

Rev. Dr. Chris Montovino  
1 Timothy 1:1-2  
September 11, 2022

### Overview of 1 Timothy

I feel as if I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the passing of Queen Elizabeth II which was THE headline news this past week. For 70 years, Elizabeth served as the longest reigning monarch that the United Kingdom has ever had. Post World War II to BREXIT and the COVID pandemic, she supported her country through some incredibly tumultuous times serving alongside 15 prime ministers from Winston Churchill to the most recent Liz Truss.

President Joe Biden called her “a stateswoman of unmatched dignity and constancy who deepened the bedrock alliance between the United Kingdom and the United States.”

Former President Bill Clinton said, “In sunshine or storm, she was a source of stability, serenity, and strength.”

Musician Elton John called her “an inspiring presence to be around and led the country through some of our greatest, and darkest, moments.”

Israeli President Isaac Herzog said, “She lived history, she made history. And with her passing, she leaves a magnificent, inspirational legacy.”

Dignity. Constancy. Bedrock. Stability. Strength. Inspiration.

That will be Queen Elizabeth II’s legacy. The mark she has left behind with her family, friends, countryfolk, and the rest of the world.

Over the next couple of weeks, we will be looking at another person’s legacy and the mark that they had hoped to leave behind. Namely, the Apostle Paul and his young protege Timothy. The common lectionary had us to spend sometime poking some of the texts from their letters but it just didn’t seem right that we should address some of the issues and not all of them.

Today we will only consider the first two verses and the overview of this important letter.

So listen now as I read for us from Paul’s First Letter to Timothy 1:1-2.

**1** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,

**2** To Timothy my true son in the faith:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

I want to start off sharing a picture that I have hanging in my garage of my Navy days. This is of my ship, the USS Curts, a small frigate, during the early days of the First Gulf War. We were positioned as the northern most ship in the Persian Gulf, hiding out in oil fields, about twelve miles off the coast of Kuwait, we served as a forward lookout for the carrier air group which was many miles to the south of us.

You'll notice our ship in the background and an explosion taking place in the foreground. That is because on this day, our forward lookouts spotted a floating contact mine several hundred yards off our bow. I am so grateful for their attentiveness because that one mine could have easily sunk our small ship.

Fortunately, we stopped what we were doing. Sent out a team of explosive ordinance destruction specialists who strapped explosives to their chests, were lowered into the water by helicopter, swam out to the mine, attached the explosives to the mine, swam away, got back into the helicopter, and detonated the mine. For about a month and half we operated in those kinds of treacherous waters. As the head fire fighter and flooding specialist for our ship, this was not a particularly fun season of life for me.

The reason I bring this up is that our journey through 1 Timothy is laden with theological mines that have shipwrecked the Church over the ages. This is particularly true as some have taken Paul's words to Timothy out of context and developed their ecclesiology, or how the church ought to function, based on a few of these hard to understand texts. In truth, even faithful Christians have used these texts to justify their positions supporting sexism, racism, and even slavery. That said even today the Christian Church worldwide does not agree on how to interpret some of these texts. Even the Apostle Peter said, "[Paul's] letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do other Scriptures."<sup>1</sup>

However, what we must understand before we dive into these letters is that we are essentially reading other people's mail. These letters were written between Paul and Timothy, who as I mentioned earlier was Paul's young protege. Whether or not they were intended to be read to the entire church in Ephesus or circulated among the other churches in Asia Minor as many of Paul's other letters were, I'm not sure. We can see very clearly by the opening address who Paul states to whom this letter is addressed.

"To Timothy my true son in the faith." No one else.

