



An Introduction and Outline

Brent Summerhill

Introduction

When did Paul write 1 Timothy?

The timing of this letter depends on whether one holds to a single imprisonment for Paul or two imprisonments.

Holding to a single imprisonment timeline, J. Van Bruggen surmises that 1 Timothy and Titus were written during Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:15). He then places 2 Timothy during Paul's Roman imprisonment introduced in Acts 28. If this is the case, then Luke is silent about Timothy and Titus' respective assignments in Ephesus and Crete. To accommodate this, Van Bruggen suggests a time gap between Acts 19:20 and 19:21.¹

Other scholars believe Paul was released from a first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28). This allows time for Paul's travels and ministry as indicated in 1 Timothy and Titus. 2 Timothy would have been written after Paul was rearrested. But these travels are unmentioned by Luke.²

These two theories as to Paul's travels and time of his writings to Timothy and Titus number among many. What we do know is that when Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he was in prison and in imminent danger of execution (4:6). However, 1 Timothy and Titus were written while Paul was free and moving about.

The issue is not that travel data in Acts conflicts, but it is simply not sufficient to provide a detailed timeline. Those who received the letters had contemporary knowledge of Paul's movements and could fill in the gaps.³

Following a two-imprisonment timeline, the dates for his letter to the church at Ephesus and for his letters to Timothy could resemble the following with plenty of leeway for error.

- Ephesians 62AD during first imprisonment
- 1 Timothy 62-65AD after release from first imprisonment.
- 2 Timothy 64-67AD during second imprisonment.

Paul and Timothy

Regardless of the timing of Paul's travels, we know that Paul either left or sent Timothy to Ephesus to deal with matters in the church there. He had told Timothy to remain there as he

¹ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 13.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

³ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1982), 14.

was traveling to Macedonia (1:3). The purpose of assigning Timothy to Ephesus was to deal with teaching and practice in the church that diverged from the gospel.

Thus, Timothy was not assigned to Ephesus as their pastor, but as Paul's apostolic emissary to the church. Timothy was acting under Paul's authority and in Paul's name. Assuming the letter was not only read by Timothy but shared with the church, it established Timothy's position as Paul's emissary before the church. The church was to listen to Timothy as if they were listening to Paul.

But that did not make the task at hand any easier. As the letter unfolds, it becomes apparent that Timothy needed a reminder of why he was there and a shot of courage to undertake his task. Confronting those who were deviating from the gospel would not be easy.

Ephesus

The City

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor, located at the mouth of the Cayster River on the Aegean coast (the southwest corner of modern Turkey). Originally founded in 1000 BC by the Greeks, in Paul's day it was the third largest city in the Roman empire with an estimated population of 250,000, including Ludians, Ionians, Greeks, Anatolians, and a large Jewish contingency.

Ephesus was a major commercial port, a crossroads of commerce with accompanying wealth. Buildings in Ephesus included the temple of Artemis, public squares, stadiums, gymnasiums, and theaters. One theater in the side of Mount Pion could seat about 24,000 people.

Religion and Morality

The temple of Artemis provided the area with a lucrative pagan tourist business. It also served as a financial institution and lent out money from its wealth. Artemis (Diana to the Romans) was a goddess of fertility, magic, and astrology. Excavated inscriptions portray Artemis as a savior able to answer prayers. In general, Ephesus was known for "the practice of magic, sorcery, and soothsaying, practices that found room in most or all of the pagan religions."⁴

The imperial cult, which bestowed emperors with honors such as given to the gods, was also present in Ephesus with festivals, games, temples, and statues. An inscription related to the Emperor Hadrian referred to him as a "founder and savior."

⁴ Philip H. Towner, 38.

“Sexual morality in the Roman Empire was permissive, based on social status, and sexual desire could be fulfilled in a myriad of ways.”⁵ This included the sharing of wives and same-sex relationships. Sexual fulfillment with slaves, prostitutes, and even boys was considered an acceptable outlet for male passions. In *The Ephesian Tale*⁶, an older lover “adopts” his young male beloved. Though not a marriage, it was described as a happily-ever-after kind of union.

