

# GOD WITH US

## Part 11: LATER LETTERS

### Message 1 – 1 Timothy

#### Letter to Pastor Timothy in Ephesus

#### 1 Timothy

#### Introduction

The pastoral epistles, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, were written by Paul to Timothy, pastor in Ephesus, and Titus, pastor in Crete. These highly personal letters were written to these two spiritual shepherds, where Paul encouraged them personally and gave them instructions for the organization and operation of their local house-church groups. 2 Timothy differs in that it was Paul's final letter written later before his death, and it focuses much more on Paul's personal life and his final admonitions to his dear spiritual son, Timothy. There is a significant amount of "church administration" material in 1 Timothy and Titus. What is relevant for us today *are the positive marks of an effective and healthy New Testament-like Christian church*, that we can draw application from. This can help us understand how our own local church can be more effective. It can also help each of us in the future, to know what to look for, if we are searching for a new church home. Thus, our commentary will focus on the key principles related to this theme.

#### **Background on Timothy: A young and faithful pastor**

*(From 1&2Timothy and Titus, by Dr. Irving Jensen, pgs.6,7)*

- Timothy is mentioned 24x in the New Testament.
- Paul's closest and loyal convert and disciple (1Tim1:2).
- From Derbe: son of a Greek father and Jewish mother & grand mother (Acts 16:1,3; 20:4; 2Tim1:5).
- Character: There are many descriptions of Timothy that help us get a feel for his human nature and character:
  - tender and affectionate (1Cor 4:17; Phil 2:20-21).
  - timid and tactful (1Cor 16:10-11; 1Tim. 4:12; 2Tim 1:6-7).
  - faithful and loyal (1Cor 4:17; 2Tim 3:10-11).
  - conscientious (Phil 2:19-23).
  - devoted to God (1Tim 6:11; Phil 2:1).
  - with a physical infirmity (1Tim 5:23).

## The Marks of a Healthy Church

### 1. A healthy church has teachers who are well-trained in biblical doctrine, thus able to protect the church from false teachings (1:1-11).

The very reason Paul assigned Timothy to oversee the church in Ephesus was because there were false teachers trying to twist the teachings that Paul had long sought to establish there.

*“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God’s work – which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm” (1:3-6).*

The church is “the pillar and support of the truth” (1Tim.3:15). Preserving and proclaiming the truth is the essence of the mission of the church. Thus, Paul writes that a leader “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9). And again: “You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). When you are looking for a church, always look first at the theological training and teaching of the leader(s). Where did they study? How much did they study? Have they been ordained by a board of seasoned ministers? Is this a church led by people deeply devoted to sound doctrine? A church is only as good as its doctrine is sound.

Paul explained the role of God’s law: “We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for the lawbreakers...” (1:8-11). Who are the “lawbreakers?” Paul explains in Romans 3:10 from the O.T. that, “There is no-one righteous, not even one.” Therefore, the designation “lawbreakers” includes himself and all of humanity. He further explains in Romans 7:7-25, that without the law being clear, he would not have known how badly he *coveted* other people’s possessions or status. God’s law served to reveal his sin and his need for a Savior. Culture often operates contrary to God’s law. It is *hard* to understand God’s holy standards, but Paul declares in 1Timothy that everyone

needs the law to reveal their own sin . . . and he declared that he was the most sinful of all.

## **2. A healthy church emphasizes the amazing grace of God for all people (1:12-17).**

This beautiful passage contains the essence of Paul's own personal testimony. He openly confessed that he considered himself the "*chief of sinners*" whom God saved for the express purpose of magnifying His amazing grace first to Paul himself, and also to all who might feel unworthy of His love. If Paul could be saved, anyone can be saved!

*"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1:12-17).*

"No shame, no same." That saying balances two things Paul strongly emphasized: The grace of God to forgive us from our past and present failures, and the power of God to transform us evermore into the image of Jesus. God's amazing grace must always be the foundation of the church. Beware of the church that is more focused on law than on grace. You will thrive in places where God's holiness and law are taught, yet His grace is enjoyed experientially as the "air of the environment."

## **3. A healthy church will be a praying church (2:1,2,8).**

*"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior... Therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing" (2:1-3,8).*

We are called to pray for all people, and particularly for those in authority over us. The goal of our prayers for government leaders is that they might govern in such a way as to allow believers to pursue their beliefs and mission in the world with peace.

