

# The First Letter to Timothy



Timothy



The following three letters are addressed to an individual who has been appointed pastor of the community, but they are clearly intended to be heard by the whole assembly. They are, therefore, given the title of the 'Pastoral Epistles'. They are also commonly referred to as 'deutero-Pauline' writings, because they were not composed by Paul himself. They were written towards the end of the first century by one or more people who had been influenced by Paul and who wanted to keep his teaching alive and relevant for new circumstances. This is indicated by changes in style, themes and context between them and the undisputed Pauline letters. Timothy is addressed here as 'my loyal child in the faith' (1 Timothy 1:2), for example, implying that his teaching is in line with that of Paul and that he bears Pauline authority.

The author does not begin the letter with an expression of gratitude for the faith of the community as is Paul's normal practice. This is probably because of his concern about the church becoming undermined by false teaching. This means that Timothy must strive to 'guard what has been entrusted to you, and avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge' (1 Timothy 6:20). What false ideas are circulating is not made specific, but the beginning of the breakdown of the Roman state religion had created a vacuum that was being filled across the ancient world by many kinds of philosophies and teachings about the meaning of life. In 1 Timothy 6:3ff, these beliefs are linked with a mind-set which slips into immoral ways of living, with the greed for wealth in particular acting as a temptation to wander away from God (1 Timothy 6:3-10).



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*"He was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels,  
proclaimed among the nations,  
believed on in the world, taken up in glory."  
(1 Timothy 3:16)*

Timothy's task, then, is to 'fight the good fight' (1 Timothy 1:18) and to pass on the sound traditions that he had been taught (1 Timothy 4:6). He is instructed to lead prayer 'for kings and all who are in high positions' (1 Timothy 2:2), such as the emperor and Roman officials. These prayers are to be offered to 'God our Saviour' (1 Timothy 2:3). Three times in the letter, God is spoken of as the Saviour (1 Timothy 1:1; 2:3; 4:10), an implicit challenge to the Roman emperor who declared himself saviour of the people. The young community of Jesus-followers had to live with the tension between their faith in the one God and the emperors' demands for worship, while not drawing attention to themselves for the wrong reasons (1 Timothy 3:7). Rather, they should let their Christian moral life and good works draw the attention of others (1 Timothy 5:25).

It is important, therefore, that those chosen as community leaders, namely episkopoi (overseers or bishops) and diakonoi (servants or deacons) 'be well thought of by outsiders' (1 Timothy 3:7). The model presented for their character and conduct is that of the patriarch of the Roman household. As the Christian communities originally gathered in the houses where there was sufficient public space to accommodate about 30 people, they came to be seen as households. Bishops and deacons must, therefore, manage their own household well (1 Timothy 3:4) and should not be 'lovers of money' (1 Timothy 3:3; cf. 6:17).

If God is the Saviour, Jesus Christ is at the heart of the mystery that is God's plan for human salvation (1 Timothy 3:16). This belief is expressed in the citation of a fragment of a hymn, which proclaims that Christ (who existed in heaven) was manifested on earth and (having died on the cross) was vindicated by the Holy Spirit (therefore was seen or verified by the angels) and taken up into glory. He is the source of the gospel that is proclaimed among the Gentiles and believed throughout the world. This hymn summarises the story that is the foundation of Christian faith and forms the basis for Timothy's instructions.

# The Second Letter to Timothy

THESSALONIKI

CORINTH

This very personal letter of encouragement, directed to Timothy himself, is perhaps the most likely of the three pastoral letters to have come from Paul, perhaps written during his imprisonment in Rome, not long before his execution. It focuses on Timothy and his ministry rather than the wider life of the community.

The letter gives the impression that Paul is coming to the end of his life (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Yet the author is thinking, not about his own death but about the future spread of the gospel (2 Timothy 4:9-13). He urges Timothy to come soon (2 Timothy 4:9), and to bring Mark as well 'because he is useful in my ministry' (2 Timothy 4:11). This would suggest that he regarded his work of evangelisation as by no means ending and that he was preparing for new travels. It may well be that the background to this letter was a setback Paul had experienced: intending to travel to Spain, Paul had written to the communities in Rome. But his hope of help from them for his new mission had come to nothing, and so at this point he is trying to get a group of his well-known and trusted companions to join him again on his travels.

