

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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1 Timothy

During the final phase of Paul's apostolic career, a serious disruption was troubling the long-established Christian church in Ephesus: Some church leaders had become false teachers. Paul had warned that this would happen ([Acts 20:29–31](#)), and now their impact was threatening the life and well-being of the community. A skillful person was needed to restore order to God's household. Paul gave this task to Timothy, his trusted delegate.

Setting

Paul's first contact with Ephesus, during his second missionary journey ([Acts 18:19–21](#)), gave no opportunity for significant work. During his third journey, Paul served in Ephesus for three years (around AD 53~56, [Acts 19](#)). Later, when Paul was on his way to Jerusalem, he had opportunity to stop at Miletus and speak to the elders from Ephesus, who met him there ([Acts 20:17–38](#)). Paul traveled to Jerusalem, was arrested, was later transferred to Caesarea, and was then sent to Rome, where he stayed under house arrest for approximately two years (AD 60–62, [Acts 21–28](#)). When he was released from prison, he reembarked on his mission, possibly directed toward Spain (see [Rom 15:24, 28](#)), although it is just as possible that the imprisonment changed Paul's orientation back eastward. Paul was still involved with the Ephesian church during this period.

Timothy, who had accompanied Paul for much of his original ministry there ([Acts 19:22](#)), had now been delegated the task of dealing with new and troubling developments in Ephesus ([1 Tim 1:3](#)). False teachers had emerged ([1:3](#)) and were evidently upsetting households (see [1 Tim 2:15; 3:4–5; 5:11–15](#); cp. [Titus 1:11](#)). Paul wrote Timothy to guide him in correcting errant behavior and in preventing false teachers from gaining another foothold.

Summary

After directing Timothy to deal with the false teachers, who espoused to be teachers of the law ([1:13-20](#)), Paul gives guidance on conduct in God's household with respect to prayer, women's teaching, and leadership ([2:1-3:13](#)). These three areas had been harmed by the false teachers. Paul makes clear what he is trying to accomplish and explains why and how it must be done ([3:14-4:16](#)). Then he resumes his instructions on godly conduct, focusing on old and young people, widows, elders, and masters ([5:1-6:2](#)). Relationships in these areas had also been distorted by false teaching. Finally, Paul returns to the need to deal with the false teachers themselves, this time centering on issues of wealth and profit ([6:2-21](#)).

Authorship

There is a widespread view that the Pastoral Letters (1 Timothy—Titus) were not written by Paul. According to this view, a follower of Paul wrote the Pastoral Letters after his death and signed his name. There are several good reasons, however, to believe that Paul is the author: (1) Until the 1800s, there was no hesitation in ascribing these letters to Paul. This includes early church fathers whose native language was Greek and who were very familiar with Paul's other letters. (2) The early church would never have accepted these letters had they suspected the letters of being falsely signed in Paul's name. (3) While Paul's style in these letters is different from elsewhere, this might simply be a result of the specific situations Paul was addressing and the distinctive period of Paul's life and career during which these letters were written. It also might result from the use of a different *amanuensis* (scribe) for these letters. It is reasonable to affirm Paul's authorship of the Pastoral Letters.

Date of Writing

The Pastoral Letters (1 Timothy—Titus) were most likely written after Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (AD 60–62, [Acts 28:1–31](#)) and before his death in AD 64~65 under the persecution of Nero.

In 2 Timothy, Paul is jailed in Rome at the end of his life (see [2 Tim 4:6](#)). This would seem to place the letters of 1 Timothy and Titus—written while Paul was still moving freely—in the time leading up to his arrest. How do these details fit with Acts?

One possibility is that 2 Timothy was written during the Roman imprisonment of [Acts 28](#). In this case, all three letters would fit into Luke's historical account in the book of Acts, and Paul would have been executed at the end of that imprisonment (AD 62).

There are early reports, however, that Paul was released from this Roman imprisonment (e.g., *1 Clement*[5:6–7](#), AD 95~97; see also Eusebius, *Church History* 2.22, AD 325). If this is the case, he likely engaged in further work, possibly went to Spain, and was then rearrested and executed in Rome during Nero's persecution of Christians (around AD 64~65). The letters to Timothy and Titus were likely written during this later period.

In support of this approach, there is no reason that these letters must be fitted into the history recorded in Acts. Also, the activities of Paul and his delegates in 1 Timothy and Titus do not correspond to the details in Acts, nor does the imprisonment of 2 Timothy sound like the imprisonment of [Acts 28](#). Finally, the distinctive style and content of these letters is less puzzling if they were written at a different time from Paul's other letters.

The False Teachers

The false teachers discussed in 1 Timothy bear much resemblance to similar figures whom Paul mentions in both 2 Timothy and Titus. It is very difficult to draw a clear picture of these false teachers, but there are clues. Their teaching had ascetic elements (see [1 Tim 4:3; Titus 1:15](#)) and a Jewish focus (see [1 Tim 1:7; Titus 1:10, 14; 3:9](#)). They claimed special knowledge ([1 Tim 6:20; Titus 1:16](#)), asserted that the resurrection of believers had already taken place ([2 Tim 2:18](#)), disrupted relationships ([2 Tim 3:6-7; Titus 1:11](#)), and might have emphasized salvation by works ([2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5](#)). Paul's strong response suggests a need to make corrections regarding the doctrine of Christ (see [1 Tim 2:5-6; 3:16; 2 Tim 2:8](#)) and the last days (see [1 Tim 4:1-5; 2 Tim 2:18; 3:1-9; Titus 2:11-14](#)). The false teachers opposed Paul's message, promoted immorality, and undercut the church's mission. Thus, good leaders were needed (see [Titus 1:10-13; 2:6-8, 15](#)).

Meaning and Message

First Timothy is passionate and masterful advocacy for the Good News of Jesus Christ, its ongoing progress in the world, and the new life which it creates and promotes (see [3:14-16](#)).

God's household was Paul's immediate concern. Just as the surrounding society expected orderly conduct in the family household—with roles and decorum and notions of honor and shame—so it was with the household of God. God's household reflects widely accepted standards of honor and propriety as well as the social structures of society. At the same time, where proper and necessary, God's household runs counter to society, reflecting very different and even countercultural values and practices. God's household is in the world, but not of it. The world remains God's good creation ([4:3-4; 6:17](#)), but it is transient and is in its last, difficult, evil-ridden days ([4:1; 2 Tim 3:1](#)). God's household reflects the new creation even as it exists in the world.

The mission of God's household is to advance the Good News in the world and promote the will of God (see [1 Tim 2:4-7](#)). God's people should do what supports that mission ([2:1-3:13; 5:1-6:2](#); see [1 Cor 9:19-23](#)). The false teachers were, by contrast, talking foolishness and damaging the integrity of the church, so Paul directed most of his words toward right conduct. The condensed summaries of the Good News ([1 Tim 1:15; 2:5-6; 3:16; 6:13-16](#)) indicate what was actually under assault—the right understanding of salvation in the present age. This is what must be preserved, skillfully taught, and passed along—with godly life as its outcome.