*A strong emphasis on prayer is a sign that the church depends on God and follows the lead of the Spirit in all things. A church that is not a praying church will inevitably be built on human abilities, ideas, resources and power. It will be a movement of man. On the other hand, a praying church will be a Spirit-empowered, Spirit-directed movement of changed lives. Always inquire about the prayer ministry of the church and you will find an indicator of the church's health. Jesus said that His Father's house was a "house of prayer" (Matthew 21:13).*

**4. A healthy church will be focused on the centrality of Jesus Christ, His sacrifice for humanity to pay the ransom for us all (2:3-7).**

*"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle – I am telling the truth, I am not lying – and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles" (2:3-7).*

God loves *all people*, and desires that *all people be saved*. (This is a clear indication that human free will is real and consequential, because it is equally clear that not all people will be saved; thus, God has a *desire* that will not be *fulfilled*. Human rejection of the love and grace of God has an impact on the heart of God.) He has given us *one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus Who gave Himself as a ransom for all*. The death of Jesus provided the opportunity for all to be saved since His death paid the penalty for the sins of all. Yet, the payment of the penalty (death on the cross), only becomes fully effective when the individual has *accepted the payment made on his/her behalf*.

**5. A healthy church has both men and women participating and contributing to the life of the church appropriately (2:8-15).**

There are numerous views on this passage regarding women's roles in the church. I will briefly summarize my own view, taking into account not only this passage but also parallel passages where Paul addresses women's roles and/or speaks about how women had

actually participated in the life and ministry of the early church.

- The context (v.8) suggests that Paul was *emphasizing the need for men to be actively involved* in the life and ministry of the local church. His instructions concerning women may reflect an underlying problem: Paul did not want men *abdicating their responsibility and allowing the women to do all the work* (which has often been the case . . . to use a phrase from Dr. Larry Crabb – the “silence of Adam” is that tendency among men to step back and allow women to assume responsibility in the home, the church and the family).

- The warnings about women “*not teaching*” and “*not exercising authority*” over men are peculiar in their Greek construction. These are *present tense infinitives*, which (in Greek language) meant that Paul was specifically warning against women assuming *ongoing, permanent teaching and leading roles*. Had Paul wanted to make clear that women were *never* to teach or lead in the church he likely would have used a different Greek construction to make this clear. We know that women were speaking, praying and prophesying in the early churches – eg. 1Cor.11:5. Thus, Paul seems to have been more concerned with women *permanently* taking the leadership roles, thus allowing men to abdicate and take a back seat.

- Paul implied that based on the events in Genesis 3, Satan may continue to target women with spiritual deception, as he did with Eve. The responsibility of men to be spiritual protectors of women (and for women to accept such protection) seems to be a clear message here (and in the wider context of this letter where false teaching in general was a problem being remedied through solid, well-trained leadership).

- The phrase, “*she will be saved through the bearing of children*” is difficult to interpret. It has been understood in numerous ways:

1. Physical deliverance - through the childbirth process.
2. Spiritual deliverance - by bringing about the birth of Jesus.
3. Moral deliverance - through women’s role in the home.
4. Role deliverance - through the significant role women of faith play in the raising up of godly children. (While this last view makes the most sense to me, it should be noted that in Genesis 3 God made a specific promise to Eve that it would be the *male child of the woman* Who would come into the world to crush the serpent – which aligns with #2 above.)

- Summarizing the main message of this passage: *Male passivity is unacceptable in a church (what Larry Crabb called “the silence of Adam”). Men must accept responsibility to lead, teach, pray and protect the flock. Women should not enable male passivity by permanently assuming the spiritual responsibilities of leading and teaching in the church; rather, women should be released and empowered to thrive in the ministry with their time, talent and treasure, under the protection provided by godly, engaged men. Wise men will invite the contribution of godly women as they seek to lead the church. Women should strive to adorn themselves in ways that don’t distract others with their outward appearance, but rather focus on developing godly character and good works. Women should give attention to the high calling of raising up children who grow to know, love and obey God. If a woman does not have biological children of her own, she can fulfill this role by being a ‘spiritual mother’ to many others.*

If you’re looking for a healthy church, begin by asking how and where men are involved in the life and leadership of the church. The men should be visible and active. Then look to see if the women are fruitfully thriving in all aspects of the life of the church, under the umbrella of protection provided by humble, godly men. If the women are doing everything and the men are invisible, that is unhealthy. If the men are ruling with an iron fist, and women are doing nothing, that is unhealthy. There should be men and women thriving together in Christ-honoring relationships that reflect the unity and mutual submission within the Trinity.