Timothy was a close associate of Paul as an evangelist and teacher, and also a much-loved friend (Philippians 2:19-21). Paul sent him to Corinth and Thessalonica as his personal ambassador to strengthen and encourage the faith of these communities. But something has changed by the time this letter is written. Paul wants him to come to see him quickly. Why? The clue may lie in 2 Timothy 1:4: 'Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy'. Are these the words of a dying man wishing to see his dear friend for the last time? Or is he concerned about Timothy's faith and a possible breakdown in his morale, the reason for which is never made specific, but which may have resulted from the suffering often necessitated by faith in the gospel (2 Timothy 1:8) for which Timothy was perhaps not fully prepared?





Paul encourages Timothy by sharing his own sorrow in the desertion of many of his former friends and co-workers (2 Timothy 1:15-18). He explains that suffering is part of the preaching of the gospel, as necessary as the hardships endured by a soldier or an athlete struggling to win the prize (2 Timothy 2:4-5), but he then reminds Timothy that the Lord has rescued him from all his own persecutions (2 Timothy 3:11). As he frequently does in other letters, Paul brings Timothy back to first principles, quoting a primitive creed – ‘Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead...’ (2 Timothy 2:8), and ‘a sure saying’ – ‘If we have died with him, we will also live with him... if we are faithless he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself’ (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