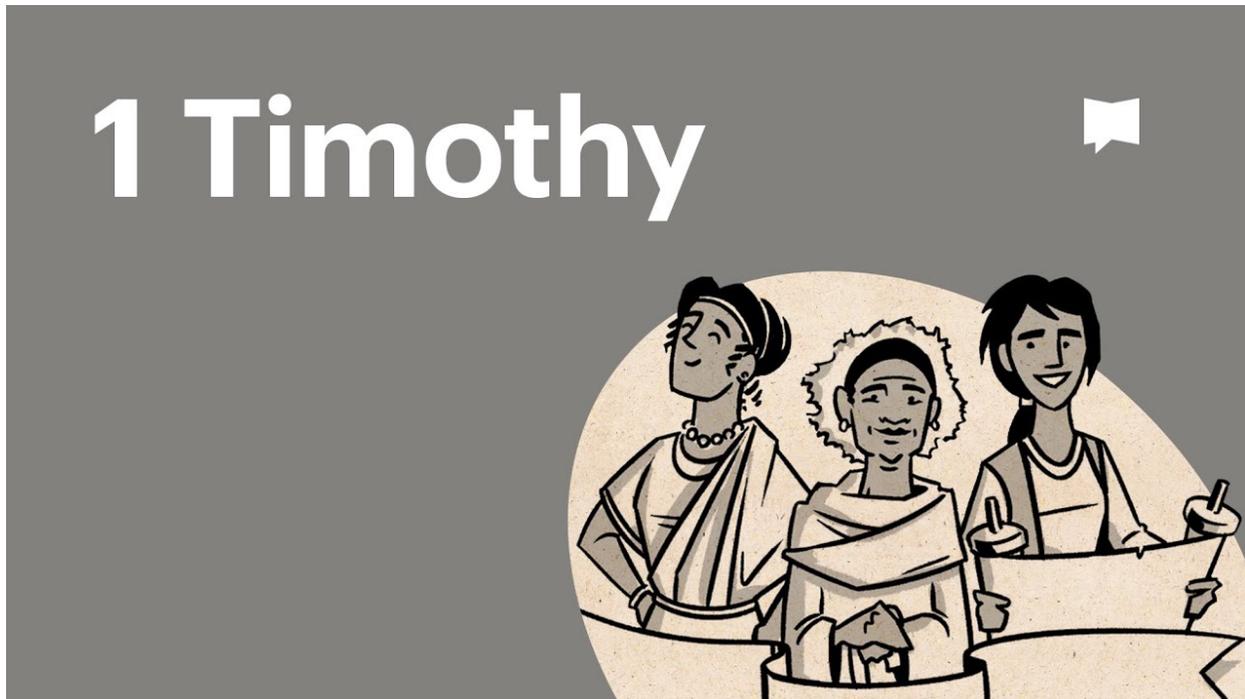
I believe that we will see that Paul's words are descriptive, describing how to address these issues. I do not believe they are prescriptive, prescribing how things generally ought to be. So before we dive into what he said, lets first establish the

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 3:16

context behind this letter. The way I'd like to do this this morning is by showing you a video by The Bible Project, an organization from Portland, Oregon. Their videos paint awesome overviews of what is going on in the text and behind the text. What we sadly often lack, and sometimes wrongly assume, is that very important back story.

So watch this with me as we see 1 Timothy from 30,000 feet above the land, traveling about 600 miles per hour.



Did you catch all that? I know it was fast. But be at ease that you will not get a pop quiz at the end of my sermon...today.

This morning we will focus briefly on three primary questions raised by today's text. Who was Paul? Who was Timothy? What was the story of the Ephesian Church?

First who was Paul? We know from multiple sources that Paul was originally Saul of Tarsus. He was a Jew, but was also a Roman citizen, with all the rights and privilege of that citizenship. He was a member of the Pharisee class or those who followed the letter of the Old Testament Law to a "T." A legalizer. We learn in Acts how he actively sought out and persecuted early followers of Jesus Christ. He even oversaw their murders. This information will come in handy later on we hear Paul talk about how he of all people needed the grace, love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

We also know that Saul had a radical conversion where the resurrected Jesus himself met Saul on his way to persecute Christians. Jesus confronted him and commanded him to stop doing what he was doing and instead follow him and spread his Good News throughout the Gentile world. Saul was convicted of his sin, had an immediate heart conversion, was renamed Paul, and picked up his cross and followed Jesus from then on out.<sup>2</sup>

Now an apostle according to Acts 1:21-22 was one of the twelve eye witnesses of Jesus' ministry who had been entrusted with sharing the Good News of the Gospel with the rest of the world. Paul was not a contemporary of Jesus but he claimed his apostleship from this direct encounter with Jesus which I mentioned earlier. Paul was constantly having to remind people that his authority came directly from Jesus himself and not from some other person or group of people.

It does seem a little odd that Paul mentions this in his opening salutation to this letter to Timothy. Some commentators thought that maybe it was not so much for Timothy's sake but for others who might read it and question from whose authority Paul writes. Paul clearly states that his authority comes directly from "the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope." Hard to argue with that.

As far as we know, Paul never married, nor had any children of his own. So when he addresses Timothy in this opening salutation as "my true son in the faith" we get a window into the depth of his feeling for Timothy. The Greek word *gnesios* for true means genuine, sincere, or legitimate. It distinguishes a natural-born heir from one who was adopted. Paul loved Timothy like son who he had prepared to take over the reigns for him.

Notice also in the greeting how Paul includes mercy amidst the gifts he wished to bestow upon Timothy from God the Father and Jesus Christ. We see how he often includes grace and peace, but not mercy. The Greek word for grace is *charis*. It means unmerited favor. The Greek word for peace is *ereine*. It means quietness or peace. The Greek word used for mercy is *eleos*. It means tender mercy, compassion, or an uncommon affinity. The Hebrew word that would have been used here is *hesed* or gracious faithful love.

All said, we can get this sense that there is indeed something special going on between Paul and Timothy. Paul reminds Timothy of all of our unmerited favor by God, peace or quietness amidst the chaos of spiritual noise that surrounded him, and Paul's gracious and faithful love for Timothy that stems from God's love for his own true son, Jesus Christ.

