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1 TIMOTHY

*Keep the truth pure and free from accusation*

WRITTEN

63 AD

KEY VERSE

*"to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ"*

6:14

Last updated April 28, 2023

Encourage Timothy to stop heresy

PURPOSE

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## Introduction

Paul met Timothy in Acts 16 on his second missionary journey, and since then Timothy became one of Paul's closest associates (2 Tim 3:10-11, Phil 2:22). Timothy joined the rest of the second missionary journey and the whole of the third. He was also with Paul when he wrote many of his letters. It was probably after Paul's imprisonment in Rome in the year 60-62 AD that he left Timothy in Ephesus (1:3) and wrote this letter to him. Paul calls him "young" in 4:12, but he may well have been over 30 based on how this word was used at the time.

In Acts 20:30, Paul says to the elders from the church in Ephesus that *"men will arise and distort the truth to draw away disciples after them."* It seems that this happened when Paul wrote 1 Tim. He also says that the reason he left Timothy there was to *"command certain people not to teach false doctrines"* (1:3), and there is a lot of talk about both right and wrong teaching.

Chapter 1 describes Timothy's mission. He must stop the heresy in Ephesus with love as the goal. Verses 12-17 are a small digression about the grace Paul himself received for his mission.

Timothy will help the church pray for the authorities. The men must pray without anger and strife, and the women must behave well.

Some elders probably had to be replaced (5:19-20) because of the heresy (Acts 20:30), and Timothy receives guidelines for appointing new leaders in chapter 3.

In chapter 4, Paul talks more about heresy and personally encourages Timothy to be bold, even though he is young.

The younger widows are swayed by all kinds of evil desires and were perhaps the ones most influenced by the heresy (2 Tim 3:6-7). Paul wants them to remarry, while widows over the age of 60 are to be supported by the congregation. He also talks more about good and bad elders.

Paul goes on to teach more about heresy and wealth, as well as share some personal words with Timothy.

1 Tim., 2 Tim., and Titus are often called the "pastoral letters" because they are written to individuals with pastoral responsibility in a congregation rather than to whole congregations. But one could perhaps rather say that Timothy and Titus have received an "apostolic" responsibility from Paul to fix the situations where they are.

### What do we know about Timothy?

* Acts 16,1-3: From Lystra in Galatia. Jewish Christian mother (Eunike, 2 Tim 1:5) and Greek father. Has a good testimony. Was circumcised by Paul. Join Paulus' 2nd missionary journey from there.
* Acts 19:22, 20:4 - He seems to take part in the whole 3rd missionary journey.
* Stands as co-author of 1-2 Thess, 2 Cor, Phil, Col, and Philemon.
* Was sent to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:2) and Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17).
* Heb 13:23: Was in prison (the 60s?)
* Was left in Ephesus 63-64 (?) AD. The letter was written shortly after.
* Relatively young (1 Tim 4:12)
* Was often sick (1 Tim 5:23)
* Has followed Paul in teaching and way of life, in purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, and sufferings (2 Tim 3:10-11)
* Has been trained in the OT from childhood (2 Tim 3:15)

### What is Timothy's mission in Ephesus? (1:3-5)

Command certain people not to teach false doctrines (v. 3) or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies (v. 4).

The goal: Love (v. 5)

* of a pure heart
* a good conscience
* and a sincere faith

### Heresy in Ephesus

* *"Teaching"* is mentioned 16x in 1 Tim (and 7x in the 2 Tim)
* Myths and endless genealogies (1:4)
* Meaningless talk (1:6, 4:7, 6:20)
* Teachers of the law (1:7)
* Deceiving spirits and things taught by demons (4:1)
* Lying hypocrites with guilty consciences (4:2)
* Forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods (4:3)
* Godless myths (4:7)
* Some of the younger widows follow Satan (5:15)
* Some elders are accused and sinning (5:19-20)
* Another teaching and not the sound instruction of Jesus Christ (6:3)
* Some teachers are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction between people of corrupt minds, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. (6:4-5).
* Desires to get rich and is led astray (6:9-10)
* Opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith. (6:20)

