

*Paul's Letter to Timothy: 1 Timothy 1:1-2*  
Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church  
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This morning we're going to begin a sermon series through the New Testament letter of 1 Timothy. This is a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy. He later wrote a second letter to Timothy, and he wrote a similar letter to another man named Titus. And these three letters have come to be known as the Pastoral Epistles. They bear that name because they are written to individuals who are involved in pastoral ministry in the life of a local church. Paul wrote these epistles to instruct and encourage these leaders, and through them the congregations in which they served. In this letter of 1 Timothy, which we're going to study together over the coming months, Paul deals with many very weighty matters, and very practical matters.

In chapter 3:14-15 Paul summarizes the purpose of the letter. He says, "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, a pillar and buttress of the truth." This is what I'm excited for us to learn about as we immerse ourselves in this letter. I want us to marvel at God's plan for the church, and I want us to live out this vision in this particular local church. I want us to realize that God has provided very specific instructions for the church. He has not left us to ourselves to figure out what we're supposed to do, or what we're supposed to teach, or what the leadership structure should be, or how we should relate to one another. These are not things that we have to figure out on our own. Neither are they matters that we can take into our own hands and decide how we want to "do church." No, God has told us what the church is to be about, and we're responsible to study His Word and do what it says.

So my prayer for us as we embark on this study, is that we would be shaped by this letter in a profound way. I want us to know how we ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth (3:15). Isn't that an amazing statement?! It is God's plan that His church, made up of those whom He has redeemed, would exist in the world as a pillar and buttress of the truth. In other words, we are to uphold the Gospel message for the world around us to see. What an awesome responsibility and privilege—something, of course, we can only accomplish by God's grace in our lives as He blesses us and makes us a blessing to others. We, as a church (not just as individuals, but also as a body of believers), are to proclaim the truth of the Gospel. We are to do this with our mouths, by

expounding and exulting in the glory of what Christ has done on the cross. We are also to oppose false teaching, as Paul commands Timothy to do in this letter.

And we are also to be a pillar and buttress of the truth by living godly lives. True belief must translate into godly behavior. Our head knowledge must sink down into our hearts and transform our daily lives. This is something we'll see throughout the letter. For instance, in 1:5, "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." Paul is giving these instructions with love as his aim. He is not trying to produce theological eggheads. He certainly doesn't want to produce individuals who are proud of their biblical or theological knowledge. He wants to produce loving people, and he knows that only thing that can do that is the truth of the Gospel. That kind of love only comes from people who have been forgiven of their sins through the blood of Jesus, and therefore they have a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith which will necessarily produce loving actions toward others.

On the other hand, teaching that is contrary to the Gospel will produce the opposite of love. Paul writes toward the end of the letter, in 6:3-5, "If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain."

Right theology will produce love, but wrong theology will produce pride and controversy, quarrels, envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction. My prayer for us is that God will use this letter to give us an even greater foundation in the truth of the Gospel in a way that will make us more loving, and more godly, and more sacrificial, and more generous, and more joyful, and more passionate, and that God would be glorified through this church as we learn how to live out our calling to be a pillar and buttress of the truth.

This morning we're going to focus on the greeting of the letter, and some of the historical background of the letter. But I want to encourage you to read through this letter in its entirety, especially if you're not very familiar with it. You'll find here warnings against false teachers, instructions concerning manhood and womanhood and what that should look like in the context of the church, the qualifications for overseers (which is synonymous with the terms elder and pastor), the qualifications for deacons, how to relate to others in the church, how to care for widows, other

instructions concerning elders, instructions for the workplace, and warnings about riches. You'll also read many very well known verses. For instance, in 1:15, "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." Or in chapter 2:3-4, the often-quoted and much-debated statement that "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." And just a few verses later, another hotly debated verse is 2:12 where Paul says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man." In chapter 4 there's the great analogy of athletics that Paul uses: "Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (vv. 7-8). Then a few verses later is the word of encouragement that Paul gives to his young friend Timothy, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." Toward the end of the letter, in chapter 6, Paul pens the famous words, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils" (v. 10). Then in verse 12, in his concluding exhortations, he tells Timothy, "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." And he ends the letter with these words, "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. Grace be with you" (6:20-21).

