

# INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

by

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**Note:** Author's introduction in his *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, First and Second Timothy and Titus, and the Epistle to Philemon* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1890). The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.

## Section First -- Sketch of Timothy's Life

Timothy was probably a native of Lystra in Lycaonia. His father was a Greek but his mother a Jewess (Acts 16:1-3). He was early instructed in the Scriptures, and under the pious influence of his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, was doubtless trained in the knowledge and observances of the Hebrew religion (2 Tim. 1:5, 3:14,15). His conversion seems to have occurred under Paul's ministry during the apostle's first visit to Lystra on the first missionary journey (A.D. 48-49), for Paul commonly refers to him as "his own son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 2:2). On the second missionary journey, A.D. 51-54, Timothy, being "well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium," was selected by the apostle as his assistant in the missionary work, and after his circumcision (Acts 16:3) was formally set apart to the work by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. With this were connected the laying on of Paul's hands as an apostle, imparting the special, miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, and also certain prophetic utterances pointing out his divine call, as in the case of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:2), and perhaps predicting the future usefulness of the youthful minister (1 Tim. 1:18, 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Thenceforward to the end of Paul's life, he remains the loved and trusted friend and companion of the apostle, associated with him in all the perils and labors and triumphs of his wonderful career; and the latest words of Paul, written just before his martyrdom, were sent to this true and faithful disciple.

Frequent notices of him are found in the Acts and the Pauline Epistles. From Lystra he accompanied Paul through Asia Minor to Macedonia and assisted in planting the gospel at Philippi (Phil. 2:22) and probably in Thessalonica. At Berea he is left behind with Silas when Paul is driven away; and from this place, or from Athens, he was sent back to Thessalonica to guide and strengthen the imperfectly instructed and persecuted church there (1 Thess. 3:2). On leaving, he came with Silas to Paul at Corinth where he labored in the establishment of the gospel, as also in the neighboring cities of Achaia (Acts 18:5; 1 Thess. 3:6). His name, with that of Silas, is associated with Paul's in the two epistles to the Thessalonians written at Corinth, and his service in that city is mentioned with high commendation (1 Cor. 1:19). On the apostle's third missionary journey he is again seen with him at Ephesus; and near the close of the three years spent there he is sent to Macedonia and Achaia on special service to the churches in those regions (Acts 19:21,22; 1 Cor. 4:17, 16:11). Returning, he is present with the apostle when, in Macedonia (probably in the autumn A.D. 57) the Second Epistle to the Corinthians is written (2 Cor. 1:1); and in the

following winter, A.D. 58, he is laboring with Paul at Corinth when the Epistle to the Romans is written, as he there unites in the salutations sent to friends at Rome (Rom. 16:21). On Paul's return eastward through Macedonia, Timothy was in the company that preceded him from Philippi and waited for him at Troas (Acts 20:5).

His subsequent course at this time is not indicated. It is not certain whether he accompanied the apostle to Jerusalem and was with him during the two years imprisonment at Caesarea and the voyage to Rome. But he was with him during the first Roman imprisonment (A.D. 61-63) as he is mentioned with glowing eulogy in some of the epistles written at that time (Col. 1:1; Philem. 1; Phil. 1:1); and in this last epistle Paul speaks of his intention to send him to Philippi for the comforting of the church there (2:19-23). If the Epistle to the Hebrews belongs to this period, it was probably at this time that Timothy suffered imprisonment at Rome (Heb. 13:23), and possibly there, in the presence of the Roman Imperial Court, witnessed the "good confession before many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:12). After the release of Paul from the first imprisonment at Rome, A.D. 63 or 64, his career, like that of the apostle, is not certainly known; but A.D. 65 or 66 he is with Paul at Ephesus, and on Paul's passing into Macedonia, Timothy is left behind to act in the apostle's place during his absence (1 Tim. 1:3). The separation seems to have been one deeply sorrowful to Timothy, who doubtless trembled in view of the responsibilities thus devolved on him (2 Tim. 1:4).

At a later period, in the fall A.D. 67, the apostle, then a prisoner at Rome, writes the Second Epistle to Timothy, charging him to hasten his coming to that city and giving to him his farewell counsels. Beyond this, nothing is certainly known respecting this chief assistant of Paul. Whether he actually reached Rome before the apostle's martyrdom, and thus was present to cheer him in the closing scenes, is not unknown. Ecclesiastical tradition, which, however, is colored by hierarchical interest, makes him the first Bishop of Ephesus; but this is in direct conflict with the whole tenor of the Epistle, in which he everywhere appears not as bishop but as an assistant of the apostle; nor is there a shadow of support for the tradition in authentic history. He is reported as having suffered martyrdom under Domitian or Trajan.

