and who taught were to receive generous remuneration (vv. 17-18). Any accusation against them not substantiated by two or more witnesses was to be ignored (v. 19). Where it is proved that an elder has been guilty of gross sin, he is to be rebuked publicly (v. 20). Timothy is not to be hasty in ordaining elders (v. 22). To lay hands on a man is to identify himself with his sin. Timothy is to exercise caution in ordaining elders, for though the sins and failings of some men are apparent, in others they do not come immediately to light (vv. 24, 25).

(d) *Slaves* (6:1, 2).

Slaves are to perform conscientious service to believing and unbelieving masters.

VI. Concluding Exhortations. 6:3-21.

Timothy is exhorted -

1. To separate himself from those false teachers who teach contrary to Paul's doctrine, and who suppose that religion is for purpose of material gain. vv. 3-10.
2. To flee the love of money and to follow after the true riches which consist of Christian virtues. v. 11.
3. To fight in the glorious struggle for the faith and to grasp the prize of life eternal. v. 12.
4. To keep Paul's charge to him flawless and irreproachable. vv. 13-16.
5. To charge the rich not to trust in their wealth but in God who is the Owner of all things; and to so use their money here as to bring for them interest throughout eternity. vv. 17-19.
6. To guard the sacred trust, avoiding the philosophic theories of Gnosticism. vv. 20, 21.

~ end of I Timothy ~

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