I mention these things not just to pique your interest concerning this sermon series, but hopefully to spark a desire in your heart to study this letter personally, as we also do so corporately. I hope you'll be as excited as I am about learning from this portion of God's Word and applying to our lives and to our church. What a precious gift God has given to us in this inspired epistle! This is God's will for us, that we would live out these truths. So let us all be attentive, let us be engaged, let us be eager to be changed by God's Word and to see what He will be pleased to do among us in the coming months.

Let's start, then, with the first two verses this morning, and we'll see the salutation with which Paul begins his letter. First, we'll talk about Paul, the apostle. Then, Timothy, Paul's child in the faith. And finally, Paul's Gospel greeting.

### **Paul the Apostle**

The typical Greek letter in Paul's day would begin with the name of the sender, the name of the recipient, and a brief word of

greeting. In this case, it would have been, “Paul, to Timothy, greetings.” Paul follows the same pattern but he also pours in rich theological truth. From the very first words of his letter, Paul points to Gospel. He uses the typical format for beginning a letter, but uses even this as an occasion to speak of God our Savior and Christ Jesus our hope and to mention the grace, mercy, and peace that come from God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul begins by identifying himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus, which gives much weight and authority to his letter. This may seem out of place in a personal letter to Timothy, but this helps us see that Paul’s instructions in this letter were not intended for Timothy only. Rather, Timothy was going to be the spokesperson who would pass along these instructions to the church in Ephesus. Therefore it was necessary for the church to be reminded of Paul’s status as an apostle.

The word apostle literally means messenger, and it is used in that general sense in some places in the New Testament. But it often refers to something more specific, namely, the office of apostle. There were the twelve disciples, whom Jesus named apostles. They were with Jesus throughout His ministry and the eleven also witnessed His resurrection and were instructed to carry on the ministry after Jesus’ ascension. There were also a few additional men who were named as apostles: Barnabas, James the brother of Jesus, and Apollos, along with possibly a few more. And then Paul is somewhat of a unique apostle. He says in 1 Cor 15:8 that he was “one untimely born.” He had seen the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, and he had been commissioned by Him to preach the Gospel.

Paul was an apostle *of Christ Jesus*, meaning he was commissioned by Christ Jesus and he preached the Gospel of Christ Jesus. And his apostleship is *by the command of God of our Savior and Christ Jesus our Lord*. This statement makes it clear that Paul’s apostleship is owing only to a divine calling, and not to anything that he had done or anything that others had conferred upon him. As he begins his letter to the Galatians, he identifies himself as “Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father.” Paul wants to be clear—and he makes great effort to defend this—that he had been called to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. And what a miraculous story this is! Later in 1 Timothy 1 Paul elaborates on this a little bit. He refers to his former life as a persecutor of Christians: “I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent” (vv. 12-13). What an amazing act of God, and what an insight into the way that God is pleased to work, that God

would take this rebellious, proud opponent of the Gospel and transform him and appoint him to be the great apostle to the Gentiles. This is a vivid demonstration of the power of the Gospel. And I would encourage you, if you are not a believer, to consider the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who was later called Paul. This man hated the Gospel. He wanted to imprison and kill those who embraced the Gospel. And then the Lord Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), and all of a sudden Paul loved the Gospel with all of his heart and he was willing to lay down his life in order to make the Gospel known among the Gentiles. There's only one thing that can explain that, and that is the supernatural power of God to save sinners. If you're an unbeliever here this morning, I pray that God will use this testimony to open your eyes to the veracity of the Christian Gospel, and I pray that God will work the same miracle in your heart as He did in the heart of Paul. And if you're already a believer, I hope this will be an encouragement to your faith and a reason to praise God for your own salvation. Our hearts were opposed to God and to His Word and to His Son Jesus Christ. But He changed our hearts so that we now love Him and follow Him and want to obey Him. May we continually be amazed by this!

