

**Core Seminar**

**New Testament**

**Class 14: 1 Timothy**

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##### I Timothy: Servant Leaders of the Kingdom

How often do we really remember the losers? So you’ve heard of Lincoln (not John Breckenridge) and FDR but not Alf Landon, Wendell Willkie, or Thomas Dewey. So what makes a memorable, successful leader?

But short of winning an election, or more importantly, going platinum, or a Superbowl ring, what is the measure of such success in our day-to-day lives, our careers, our relationships and networks? In America today, the metric is pretty standard: How productive are you compared to others, how much attention have you received in comparison to others, how do you stand out from the next person, from each other?

Well if that is how our culture measures the world, how does the Bible stack up against that? More so, how does the Bible view a successful leader - what does he look like, how does he win? Well, let's take a look this morning at a book, in the Bible, that talks about leadership in the church.

###### Background: Pastoral Epistles

The Apostle Paul wrote three letters to men named Timothy and Titus, two of his most trusted disciples who later became leaders in churches themselves. These letters [ 1 and 2 Timothy & Titus] became known as the “pastoral epistles” because they clearly frame many of the important aspects of good pastoring, as well as good, -- we could say, pasturing -- that is, how we as members of a church ought to live and thrive under church leaders.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Paul probably wrote I Timothy while under house arrest in Rome; Titus during the short period of freedom between his two imprisonments in Rome, maybe on his fourth missionary journey – to Spain; and II Timothy from a Roman dungeon very shortly before Paul was put to death. So if Paul died around 67 AD, I Timothy was probably written around five years before he died - about, the early sixties AD.

###### Background: The Church

The longest of the three pastoral letters, 1 Timothy, is the most thorough treatment of Paul's instruction. Paul had left Timothy to minister to the growing church in Ephesus. And there was good reason: As Paul writes in chapter 1 vs. 3:

 *As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine”*

A major problem in the Ephesian church was a heresy that combined a kind-of decadent Judaism (I Timothy 1:3-7) and false asceticism (I Timothy 4:1-5).

This wasn't really a surprise: Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul warned the Ephesians to be or guard -- he called these false teachers "savage wolves" who will "come in among you and will not spare the flock." (Acts 20:29)

So, Timothy would have been an interesting person to leave behind to shepherd this situation. At first glance, he doesn't seem to have the manliness to stand up to these "savage wolves." We know that he was relatively young (about 40 at the time of this letter). It seems he may have been known for being timid. Paul had to remind him that:

*God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.* (II Timothy 1:7)

He was from Lystra and not from Ephesus. He was probably converted during Paul’s first missionary journey and joined Paul in his second journey. (See Acts 16:1-5)His mother was Jewish and his father Greek—so he would have had difficulty fitting well into either group.

But we also know that Timothy had a Godly heritage and had been mentored by Paul: Both his mother and grandmother were Christians, and had apparently been saved prior to Timothy’s conversion (2 Timothy 1:5). He enjoyed a close relationship with the Apostle Paul, who referred to him as his “son” in the faith (see 1 Tim 1:2; 2:1; Phil 2:19-22). And the feeling seems to have been mutual (2 Tim 1:4). He traveled extensively with Paul and is mentioned in the introductions of many Pauline letters. (See I and II Thessalonians)

With that is Background, we now turn to the main theme of the Book:

Paul is preparing guidelines for how people should act as members of God’s household.

1 Timothy 3:14-15 seems to capture pretty well the purpose of the book. *“I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God”*

The goal: leading God’s people to conduct themselves as a church in a way that brings honor to God. It’s interesting: a book that on one hand seems to be a manual of church structure and authority is *filled* with teaching about the gospel and about how Christians should live their lives. It seems that teaching about church offices (pastors and deacons) actually is there as part of a larger theme of how the gospel should evidence itself in our lives—especially in contrast to the false teaching Timothy was confronting. So a good thematic statement for this book would be something like this:

“*The true gospel, in contrast to false teaching, will always lead to godliness in its hearers, and that godliness is especially visible in our relationships within the local church.*”

So, with that in mind, how does Paul communicate that message?

**Outline**

You can see an outline of the book on the back of your handout. Paul begins the book commanding Timothy to confront false teachers with the truth of the gospel. But he does this in the most personal of terms. We see Paul declaring the gospel through the lens of his own life: Read with me in 1:13, 15:

*“Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief”* Jumping to verse 15: “*The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”*

The gospel. Pure and simple. In contrast to false teaching.

Chapter 2, then, begins a new section that moves us all the way to that summary statement I quoted earlier on HOW to CONDUCT ourselves in God’s household. Confronting false teaching isn’t merely about saying true things, but about ordering our life together as a church as God commands. So chapters 2 and 3 focus on gospel-shaped living within the church. It talks about everything from who should teach to who should lead to how we should pray.

And then in chapter 4, we return again to the topic of false teaching. And we repeat the pattern we saw in chapters 1 - 3.

A short message on false teaching (now it's a kind of Holy Asceticism), followed by an example of the gospel in the life of a believer. This time the model is Timothy, and how he was trained up. With that comes another "trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance" Look there in Chapter 4:9:

"*The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*

And the pattern we saw in the first half the book continues. Having seen the gospel through the lens of Timothy’s life, we now come across another very practical section about how we ought to love and treat the different kinds of people in the church - all the way to the beginning of chapter 6: Sections on young and old members, widows and families, more on elders and elders in training, and slaves and masters. And finally we finish the book, through the end of chapter 6, returning once again to the false teachers and how Timothy and other church leaders should behave in contrast.

So overall, a pattern repeated twice. False teachers. The gospel. How we should order our lives in light of that gospel. And then a conclusion contrasting false teachers with their gospel-focused counterparts. In all, a celebration of the gospel and how Timothy can lead these people to live it out.

Now, then, with that outline, let's go a little deeper into the teaching. But first, any questions so far on the background, the authorship, Timothy, Paul, the "heretics" the Ephesian church?

First Point. What should a leader teach? The gospel.

##### What Should a Leader Teach?

Paul urges Timothy to "fight the good fight" by opposing false teachers and by devoting himself to being an example and faithful teacher of the Gospel. Now, to understand this we need to see a little of what its opposition looked like.

(1) Take a look at 1:3-7: "*As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things that which they make confident assertions.”*

So, We can see something of what these false teachers were teaching: “*myths and endless genealogies*.” Paul says that these teachers promoted controversies, not the true loving work of God. These self-appointed teachers might be confident talkers, says Paul, but they do not know what they are talking about. They want to be teachers of the law: they want to teach people how to earn righteousness. Here is the real problem: You see, the news we have to declare as Christians is not fundamentally about our law-keeping or our obedience. The glad tidings we bear are not for ‘good people.’ See what Paul says in verses 8-10:

*"Now we know that the law is good, if one uses It lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine”*

Paul's Point is that the gospel is for these kinds of people, and the law is what shows us that we really are like this (I Tim 1:9b-10a)…[this] is a message that brings joy to people like father-killers and slave-traders! Apparently, some teachers in Ephesus did not know that. They thought church was for good, respectable, law-abiding people!

Now, what is the simple and clear antidote to false teaching? The Gospel. Remember that passage I read earlier. ” Turn to 1:15-16. After urging Timothy to resist the false teachers in Ephesus, he gives that example from his own life. “*The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”*

If the Gospel could penetrate Paul’s dark heart and make him an apostle of Jesus Christ, then we have the same hope ourselves. If I am a sinner, what hope do I have if someone teaches me the law? But if I am a sinner, and someone teaches me grace, I have real hope. . . . This message is worthy of being believed and proclaimed over and above the message of the false teachers.

(2) The theme of false teaching versus the Gospel appears again, as I mentioned before, in chapter 4 as Paul instructs Timothy on the character and motivations of the false teachers he is to face. Motivated by deceiving spirits, they seek to control others by forbidding people to marry and commanding them to abstain from certain foods (4:1-5).

Important lesson here for us in the church: Do not fail to notice how attractive false teaching is. In chapter 1, we learn the false teaching is about the law, and the law is about right and wrong. In chapter 4, we find that the false teaching included asceticism and self-denial for spiritual reasons…What was so bad about this teaching?

Well, whenever we do things in order to earn God’s favor, we have accepted false teaching. We have fundamentally misunderstood Christianity to be about us and our character when it is fundamentally about God and his character. You see how the gospel is woven into even this book of practical living and instruction. The Gospel exposes God’s gracious love and mercy to us in Christ, NOT our upstanding characters.”

SO: Timothy's job, according to Paul, is to point out these teachers and their teachings to the faithful and avoid their foolishness, combating falsehood by teaching the true gospel of grace.

Yet, all this will be moot if Timothy does not follow Paul’s admonition at the close of chapter 4:16: this is key for a leader in the church.

“*Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”*

How often have you heard, let's not worry about doctrine? Aren't personal relationships and love more important than beliefs?

Paul is telling Timothy that for the man who would lead and teach God’s people, he must be marked by right living *and* right doctrine. And Timothy and every other teacher of God’s Gospel must first be those who have been transformed by that Gospel, lest they shift into teaching the Gospel as something others need, but which they have somehow mastered and overcome. While this message is aimed at Timothy as a pastor, these qualities are to be pursued by every Christian.

* So, how closely are you guarding your life and doctrine?
* Are you regularly reading God’s word?
* Seeking accountability with other Christians?
* Are you tempted to think people are too concerned about theology? Or are you tempted to be more concerned with right belief but apart from a changed life?

That pretty much summarizes the false teaching/gospel sections of chapters 1 and 4. But with that foundation in place, how ought the life of the church reflect this gospel? It all comes down to a question of authority. And that’s chapters 2 and 3.

##### Who should have authority?

Government:

At the beginning of chapter 2, Paul tells Timothy, “*I urge that supplications, prayer, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”* (2:1-2). Government authority over Christians is a small part of this book, but it's good to see that Paul is not setting up some rogue religious system that rejects established authority. Paul and the writers of the New Testament see authorities established and designed by God as a good thing, even while they recognize that those authorities may from time to time abuse their power. Paul tells Timothy that authority is important and that good authority is a blessing—between Christians and the state, between men and women in the church, and between church leaders and church members. Biblical authority is a blessing for those who are beneath it.

Women:

Paul then moves on to defines the role of women in the church in 2:9-15. And at the center of this teaching we read in verses 11-12: “*Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet.”* (2:11-12). Of course, with regard to the role of women in the church, our modern sensibilities often cause us to miss the positive force of Paul's message regarding the role of women. Many strongly react against Paul because they see his teaching as essentially oppressive of women, chauvinistic. However, Paul is stating in these verses that women *should* be instructed in the faith. In Roman, Greek and Jewish culture, which would have shaped the Ephesian church, women had few rights and were rarely, if ever, included in religious instruction Paul's inclusion of them as fellow students is a socially radical command.

But having said that, Paul also gives us the proper bounds of that inclusion. Women are not to exercise authority over men or publicly teach men in the gathering of the church. And he grounds this prohibition not in cultural norms of the day, but in the very structure of relationships established at the beginning with Adam and Eve. Paul says, Chapter 2:13-14: “*For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.”*[[3]](#footnote-3)

The intent of gender roles in creation was supposed to be that Adam would lovingly lead Eve to obey the Lord. Instead Adam sinfully follows Eve to disobey the Lord. Eve herself had listened to the serpent -- the creature over which she was designed to exercise dominion together with her husband.

In the created order, the serpent submits to woman, who submits to man, who submits to God. Instead the order has been turned on its head. Man submits to woman, who submits to the serpent, and God is out of the picture. Paul’s point is that within the New Creation, within the church, the creation order is to be restored. The picture which has been flipped, is to be righted again.

Once: again there is to be self-sacrificial leadership, obeying the ordinances of God that were abandoned at the Fall. Culturally, we often make an assumption that if people are to be considered equal in value, they must be equal in authority, or, at the very least, have equal opportunity to reach positions of authority. This is not a biblical idea. Value and Authority are not equated.

[EXAMPLE: The perfectly divine Father eternally exercises loving authority over the perfectly divine Son. The Son, being in very nature God doesn’t see equality with God as something to be exploited, but makes himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, and becomes obedient to his Father to the point of death. He came, not to do his own will, but the will of the Father who sent him.]

So, within the church, men and women are of equal significance but are different in role. Contrary to some claims, the apostle's arguments appear to be normative for all time and not culturally conditioned or bound. If you want to take a closer look at these issues, track down Mark’s recent sermon on “Gender Roles in the Church,” or pick up *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* on the bookstall.

A few additional notes on this point, on how to apply it:

Women, don’t assume that these verses mean you cannot give spiritual encouragement to men. It is right for brothers and sisters to encourage and admonish one another, and that ministry of mutual edification should not be undervalued.

As a congregational church, the members of the church have the final say, and in a church that is made up of ever so slightly more women than men, the congregational guard against this church altering the Gospel is very much the responsibility of women. Single women: invite an elder or two to visit to your small group.

Men who would be pastors, ask questions of women in your church about how you can teach them better; don’t assume that you know the answers. These are just a few ways we can apply Paul’s teaching about men and women in the church.

Elder and Deacon:

Chapter 3:1

*The saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

*Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

Two things to notice about these lists.

**First** is just how unremarkable they are! With the clear exception of “able to teach,” all of these qualifications ought to typify every Christian. They make a great spiritual checklist for discerning whether you’re living as a Christian should live in this world. Our leaders are not held to anything more than the rest of us!

**Second**, Paul’s emphasis is on the character of the leader and not the tasks of the leader. We’re told little about the duties of the elder in the early church – most of what we find comes from the three interchangeable titles that they are given:

* **Elders**, showing that they are to exercise leadership;
* **pastors**, showing that they are to feed and protect the flock; and
* **overseers**, showing that they are those who must give an account for the lives of those under their care.