*“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.”* - Paul in Acts 20:29-30

### Structure

Chapter 1: Timothy's mission

* 1:1-2: The greeting
* 1:3-5: Timothy's mission
* 1:6-11: The false teachers
* 1:12-17: Digression: God's grace towards Paul
* 1:18-20: Timothy's mission

Chapter 2: The congregation's gatherings

Chapter 3: Overseers and deacons

Chapter 4: False doctrine

Chapter 5: Widows and Elders

Chapter 6: False doctrine

## The false teachers (1:6-11)

1. The false teachers use the law wrongly. They use it for the righteous, but it is meant for the unrighteous.
2. The law must be used in a way that is consistent with the gospel. (vv. 8 and 11)
3. The moral standard of the gospel corresponds to the moral standard of the law. But the law condemns while the gospel justifies.

## 1:18-20: Some additional clues about the false teachers

Hymeneus and Alexander have swept their consciences aside. They have suffered shipwreck with regard to their faith, and they blaspheme.

2 Tim 2:17-18: Hymeneus (and Philetus) say that the resurrection has already happened.

* 2 Tim 4:14-15: *"Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm.... You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message."*

An early form of Gnosticism?

* The Gnostics claimed that the resurrection had already happened *spiritually* when one came to faith. At death, one would be freed from the "prison" of the body and return to heaven.
* 1 Tim 6:20: *"Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge ["the pseudonymous gnosis"]"*
* If so, is it Gnostic myths he is talking about? (1:4, 4:7, 2 Tim 4:4)

## The importance of a good conscience

1:5-6: *"The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk."*

1:18-20: *"... fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander…"*

3:9: *"They [the deacons] must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience."*

4:2: *"Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron."*

The good/clean conscience is rejected and becomes seared. A progression?

A connection between the conscience and keeping the faith? (Romans 1:18-25?)

The conscience is not always God's voice, but a good one points out what is right and wrong because God has laid this down in all people. (Romans 2:15)

Listen to your conscience! It is dangerous to constantly overdrive it.

*“My conscience is bound by the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, because going against my conscience is neither right nor safe."* Luther (the quote has been translated)

**Reflection questions**

1. Do I have a good conscience?
2. Am I pressing my conscience?
3. Am I living a transparent life?

## 2:1-9

2:1-4 is about prayer.

2:5-7: A "digression" about the Truth.

2.8: The men's prayer. Maybe *"without dispute"* is emphasized due to the heresy mentioned in 3:3, 6:4-5, and 2 Tim 2:23-24?

2:9-15: Discuss the behavior of women. Seem to be connected with the heresy rather than being general church structures that Timothy is to introduce. This is also not part of his mission, but he must, among other things, replace the elders who come with false teaching (5:19-22).

v. 1: Connected to Timothy's mission and the heresy presented in chapter 1.

v. 4: *"wants all people to be saved"* Maybe *"all"* is emphasized because the Gnostics taught that salvation was only for the "intellectual elite"? *"all"* is also mentioned in vv. 1, 2, and 6.

v. 8: What does *"Therefore"* refer to?

* Paul's authority, mentioned in verse 7?
* Verses 1-7 which continues from chapter 1 and Timothy's mission?

Regardless, he still talks about prayer.

v. 9: *"likewise"* (ESV) → connected with v. 8, which seems to be connected with vv. 1-7.

**The Women of Ephesus**

* Shall behave well and adorn themselves modestly (2:9)
* Shall dress with good deeds (2:10)
* Shall learn in quietness and full submission (2:11)
* Shall not teach or assume authority over a man (2:12)
* Must be quiet (2:12)
* Shall be saved through childbearing (2:15)
* The female deacons (?) are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. (3:11)
* The widows who are really in need and left all alone are well known for all kinds of good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, etc. (5:5,10)
* Some younger widows have nothing to do. Being idle and going about from house to house, they become busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to. (5:13)
* The younger widows are to marry, have children, and manage their homes (5:14)
* Some younger widows have already turned away to follow Satan (5:15)
* The false teachers especially gain power over gullible women who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires (2 Tim 3:6)
* They are always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim 3:7)

*"I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God."* 1 Tim 2:9-10

## Is 2:11-15 timeless or time-bound?

**1. Timeless: Women should not teach or rule over men.**

1. It is justified theologically from the creation.
2. *"if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household"* 3:15
3. He could have said "I do not allow a woman to come up with heresy" (*heterodidaskalo* instead of *didaskalo*)
4. He could have said "she shall be silent" (*sigao*, as in 1 Cor 14:34) if he wanted to stop the heresy. Instead, he tells her to be "quiet".
5. Traditional interpretation in academic circles until 1969 (?)