Paul wanted to remind Timothy and the church at Ephesus of his divine calling as an apostle, because he had some very weighty matters to confront. And he didn't want this letter to be received merely as a list of suggestions from our good friend Paul. No, this was (and is) God's inspired and inerrant word to His church, and it is to be respected and obeyed as such. This is Paul the apostle delivering these commands to the church, and therefore Paul's words are God's words.

Paul describes God the Father as "God our Savior," drawing on the Old Testament background, where God is referred to as Savior. A great example of this is the Exodus, which points forward to an even greater exodus that occurs when someone is released from their captivity to sin and given new life in Christ. In the Old Testament Exodus, God saved His people free from their slavery in Egypt. And now, ultimately, He is the One who has saved us from our bondage to sin, through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God is our Savior. That is how Paul refers to the first person of the Trinity.

And then he refers to the second person of the Trinity as "Christ Jesus our hope." This is not a hope that disappoints, but a hope that is firm. It is a confident expectation we have in the finished work of Christ Jesus. Who He is and what He has done is the embodiment of our hope. Indeed, we cannot and must not hope in anything else, for everything else will fade and fail. But Christ Jesus has accomplished for us what we could never do ourselves

and what nobody else could ever do for us—He has forgiven our sin and brought us into fellowship with the Almighty God. And therefore, no matter what happens to us in this life, we have hope in the fact that we will not be condemned for our sin. Rather, we will inherit eternal life in the presence of God, because our sin has been counted as Christ’s and Christ’s righteousness has been counted as ours. Let this be an encouragement to you today, brothers and sisters. Don’t despair. Don’t give up. Don’t feel sorry for yourself because of the trials in your life. Instead, look to Christ Jesus who is our great hope!

### **Timothy, Paul’s Child in the Faith**

Now let’s turn to the named recipient of the letter, Timothy. Paul says, “To Timothy, my true child in the faith.” We first read of Timothy in Acts 16, where we’re told that “Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek” (vv. 1-3). We find out from this that Timothy was from an area where Paul had previously ministered (cf. Acts 14). We also find out that Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father, which meant that Timothy was not circumcised. And Paul decided in this case to have Timothy circumcised. It was not because he felt that Timothy had to be circumcised. Titus was also a Greek, and Paul did not have Titus circumcised (Galatians 2:3). So it wasn’t because he thought it was required, but he wanted to prevent it from being an issue for the Jews.

From this point on, Timothy was a very dear friend of Paul and a co-worker in the ministry. He traveled many places with Paul, and was sent out by Paul to minister in various cities. At the time when Paul wrote this letter, Timothy is in the city of Ephesus, and Paul is urging him to remain there (1:3). Paul intends for Timothy to be his spokesman there in Ephesus and to lead and instruct the church while Paul is trying to get there.

Timothy was a man with some evident liabilities. For the work he was doing and the role he was in, we might think that there would be someone better suited for the job. He’s not the got-it-all-together, strong and confident leader that we might expect. First of all, we know that he was young. As I read from 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul tells Timothy, “Let no one despise you for your youth . . .” Scholars estimate that Timothy was in his 30s at this point. He was probably at least in his late teens or early twenties when he began traveling with Paul in Acts 16. And now this letter is being

written more than a decade later. So we estimate that Timothy was somewhere in his mid-thirties as he bears the responsibility of leading the Ephesian church. And Paul had to encourage him not to let his relatively young age deter him from doing the important things he needed to do.

Not only was Timothy young, he was also physically frail. His youthfulness may have been seen as an advantage if he was physically healthy and strong and energetic. But this was not the case. He was a sickly man. Paul even uses some space in this letter to address this concern. He tells Timothy in 5:23, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.” Timothy was a frail young man, and this should be an encouragement to us—that God loves to use those whom the world would look down upon. Timothy wasn’t the kind of guy that people would look at and say, “What an amazing leader! He has such a commanding presence about him. What an impressive résumé!” But he was a man who loved the Lord and loved the Scriptures, and God was pleased to use him in this significant task.

