



# John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions - 1 Timothy

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## Bible Introductions – 1 Timothy

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### Title

This is the first of two inspired letters Paul wrote to his beloved son in the faith. Timothy received his name, which means “one who honors God,” from his mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois), devout Jews who became believers in the Lord Jesus Christ ([2 Tim. 1:5](#)) and taught Timothy the OT Scriptures from his childhood ([2 Tim. 3:15](#)). His father was a Greek ([Acts 16:1](#)) who may have died before Timothy met Paul.

Timothy was from Lystra ([Acts 16:1–3](#)), a city in the Roman province of Galatia (part of modern Turkey). Paul led Timothy to Christ ([1:2, 18; 1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Tim. 1:2](#)), undoubtedly during his ministry in Lystra on his first missionary journey ([Acts 14:6–23](#)). When he revisited Lystra on his second missionary journey, Paul chose Timothy to accompany him ([Acts 16:1–3](#)). Although Timothy was very young (probably in his late teens or early twenties, since about 15 years later Paul referred to him as a young man, [4:12](#)), he had a reputation for godliness ([Acts 16:2](#)). Timothy was to be Paul’s disciple, friend, and co-laborer for the rest of the apostle’s life, ministering with him in Berea ([Acts 17:14](#)), Athens ([Acts 17:15](#)), Corinth ([Acts 18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19](#)), and accompanying him on his trip to Jerusalem ([Acts 20:4](#)). He was with Paul in his first Roman imprisonment and went to Philippi ([2:19–23](#)) after Paul’s release. In addition, Paul frequently mentions Timothy in his epistles ([Rom. 16:21; 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1](#)). Paul often sent Timothy to churches as his representative ([1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; Phil. 2:19; 1 Thess. 3:2](#)), and 1 Timothy finds him on another assignment, serving as pastor of the church at Ephesus ([1:3](#)). According to [Heb. 13:23](#), Timothy was imprisoned somewhere and released.

### Author and Date

Many modernist critics delight in attacking the plain statements of Scripture and, for no good reason, deny that Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles (1, 2 Tim., Titus). Ignoring the testimony of the letters themselves ([1:1](#); [2 Tim. 1:1](#); [Titus 1:1](#)) and that of the early church (which is as strong for the Pastoral Epistles as for any of Paul's epistles, except Rom. and 1 Cor.), these critics maintain that a devout follower of Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles in the second century. As proof, they offer 5 lines of supposed evidence: 1) The historical references in the Pastoral Epistles cannot be harmonized with the chronology of Paul's life given in Acts; 2) The false teaching described in the Pastoral Epistles is the fully- developed Gnosticism of the second century; 3) The church organizational structure in the Pastoral Epistles is that of the second century, and is too well developed for Paul's day; 4) The Pastoral Epistles do not contain the great themes of Paul's theology; 5) The Greek vocabulary of the Pastoral Epistles contains many words not found in Paul's other letters, nor in the rest of the NT.

While it is unnecessary to dignify such unwarranted attacks by unbelievers with an answer, occasionally such an answer does enlighten. Thus, in reply to the critics' arguments, it can be pointed out that: 1) This contention of historical incompatibility is valid only if Paul was never released from his Roman imprisonment mentioned in Acts. But he was released, since Acts does not record Paul's execution, and Paul himself expected to be released ([Phil. 1:19, 25, 26](#); [2:24](#); [Philem. 22](#)). The historical events in the Pastoral Epistles do not fit into the chronology of Acts because they happened after the close of the Acts narrative which ends with Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. 2) While there are similarities between the heresy of the Pastoral Epistles and second-century Gnosticism (see [Introduction to Colossians: Background and Setting](#)), there are also important differences. Unlike second-century Gnosticism, the false teachers of the Pastoral Epistles were still within the church (cf. [1:3–7](#)) and their teaching was based on Judaistic legalism ([1:7](#); [Titus 1:10, 14](#); [3:9](#)). 3) The church organizational structure mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles is, in fact, consistent with that established by Paul ([Acts 14:23](#); [Phil. 1:1](#)). 4) The Pastoral Epistles do mention the central themes of Paul's theology, including the inspiration of Scripture ([2 Tim. 3:15–17](#)); election ([2 Tim. 1:9](#); [Titus 1:1, 2](#)); salvation ([Titus 3:5–7](#)); the deity of Christ ([Titus 2:13](#)); His mediatorial work ([2:5](#)), and substitutionary atonement ([2:6](#)). 5) The different subject matter in the Pastoral Epistles required a different vocabulary from that in Paul's other epistles. Certainly a pastor today would use a different vocabulary in a personal letter to a fellow pastor than he would in a work of systematic theology.