**2. Time-bound: This concerned a problem in Ephesus.**

* This is the only verse in the Bible that forbids women from teaching. Did Timothy need to hear this, as he was one of Paul's closest associates (1:2, 2 Tim 3:10-11)?
* Priscilla (w/Aquila) had previously taught a man in Ephesus, probably with Paul's approval (Acts 18:26, 2 Tim 4:19).
* A consistent interpretation of vv. 8-15 means that men must always pray with raised hands, while women can never braid their hair, wear expensive clothes, or teach men.
* Paul argues strangely and seems to contradict his theology. Therefore probably a special situation.
* 2:11-15 follows from Timothy's commission to stop heresy, and this seems to have particularly affected younger widows.
* *"Assume authority over a man"* (2:12): *Authenteo* is used only here in the NT. Paul otherwise uses two other words for *"take charge of"*. The meaning of this word is also a bit diffuse (can also be used for "tyrannize").

## Early Gnosticism?

* The resurrection had already happened (1 Tim 1:19-20, 2 Tim 2:17-18)
* "The pseudonymous gnosis" (1 Tim 6:20)
* Myths (1:4, 4:7, 2 Tim 4:4)
* *Apocryphon Joannis* (100s AD): Adam was created first, but Eve was given life first. Marriage and family were the devil's invention; the great sin for a woman was to bear children. The world cannot be saved if women do not find their way back to the *authentia* the woman had over the man in the beginning.
* Writers in antiquity mention that distorted versions of the story of Adam and Eve circulated already in the 1st century AD.
* We find possible traces of Gnosticism already in 1 Corinthians (the 50s).

## Saved through childbearing? (2:15)

1. Christian women should not die in childbirth…?

2. The curse on women came through a woman (Eve), and so did salvation (Mary).

* Justin and Ignatius in the 100s, etc.
* But the noun *"childbearing"* always has to do with giving birth, not with a single birth.

3. Saved from the heresy in Ephesus.

* According to 5:11 and 14, the woman's good works are marriage, child-rearing (the verb form of the noun in 2:15), and keeping the home in order.
* If the younger widows remarry and have families, there is a greater chance that they will be kept in the faith and saved, as the false teachers will then lose their influence over them.

### A kind of summary of interpretation 2:

* The younger widows must remarry, "follow the rules" and raise families. Then the false teachers will no longer influence them and they will be saved.
* The heresy may have been an early form of Gnosticism; therefore, Paul uses *authentia*, refers to Genesis 2, and includes childbearing.
* *"When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up."* (1 Cor 14:26) Here, he says nothing about who can teach whom. The spiritual gifts are not gender specific.
* There are so many uncertain points in this text that we should perhaps give the women the benefit of the doubt...?

## A few more points about female pastors/preachers/teachers:

* Paul is talking about teaching, not preaching. But in Acts, teaching takes place "indoors" in the congregation and preaching "outdoors" in the squares.
* The priesthood is only found in the Old Testament.
* The word *"priest"* comes from the Greek *presbyteros*, which means *"elder"*.
* The NT speaks of elders (*presbyteros*) and overseers (*episkopos* —> bishop). In Tit 1:6-7 these are used as synonyms. So the first congregations did not have priests but were instead led by a group of elders/bishops. There was never one leader over a congregation in the NT either, neither a priest nor a pastor.
* It is easier to find arguments for female elders/bishops in this context than as the sole supreme leader of a congregation. → Chapter 3.

