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CHURCHES ARE PRONE TO DRIFT.

Just like a framework of a house can become compromised by wind or ground pressure, so churches may begin to lean off-level. Opposition, temptation, and aberrant teaching are always a threat. So, what are God's key guidelines for a strong, healthy church?

GOD'S FOUNDATION AND FRAMEWORK FOR THE CHURCH

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Pastoral Letters: A Collection of 3

Paul penned two letters to Timothy and one to Titus. Together, these are known as *The Pastoral Epistles*. They show the mentor relationship between the apostle and these two men, who were serving as pastors of rather large yet very young churches.

These short, poignant letters are deeply personal, practical, and pastoral.¹ Paul shepherded Timothy and Titus as they, in turn, aimed to shepherd their local gatherings. Here we find 1 Timothy overflowing with advice on the framework for a church, along with direct instructions on doctrine, morality, benevolence, prayer, giving, courage, and humility.

Date and Author

Paul wrote 1 Timothy most likely after his release from his first imprisonment in Rome in approximately A.D. 62. Therefore, he likely penned this epistle around A.D. 62-64. A circle within liberal-critical scholarship argues against Pauline authorship. However, all the

pastoral letters carry various trademarks of Paul's writing style, theological themes, and an expansion on ideas previously mentioned in other letters, e.g. church governance by elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17-22; Tit. 1:5-9).²

Recipients: Who Received It?

This letter was directly addressed to the young pastor Timothy, who was around 32-years-old at the time. But the epistle would have also been read aloud to the believers in Ephesus, and eventually circulated throughout other first-century churches.

The Ephesian believers were new in Jesus. Their lives were immersed in paganism. The Temple to Artemis was the most prominent feature in their city and served as an epicenter of immoral sexual acts, which were considered part of their idol worship. But then Paul arrived in Ephesus on his return trip to Antioch at the close of his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19-22). Men and women began hearing and believing in the good news of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Paul later spent 3+ years in Ephesus on his third

missionary journey (Acts 20:31). During this time, God worked in powerful ways in the city: 12 followers of John the Baptist were baptized (Acts 19:1-7), Paul preached for 3 months in the local synagogue and hosted teachings in the hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10), people were healed of various diseases and demonic oppression (Acts 19:11-12), even large numbers of sorcerers repented and turned to faith in Christ. All of these shocking events resulted in a city-wide riot (Acts 19:23-41), because so many people were rejecting idolatry for Christ. These new believers lost their place and belonging in society. Many would be disowned by their families. But what they lost now pointed to what they had gained: "grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (1 Tim. 1:2b).

Purpose: Why Was It Written?

Timothy was appointed by Paul to oversee the church in Ephesus as the apostle went onward to Macedonia (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3). Therefore, he wrote to provide key instructions on God's framework for the order, conduct, and mission of the church (1 Tim. 3:15).

THE ULTIMATE GOAL

Right out-of-the-gate, Paul makes clear that the goal of all our instruction is love (*αγάπη* – *agape*). God's pure, unconditional, and unadulterated love given to us in His gospel flows from and results in "a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). Love must guide all our teaching and serving. False, self-serving teachers are always a threat to any healthy church. So, Timothy must refute "certain men," who were purveying misguided dogma that did not bear the fruit of love (1 Tim. 1:6-7).



Artemis, the Ephesian Greek goddess; identified as Diana by the Romans.

GRACE > LAW

A Vital Distinction

The false, destructive teachers gaining prevalence in the church of Ephesus were misusing and misapplying God's Law, i.e. the Law of Moses (1 Tim. 1:4-9). Certain men were promoting the idea that keeping the Law was a way to gain *and* maintain a good relationship with God. We are unsure if these false teachers were of Jewish background, similar to the Judaizers addressed in Paul's letter to the Galatians, or if they were merely zealous yet misguided Gentile students of the scriptures.

Either way, Timothy – as the elder-shepherd – was to hold firmly to the faith (1:19), the truth of the gospel in Christ, and courageously rebuke these aberrant preachers (1 Tim. 1:3; 4:6-12). Receiving *and* growing in a relationship with God comes purely by His grace, through which we also obtain mercy and peace (1 Tim. 1:2). We are to fight the same "good fight" against distorted doctrine as people under grace (1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12).

Getting it "Right" isn't Good Enough

Paul warned Timothy and the other leaders in Ephesus to guard against false teachers (see Acts 20:29-30). We later discover in the book of the Revelation that they ably kept correct doctrine (Rev. 2:2). However, they "failed to maintain the vibrancy of their first love for Christ (Rev. 2:4)".³

We face the same danger today. We can smack down false teachers and post biblically correct statements of faith. But if our aim is not deeper love for God and genuine love for people, then we have drastically missed the goal.

PASTOR RAY ORTLUND SAYS...

"Left to ourselves, we will get it partly wrong, but we won't feel wrong, because we'll be partly right. But only partly.

Truth without grace is harsh and ugly. Grace without truth is sentimentality and cowardly. The living Christ is full of grace and truth (John 1:14)."⁴



A rendering of the Temple to Artemis in ancient Ephesus

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

I. The Gospel Foundation for the Church (1:1-20)

- A. Greetings in the Gospel of Grace (1:1-2)
- B. The Goal: Love (1:3-7)
- C. God's Grace > God's Law (1:8-17)
- D. Paul's Charge to Timothy (1:18-20)

II. God's Framework for the Church (2:1-3:16)

- A. Prayer: First and Most Important (2:1-8)
- B. Women of grace (2:9-15)
- C. Elders: Men of oversight (3:1-7)
- D. Deacons: People of service (3:8-13)
- E. Core Framework: Christ's glorious gospel (3:14-16)

III. Guidelines for God's Servants (4:1-16)

- A. Guard against false doctrine with God's good Word (4:1-10)
- B. Pastoral practices that produce progress (4:6-16)

IV. Guidelines for Groups (5:1-6:10)

- A. Pastoring all life-stages (5:1-2)
- B. Pastoring Widows (5:3-16)
- C. A Pastor's guide for Pastors (5:17-25)
- D. Pastoring slaves and masters (6:1-2)
- E. Pastoring the misguided and the greedy (6:3-10)

V. The Good Foundation in the Gospel (6:11-21)

- A. Fight the Good Fight (6:11-16)
- B. True, Eternal Riches (6:17-19)
- C. Guard the Faith (6:20-21)

ABOUT TIMOTHY...

Timothy began as an uncircumcised half-breed from Lystra; with a Jewish mother and a Greek father (Acts 16:1) he was a societal outcast, the object of ridicule by the Jews and the punch-line of jokes by the Greeks and Romans. To the young boy Timothy, he was "a nobody" with no real future and no hope.

During Paul's second missionary journey, Timothy enters the scene. Timothy had been taught the Old Testament scriptures from his faith-filled mother and grandmother, and he apparently connected with those Paul led to Christ on his first visit to Lystra. Upon Paul's second visit to this village, Paul hears about Timothy's reputation as a follower of Christ and so the great apostle Paul asks the young man to join him as a missionary (Acts 16:1-5). Paul trains and equips Timothy and becomes like a spiritual father to this young man, maybe the father he never really had. Later Paul left Timothy in charge of the **growing church in Ephesus.**

For Digging Deeper

¹ Litfin, Duane A. "1 Timothy", in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1983), 727.

² Carson, D.A. and Moo, Douglas J. *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 556-571.

³ Hoehner, Harold W. "Ephesians", in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1983), 614.

⁴ Ortlund, Ray. *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 22.

⁵ Koessler, John. "1 Timothy", in *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 1896.