

Focal Text

1 Timothy 1:1–19a

Background

1 Timothy 1

Main Idea

Healthful Christian teaching and a life in accord with the gospel are based on one's recognition of God's mercy and grace.

Question to Explore

What's most important to you—God's mercy in your life or arguments about the details of religion?

Study Aim

To explain how one's need for God's mercy and grace is the basis for healthful doctrine and right living

Study and Action Emphases

- Affirm the Bible as our authoritative guide for life and ministry
- Share the gospel with all people
- Develop a growing, vibrant faith
- Equip people for servant leadership

LESSON ONE

Called to Healthful Teaching and Right Living

Quick Read

Paul called on Timothy to stop the false teachers in Ephesus from spreading their doctrines. Paul wanted Christians to focus on the gospel of Christ Jesus, which leads to love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith, and not to dabble in foolish teaching, which could lead only to ungodly living.



1 TIMOTHY: *Care for the Church*

When I was in seminary, I discovered a television preacher who seemed most unusual. He sat on a stage and smoked a cigar, promising that he would give a prophetic secret just as soon as a set amount of money was raised. His band played music to drum up business while he used profanity to goad the television audience to call in their commitments so that he would have enough money to reveal the prophetic secret.

This wild, cigar-smoking preacher appeared to have much in common with Paul's opponents in Ephesus. They, too, had little regard for godly living and were peddling endless mysteries and secrets in order to make money. They were prophets for profit. Paul, in the midst of this chaos, called Timothy to lead the church back to sound biblical doctrine.

First Timothy is part of a collection known as the pastoral epistles (2 Timothy and Titus are also included in this collection). The pastoral epistles contain instructions about the administrative responsibilities of Timothy and Titus in the churches.

The pastoral epistles confront a brand of false teaching found in the early church. As Paul challenged this perverted version of Christianity, he called for sound doctrine that avoided the Jewish myths and disputes concerning the law that had become centerpieces of the false teachers' assertions.

1 Timothy 1:1–19a

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope,

²to Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

³As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, ⁴nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. ⁵But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, ⁷wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.

⁸But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who

are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers ¹⁰and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, ¹¹according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.

¹²I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, ¹³even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. ¹⁶Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. ¹⁷Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

¹⁸This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, ¹⁹keeping faith and a good conscience. . . .

Spurn Speculation (1:1–4)

Our rules for writing letters call for us to wait to identify the sender until the final words of a letter (Sincerely yours, John). Paul's letters, though, followed a different format, as follows: sender (Paul), recipient (Timothy), greeting (grace, mercy, and peace), and often (although not in this case) a word of thanks or praise. While 1 Timothy was written to an individual, Paul was also communicating to the Ephesian church through Timothy. At the letter's conclusion, Paul wrote, "Grace be with you" (6:21; "you" is plural). Knowing that some Ephesian believers were turning away from the gospel of grace, Paul asserted his authority by declaring that his apostleship found its origin in God's (and Christ's) command on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:15; 22:14–15; 26:14–18).

Paul's gospel is a gospel of grace (1 Tim. 1:2, 14). "Grace" was Paul's one-word sermon for God's saving act in Christ, an act that made God's good favor available to undeserving sinners.

Crowds will gather for the spectacular, the mysterious, and the intriguing. Many preachers have learned well the tricks of filling the

1 TIMOTHY: *Care for the Church*

sanctuary. Topics of endless speculation and hot debate will often draw the throngs. Pretend to be peddling a secret, and everyone will gather to hear the glamorous revelation. Seminars advertising prophecy secrets or mysterious studies about angels will often pull in the people while less flamboyant topics like service and stewardship will leave the auditorium

*They were prophets
for profit.*

with a hollow ring from empty pews. People tend to be attracted to intriguing teachers who promise a new spin and a newly revealed truth.

While it is difficult to determine the content of the false teaching at Ephesus based on the admonitions against it, we can attempt to project what Paul's opponents were arguing. In presenting their "different teaching" (1:3, my translation), these opponents were advocating a skewed form of Judaism that overemphasized law and limited the role of God's grace.

These teachers loved endless debate about the minutia of the Old Testament law and quibbled constantly about words (see also 6:3–4; 20–21). Casting aside the gospel of grace as preached by Paul, these heretics were promoting speculative myths based on minor characters listed in Old Testament genealogies (see also 4:7). Paul referred to their teaching as "worldly fables fit only for old women" (4:7; "old wives' tales," NRSV). The result was unacceptable behavior.

Seek Sound Teaching (1:5–11)

We all know how to lose weight. The formula is actually quite simple. We must burn more calories than we consume. We can increase the number

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of calories we burn by exercising and/or reduce our caloric intake by eating less food or eating less calorie-laden foods.