*"I wonder if it was a coincidence that God used a woman to be the first to preach about the resurrection of Jesus?"* Lars Gunnar Røed (the quote has been translated)

## How Early Christianity Was Mocked for Welcoming Women

*Retrieved from Michael J. Kruger*

1. Celsus: “[Christians] show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonorable and stupid, only slaves, women, and little children” (Cels. 3.44). Celsus continues his ridicule by accusing Christians of hiding out in their “private houses” and being unwilling to engage in the public sphere—yet another way to associate Christianity with women who were often the managers of those households.
2. Pliny the Younger: When he writes his famous letter to Emperor Trajan, the fact that the only specific Christians he mentions to Trajan are “two female slaves” is a less-than-veiled statement that Christianity is an emasculated religion.
3. Lucian: Comments about the “widows and orphan children” who were gullible enough to bring meals to the charlatan Peregrinus while he was in prison (Peregr. 12).
4. Minucius Felix penned an apologetic work called Octavius, which contains a dialogue between a pagan named Caecilius and a Christian named Octavius. Caecilius offers a lengthy diatribe against Christianity, including the criticism that early Christianity was recruiting from "the dregs of the populace and credulous women with the inability natural to their sex" (Oct. 8.4).

## Qualifications for Overseers/Elders (Ch. 3)

* is to be above reproach (different in different cultures)
* the husband of one wife (v. 2, ESV)
  + Against polygamy? Forbidden - little point in mentioning it.
  + Not remarried?
    - There was no ban on remarriage.
    - Younger widows are to marry (5:14), without losing church support later (5:9)
  + Probably not meant as *"the husband of one wife";* an expression of faithfulness in marriage. This was a common requirement in ancient times. Marriage to only one woman is never a requirement. The false teachers forbade marriage (4:3).
* temperate
* self-controlled
* respectable
* hospitable
* able to teach (to go against the false teachers)
* not given to drunkenness
* non-violent
* gentle, not quarrelsome (the false teachers were quarrelsome (6:3-5 and 2 Tim 2:22-26))
* not a lover of money (the false teachers were greedy (6:5,9-10))
* manage his own family well (as the head of the extended family)
* have obedient children (important in both Jewish and Greek cultures)
* not be a recent convert (not in Titus (newly planted church). Not a standard list. The false teachers were haughty (6:4, 2 Tim 3:4))
* have a good reputation with outsiders

### What is not mentioned in the list?

**Age?**

* Taken for granted or not a requirement?
* OT: the men with the most wisdom and experience
* OT Judaism: older men
* The most common were older men, but probably no clear age limit.

**Sex?**

Do not clearly say *"he"* in Greek.

*"the husband of one wife"* (3:2, ESV), but does Paul mean that all the requirements apply to everyone? (cf. Phoebe)

* Was it required to be married and have children, even if Paul (and perhaps Timothy?) was not married himself?
* Or do *"the husband of one wife"* and *"obedient children"* only apply to those who have a wife and children?

Could Paul envision a woman as *an episkopos* (overseer)?

* No trace of female elders in OT and Judaism.
* Problems with women in 1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 2.

A personal relationship with God?

What should their salary be? (5:17)

How many hours a week?

How many elders should there be in each congregation?

How long is their term of office?

What are their tasks?

*Retrieved from Gordon Fee:*

What were the duties of overseers/elders? On this point, our information is limited, precisely because this was not the most important thing for Paul. Two things seem certain:

1. Overseers/elders were responsible for teaching (3:3, 5:17, Tit 1:9), for which they were to be remunerated (5:17).
2. Together they were responsible for "governing" and "taking care of" the local congregation (3:4-5, 5:17). Beyond that, everything is speculation.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Elders (Titus 1:6-9)** | **The false teachers (Titus 1:10-16)** |
| Blameless, a man whose children believe (1:6) | Disrupting whole households (1:11) |
| Not overbearing, not quick-tempered (1:7) | Evil brutes (1:12) |
| not given to drunkenness (1:7), self-controlled (1:8) | Lazy gluttons (1:12) |
| Not pursuing dishonest gain (1:7) | Looking for dishonest gain (1:11) |
| One who loves what is good (1:8) | Wicked (1:12), unfit for doing anything good (1:16) |
| Holy (1:8) | Their actions deny God (1:16) |
| Must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught (1:9) | Teaching things they ought not to teach (1:11), paying attention to Jewish myths and to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth (1:14) |
| Can encourage others with sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (1:9) | Needs to be stopped and corrected (1:11, 13) |

### What does this tell us?

* The overseers must be the opposite of the false teachers in several ways. The situation in Ephesus seems to govern the criteria somewhat.
* Several of the requirements were important values in that culture and seem to govern the criteria somewhat.