## **6. A healthy church has leaders who are tested and qualified before assuming their duties (3:1-13).**

Here we find a very detailed list of character qualifications for elders (overseers), deacons (servants) and deaconesses. *Godly character* is the central, unifying theme. Being in these leading/serving roles is not a matter of “spiritual gifting,” rather, “spiritual maturity.” Based on the language of this passage, we assume that Paul intended for the role of elder to be filled by men (note the “husband of one wife” qualification), while the role of deacon could be filled by both men and women (see v.11).

How does a local church select elders and deacons? By examining behavior over a significant period of time. The principle is found in v.10. “They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve . . .” (3:10). Thus, in a healthy church, leaders will rise to the surface over time as they give evidence of their godly character and involvement in the life of the church. The potential leader will be put before the congregation to ensure there is no charge brought against them. When a leader is finally given a title, it is not a matter of “conferring on them” some mystical quality; rather, it is a matter of “recognizing within them” the qualities that are already evident, making them fit for the roles they are invited into.

### **7. A healthy church protects and proclaims the historic, apostolic doctrines of the faith (3:14-16).**

Paul stated his purpose for writing this letter. He then described the church as *“the pillar and foundation of the truth.”* This is an essential component of the purpose of the local church: to enshrine eternal truth. What follows is one of the earliest known credal statements of Christianity, expressing “essentials of the faith.”

*“Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great:*

*‘He appeared in the flesh,  
was vindicated by the Spirit,  
was seen by angels,  
was preached among the nations,  
was believed on in the world,  
was taken up in glory’ (3:14-16).*

### **8. A healthy church has teachers who are constantly being nourished on the words of faith and sound doctrine; they are constantly “training for godliness” (4:1-16).**

This passage opens with another reference to false teachers who will seek to infiltrate the church. Against that backdrop, Paul goes again to the church’s best defense: well-trained teachers who are constantly training themselves in the knowledge of truth and the practice of godliness.

*“If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be*

***a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come" (4:6-8).***

While age and stage of life can be a factor determining the effectiveness of a leader, there are also many *young leaders* who have the potential to model great maturity to the body of Christ, like Timothy who was "wise beyond his years."

***"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (4:12-16).***

Note the wording in v.16. Watch your life and your doctrine closely. The leader's "life" is his/her private life, character, walk with God, integrity, habits, practices, the "inner world." The leader's "doctrine" is his/her words, teachings, beliefs, declarations, convictions, the "outer world." When examining spiritual leaders, we should look closely at both sides: their walk and their talk; their private life and their public life. Both aspects must be exemplary. Notice the last line and what is at stake: "*Persevere in these things, because as you do you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.*" The integrity of the teacher/leader and the destiny of the disciples & followers stand or fall together. Spiritual leadership is EVERYTHING!

*Is there a young leader in your midst that you can encourage and strengthen? It is so important that a church always be thinking about "next generation leaders." If you are looking for a healthy church, look to see if young people are being prioritized, supported, encouraged and promoted into the work of the church. A "next generation church" will not only survive, but thrive, in an ever-changing world. A church that ignores or suppresses the voice and power of young people is a church doomed to die.*



**9. A healthy church is marked by the public reading and teaching of the Scriptures (4:13-15).**

*“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress” (4:13-15).*

In Paul’s final letter to Timothy, he will sound the same theme concerning critical importance of teaching the Word (2Tim. 4:1-5). In the early church everyone did not have their own Bible. Thus, when they gathered they would listen to the Scriptures being read publicly. We see this at work in the synagogue of Nazareth where Jesus gave a sermon (Luke 4:16-20).

*Churches often minimize the serious teaching of God’s Word, opting instead for ‘lighter’ series oriented around felt needs. One leader said he would never offer a series longer than 6 weeks because “people do not have an appetite for anything longer.” To me, that is like a child saying to a parent, “I don’t like anything but sweets,” and then the parent responding with a diet of only sweets. Just as a wise parent will seek to shape the appetite of a child with healthy offerings, so a church should seek to increase people’s love for God’s Word with regular teaching of the Bible.*

**10. A healthy church seeks to assess and meet the genuine needs of its more vulnerable people, through either private or church means (5:1-10).**

There is a long discussion here about the care of widows in the church. It is clear that the early church did have something akin to “membership lists,” for here we see that they had “widows lists” indicating the names of widows that the church felt responsible to care for. The first issue was to determine whether or not a vulnerable widow had children who were able to care for her:

*“Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God . . . If any woman who is a believer has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need” (5:3,4,16).*

If there were no children to care for her, the widow needed to qualify in other ways in order to get her name on the widows list:

***“No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord’s people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds” (5:9,10).***

This kind of church administration process shows us the extent to which the early church was learning to organize itself as a community responsible for the care of its own. This is all remarkably similar to how our modern church benevolence department seeks to vet out people who ask for help, to ensure that the church’s resources are being put to good use.