## Question for Reflection

**How do these two letters guide us in our discipleship in the public square?**

# The Letter to Titus



## Titus

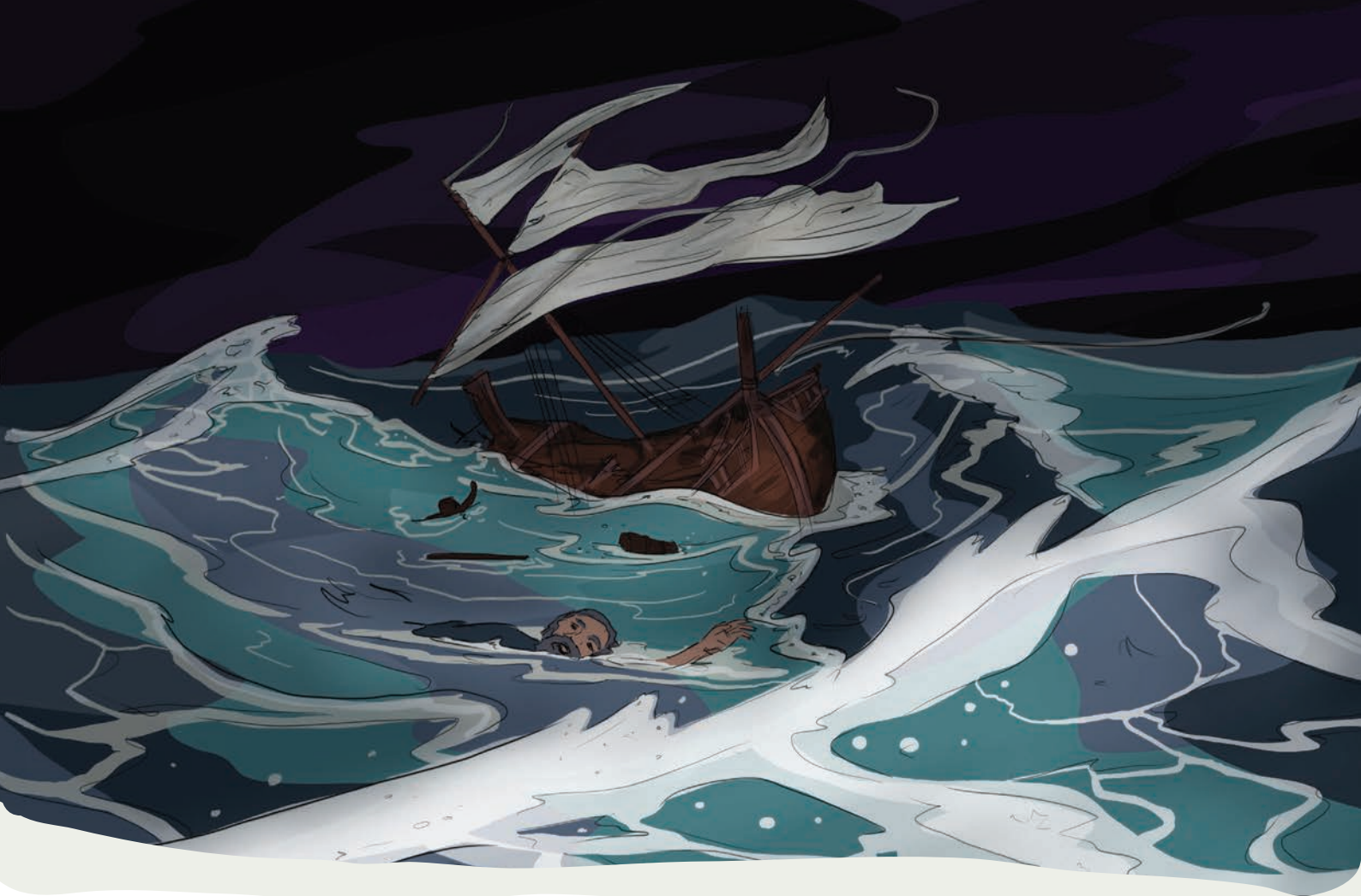


The author, Paul himself or another person recognisably from within the Pauline tradition, writes to give Titus the authority to provide instruction in the name of Paul. The tone and themes of the letter are similar to 1 Timothy. Some commentators regard the letter as having been composed in the 80s, long after Paul's death, while others place it in the early 60s after Paul's imprisonment in Rome, noting that it depicts Paul as being out of prison and arranging to travel to Nicopolis in northwestern Greece (Titus 3:12).

Titus is mentioned in 2 Corinthians as a greatly loved and highly respected co-worker of Paul, who was appointed to organise the collection for the mother-church in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:16-19). According to this letter, he has been left in Crete by Paul to help with the next phase of the development of the church there and with the appointment of elders in every town in the region (Titus 1:5). Although there is no evidence to suggest that Paul himself founded the Christian community in Crete, Acts 27:8 records him making a brief stop in a Cretan city before travelling on to Malta.

Titus' first task is to organise the leadership of the church in Crete (Titus 1:5-9).

At this stage the terms *presbyter* (elder) and *episkopos* (bishop) appear to refer to the same function, and deacons are not mentioned at all. As in 1 Timothy the qualities expected of both roles are similar to those expected of the father of a well-run Graeco-Roman household. The leader of the Christian household is to be a 'safe pair of hands.' As God's stewards they must be blameless and be able to preach 'sound doctrine'. The underlying Greek term is *didaskalia hygiainouse* (healthy teaching), the kind of teaching that would prevent the community being infected with dangerous ideas disseminated by 'rebellious types, idle talkers and deceivers' (Titus 1:10) who are accused of largely being interested in their own financial gain (Titus 1:11).



Using the model of the Household Code that has already been seen in Colossians, Ephesians and 1 Timothy, Titus is to instruct the different generations of the church 'household'. Here, particular emphasis is placed on self-control, but also on behaviour which will enhance and not destroy the reputation of the Christian family. The believers are to be deferential to rulers and respectful to all and should avoid quarrelling (Titus 3:1-2).

The basis of this instruction is 'the appearance of the grace of God bringing salvation', a reference to the epiphania or appearance of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11ff). The present, the period between Christ's first coming and his hoped-for appearance in glory, is a time for training, enabling believers to 'live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly' (Titus 2:12). These terms 'self-controlled, upright and godly' would not look out of place in the philosophical teachings of the time.

Although the letter is addressing a community that, to use a Johannine phrase, is in the world (John 1:10) where all must respect and honour the emperor and be seen to do so, as good citizens, yet it is not of the world, since the emperor is not its Lord and Saviour. Christ has dominion over all the gods of the Roman state. As the one who reveals both the past and future grace of God, in which the community finds hope and healing, Christ is now given the very name of God (Titus 2:13).

## Question for Reflection

**What can we learn and apply today from the Household instructions and Household Code models?**