We all know that a reasonable diet of fruits, vegetables, and lean meats combined with a regular exercise program will lead us to the most healthful lifestyle. We are always, nonetheless, searching for new wisdom when it comes to parting with our pounds. There are diets to please everyone looking for that mysterious magic that will shed the pounds without demanding discipline in the diet. For example, have you heard of "The Pasta-Chocolate Diet"? While you might have thought

Kindred Spirit

Paul invested himself in Timothy's life. More than any other companion, Timothy accompanied Paul on his journeys, beginning sometime during Paul's second missionary journey (see Acts 16:1). Paul described Timothy as "my fellow worker" (Romans 16:21), as "God's fellow worker" (1 Thessalonians 3:2), as "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 4:17), as "genuinely . . . concerned for your welfare" (Philippians 2:19–20), and as a person of "proven worth" (Philippians 2:22). Paul ultimately called him his "brother" (2 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 1:1) but also "my son" (1 Timothy 1:18). He declared, "I have no one else of kindred spirit" (Philippians 2:20). In the end, during Paul's projected second Roman imprisonment, he called for Timothy to come to his side (2 Tim. 4:9).

Timothy descended from a long line of faith—a faith that resided in his grandmother Lois (2 Tim. 1:5) and his mother Eunice, a Jewish-Christian woman (Acts 16:1). Timothy's father was a Gentile. We can suppose that Timothy became a Christian through the influence of his mother and the church leaders in Lystra who had heard the gospel through Paul and Silas.

Timothy had been helpful to Paul, but we also know that Paul was constantly encouraging Timothy, who was youthful (1 Tim. 4:12) and frequently ill (5:23).⁸

that you must stay away from these guilt goodies, the Pasta-Chocolate Diet actually steers you toward these two delightful delicacies.¹

Or how about "The Incredible Ice Cream Diet"? Prevention.com claims new research shows that ice cream may actually melt away fat, helping you lose extra pounds faster than if you'd abstained!²

If you're not into chocolate or ice cream, you might want to try "The Amazing Peanut Butter Diet." This is sure to satisfy your longing for that rich, sticky goo that you craved as a child.³

"The 7-Day-All-You-Can-Eat-Diet" is the diet I'm interested in! On Monday, you can consume all the fruit you want, except bananas. On Tuesday, you can have all the vegetables you want. On Wednesdays, you can eat all the fruits and vegetables you desire. This diet continues to allow you to have all you want, "all you can eat!"⁴

If none of these work for you, don't fret. There are plenty of others to choose from: The Popcorn Diet, The Three-Day Diet, The Seven-Day Diet, or The Cabbage Soup Diet!⁵

While we all know fad diets will not fade away our fat, we are not attracted by a solid and diversified diet that leads us to a balanced and

1 TIMOTHY: *Care for the Church*

healthful meal. On the contrary, we are drawn to mysterious meal plans that promise the unleashing of some great secret that will allow us to eat delicious foods, eat what we want, and still shed the pounds.

In the same way, the enemies of Paul were not interested in Paul's gospel of service and sacrifice centered on grace received from Christ Jesus. Rather, they were always searching and debating new mysteries

Pretend to be peddling a secret, and everyone will gather to hear the glamorous revelation.

that promised enlightenment. In chapter 6, Paul asserted that their "different doctrine" did not "agree with sound words" (6:3). For Paul, the sound words to be sought were the ethical teachings of Jesus, which—unlike his opponents' fruitless discussions—lead to a Christlike life (6:3).

Timothy was to stop the opponents of Paul and the gospel from spreading their speculative and spurious debates. He was to guide the church in healthful Christian teaching that yields godly living (1:5). Paul's goal was to lead Timothy to guide the church away from this false teaching and toward a spirit of love. This love comes from a heart cleansed from sin, a conscience free from guilt, and a faith formed in sincerity (1:5).

The false teachers pretended to be experts on Jewish law (1:7), but they had, in reality, misunderstood the very role the law played in leading people to Christ (see also Galatians 3:24). Paul asserted that the law is for the ungodly (1:9). In Galatians 3:23—4:7 and Romans 7:7–25, Paul suggested that the law serves to expose the depth of our depravity. From Paul's examples in 1 Timothy 1:8–11, we can conclude that

. . . Godly living is a result of an inward transformation produced by the presence of God.

the false teachers were dabbling in the law of Moses, perhaps the Ten Commandments. The opponents were probably also saying that Paul had rejected the law. On the contrary, Paul affirmed the goodness of the law as long as it is used as God intended. The law does not apply to those who live under God's

grace, which flows from the story of Jesus. For the follower of Christ ("righteous person," 1:9), godly living is a result of an inward transformation produced by the presence of God.

