

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?

Teaching Aim

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

1 TIMOTHY



Care for the Church

Lesson One

Called to Healthful Teaching and Right Living

BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

What's a young pastor to do? When I first got out of seminary I went to serve as pastor of my first church. I had received a fine education in Baptist schools. I had learned to parse Greek verbs, I understood the finer points of theology, and I knew who the Jebusites and Edomites were. The first day on the job I sat down behind my new desk in my new office, ready to begin being a pastor. I sat there for a few minutes and thought to myself, *Here I am in a job that I have wanted to do for a long time. I have received a fine education to do this job. But now that I am here, what am I supposed to do?*

When Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to take care of the church there, Timothy may have been asking the same question. *Now that I am here, what am I supposed to do?* Paul wrote to Timothy to give some advice on what to do. Some real problems in the church threatened church unity. There were serious questions about doctrine, ethics, worship decorum, church leadership and organization, and ministry efforts. In other words, they were dealing with the same struggles that churches today deal with, and Timothy needed to negotiate hazards similar to what

modern pastors face. Paul's first letter to Timothy was intended to help this young pastor with practical matters of church life.

Questions have been raised by serious scholars as to whether the Apostle Paul was the author of this letter. You may want to explore these questions further. However, many good arguments affirm the traditional authorship of Paul. We will assume the traditional Pauline authorship, but we should also be aware that many very good scholars have come to a different conclusion. Regardless of authorship, the origin of this letter is God.

So, what's a young pastor to do? The first day I was on the job I knew that I would be expected to preach the next Sunday. So I thought it would be a good idea to write a sermon! Preaching and teaching help us to dispel false teaching and encourage right living. The first thing Paul told Timothy to do was to dispel false doctrine in the church and to teach good doctrine.

The acceptance of good theology leads to right living. When theology is distorted, then people live distorted lives based on false belief. Paul pointed out that when he was living under the law he was living under the influence of false theology, and that is what led him to be a persecutor of Christians (see 1 Timothy 1:13). So, the first thing a pastor (or any Christian teacher) should do is teach good doctrine and dispel falsehood. Good teaching will help people recognize God's grace and mercy and lead to right living.¹

Interpreting the Scriptures

The Salutation (1:1–2)

Paul began his first letter to Timothy with the standard salutation of ancient letters. As was his custom, though, Paul gave the salutation a Christian bent. He identified himself as an apostle, one sent by the command of God, and as one who found his hope in Jesus. Along with the Christian attribute of hope, Paul also blessed Timothy with God's "grace, mercy, and peace."

Timothy is identified as the recipient of this letter. Presumably, Paul first met Timothy in the city of Lystra on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 16:1–3). Timothy's mother was a Jew who seems to have become a follower of Jesus, and his father was a Greek. When Timothy began to

do missionary work with Paul, Paul circumcised him as was the Jewish custom. He did this so Timothy could have influence within the Jewish community. This act was not a compromise with the gospel of grace. Rather it was a practical issue of ministry within a certain community. Timothy was a faithful protégé of Paul for the rest of his life. We see him accompanying Paul on many occasions. For further background on Timothy you may want to read Acts 16:1–3; Philippians 2:22; 1 Thessalonians 3:2–6; and 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10.

The Importance of Healthy Teaching (1:3–11)

1:3–4. Healthy teaching promotes sound doctrine that results in accomplishing God’s work. Evidently some false teachers in the church at Ephesus were arguing for meaningless doctrines that were causing unneeded controversy. This false teaching was tearing down the church instead of building it up. Paul urged Timothy to not give in to temptations to quit, but to stay there and put a stop to the false doctrines.

These teachers were making a big deal over insignificant things. They talked about stories that had been circulating about people in genealogies and spent their time trying to answer questions that had no relevance to the health of the church. In fact, they caused uproar in the church because people would argue over trivial matters and never do God’s work. This can still happen. Christians in the past have argued over trivial questions. They often do so today. Healthy teaching will avoid these kinds of useless discussions and concentrate on matters that edify the church.