The character of Timothy, as seen in Scripture, is one of rare beauty. He seems to have suffered, like the apostle, from ill health, probably occasioned by the hardships and privations of the missionary life. It is not improbable that these "often infirmities" tended to depress his spirits (1 Tim. 5:23), and led to a certain timidity, which gave occasion for the exhortations of Paul summoning him to courage and fortitude in the perplexing and responsible posts he occupied (1 Cor. 16:10; 1 Tim. 4:12; 2 Tim. 1:7). But nowhere is there any indication of a real failure of faith. From his call at Lystra, A.D. 51, to the end of Paul's life, A.D. 68, he appears as the loved and trusted companion and helper of the apostle, never swerving from the truth of the gospel, never shrinking from the post of toil and danger and suffering, and never failing either in fidelity to the trusts committed to him or in love and loyalty to Paul or to Paul's great Master.

## Section Second -- The Time and Occasion of Writing

It has already been shown that this Epistle falls within the period between the first and

second imprisonment of Paul at Rome, and may probably be dated A.D. 65 or 66. The apostle had been laboring at Ephesus, but on taking his journey to Macedonia had left Timothy behind to act in his place in the Ephesian Church. There were two sources of grave anxiety. False teachers were arising in that church, apparently Jewish in their origin, "desiring to be teachers of the law," who taught that through austerities and a certain secret knowledge men attain a higher holiness than through faith in Christ and works of practical piety. This was accompanied by a debased ethical standard and a factious, disorganizing spirit. The other matter of anxiety related to the right organization and practical administration of the church by the admission to official station only of duly qualified men; by the proper dispensing of the charities of the church, especially in the case of widows; by the maintenance of quiet obedience to masters on the part of Christian slaves, and by the repression of the inordinate love of earthly gain, which prevailed especially among the heretical class in that wealthy and luxurious capital of Proconsular Asia. The position of Timothy (as representative of the apostle in that large and influential church, and as presiding over affairs among elders, some of whom must have been much older than himself) was one of great and delicate responsibility. It was specially important that his power to act by the authority of the apostle be fully authenticated, and he be given clear and explicit instructions for his guidance. Paul, therefore, after reaching Macedonia, sends this Epistle to him, an Epistle which while admirably adapted for this immediate end was also fitted to be a guide for church and ministerial action through all after ages.

### Section Third -- The Contents

No formal, systematic arrangement is found, as was to be expected in an epistle to a personal, familiar friend. The topics follow each other naturally, but apparently without premeditated order.

*Chapter First* -- Address and salutation (1,2); his purpose in leaving Timothy at Ephesus (3,4); the character of the false teachers of the law whom he is to withstand (5-7); the excellence and true end of law, which these pervert (8-11); Paul's thankfulness to God for his [Paul's] conversion and call to the ministry, notwithstanding his sin in persecuting the church (12-17); solemn charge to fidelity in his ministry (18-20).

*Chapter Second* -- The duty of public prayer for all men, especially for rulers, grounded on God's provision of mercy for all (1-7); the position and duties of the sexes in public worship (8-15).

*Chapter Third* -- The qualifications required in a bishop (1-7); those required in deacons (8-13); necessity of attending to these instructions, from the dignity of the church as the house of God, and its importance as the pillar and ground of the truth (14-16).

*Chapter Fourth* -- Prediction and description of a departure from the gospel (1-5); foolish and superstitious fables are to be avoided, and practical piety, rather than austerities, to be cultivated (6-10); solemn admonition to personal holiness and ministerial fidelity (11-16).

*Chapter Fifth* -- The spirit and manner in which admonition is to be given (1,2); the duty of the church in regard to the care of widows (3-16); directions as to the compensation, discipline, and selection of elders (17,18).

*Chapter Sixth* -- The duties of Christian slaves to their masters (1,2); the evil character and influence of those who, opposing this instruction, teach a different doctrine (3-5); godliness with contentment great gain (6-10); Timothy, as a minister of God, must pursue high and holy objects (11-16); the rich must not trust in riches, but in God (17-19); solemn closing charge to Timothy to be true to the great trust committed to him, and an invocation of God's grace upon him (20,21).

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