What requirements would Paul write today to a congregation in the country where you live?

Would women be able to be overseers/elders then?

Must we do it as Paul did?

## "The Spirit says"

* Paul never uses this expression elsewhere when he quotes from the OT.
* Peter also knows this (2 Pet 3:1-3), and it may be the same thing that John also thinks about in 1 John 2:18. Something similar also in Jude vv. 17-18.
* Suggests that it goes back to Jesus and Matt 24 (as in 2 Thess 2).
* John Stott: *"Perhaps he is referring to the prediction of an apostasy that Jesus brought, of which the Spirit continues to speak (see the refrain about listening to 'what the Spirit says to the churches'* *throughout Christ's seven letters to the churches in Asia in Rev 2 and 3)."*

## *“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young* *…”* (4:12)

Those who were not elders were generally not considered capable of leadership, and many positions in Judaism were not available until the age of 40.

Older men would normally not accept instructions and guidance from a younger person.

Regardless of his young age (compared to Paul and the elders in Ephesus), he must be a role model for others, even those who are older than him, and with his lifestyle show himself worthy of his position:

1. **in words:** How he talks or what he talks about? Don't grumble and argue like the false teachers.
2. **in conduct:** he must live according to what he teaches
3. **in love** (which is the opposite of speculation in 1:4-5)
4. **in faith** (which is what the false teachers have left)
5. **in purity** - as in 1:5 and 5:22. A contrast to the false teachers and their false asceticism.

## Widows and Elders (Ch. 5)

### Structure

Timothy must relate to the congregation as a family. (vv. 1-2)

Separates the widows, who were to be supported by the congregation, from the younger widows who should marry again. (vv. 3-16)

Good and bad elders (vv. 17-25)

### 5:1-2

Paul adopts Jesus' description of church relationships as one's immediate family.

This was not typical in ancient times. The Romans looked down on those who claimed to have family ties without reason. Being a family comes with obligations.

Jesus’ and Paul's language about the church as a family was radical and not a cultural habit.

Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes

This is a challenge for us in the West. We often hear that "you don't choose your family", but we know that we can choose our church. In the West, the congregation is perceived as something you join voluntarily.

Do we have to rethink what church means?

### Widows (5:3-16)

v. 4: A widow with a family does not need help from the congregation, then the family will take care of her. It is a way of showing godliness.

v. 8: Those who do not help their own family, especially Christians, have completely misunderstood and are worse than an unbeliever.

vv. 9-11: "Criteria" to get on the list. 60 was considered the "pensioner limit".

“Real” widows:

* Have no family/others who can help
* Are godly
* Puts their hope in God and pray all the time
* Do not live according to their desires
* Is over 60 years old
* Has been faithful to her husband
* Is known for good deeds
* Have raised children
* Hospitable
* Have washed the feet of the Lord’s people
* Have helped those in trouble

## Structure of Ch. 6

The topic of chapter 6 is false doctrine.

• vv. 1-2: Slaves (with believing masters)

• vv. 3-10: More heresy and warning against the love of money

• vv. 11-16: Words to Timothy

• vv. 17-19: Admonitions to the rich

• vv. 20-21: Conclusion

## What does 1 Timothy tell us?

1. What kind of false teaching threatens us today? Where is the line between heresy and different theological interpretations?
2. How can the Law of Moses be used wrongly in churches today and not in accordance with the Gospel? (1:6-11)
3. How does Timothy's young age encourage you?
4. What do you think about women teaching men?
5. To what extent should we follow Paul's list of criteria?
6. Do you live with a clear conscience? Do you push your conscience sometimes?