1:5. The goal of healthy teaching is love. If our doctrine does not result in love, then it is not healthy. After all, it is love that builds the church. Love always looks out for the best for others. Therefore, any action or conversation that does not build up others is done with impure, selfish motives.

1:6–7. Paul warned Timothy that some in Ephesus had wandered away from love. Some of the teachers were adamant about what they taught, but they had forgotten that healthy teaching accomplishes things for God’s kingdom. One cannot help but wonder whether they ever repented. Maybe this is what Jesus was talking about in Revelation 2:4 when he told the Ephesians that they had forsaken their first love. A teacher may be orthodox in doctrine and have answers to every trivial question. If, however, teaching does not result in love, it is useless.

1:8–11. Paul sometimes has the reputation of being against the Jewish law. Such was not really the case. Paul stated that “the law is good if one uses it properly” (1 Tim. 1:8). The law does not solve the problem of sin. Rather it reveals sin to the sinner. The law puts restraints on sinful activity by educating the sinner.

Examples of sinful living are seen in verses 9–10. Sinful living is the opposite of the kind of life that is informed by sound doctrine. The word “sound” has the idea of being healthy and whole rather than being sick and distorted. Sound doctrine leads to right living. But sound doctrine alone is not enough.

The Necessity of Abundant Grace (1:12–19a)

Paul’s mention of the “glorious gospel” (1:11) reminded him of God’s grace in his own life. In rapturous language Paul expressed his amazement at how God could transform someone like him so that he could be used in God’s kingdom. His life was turned upside down, not by sound doctrine alone, but by the grace of God.

1:12. A changed life is evidence of the abundant grace of God. Paul was amazed that God chose to use him in the service of Christ. Not only did God put him into service, but also God empowered him and entrusted him with service for the sake of the gospel.

1:13–14. Paul was amazed because from a human standpoint putting him into Christian service was about like leaving the cat to guard the fishbowl! When Paul lived by the Old Testament law, he was a violent man, having assisted in the stoning of Stephen and having dragged Christians from their homes and imprisoning them (see Acts 8:3). Paul hated followers of Jesus because, by his own admission, he was deceived by falsehood. But when he received the mercy of God, his life changed. God’s grace was so abundant that God could take a misguided, violent person and change him into the greatest Christian missionary ever. Healthy teaching is important. But even more important is God’s grace. God’s grace changes people so they can practice right living.

1:15–16. Paul quoted a saying that Timothy may have already heard. Paul endorsed it as the purpose of the incarnation and the message of the gospel: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”! I recently heard of a young, immature Christian who had made a sinful mistake. The church where he was a member told him not to come back to

church because they would not have a sinner in their church. I told him he could come to our church. Sinners are the only kind of people we have in our church. After all, sinners are the reason Jesus came. We are sinners being changed by God's grace. The purpose of Jesus' coming into this world was to deliver sinners from sin so that they could live a life pleasing to God. This had been Paul's experience. Paul counted himself as the number one sinner in the world. If Jesus could save Paul, Jesus could save anyone.

1:17. The news that Jesus came to save sinners is enough to make a person want to shout a song of praise! Paul was so overcome by God's grace that he interrupted his train of thought to sing a doxology. Jesus saves sinners! Praise the Lord!

Don't Give Up (1:18–19a)

It is impossible to know Timothy's state of mind, but reading between the lines it is possible to gather that he was discouraged with his assignment. Paul wrote these words to encourage him to remain where he was and do his job. Even though Timothy's job was difficult, the Ephesians needed Timothy to stay in Ephesus in order to teach them good doctrine and encourage right living. Most of all, they needed to see an example of God's grace in Timothy's life. So, Paul instructed, "fight the good fight, holding on to faith."

Focusing on the Meaning

Healthy teaching of sound doctrine is vitally important for the well-being of the church. False doctrine can result in disruption and chaos in the church. This lesson should remind us of the great responsibility we have as teachers. What we do in teaching the Bible is crucial to the health of the church and the spiritual well-being of individual believers. But teachers are not the only people with responsibility. All believers should strive to understand the doctrines of the faith so that they can discern truth from falsehood.

