

1 Timothy: Paul's Convert and Loyal Fellow-worker

by Steve Ray

[NOTE: In my articles on the *Pastoral epistles*, I use each one to relay a theme: *1 Timothy* emphasizes the life of Timothy; *Titus* emphasizes Paul's ecclesiology; *2 Timothy* emphasizes the end of Paul's life.]

He was a young man with a past and because of this letter, many were now aware of his past. It was not a sordid life he had lived—but it was unusual. He stood out from the crowd, not in a loud or brash manner, but in a quiet and calm manner. He was not like the rest.

Coming from a mixed marriage in fluctuating times, he was amazingly focused and steady on his path. He was a loyal friend and companion which also caused him to stand out from the rest. Humility and gentle quietness enhanced his image as he stood at the right hand of the great apostle.

His Jewish mother Eunice gave him the name Timothy—"honoring God"—because she had high hopes for her young son, as did his grandmother Lois (2 Tim 1:5). We know nothing about his father other than Scripture says he *was* a Greek, implying that he had died. It also leads us to conclude that was not a believer (Acts 16:1). But the two women in Timothy's life taught him by word and example, passing the sincere faith on to this third generation (2 Tim 3:14–15). A son born to a Greek father and Jewish mother was Jewish by birth—he had learned the sacred Jewish scriptures from childhood.

One day a Jewish rabbi appeared in his city of Lystra (in modern day Turkey) preaching about the promised Jewish Messiah, the same Messiah Timothy had heard about in the scriptures (Acts 14:5–7). It seems apparent that the young teenager Timothy listened intently to the Apostle Paul, and believed—especially after seeing the man lame from birth miraculously healed in the center of town (Acts 15:8–10). Even though young, he made a momentous decision and joined the small group who believed in Jesus.

Several years later Paul returned to Lystra and found that young Timothy had made quite an impression and was very well spoken of—he stood out from the crowd. Paul chose him to join him in his apostolic travels (Acts 16:1–3) and Paul became a father to him, a father in the faith (1 Tim 1:2). Timothy was circumcised (Acts 16:3), ordained by the laying on of hands (1 Tim 4:14) and from that point on he was Paul's most loyal and ever-present companion, even suffering persecution and prison for the name of Christ and for his loyalty to Paul. His legacy is forever sealed in the New Testament since two of Paul's letters were addressed to Timothy—and something most people don't realize, Paul includes Timothy as co-author of six of his epistles.

Standing out from the crowd has its price and that price often entails difficult tasks. Timothy was chosen for such a task—the job of fixing the problems in the church at Ephesus, the 4th largest city in the Roman Empire. But Paul knew that Timothy’s weaknesses were as apparent as his strengths: he was still young (1 Tim 4:2), he was timid and nervous (2 Tim 1:7ff), probably very shy, and he had a weak stomach (1 Tim 5:23).

As the gateway to the east, Ephesus was a hotbed of new ideas and religious controversy. Arguments and debate filled the air—and they also filled the church. Pagan deities and shrines filled the city. Judaizer and Gnostic heretics—the scourge that followed Paul everywhere—jockeyed for followers and their arguments were likely to sway the superficial or unchatechized believer. As always, the learned needed to defend the faith and protect the flock. It took courage, tenacity, and clarity of thought—and it took authority. Timothy was sent by Paul to protect and teach the believers in Ephesus—a timid young man was sent to confront a pack of fierce wolves (Acts 20:29). Paul exhorts Timothy regarding true doctrine (ch. 1), public worship (chs. 2 and 3), false teachers (ch. 4), Church discipline (ch. 5), and pastoral duties (ch 6).

The *First Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy* was written to Timothy while he was in the thick of the fray in Ephesus. Paul the father was writing to Timothy his son in the faith to encourage and challenge him to fight the good fight and to keep the faith. Three times in his letters to Timothy Paul uses an important word: *paratheke*—“a deposit, a trust or thing consigned to one’s faithful keeping” (see 1 Tim 6:20). Timothy knew the Jewish scriptures but the New Testament did not yet exist. But the gospel and the apostolic tradition had been handed on and were to be guarded and obeyed. St. Irenaeus, about a hundred years later recognized this as a basic foundation of Christian truth when he wrote, “It is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth” (*Against Heresies*, 3, 5). The apostles left a deposit of faith, an apostolic tradition, a living Church, a magisterium—not just a library, *sola Scriptura*.

The Gnostic heretics claimed matter was evil, spirit was good. God, who is spirit, could not have dealings with the material world, and certainly couldn’t have taken on flesh himself. Throughout this intimate and personal letter Paul jabs at the heresies and their gnostic mysteries, often using their own terminology against them. “Gnostic mysteries”? By common confession the *real* mystery of godliness is that the heavenly *did* take on flesh and he was vindicated by the Spirit and seen by angels—the very powers that the Gnostics claimed in their endless genealogies and speculations (1 Tim 3:16). Paul reminds Timothy to hold fast to the *true* knowledge, and not to fall prey to what the heretics falsely call “knowledge” (*gnosis*) and which was causing many to miss the mark (1 Tim 6:20–21). Judaizers were also leading the faithful astray, teaching that faith in

Christ was not enough, but that the Gentiles must also become circumcised and obey all the laws and ceremonies of the Old Covenant.

The *Acts of the Apostles* ended well before St. Paul ended. *Acts* ended with Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, but after two years under house arrest awaiting his appeal to Caesar, Paul was released around AD 63. He continued preaching and contending for the faith for several more years, probably fulfilling his desire to preach the gospel in Spain (Rom 15:24, 28). While heading for Macedonia (in modern day Greece) sometime around AD 64–66, Paul wrote this letter to his trusted fellow-worker and friend Timothy who had been left to tackle the problems in Ephesus. His earlier epistles had mostly been directed at various churches teaching them doctrine and demanding moral uprightness. But in the twilight of his apostolate he wrote three “pastoral epistles” to trusted comrades showing his concern for the doctrine, structure and authority in the Church. In these epistles one can see the blossoming of the Catholic Church with her bishops (overseers—*episkopos*), priests, and deacons.

Some modernist scholars have taken a somewhat patronizing position implying that the scholars and historians of the last two thousand years were deluded in their acceptance of Pauline authorship of *1 Timothy*. This modern “scholarship” is jousting with windmills and careful study undermines their skeptical speculations. The Pastoral epistles were unanimously accepted as Pauline by the Fathers of the Church, though denied by some heretics (e.g., Marcion).

Paul trusted his beloved Timothy, his son in the faith and Paul wrote him this personal and pastoral letter which has become a treasured document of the Church and is an inspired word from God. Knowing his time was short Paul challenged Timothy to hold fast to the deposit of faith and to pass on the oral tradition, defending it against the wolves and false teachers. As St. Paul wrote, “the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:5).