The ungodly are described by a vice list that parallels the Ten Commandments. The first three couplets ("lawless and rebellious," "ungodly and sinners," and "unholy and profane," 1:9) reflect the sins committed by Paul's opponents in Ephesus. The final offenses, offenses

Survey of Sins

In more than one of his letters, Paul offered his readers a catalog of sins, called “vice lists” by scholars. Such lists are found in Romans 1:29–31; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21; and 2 Timothy 3:2–4. In each case, the list seems to be adapted to the context to which Paul wrote. For example, we detected in the list from 1 Timothy that the first three couplets relate to the lawless behavior of the false teachers. No single sin is specifically repeated in all the lists. Read the various sin lists and note their similarities and differences.

against people, remind the reader of the Ten Commandments, which address sins against humanity, as follows:

“those who kill their fathers or mothers”	“Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16).
“murderers”	“You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17).
“immoral men,” “homosexuals”	“You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18).
“kidnappers”	“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19).
“liars,” “perjurers”	“You shall not bear false witness” (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20). ⁶

Unlike their “strange doctrines” (1:3), the “sound teaching” (1:10) of Paul’s “glorious gospel” (1:10) did not lead to ungodly behavior that breaks the law. “Sound teaching” is an often repeated theme in the pastoral epistles (see 6:3; 2 Timothy 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:2, 8). Borrowing medical terms, Paul was referring to the healthiness of teaching found in the gospel as opposed to the “morbid craving” (6:4, NRSV) or “unhealthy interest” (NIV) of the false teachers whose “talk will spread like gangrene” (2 Tim. 2:17).⁷

Follow My Faith (1:12–19a)

In verse 11, Paul had spoken of “the glorious gospel” of God. Paul next applied that glorious gospel to his own life, giving his testimony. In this

The Authorship of the Pastoral Epistles

According to the text of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, Paul was the author. More than any other books attributed to Paul in the New Testament, the authorship of the pastoral epistles is debated by scholars. The question about Paul's authorship stems from several factors, including a different vocabulary and writing style when compared with Paul's other letters.

I, however, fully attribute these letters to Paul. Ancient writers often used secretaries, called *amanuenses*, who had freedom in expressing the author's thoughts with words of their own choosing. Also in favor of Paul's authorship is the fact that the early tradition of the church strongly attributes these letters to Paul. In fact, only Romans and 1 Corinthians have stronger backing from the early church. While many claim that these letters were written in Paul's name by someone else, the early church did not accept writing in the name of another—writing pseudonymously. Paul himself warned against any such forgeries that might bear his name (2 Thess. 2:2; 3:17). Too, only Paul would describe himself as the “foremost” of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

Difficulties arise when we attempt to place the writing of the pastoral epistles within the life of Paul as presented in Acts. Paul, however, might have been released from his first Roman imprisonment, where the Book of Acts ends, and allowed a time of freedom. We could account for the events described in the pastoral epistles during that time. He might then have been imprisoned in Rome a second time.

Paul possibly wrote 1 Timothy and Titus between the imprisonments and 2 Timothy during his second imprisonment just before his death. Of course, given the uncertainty of these issues, we must always leave room for other opinions in regard to how these books fit within the life of the apostle.

closing part of the chapter, Paul focused on God's grace as it is given in Christ. Unlike the law, grace brings the followers of Christ to faith and love and culminates in eternal life (1 Tim.1:14, 16).

Paul saw his conversion to Christianity as an act of God's grace (see also 1 Corinthians 15:9–10; Galatians 1:13–16). Paul, who had been a persecutor of God's people, the church, was changed by the grace of God. In response to God's grace, Paul found faith (Romans 3:22–25; Ephesians 2:8).

If grace leads to faith, then faith leads to acts of love (Galatians 5:6). Faith and love are the result of a relationship with the Savior. The Ephesian opponents, on the other hand, turned away from faith and love (1 Tim. 1:5–6) and had, therefore, rejected this gospel of grace.

Note the words “It is a trustworthy statement” in 1:15. Paul used this expression four more times in the pastoral epistles (3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:8). The expression introduces statements that were currently being used in the churches and were acknowledged as “trustworthy.” Stating that Christ came into the world to save sinners, Paul set forth a central Christian truth, indeed, a “trustworthy statement.”

Paul never strayed from the truth that salvation is for sinners. He was well aware of his own sinful nature, saying that he was “foremost” among sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Understanding the depth of his sin allowed Paul to understand the magnitude of God’s mercy (1:16). Paul called for the Ephesians to follow his example (1:16), thus living a life of faith in Christ. The word used for “example” is a word that could be translated as *a pattern*, like an outline sketch by an artist. Reflecting on the mercies of God, Paul was prompted to praise God with a doxology (1:17). Finally, he called on Timothy again (1:18) to “fight the good fight,” thus embracing the gospel of grace he had received.

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QUESTIONS

1. What teachers or movements in our day parallel the false teachers found in Ephesus? In what ways?

2. Why do some Christians tend to follow new teachers, even people who are not grounded in a community of faith, a church?