People act according to what they believe. If people really believe in the transforming power of the gospel, they will live transformed lives. We all know people who hold strictly to orthodox doctrine and what they consider a strict interpretation of the Bible. Yet they are constantly causing

dissension and chaos in the church. They fuss and fume over minor details that are not helpful to the health of the church. They argue over questions that make no difference in the lives of people. The real test of orthodoxy is whether our doctrine results in love.

Love does not come from strict doctrine alone. It comes because the grace and mercy of God has transformed us into the image of Christ. Healthful teaching and right living are a result of God's grace.

TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Prepare a half-full pitcher of Kool-Aid®, tea, juice, or other drink made by adding water to concentrated contents. Use small cups to serve the drink to class members, and ask them to describe the flavor. Next add water to fill the pitcher completely and dilute the contents. Invite members to again sample the drink and compare it to the previous taste. Responses may include statements such as *not as good*, *not strong enough*, or *watered down*.
2. Comment that in Paul's first letter to Timothy, Paul challenged Timothy and the churches in Ephesus to examine various doctrines and teachings to make sure they rang true with the truth of the gospel. Then as now, people were easily confused by half-truths and "watered down" teachings of less than committed teachers. Specifically, the false teachers Paul addressed continued to over-emphasize the role of the law, and they watered down the good news of God's grace. Lead class members to brainstorm ways that someone might "water down" the gospel in our culture.

Guide Bible Study

3. Share that Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, his apprentice in the faith. Enlist a participant to read 1:1–4 aloud. Ask class members to listen for answers to these questions:

- How would you describe the relationship between Paul and Timothy?
 - What did Paul ask Timothy to do? Why?
4. Point out the words “grace, mercy, and peace” in verse 2. Note that these words are common in Paul’s greetings, but that in this case they are directed specifically to Timothy, Paul’s “true son in the faith.” Encourage class members to reflect further on the strength of Paul and Timothy’s relationship.
 5. To examine verses 5–11, pass around small slips of paper with one of the following phrases written on them (download a copy from www.baptistwaypress.org): “love from a pure heart,” “a good conscience,” “a sincere faith,” “fruitless discussion,” teachers of the Law,” “the Law is good,” “law is not made for a righteous man,” “lawless and rebellious,” “ungodly and sinners,” “unholy and profane,” “those who kill,” “immoral men,” “contrary to sound teaching” (quotes from NASB).
 6. Point out that verses 5–11 contrast the purposes of godly instruction with the characteristics of false teachers. Invite class members to scan these verses. Then call for each to read his or her slip of paper aloud and decide to which category (godly instruction or false teaching) it belongs. Remind class members of the specific danger of false teaching in verse 4, “Which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith” (NASB).
 7. Comment that in verses 12–19a Paul viewed his conversion as an act of God’s grace. Enlist a class member to read Acts 8:3 to give participants a glimpse of Paul’s life before coming to Christ.
 8. Invite class members to scan 1 Timothy 1:12–19a and fill in the columns listed on a markerboard. Possible answers are provided.

Paul’s Life Before Christ	What God Did for Paul (and Does for Us)	Paul’s Response (and Ours)
Blasphemer	Strengthened him	Thankfulness
Persecutor	Considered him faithful	Found mercy
Violent aggressor	Put him into service	Believe in Jesus for eternal life
Acted ignorantly in unbelief	Showed mercy	Give glory and honor
Foremost of all sinners	Gave grace	Fight a good fight
	Sent Christ to save him	Keep faith and a good conscience
	Demonstrated his perfect patience	