So now we ask, "Who was Timothy?" Timothy was a young man that Paul had met during his second missionary journey to Lystra. His mother was a Jewish

---

<sup>2</sup> Acts 9:1-9

believer in Jesus, the Messiah. His father was a Gentile, non believer. Timothy we will learn in Paul's second letter to him was highly influenced not only by his mother's faith, but his grandmother, Lois' as well. They taught him the truth about Jesus.

The elders had talked so highly of Timothy to Paul, that they insisted that they meet during Paul's visit. Timothy, was studious, emotional, dedicated, and resolute. Much like Paul. Like Paul, Timothy had one foot in Jewish Christianity and the other in the Gentile world. Because of these similarities, Paul and Timothy immediately hit it off, like kindred spirits, and began a relationship in Christ that transcended their blood relations. You've heard the term, "Brothers from another mother?" That was Timothy and Paul.

Timothy became Paul's disciple or student, learning his yoke or teaching about Jesus. Paul took him everywhere where he went. Whether they went into the Jewish synagogues to reason with the Jews or into the Gentile market places, Paul and Timothy together would share the Good News about Jesus with people who had never heard about Jesus, the Messiah for all people, Jew or Gentile.

Now being that Timothy's father was a Gentile and his mother Jewish, Timothy himself was not circumcised when Paul first met him. (That is having the physical markings on his genitalia of inclusion into the Jewish covenant of faith.) Though Paul had fiercely argued to the Galatians that it wasn't necessary for salvation, he did insist on Timothy being circumcised simply because the first place Paul would go when he arrived into a new city was the synagogue. If Timothy wasn't circumcised then he would have been immediately disqualified from entering the synagogue and allowed to worship which would have hindered Paul and Timothy from sharing their Good News with the Jews. I understand that this seems like an odd contradiction that is hard to make sense of.

After Paul and Timothy's third missionary journey, things started heating up between the Roman Emperor Nero and the Christians. Nero started persecuting the early church. Paul included, who found himself under house arrest in Caesarea Phillipi. As a Roman citizen, Paul appealed to the Emperor himself and ended up in prison on Rome, leaving Timothy back in Ephesus to pastor this very important body of new believers. From prison is most likely where Paul wrote this letter.

When it became obvious that Paul couldn't stay in Ephesus any longer, Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to pastor the church there and combat false teachings that had arisen from the rich, powerful, pagan influences of the town.

So in essence, Timothy was Paul's right hand man, the executor of his spiritual estate, the one he entrusted to care for the churches he founded which were his offspring. Think about who you've left your estate to, material or spiritual. What do you hope happens to the legacy you will leave behind?

Lets now move on to the Ephesian Church where Timothy was located when he received his letter. What was their back story? Well, we heard a lot of it in the video.

But, in the mid 60's A.D., Ephesus was a beautiful, stunning city, constructed mostly of polished marble which "paved the streets, supported the many monuments, and channeled rainwater to the sea. [It is said that] Even the public toilets were constructed of polished marble." One commentator wrote that "The city gleamed with white iridescence, as if to say to the world, "This city will shine forever."<sup>3</sup>

Ephesus was also in a very strategic location. It was a center for pagan philosophy and was the one church most susceptible to corruption. Ephesus sat on the Aegean Sea and the mouth of the Cayster River. It had incredible access to the sea and land which made it an affluent hub of commerce, trade, and ideologies throughout the Roman Empire. "Materials and knowledge flowed into the city from all over, feeding its voracious appetite for more wealth and new philosophies."<sup>4</sup>

Ephesus was also known for it's paganism with over fifty gods and goddesses who were worshipped there. The most significant was the goddess Artemis, The Earth Mother, the pagan goddess of fertility. The Temple of Artemis in Ephesus was so popular that it was known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. People traveled from all over to worship at the temple and pay their respects to Artemis. This also meant that they brought their money as well. So much money flowed into the temple that it became one of the earliest banking institutions. And along with money came an enormous amount of influence and power. I think we will see how sometimes the combinations of new believers, wealth, and power can be a lethal combination to what Paul had hoped for his fledgling followers of Jesus Christ.

Ok, who feels like they just drank from a firehose. That is it for today and this opening of Paul's first letter to Timothy.

May we see that this letter is indeed inspired by the Holy Spirit which speaks as much to us today as it did in Paul's day. May we reflect upon the spiritual legacies that we are leaving in the wakes of our lives. And may we believe that God's grace, mercy, and peace follows us all the days of our lives and will strengthen us should struggles come down the road in life.

Amen.

---

<sup>3</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary on 1&2 Timothy, Titus* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2014), 11.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 9.

Old wives tales for children's message

an apple a day keeps the doctor away.

sticking chopsticks upright in your food is bad luck.

that if your ears are ringing, then somebody is talking about you.

that terrible things come in threes.

that spilling salt brings bad luck.

that if you follow God's ways, then he will make you rich.