Paul in Ephesus

Acts records Paul’s visits to Ephesus on his second and third missionary journeys. Paul convinced twelve disciples of John the Baptist to receive Christian baptism (Acts 19:1-4), and he healed many diseases—even through aprons and handkerchiefs he had contact with (Acts 19:11-12). According to Acts 19:9, Paul had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus at Ephesus.

The seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva attempted to use the Jesus Paul proclaimed to conduct exorcisms in the city (Acts 19:13-17). Newly converted Christians burned their magical books in the town of Ephesus (Acts 19:18-20). The riot of the silversmiths occurred at a theater in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-40) because Christianity threatened the tourist trade built around the goddess Artemis.⁷ After the riot, Paul encouraged the disciples in Ephesus and then left for Macedonia (20:1).

Why Preach 1 Timothy?

It is relevant.

All Scripture is always relevant. Yet given the decrease of those who identify as Christian; the decrease of those who do identify as Christian but are not involved in church⁸; the doctrinal and moral turmoil that exists within Christianity at large in our culture and even among some Southern Baptists; and given the increased secularization of NWA culture and its Ephesus-like position as a crossroads of commerce with its accompanying wealth, Paul’s letter to Timothy fits us where we are and how we live.

⁵ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/first-sexual-revolution-triumph-christian-morality-roman-empire/>

⁶ The Ephesian Tale of Anthia and Habrocomes, an ancient Greek novel written before the 2nd century AD.

⁷ Seal, D. (2016). *Ephesus*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

⁸ A recent Lifeway report indicates that on average 85% of church attenders in early 2000 have returned post-pandemic as of November 2022.

It urges bold yet humble clarity from the pulpit.

Within the first chapter Paul calls for bold confrontation of teaching that diverges from the gospel and then humbly speaks of God's mercy in his own life. In an age where some preachers are callous toward people and others are capitulating to the culture, we need bold humble clarity in the pulpit.

It emphasizes the importance of good theology.

Theology, good or bad, has consequences. Good theology strengthens our hope in God; bad theology causes shipwreck. Good theology brings us contentment with godliness; bad theology brings ruin and destruction. Good theology saves; bad theology damns.

It addresses key contemporary issues.

Is the law applicable and, if so, how does it apply to moral matters today? What is the role of women in the church? What is our Christian obligation to rulers we don't agree with? What does it mean to be an Elder with oversight of the church and who can be one? Why are people leaving the faith? How should we treat and care for one another in the church in an age of division? How can we remain faithful in this modern era? These are some of our contemporary issues present in Ephesus twenty centuries ago.

It provides proper order for the church.

The church is God's household and flourishes under His order.

It focuses the church on the gospel.

Praying for the gospel is of first importance (2:1-6). God wants people to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of truth. We should, too.

OUTLINE

Be Gospel Clear 1:1-20

1:1-2 When the Going Gets Tough: Grace, Mercy, and Peace

We live in an increasingly Ephesian-like culture. NWA is a crossroads of commerce, wealth, and culture, and is increasingly secular. Paul's blessing of grace, mercy, and peace was not a pointless salutation, but how Timothy and the church could remain spiritually faithful and healthy as a gospel witness in their culture. The same is true for us.

1:3-7 Be Clear: Don't Get Distracted

Paul did not address the doctrinal errors in the church in any detail, though they probably included misuse of the law (1:8-11). Timothy knew exactly what the errors were. What Timothy needed was encouragement to be bold and clear in repudiating those errors. And the church needed to know Timothy spoke as an apostolic emissary of Paul. The church today needs doctrinal clarity for the sake of the gospel.

1:8-11 Be Clear: Use the Law Lawfully

It seems the Old Testament Mosaic law, or the use of it, has been an issue throughout the New Testament era. The extremes of legalism and antinomianism are addressed in the New Testament. And sometimes when a person breaks free from one, he falls back into the other. But Paul says the law is good when used lawfully to make sin apparent in the light of God's holiness. The list he provided no doubt stood out in the Ephesian culture even as it does today. The "gospel of the glory of the blessed God" (11) required Timothy, the Elders, and the church itself to be clear on sin.

