

1 Timothy (September 27)

Reading 1 Timothy

“My lord,” the chief servant explains, “the granary is full, though the harvest is not yet complete.” The head of the household excuses himself from his guests, crosses the mosaic floor of the men’s quarters, and enters the family courtyard. His wife sits in the shade of the women’s quarters. She spins thread while watching the progress of the young women. Their children and the slaves’ children race clay horse figurines around the beaten-earth courtyard. The lord passes into the street, encouraging his chief servant as they walk through town on the way to the fields.

In 1 Timothy, the apostle Paul speaks as Timothy’s father. Paul compares Timothy’s service in the church at Ephesus with the service of a father in a typical Greek household. The overseer must manage his household, commanding and teaching the members, seeing that care is distributed to all. Each member must fulfill a role and a calling in service to the Lord of all.

Author and Date

Both early tradition and the salutations of the Pastoral Letters themselves (1, 2 Timothy and Titus) confirm Paul as their author. 1 Timothy was written sometime after the events of Acts 28, at least eight years after Paul’s three-year stay in Ephesus.

Recipients and Purpose

As the salutation indicates, Paul is writing to Timothy, a native of Lystra (in modern Turkey). Timothy’s father was Greek, while his mother was a Jewish Christian. From childhood he had been taught the Old Testament. Paul called him “my true son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2), perhaps having led him to Christ during his first visit to Lystra. Timothy traveled with Paul during some of his missionary journeys and during Paul’s first imprisonment. Paul’s closeness to Timothy is seen in Paul’s naming him as the co-sender of six of his letters (2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon) and in his speaking highly of Timothy to the Philippians. At the end of Paul’s life he requested Timothy to join him at Rome. Timothy himself was imprisoned and subsequently released – whether at Rome or elsewhere, we do not know. Timothy was not an apostle, and he was probably not an overseer since he was given instructions about overseers. It may be best to regard him as an apostolic representative, designated to carry out special work.

Timothy eventually stayed at Ephesus to deal with the problems there while Paul went on to Macedonia. When Paul realized that he might not return to Ephesus in the near future, he wrote this first letter to Timothy to develop the charge he had given his young assistant, to refute false teachings, and to supervise the affairs of the growing Ephesian church.

Blessings for Readers

In 1 Timothy, Paul offers sound teachings for young and old, for men and women. As you read this letter, look for passages about your particular calling in order to learn more about your service and the service of others. Be encouraged to pray for those who serve in your congregation and nation.

God’s word and prayer hallow our good works offered in thanks to our blessed and only Sovereign. Although he has challenged us to serve well, he has also equipped us with sound teaching so we may pursue righteousness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness.