

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

1 Timothy 1

Background

This epistle was likely written by Paul around 64AD, in the final years of his life. Paul writes to Timothy, who represents the next generation of leadership. The themes are church order, soundness of doctrine and discipline.

Introduction and Warning (1:1-11)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than 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 wandered away from these and 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. 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 lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers, and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

1. Paul begins formally, by stating the authority for this letter comes from his apostleship. What he is about to say must be taken seriously. He also talks of God and Jesus as one being, but different persons, which is the basis for the doctrine of the Trinity (Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit). (2 Cor 13:14)
2. Paul wishes grace, peace and mercy for Timothy (and all Christians). Grace is what God gives to save and empower us to become like him. Peace comes from our being forgiven and adopted as his children. It also continues to be an experience of the presence of God as we follow his revealed will. Mercy is extended to born-again Christians when we are saved by faith and when we fail to follow

God's will thereafter. Therefore, Paul is reminding them of God's complete and continuing blessings that are bestowed upon believers. These blessings should be always in our minds and inspire rejoicing and thanksgiving.

3. Paul warns about false teachers who use myths and genealogies to lead Christians astray. *What false religions use tales of mystical revelations and stress the importance of genealogies? How do such teachings cause controversies, rather than simply relying on faith in Jesus for salvation?*
4. When Paul says that the laws of God are not made for the righteous, he means that born-again Christians have been forgiven, and so the penalty for breaking God's laws have been satisfied by the sacrifice of Jesus. However, God's laws apply to sinners who do not believe in Jesus. *How do the laws of God encourage religious people to live moral lives? What are some basic moral laws found in the Ten Commandments that are commonly found in every culture and government? (Dt 5:6-21)*
5. Paul says that sound doctrine depends upon adhering to the gospel. This is why it is essential to study the Bible and follow its teachings. Those who say that the Bible is not inspired or authoritative, soon wander from the truth and teach false doctrines. Some false teachers say that what the Bible teaches does not apply today, because the culture has changed. Others have said that you can't rely on the Bible, because of copying and translation errors. *Do you know some examples of Christians who have started false religions or have false doctrines, because they do not closely follow the Bible?*

A False Teacher Saved by Grace (1:12-20)

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, 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 unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed

over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

1. Paul admits that he was a false teacher, but he acted out of ignorance. God called him and gave him the grace to believe in Jesus. Jesus also taught him the gospel which was confirmed by the Christian leaders in Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-17; Gal 1:11-24) Paul calls himself a blasphemer, persecutor and a violent man. *What was he doing before his conversion that made him these things?*
2. Paul says that he was very committed and zealous in persecuting Christians because he considered them to be heretics. He believed that he was serving God, through acts of violence, to purge Christians from society. He considers himself to be an example of how God can save even very evil men. *Who are some evil people that you know? Do you pray for their salvation? God can make great saints out of great sinners.*
3. Paul reminds Timothy of the revelations of God that were given to him by prophecies. God may choose to reveal his will through other Christians, through reading the Bible, prayer and words of knowledge. I call words of knowledge, revelations that change our thinking and show us what God wants us to do. Sometimes this comes spontaneously and other times it comes through the other methods I mentioned. *What revelations has God given you since you were born-again?*
4. Paul mentions two false teachers, who ruined themselves and others. They did not keep the faith delivered to them in the gospel. They gave in to the lies of Satan, who corrupted their thinking and actions. Paul taught that such people must be removed from the church, with the hope that they would repent. (1 Cor 5:9-13; 2 Tim 2:17-18, 4:14-15)

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Sunday School Lesson

1 Timothy 2

Prayer and Women (2:1-15)

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—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, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave

himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its 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 teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles. I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should lean in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

1. Christians should pray often for government leaders, police, fire and others who have authority over us. Paul says that we need to pray for the salvation of these people. *How would the laws of your country change if your government leaders were all born-again Christians? How would this promote peaceful and moral living?*
2. There is only one way for humans to be made holy and to be with God. This is through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Faith is the way. Humans are rebellious because of their sinful nature and will not accept the gift of faith, unless God draws them to himself. It is a mystery why God chooses some but not all. Praise God for this wonderful gift! (Jn 3:16-18; Rom 6:23; 2 Pet 3:9)
3. Because people choose to sin, there are consequences. If Adam and Eve would not have sinned, all of their descendants would be able to be with God. This is the desire that is spoken of, where God wants everyone to be saved. However, God created man with a free-will, and like the rebellious angels, mankind chose to rebel against God. Unlike the fallen angels, God has chosen to redeem some people and restore them to holiness. This is for his pleasure and glory. (Eph 1:3-8)
4. Men are to lead in public prayers when women are present. God has given men the responsibility to cherish and lead women in marriage. This is also the case in church matters. Public prayers must align with God's will, they must not be said in anger or doubt. (1 Cor 11:3-15, 4:34-35)
5. Women are to dress modestly in church. They should not try to distract others or attract attention to themselves.
6. Women are to model humility in the church. Being submissive for the sake of order and unity does not imply inferiority. Jesus was submissive to the Father in

the role he took as a servant and sacrificed himself to save us. Women were created to be helpers to men. The Holy Spirit is called our helper and counsellor. There is glory and honor in being a servant. (Gen 2:18-23; Mt 23:11-12; Jn 14:26; Phil 2:5-11)

7. Paul is not saying that women will be saved by having children. This clearly contradicts the teachings of salvation by faith in Jesus. Paul likely means that women should fulfill their unique role as mothers. They should live sacrificial and humble lives, under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Being a mother is a special role that is Christ-like when lived with faith, love and holiness.

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Sunday School Lesson

1 Timothy 3

Elders and Deacons (3:1-16)

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. 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 of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, 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.

1. Bishop, elder and overseer are all equivalent terms to describe the spiritual leaders of the church. (Acts 14:23, 20:17; Phil 1:1; Jas 5:14)
2. Elders and deacons must sense a call from God to these leadership offices. They are to be examples of Godly living and so they must be proven to be faithful to the gospel and their families. They must not be recent converts and they must have a good reputation, within and outside of the church. *Why are these traits important as witnesses to the truth of the gospel?*
3. Being the husband of one wife fulfills God's will for marriage to be held as a holy bond. It is also held as a sign of a good and faithful man, which is an important aspect of having a blameless reputation. (Mt 19:3-9)
4. *What is the sin that caused Satan to rebel against God? Why is it important that leaders of the church be mature and tested Christians?* (Is 14:12-15)
5. A pillar is a vital supporting structure. It is also a place where information is posted in public places. *In what ways is the church like a pillar and foundation of the truth? What is truth? Who speaks truth?* (Jn 14:6, 6:63)
6. *What is the mystery of godliness that has been revealed through the life of Jesus? Jesus became like us so that we might become like him.* (Phil 2:5-11)

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Sunday School Lesson

1 Timothy 4

Remain Faithful to the Gospel (4:1-16)

The Spirit clearly says that in the later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and 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. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, 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 a prophetic message 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.

1. Paul warns against the dangers of not strictly following the teachings of the Bible. Demons seek to put evil thoughts in our minds, that may seem appealing and contain some truth mixed with errors. Church doctrines and the gospel can be corrupted, and Christians become ensnared in a false religion. An example found in some Christian churches is that good works and faith are both needed for salvation. Cultural changes also corrupt Christian churches by causing the rejection or reinterpretation of what the Bible says (or doesn't say) to allow for what is popular. The acceptance of homosexuality and gay marriages in some Christian churches are examples. *Can you think of other examples?*
2. Godless myths are stories that are contrary to the teachings of the Bible. The theory of evolution and mythical stories about the origins of man from alien beings from outer space are examples. *Can you think of other examples? How do these stories corrupt Christians and mislead people away from the gospel?*
3. Paul says that Christians are to train themselves to become strong in their faith and more like Jesus. He compares this with the self-discipline and rigorous exercise that is needed to build physical muscles. *What are some ways that you can build your spiritual muscles and become stronger in your walk with Jesus?*
4. Timothy was a young leader and perhaps he looked youthful. Paul tells him not to let others intimidate him, because he doesn't have the appearance that commands respect. He has been given a spiritual gift (teaching?). God has chosen him to be a leader and he should not be swayed by popular opinions.
5. Preaching, meditating, praying and teaching the Bible methodically and consistently are essential to keep false ideas from corrupting the church. These things

must be practiced by all Christians, so that they are not misled by evil spirits.
(Ps 119:11, 105)

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

1 Timothy 5

Care for the Needy in the Church (5:1-16)

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. 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. The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. Give the people these instructions, too, so that no one may be open to blame. If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 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 saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds. As for young widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan. If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.

1. Christian leaders must treat their fellow Christians with respect, regardless of their age or sex. Paul tells Timothy to not speak harshly to older men, but to encourage them and treat them like he would his father. Speak the truth but do it in love for the benefit of others. Speaking harshly may be truthful, and it may

make you feel better. However, your anger generally speaks louder than what you are saying.

2. Paul speaks extensively about the proper care of widows in the church. Widows frequently were left without the means to support themselves. The church should support widows, if they have no children, grandchildren or other family members that can do so.
3. The reference to widows who live for pleasure is not clear, but Paul may be referring to those widows who used prostitution to support themselves. These women should not have to engage in this evil in order to live. It is a disgrace to the church if they do not help fellow Christians in distress. *How does your church help believers in need?*
4. Widows who are supported by the church must have a good reputation for faithful service to their family and the church. They must not be lazy, gossips or busybodies. Widows supported by the church must not be idle and cause trouble. Widows who are supported by the church, must continue to do good works that bring honor to Jesus and the good reputation of the church.
5. Paul advises young widows to remarry rather than be content to be supported by the church. The reference to breaking a pledge by remarrying is unclear, but it may be that widows supported by the church may have taken a vow to remain single.
6. Hospitality and charity towards those in need have historically been ministries performed by the church. These acts of mercy show the love of Jesus and can draw people to become Christians. Christian disaster relief organizations, orphanages, soup kitchens, homeless and single women shelters are examples. *Can you think of some others? How do these ministries honor Jesus and show how being a Christian changes people in a way that attracts others? How have government programs replaced Christian organizations in caring for the needy? What effect does this have on spreading the gospel?*

Elders in the Church (5:17-25)

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages.” Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these

instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden.

1. The leaders of the church have been called by God to positions of responsibility and authority. They must be respected. This does not mean that they are infallible or do not make mistakes in leadership. Only God is infallible, and the Bible must be the standard of truth. Church leaders must be accountable, and this is why there are multiple leaders or elders. Leaders must be humble and open to different opinions or perspectives where they do not conflict with the Bible.
2. Paul quotes both the Old and New Testaments in making his point about the obligation church members have to support their leaders. (Dt 25:4; Luke 10:7) *Why do you think Paul quotes from both Testaments? In what ways are church members to be supportive of their leaders?*
3. Two or three witnesses are required to bring an accusation of evil behavior. This principle is meant to prevent personal slander or make it easy for false accusations. (Dt 19:15; Mt 18:15-17) Elders who commit serious sin, that brings dishonor upon the church, must make a public confession and repent.
4. Leaders are not to show favoritism among the members of the church. Those who are more popular, wealthy or talented must be treated the same as those who are not. *How do those who give more money to the church sometimes expect that their ideas and desires will be followed?* (Mt 23:5-12)
5. When prominent people join the church, there may be a tendency to quickly advance them to positions of leadership. Paul warns against this. *What might be some reasons why this would be unwise?*

Off the Shelf
Sunday School Lesson
1 Timothy 6

Instructions and Warnings (6:1-16)

All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them. If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife and malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. 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. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men 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.

1. The Bible does not support slavery. Christianity is not a political movement that seeks to impose its views on non-believers. However, Christians do seek to spread the gospel and help believers to become more like Jesus. Jesus will return to reign over the earth, but until then, his kingdom is within believers and not of this world. (Jn 18:36; Rev 19:11-20:6) *What are some examples of governments that had official Christian religions and that claimed to have moral authority to persecute those of different beliefs? How are Christians to influence the morals of government, while respecting the beliefs of others?*
2. Paul says that Christians are to serve Jesus and the needs of men regardless of their station in life. Every born-again Christian is a slave to Jesus. We have been purchased by his blood sacrifice. He refers to slavery as a yoke that a person must bear until he can set himself free. (1 Cor 7:21-24)
3. Paul says that slaves must respect their masters and not seek to take advantage of masters who are Christians. In such cases, the slave and master are considered equal brothers in Christ, but not according to the government. Christians are not to use their common faith in Jesus to influence each other for worldly gain. We are to encourage and help each other to become more like Jesus.
4. Paul warns against those who teach new ideas that do not conform to the Bible. They are typically full of pride and think that they have superior knowledge and insights. They seek to make money from their controversial ideas, and they like

to stir up strife and engage in arguments. *Do you know of some popular Christian teachers who are like this?*

5. The love of money influences people to think and act in ways that are contrary to what the Bible teaches. Jesus said that you must love God and serve him first. Accumulating wealth is not evil, but putting this desire first is an idol and leads to evil living. (Mt 6:24) *How does the love of money produce sinful living? Why are rich and popular people with great wealth many times miserable?*
6. Paul says that, when you love God and are content with what you have, this is real wealth and abundant living. *How can people be happy and content, when they don't have everything that others do?* (Ps 16:5-11; Mt 6: 19-21; Jn 6:35)

Final Commands (6:17-21)

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. Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you.

1. *Why do wealthy people tend to become proud, arrogant and think of themselves as better than others? Why are those who put their hope in wealth never secure and have only temporary happiness? Why are those who put their hope in God secure and have joy that does not depend upon their circumstances?* (Mt 6:19-21)
2. Christians must be born-again in order to do good works that please God. The Holy Spirit must change us, inspire us, and guide us in doing good works. Therefore, the command to do good must begin with becoming like Jesus and seeking first his will and the growth of his kingdom. (Mt 6:33; Mk 10:18; Eph 2:8-10)
3. There have been many popular schools of thought that deny the Bible. They rely on science, myths, secret knowledge, logic or other human thinking. Paul calls this “godless chatter” that may stimulate the imagination, but it is dangerous because it leads people away from having faith in the gospel. *What are some popular schools of thought that deny the Bible and have caused them to reject the Bible?*
4. Paul concludes with a blessing and prayer that God would provide the grace

needed. *What is God's grace and why do we need it?* (Eph 2:4-10; Rom 1:5, 5:17, 12:3; 1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 9:8, 12:9)