*While many consider it a burden to care for aging parents, it is a God-given ministry to do so. If you are in that stage of life where you are called to give significant time and energy to the care of an aging parent, do not see this as a distraction or deviation from the ‘real work’ that you wish to do; rather, see it as a temporary assignment and high calling from God. He sees your efforts and He will reward you for them.*

**11. A healthy church recognizes God’s gift of human sexuality, and encourages marriage relationships where sexual desires can be properly fulfilled (5:11-16).**

Paul acknowledged that while younger widows may initially pledge to remain unmarried, the reality was that they may have sensual desires causing them to want to be married again. Thus, hasty pledges of the newly widowed should be avoided. Younger widows should be shepherded wisely so that if it becomes clear that they desire to be married, this desire should be permitted and facilitated so that they may live godly lives in the marriage and home context.

**12. A healthy church recognizes and rewards the important work of elders (5:17-25).**

Paul specifically singles out elders for special honor, in that there is great weight attached to their role.

***“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (5:17).***

The reference to *“the worker being worthy of his wages”* (v.18) is important for two reasons. First, it indicates the fact that church leaders were beginning to be paid for their work out of the offerings of the community. Second, this particular phrase – *“The worker is worthy of his wages”* is a quotation from Jesus as recorded in the gospel of Luke (10:7). The fact that the *gospel of Luke* is called *“Scripture”* and that it is placed right alongside a quotation from the O.T. book of Deuteronomy indicates that even at this early date the *gospel of Luke* was already in circulation and that it was regarded as God-inspired Scripture with the same authority as the most sacred of O.T. writings. The N.T. “canon” (list of inspired books) was already in the process of forming while the apostles were living.

### **13. A healthy church promotes contentment and generosity as virtues (6:1-10; 17-19).**

Paul wrote about learning “the secret of contentment” to the Philippians (4:10-13). Here he instructs Timothy to encourage the Christians in Ephesus to learn that same secret.

*“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs”* (6:6-10).

Clearly, there is danger when our goal is “to get rich.” This, says Paul, is a temptation that leads to ruin. It is not that “money is evil” but that *“the love of money is a root that springs forth all kinds of evil.”* Thus, while guarding against greed, those who have been blessed with ‘more than enough’ should practice the *secret of generosity*.

*“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life”* (6:17-19).

Those who practice generosity in this life are laying up treasures in the next life!

*“You can’t take it with you; but you can send it on ahead.” No, we cannot take any of our earthly treasure with us when we leave this life. But by practicing contentment and generosity we can use God’s resources in such a way as to store up “treasures in heaven” (Matt.6:19-21). According to Jesus, it is the foolish person who seeks only to build bigger and bigger barns full of wealth. It is the wise person who uses seeks to be “rich with God” by using God-given wealth to generously bless other people who have needs (Luke 12:13-21).*

#### **14. A healthy church maintains an eternal perspective (6:11-16).**

Paul admonishes pastor Timothy to maintain an eternal perspective while fulfilling his earthly assignments. But what was said to him applies to every child of God.

***“But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, Who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time – God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen” (6:11-16).***

Jesus testified before Pilate (John 18:33-40). In that conversation, Jesus made the “good confession” twice that *His kingdom was not of this world (18:6)*. In a similar way, Timothy must have at some point (perhaps at his “ordination”) made the good confession that he would live for the things of eternity . . . that the kingdom he was serving was not of this world. So also, every believer should live as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, with eyes on eternity, being careful to not get tied up in the things of this world. *“Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.”* All of these admonitions to Timothy are very reminiscent of Paul’s description of the eternal mindset that guided his own life (Philippians 3:12-14, 20,21.)

## Discussion Questions

1. There are many principles in 1 Timothy related to the proper organization and function of a local church. Pick a few that most interest you and discuss those principles. How do you see these at work in the church today? Or not at work?
2. If the list of “qualifications for leaders” is viewed as a description of the *character of a healthy, maturing believer*, then it is fitting to use that list to examine our own lives to see what areas we are doing well in and what areas we need to grow in. Review various qualifications in ch.3 and ask the Holy Spirit to show you which ones you need to give attention to.
3. If you survey back through this letter you will sense the dual emphases on *the danger of error* and *the need for truth*. How does a church remain anchored in the truth in a world that continues to push Christians to modify their values and practices?