1:12-20 Be Personally Grounded in the Gospel

Paul's reflection on his entrustment with the gospel (11) triggered the memory of his own sins and his own experience of grace. Twice, Paul says, "I was shown mercy..." (12, 16). By the law Paul knew he was a sinner. By mercy he knew he had been saved. Paul's testimony sets him apart from those who had deviated from the truth of the gospel (1:3-7). And in the context, Paul's testimony served as a reminder and encouragement to Timothy, the Elders, and the church concerning the gospel. The church must be continuously grounded in and built upon the gospel to avoid shipwreck (18-20). We must never get over being saved.

Be Gospel Focused..... 2:1-3:16

2:1-7 Praying for the Gospel

As Paul plunges into the issues at Ephesus, he begins with a call to prayer. He wants them to pray on behalf of all people (1), including the rulers who could make their life difficult (2). The aim of the prayer is a lifestyle that promotes the church's gospel witness to all people. Why? Because God desires all people to be saved. The phrase "all people" occurs four times (1,2,4,6). The "all" is set in contrast to the "one" - one God; one mediator of God and people, the Man Christ Jesus; the one ransom on behalf of all people. This was of first importance for Timothy, the Elders, and the church. It still is.

2:8-15 Ordered for the Gospel

While this paragraph is filled with modern controversy, the conflict among men and women is as old Adam and Eve and the Fall when God said to Eve (Genesis 3:16),

I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."

Here, there are two primary issues at hand. First, men had abandoned holiness and given themselves over to anger and debate. And second, in that environment women had usurped the men in control of the church. We must wonder if the second did not flow out of the first. For the sake of the gospel, the church must be reordered according to God's original design for men and women.

3:1-7 Gospel Focused Church Oversight

Reordering the church for the gospel did not just mean having male Elders (5:17-24) overseeing the church but having spiritually qualified male Elders as overseers. Aspiring to oversight of the church is a good aspiration for a good work. And it is work. As a good work, it requires good (not perfect) men lest shame be brought on the gospel. By far, the qualifications listed are character qualifications. The Ephesian church needed holy men overseeing the congregation. BVBC does too.

3:8-13 Gospel Focused Deacons

In the same way as with oversight, aspiring to be a deacon (a specifically recognized servant of the church) is a good aspiration to a good work. Deacons were first chosen (Acts 6:1-6) to provide the needs of vulnerable widows in the church. The same seems true in Ephesus (5:3-16). While the work of deacons is not prescribed in Scripture, the nature of their work is

service. Being a servant of the church requires holy gospel faithfulness, not only for the sake of the church's trust, but also for the church's gospel witness.

3:14-16 Gospel Shaped Church Behavior

Closing this section of the letter, Paul pressed home why everything he had written about how they were behaving (or not behaving) mattered. It all mattered because of what the church is: God's household, the congregation of the living God, a pillar and nautical stay of the truth (15). And it all mattered because of the mystery of godliness, the gospel (16).

Be Gospel Driven4:1-16

4:1-5 Some Will Leave the Gospel

That the Spirit explicitly says some will depart from the faith in later times is tough to hear in a church growth culture. But it was and would happen in Ephesus. And it is and will happen in our modern culture. While the departures may look different at different times and in different cultures, Paul provides the reasons for departures: deceitful spirits, teachings of demons, hypocrisy of liars, cauterized consciences (1-2). If we do not remain driven by the gospel, we will drift and possibly depart from the gospel.

4:6-16 Keep Hoping in the Gospel

In a bad culture, Paul counseled Timothy to keep being a good servant of Christ. And he does so with stark honesty about it means to be a good servant. "We are toiling," he says. "We are being harshly criticized," he says (10). Why the difficulties? Because of relentless gospel hope in the living God, the Savior of all people (10; 2:1-7). Such hope is the fuel of faithfulness in suffering, the fuel for Timothy to remain faithful (11-16). And it matters because people's deliverance depends on it (16).