9. Comment that God’s grace and mercy changed Paul’s life. It can change ours!

Encourage Application

10. Ask the following questions, allowing time for discussion:
 - Do you ever get bogged down in religious discussions?
 - If so, are these discussions usually fruitful?
 - What are some dangers of such discussions?
 - What is most important to you—God’s mercy in your life or arguments about the details of religion?
11. Point out that for Paul, the proclamation of the gospel, by word and by deed, was his passion for life. He had experienced God’s mercy and grace. Therefore, his life was forever changed (1 Tim. 1:13; see also Acts 9). While Paul had previously debated the details of religion, he now lived for Christ with all his abilities.
12. Call attention to the pitcher used earlier in the lesson. Comment that we live in a “watered-down culture,” where no wrong deed seems as bad as it used to be and everyone seems to follow his or her own desires (see Judges 21:25). Lead class members to reflect on and discuss the following questions:
 - What people or groups proclaim messages contrary to the full gospel of Jesus Christ?
 - In what ways do these people or groups “water down” the gospel?
 - How are we in danger of watering down the gospel?
 - How could this affect our witness for Christ and work in God’s kingdom?
13. Ask a previously enlisted class member to state the main idea of today’s lesson passage. Then call attention to 1 Timothy 1:17, and invite class members to read this verse from their *Study Guides* together as a benediction (you may want to write the words on a markerboard or poster prior to the beginning of the session).

Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

Connect with Life

1. Read the following label information from an actual sleep aid prescription, “Take one capsule at bedtime as needed for sleep. May cause drowsiness.” Point out that while the statement “May cause drowsiness” is redundant and perhaps even humorous, it is consistent with the dosage instructions and reflects exactly what the medication is designed to do.
2. Remind class members that we live in a world of inconsistencies. Many times what we encounter is not the complete truth and will not pass the test of close scrutiny. Encourage class members to listen to the following statements and identify any inconsistencies:
 - Free gift with purchase
 - Third annual going out of business sale
 - Open 24/7, except Mondays
 - Do as I say, not as I do
 - Guaranteed 99% effective
 - Naturally enhanced photo
3. Note that in today’s study Paul encouraged Timothy to lead the church away from inconsistencies and half-truths and back to sound doctrine that results in right living.

Guide Bible Study

4. Invite participants to open their Bibles to 1 Timothy 1 as you call attention to the outline of today’s study (listed on a previously made poster or written on a markerboard).

Spurn Speculation (1:1–4)
Seek Sound Teaching (1:5–11)
Follow My Faith (1:12–19a)

5. Read verses 1–4 aloud and encourage class members to respond to the following questions:
 - How did Paul address Timothy in verse 2?

- What is the significance of Paul’s words, “My true child in the faith” (NASB)?
 - Why did Paul instruct Timothy to remain at Ephesus?
 - What is the result of “strange doctrines” and “myths and endless genealogies” (NASB)?
6. Call attention to the small article entitled “Kindred Spirit” in the *Study Guide*. Ask a previously enlisted class member to share a brief testimony regarding his or her relationship to a mentor or apprentice.
 7. Enlist a class member to read verses 5–11. Ask, *What are the characteristics of right teaching?* Invite a class member to record responses on a markerboard. Then ask, *How is it possible for us to discern right teaching and proper doctrine?* Allow time for response.
 8. Call attention to the offenses against people described in 1:9b–10. Then point out the comparisons with the Ten Commandments in the *Study Guide*. Guide the class to review the comparisons. Allow time for discussion and sharing.
 9. Read 1:12–19a aloud. Comment that this is not the first time in Scripture we see Paul encouraging someone to follow his example. Invite class members to examine Philippians 1:21 where Paul said, “For to me, to live is Christ.” Encourage discussion of Paul’s example and how we can follow it.

Encourage Application

10. Call attention to “Questions” in the *Study Guide*. Encourage class members to respond aloud (if time is limited focus on questions 2 and 3). Ask a follow-up question, *How does healthful doctrine lead to right living?* Allow time for responses.
11. Point out that verses 12–19a (“Follow My Faith”) detail Paul’s acceptance of God’s mercy and grace. Most importantly, Paul accepted God’s gift of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, as his Lord and Savior. Invite class members to examine their relationship to God. Invite any non-believers to join you in a prayer to accept God’s gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

12. Lead class members to consider the following questions. Allow time for discussion:
 - Where would we be without God’s mercy and grace?
 - How does our recognition of God’s mercy and grace prepare us for everyday ministry?
13. Close in prayer, thanking God for God’s mercy and grace.
14. During the week, follow up with anyone who might have prayed to accept God’s gift of salvation.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–6 on 1 Timothy are from the New International Version.