The idea that a "pious forger" wrote the Pastoral Epistles faces several further difficulties: 1) The early church did not approve of such practices and surely would have exposed this as a ruse, if there had actually been one (cf. [2 Thess. 2:1, 2](#); [3:17](#)). 2) Why forge 3 letters that include similar material and no deviant doctrine? 3) If a counterfeit, why not invent an itinerary for Paul that would have harmonized with Acts? 4) Would a later, devoted follower of Paul have put the words of [1:13, 15](#) into his master's mouth? 5) Why would he include warnings against deceivers ([2 Tim. 3:13](#); [Titus 1:10](#)), if he himself were one?

The evidence seems clear that Paul wrote 1 Timothy and Titus shortly after his release from his first Roman imprisonment (ca. A.D. 62–64), and 2 Timothy from prison during his second Roman imprisonment (ca. A.D. 66–67), shortly before his death.

## Background and Setting

After being released from his first Roman imprisonment (cf. [Acts 28:30](#)), Paul revisited several of the cities in which he had ministered, including Ephesus. Leaving Timothy behind there to deal with problems that had arisen in the Ephesian church, such as false doctrine ([1:3–7](#); [4:1–3](#); [6:3–5](#)), disorder in worship ([2:1–15](#)), the need for qualified leaders ([3:1–14](#)), and materialism ([6:6–19](#)), Paul went on to Macedonia, from where he wrote Timothy this letter to help him carry out his task in the church (cf. [3:14, 15](#)).

## Historical and Theological Themes

First Timothy is a practical letter containing pastoral instruction from Paul to Timothy (cf. [3:14, 15](#)). Since Timothy was well versed in Paul's theology, the apostle had no need to give him extensive doctrinal instruction. This epistle does, however, express many important theological truths, such as the proper function of the law ([1:5–11](#)), salvation ([1:14–16](#); [2:4–6](#)); the attributes of God ([1:17](#)); the Fall ([2:13, 14](#)); the person of Christ ([3:16](#); [6:15, 16](#)); election ([6:12](#)); and the second coming of Christ ([6:14, 15](#)).

## Interpretive Challenges

There is disagreement over the identity of the false teachers ([1:3](#)) and the genealogies ([1:4](#)) involved in their teaching. What it means to be “delivered to Satan” ([1:20](#)) has also been a source of debate. The letter contains key passages in the debate over the extent of the atonement ([2:4–6](#); [4:10](#)). Paul's teaching on the role of women ([2:9–15](#)) has generated much discussion, particularly his declaration that they are not to assume leadership roles in the church ([2:11, 12](#)). How women can be saved by bearing children ([2:15](#)) has also confused many. Whether the fact that an elder must be “the husband of one wife” excludes divorced or unmarried men has been disputed, as well as whether Paul refers to deacons' wives or deaconesses ([3:11](#)). Those who believe Christians can lose their salvation cite [4:1](#) as support for their view. There is a question about the identity of the widows in [5:3–16](#)—are they needy women ministered to by the church, or an order of older women ministering to the church? Does “double honor” accorded to elders who rule well ([5:17, 18](#)) refer to respect or money? These will all be dealt with in their respective notes.

## Outline

1. Greeting ([1:1, 2](#))
2. Instructions Concerning False Doctrine ([1:3–20](#))
  - A. The False Doctrine at Ephesus ([1:3–11](#))
  - B. The True Doctrine of Paul ([1:12–17](#))
  - C. The Exhortation to Timothy ([1:18–20](#))

3. Instructions Concerning the Church ([2:1–3:16](#))
  - A. The Importance of Prayer ([2:1–8](#))
  - B. The Role of Women ([2:9–15](#))
  - C. The Qualifications for Leaders ([3:1–13](#))
  - D. The Reason for Paul's Letter ([3:14–16](#))
4. Instructions Concerning False Teachers ([4:1–16](#))
  - A. The Description of False Teachers ([4:1–5](#))
  - B. The Description of True Teachers ([4:6–16](#))
5. Instructions Concerning Pastoral Responsibilities ([5:1–6:2](#))
  - A. The Responsibility to Sinning Members ([5:1](#), [2](#))
  - B. The Responsibility to Widows ([5:3–16](#))
  - C. The Responsibility to Elders ([5:17–25](#))
  - D. The Responsibility to Slaves ([6:1](#), [2](#))
6. Instructions Concerning the Man of God ([6:3–21](#))
  - A. The Peril of False Teaching ([6:3–5](#))
  - B. The Peril of Loving Money ([6:6–10](#))
  - C. The Proper Character and Motivation of a Man of God ([6:11–16](#))
  - D. The Proper Handling of Treasure ([6:17–19](#))
  - E. The Proper Handling of Truth ([6:20](#), [21](#))

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