Paul calls Timothy “my true child in the faith.” Paul was a spiritual father to Timothy. It appears that Timothy was converted under Paul’s ministry, and then in Acts 16 Paul really took Timothy under his wing as he took him along on his missionary travels. A profound bond was formed between these two men. Timothy looked up to Paul as a father, and Paul considered Timothy a son. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 he calls Timothy “my beloved and faithful child in the Lord.”

We can apply this to our own lives by asking ourselves two questions. First of all, do I have any spiritual children? And secondly, do I have any spiritual parents? Every believer should be looking for relationships in both directions. None of us are too young in the faith to share with somebody what God has done in our lives. Even if you are a new believer, you can be looking for others around you who do not know the Lord, and you can tell them about the forgiveness you have in Christ. For many of us, we have children in the home who need spiritual training, and as parents we have a tremendous responsibility in that regard. We must pray and teach and lead by example and discipline the children God has given us with the hope that God will make these children also our spiritual children. We should all be looking for ways to invest our lives in the lives of others, teaching and encouraging and mentoring others in the faith. None of us are too young in the faith to begin doing this in some way.

It’s also true that none of us are so mature that we don’t need mentors. We all need spiritual parents in our lives to whom we can go for counsel and advice and encouragement. And we

should be on the lookout for these kinds of people. It will take humility, of course, to acknowledge that others are more spiritually mature than we are and can teach us things that we need to learn. And this is so important in the Christian life. This is such a powerful means of grace that God uses to change us, as we build relationships with individuals who are further along in the walk of faith who can model for us what it means to live a pure and holy life as a single person, or what Christian marriage should look like, or what it means to be godly parents, or how to conduct yourself in a Christ-honoring way in your career. Whatever your situation in life, look for weaknesses in your spiritual walk and then look for individuals who are stronger than you are in those areas, and ask for help. Get to know that person, ask questions, observe, and learn and grow.

I think our small groups are a great place to develop these kinds of relationships, which is one reason why you should all be part of a small group. You need to be spending time with other believers in a setting that is conducive to strengthening the spiritual family—a place where you can be investing in others and others can be investing in you. This can happen to some extent on Sunday mornings, but it's not enough. It's in smaller settings where we can really get to know one another and pray for each other and hold one another accountable. So, please, for the sake of your own soul, be committed to a small group and go there looking for spiritual children and spiritual parents.

### **A Gospel Greeting**

Finally, at the end of verse 2 we see Paul's standard greeting of grace and peace. Here and in 2 Timothy he adds mercy as well. "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."

Grace is such an important word for Paul, because it's at the center of what the Gospel is all about. It's only by God's grace that we can be saved, and only by God's grace that we can be changed. We can't work our way into heaven. It's only by grace that we're saved. Paul understood God's grace in such a profound way, and he loved to proclaim the glory of God's grace. He begins and ends his letters with references to God's grace, and communicating his desire for others to experience this grace.

Paul also mentions mercy in this Gospel greeting. It's a word that is closely connected to grace, but conveying especially God's compassion on sinners. The Old Testament antecedent to this word is the Hebrew word, *hesed*, which we saw in the book of Ruth. It is God's lovingkindness, His compassion, His mercy, His kindness toward those who do not deserve kindness.



Then Paul also uses the word peace. May you not only experience grace and mercy, but also the peace that results it. When God saves—when He is merciful toward us and pours out his grace in our lives, He brings us into a peaceful relationship with Him. Because of our sin nature, we are born enemies of God. There's not peace, but hostility. But the Good News that Jesus Christ came to earth to bring peace. He did this by dying on a cross and bearing the wrath of God against our sin. Jesus took upon Himself the penalty that is deserved by God's enemies, so that God's enemies can become God's friends. This will happen for all who repent of their sins and trust in Christ our eternal hope. We are no longer enemies of God who deserve eternal punishment, but friends of God who will dwell with Him in peace forever.

This is the Gospel, and this is what we, as believers, are about to celebrate as we partake of the Lord's Supper. Because of the death of Jesus Christ we have received grace and mercy so that we now have peace with God. Let's rejoice in this as we remember the broken body and shed blood of our Lord.