But here in chapter three we’re given a list of things pertaining to the character, rather than their job. Authority should not be given to people who are self-focused but to people who reflect the good and kind authority of God, thereby blessing those they serve by leading.

So, What are some ways that you love and care for others?

Are you building God-glorifying relationships with those in the congregation who are different from you?

Do you love ideas more than people?

Do you cultivate a mastery of theology or a relationship with God?

Do you pursue being right more than being godly?

Well, with that study of authority in place, let’s skip ahead to the next section of the letter where Paul applies the gospel to our relationships as a church. Chapter 5.

Any Questions: Government, women in the church, elders and deacons in the church?

**How Should we shape our lives in the church?**

We've seen how the gospel shapes the way authority looks. Now, how does the Gospel shape the rest of our lives? We, whether we are pastors or congregants, men or women, rich or poor, can be taught from this - we'll go through these groups in brief.

Paul begins with Timothy himself. Paul tells Timothy how he ought to relate to and serve the various groups in the church.

1. **Timothy’s relationships across different age groups and gender** (5:1-2)

Timothy is instructed to treat older men and women as parents and younger men and women as siblings; and he is to especially keep himself pure with regard to relationships with younger women.

The second thing we see is a section about the church’s care for widows. Even here we should witness implications of sound gospel teaching.

1. **Widows, Proper and Improper** (5:3-16)

Apparently the early church kept a list of widows it was to care for. However, some in this church were being added to the list even though they had family on which they should have been able to depend. So in verse 8, Paul instructs: *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*

1. **Elders** (5:17-20)

Elders are to be respected and accorded honor, especially those who invest the most time and effort in teaching the word. Here, we also get a NT basis for paying ministers in the word. They are not to be lightly accused, but they are to be disciplined when wrong and to submit to such disciplined before the congregation as an example to others.

1. **Slaves** (6:1-2)

We’ll return to this in our discussion of Titus. While we don’t want to think of New World Slavery when we think of slavery in the New Testament, the New Testament encourages a love that releases slaves – wait for the class on Colossians & Philemon to hear more about that.

And then, as I said earlier, Paul concludes his letter with another contrast between false teachers and the true gospel through the rest of chapter six. Here, he looks at treatment and love of money as a primary indicator of where a teacher’s motivation is, and thus, whether what he is teaching is good or bad. It seems there was a connection between those who saw godliness as a means to financial gain (6:6) and those who had an *“constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth”* (there in 6:5)

So let us be careful with how we and our leaders treat money, and how we structure the finances in our church here on Capitol Hill to promote good teaching. (6:4).

**Conclusion:**

So what do we take away from all this? A few final observations.

Paul gives us a nice little summary of his own letter right at the end: chapter 6:20-21 – "*O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘Knowledge,’ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.”*

**First**, the need to always be on our guard against those who preach a false gospel. Even here at CHBC, this is something we must watch out for.

**But second,** the essential connection between teaching the true gospel and structuring our lives—as a church and as individuals—in a Godly way. The broader evangelical culture suggests that there is little connection between our view of authority (say, of men in the church) and our ability to guard the truth of the gospel. I think that the whole of 1 Timothy would take great issue with that. Gospel truth promotes right living, but right living also is important in preserving the gospel, and as far as Paul is concerned, a right view of authority and leadership should be foremost in mind as we consider right living. Guard your life *and* your doctrine.

**And lastly**, the connection between false teaching and *false* living. READ Chapter 5:24-25: *"The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later.”*

All sin, even secret sins, and disguised sins of false doctrine and unbelief, do have a way of eventually worming their way into the open. In God’s providence, these things prove almost impossible to hide. That should give us great confidence as we recognize leaders in this church.

We should thank the Lord for His kindness in leaving us with good leaders, never taking for granted good leaders who hold fast to the Gospel, who seek the good of Christ’s bride and not their own personal enrichment. But the main thing we should take away from I Timothy is not how great it is to have good leadership, but how great is the Gospel which shapes those leaders and those they would lead. Praise God for the wonders of his gospel!

1. The title “pastoral epistles” was coined, we think, by D.N. Berdot in 1703. Carson, Moo, Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Note “especially” here and in 5:17 is best read as “that is.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Be prepared to explain why women do not wear head-coverings in our church even though that command also references the creation as justification. In short: the commands both apply in all time since they are grounded in creation. But we must apply them in culturally-appropriate ways. Head coverings mean nothing to us, while other signs of marital commitment (such as the wearing of wedding rings) do. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)