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What's the Point....of 1 Timothy?

Mark Garner

In his absence from the church in Ephesus, the apostle Paul has left his trusted associate Timothy there, to take care of some problems and needs. To help Timothy, Paul writes to him, first recounting his perspective on his life and ministry, then giving him some practical instructions. The letter also helps us see how a good understanding of our relationship with Jesus can help us in many ways and in many situations.

Background To 1 Timothy

Timothy was one of many faithful believers whom the apostle Paul met in the course of his journeys, yet Paul saw in Timothy a deeper faith and appreciation of God. He prepared Timothy to become a fellow missionary for the good news of Jesus, and Timothy is then mentioned often in the book of Acts and in Paul's epistles. The two inspired epistles Paul wrote to Timothy were written later in Paul's life (1 Timothy was probably written between AD 62 and AD 65), when he had known Timothy and his faith for a good while.

Timothy had frequently accompanied Paul on his various journeys, while at other times Paul used Timothy as a trusted emissary. Then too, Paul sometimes had Timothy remain for a time with a congregation of believers when the apostle was not able to be there. When Paul wrote 1 Timothy, Timothy is now an experienced teacher of the message of Jesus, and he is asked to contend with some significant needs in the congregation in Ephesus. Paul hopes to return soon to Ephesus, but in the meantime he writes this epistle, particularly focusing on "how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

Overview Of 1 Timothy

The epistle opens with Paul explaining both the need for truth and sound teaching, as well as understanding some of the deeper reasons for this, as he says, "The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5). The apostle follows this with some thoughts on his immense gratitude for the grace God have him, then reminders of what can happen to those who stray from the truth, and some personal encouragement for Timothy to persevere by faith (1 Timothy 1).

Next come God's call to worship in godliness and holiness, and to pray harmoniously (1 Timothy 2). Paul then gives Timothy some guidelines for prospective elders and deacons. Before continuing, the apostle then ponders the splendor and the mystery of the message of Jesus (1 Timothy 3). Turning to an assortment of practical matters in the congregation, the epistle discusses how to handle them carefully, along with some personal advice, then with a reminder to have both our teaching and our personal lives reflect our faith in Jesus (1 Timothy 4 & 5).

As the epistle nears the end, the apostle helps us understand some of God's general truths, and then reassures Timothy of the benefits of living as blamelessly as possible. Paul's hope for Timothy, as well as for the Ephesian believers, is for them to "lay up treasures as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."

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What's the Point....of 1 Timothy? Caleb Dillinger

1 Timothy is the first of two letters written from the apostle Paul to Timothy, a young minister working in Ephesus. Paul first met Timothy in his own missionary work, and quickly brought him along as a disciple. Timothy's mother and grandmother were Jews, though his father was a Greek. This allowed Timothy to grow up learning of the Jewish God, but also understanding Gentile culture. Thus, Timothy served in multicultural church settings, and Paul writes to him with some wisdom, instructions, and encouragement.

Because of the diversity in the place Timothy serves, because of his own youthfulness, because of the relative newness of the church at this time (just a few decades old at best), Timothy is challenged to maintain truthfulness to the gospel amidst false teachers. Paul counters false teaching with right teaching, spending a fair bit of time in this letter teaching the gospel, pointing to Jesus as an example of faithfulness, and encouraging perseverance and faithfulness.

Because Timothy is young (age unknown, but best guess in his twenties/thirties) Paul reminds him not to let people look down on him for his age (1 Tim. 4:12) but instead strive to be an example by his conduct and beliefs. Just due to general lack of experience, Paul also lists some specific church management details, such as qualities of leaders that Timothy should appoint, how to engage older men and women and widows, and even how slaves (servants) should demonstrate faith in their challenging position.

This letter could be read somewhat "idealistically" as you get a lot of "command" and "must" and "ought" sort of language woven throughout. Paul has worked long and hard enough to know situations are not ideal. Yet, by the Spirit of God, Timothy should not accept failings and hardships as the norm, but teach faithfulness and righteousness. Reading 1 Timothy should be done as an extension of the story of Paul in the book of Acts and Paul's other letters, most notably Romans and Ephesians, where grace is so prevalent. Paul is not changing his mind, so much as inspiring Timothy as a leader to lead the church. In chapter 4, Paul even acknowledges that there are those who will leave the faith, but that doesn't stop Timothy from teaching the example of Jesus or following in the footsteps of Jesus.

The point of reading 1 Timothy today is to remember that there have always been challenging circumstances for leaders and the church, but that faithfulness and perseverance have always been the call. Leaders, and future leaders: live faithfully for all to see.