Be Gospel Relational5:1-6:2

5:1-16 We are Family

Our gospel hope affects how we treat one another in the church and how we care for the vulnerable among us. Paul's instruction to Timothy on how to treat others (1-2) would establish an example for the church to follow. And his detailed instructions on honoring widows provided both the mandate to care for widows and the principles to follow to avoid abuse of such care (3-16). These two paragraphs continue to provide the church with an example of gospel relationships and gospel compassion.

5:17-25 We Respect Elders with Expectations

"Elder" is by far the most used word in the New Testament to refer to spiritual church leadership. The term emphasizes spiritual maturity seen in the

characteristics required of an overseer (3:1-7). It involves shepherding (Pastor; Ephesians 4:11) the flock of God. Peter treated Elder, Overseer, and Pastor as one position in the church, using either the noun or verb form of each word (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Paul reminded Timothy of the respect the church was to have for Elders who fulfill the qualifications (17-19), especially those "toiling in word and teaching." But he also set forth expectations for Elders who do not (20-24). This balance of respect and expectation keeps the church from underestimating the value of a qualified Elder and from passive tolerance of an unqualified Elder.

On a side note, it is interesting that Paul's instruction for Timothy to drink a little wine instead of water for his stomach problems appears like a non sequitur in this paragraph. It makes one wonder if Timothy's health issues were related only to the poor water quality in Ephesus or if they were brought on by the stress of dealing with nonqualified Elders.

6:1-2 We are Humble toward One Another

Both masters and slaves had received the gospel and were members of the Ephesus church. The master-slave relationship was common in the economy and was not always a forced relationship. The corresponding relationship in our economy would be boss-employee relationship. The danger in such relationships within the church is envy and jealousy of the slave toward the master. "If there is neither bond nor free in Christ," a slave or employee might ask, "then why do I have to honor you as a master or boss?"

The answer is because we are brothers. So, while in this economy we do so not at odds with one another, but together. The employee is glad to benefit his boss brother in Christ. And the boss is glad to benefit his employee brother in Christ. Thus, as in all things, the gospel promotes such a humility toward one another we are always seeking the good of others.

Be Gospel Bold.....6:3-21

6:3-10 Warn Those Who Pervert the Gospel

As Paul turned to the conclusion of the letter, he returned to the beginning - dealing with those who diverge from the gospel (3). He was blunt in describing them, rattling off a list of deficiencies that culminated in trading on the gospel for personal gain. But more than to reveal the motive of the divergent, Paul's aim was to remind Timothy that the great gain is godliness with contentment. To desire wealth over gospel results in ruin and destruction.

6:11-16 Fight the Good Fight

Paul continued his conclusion with a flurry of exhortations: flee, pursue, fight, take hold (11-12). And he commanded Timothy in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, to remain unblemished and irreproachable until Jesus appears. Two motivations to keep fighting the good fight of faith arise: Jesus will appear (14), and God is worthy (15-16).

6:17-19 Warn the Rich

Possessing the means to live how we want provides the temptation to put our hope in our uncertain means and live selfishly. It was evidently a danger in Ephesus. It is a danger in NWA.

The gospel causes us to put our hope in God, who by His grace richly provides us every enjoyment. But the enjoyment of His grace cannot be found in hoarding, but only in sharing with others while trusting that He and His grace will always be enough for our needs. Gospel hope doesn't hope in this present age, but in the age to come.

6:20-21 Guard the Entrusted Gospel

Paul's letter to Timothy and for the Ephesus church has to some degree sounded rather matter of fact to this point. But now, after what feels like a thoughtful pause, Paul wrote, "O Timothy." And with great affection he pleaded with his child in the faith and his emissary in Ephesus to guard the deposit of the gospel entrusted to him and to turn away from the distractions that would lead him away from the gospel.

How could Timothy fulfill his potential and avoid the dangers around him? How can we? Paul's signature line takes us back to his salutation - by God's grace, mercy, and peace.