

1 TIMOTHY

DEFEND THE FAITH

A 13-LESSON STUDY

REFORMED EXPOSITORY
BIBLE STUDY

JON NIELSON
and **PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN**


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REFORMED EXPOSITORY BIBLE STUDIES

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

Studying the Bible will change your life. This is the consistent witness of Scripture and the experience of people all over the world, in every period of church history.

King David said, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:7–8). So anyone who wants to be wiser and happier, and who wants to feel more alive, with a clearer perception of spiritual reality, should study the Scriptures.

Whether we study the Bible alone or with other Christians, it will change us from the inside out. The Reformed Expository Bible Studies provide tools for biblical transformation. Written as a companion to the Reformed Expository Commentary, this series of short books for personal or group study is designed to help people study the Bible for themselves, understand its message, and then apply its truths to daily life.

Each Bible study is introduced by a pastor-scholar who has written a full-length expository commentary on the same book of the Bible. The individual chapters start with the summary of a Bible passage, explaining **The Big Picture** of this portion of God’s Word. Then the questions in **Getting Started** introduce one or two of the passage’s main themes in ways that connect to life experience. These questions may be especially helpful for group leaders in generating lively conversation.

Understanding the Bible’s message starts with seeing what is actually there, which is where **Observing the Text** comes in. Then the Bible study provides a longer and more in-depth set of questions entitled **Understanding the Text**. These questions carefully guide students through the entire passage, verse by verse or section by section.

It is important not to read a Bible passage in isolation, but to see it in the wider context of Scripture. So each Bible study includes two **Bible Connections** questions that invite readers to investigate passages from other places in Scripture—passages that add important background, offer valuable contrasts or comparisons, and especially connect the main passage to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The next section is one of the most distinctive features of the Reformed Expository Bible Studies. The authors believe that the Bible teaches important doctrines of the Christian faith, and that reading biblical literature is enhanced when we know something about its underlying theology. The questions in **Theology Connections** identify some of these doctrines by bringing the Bible passage into conversation with creeds and confessions from the Reformed tradition, as well as with learned theologians of the church.

Our aim in all of this is to help ordinary Christians apply biblical truth to daily life. **Applying the Text** uses open-ended questions to get people thinking about sins that need to be confessed, attitudes that need to change, and areas of new obedience that need to come alive by the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Finally, each study ends with a **Prayer Prompt** that invites Bible students to respond to what they are learning with petitions for God's help and words of praise and gratitude.

You will notice boxed quotations throughout the Bible study. These quotations come from one of the volumes in the Reformed Expository Commentary. Although the Bible study can stand alone and includes everything you need for a life-changing encounter with a book of the Bible, it is also intended to serve as a companion to a full commentary on the same biblical book. Reading the full commentary is especially useful for teachers who want to help their students answer the questions in the Bible study at a deeper level, as well as for students who wish to further enrich their own biblical understanding.

The people who worked together to produce this series of Bible studies have prayed that they will engage you more intimately with Scripture, producing the kind of spiritual transformation that only the Bible can bring.

Philip Graham Ryken
Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series

INTRODUCING 1 TIMOTHY

The **main purpose** of Paul's first letter to Timothy is to provide spiritual and theological guidance to a younger minister in his first pastoral charge. The epistle's **author**, of course, is Paul—the missionary, church planter, evangelist, and incomparable apostle whom the risen Christ called to carry the gospel to the Gentiles (see, for example, Acts 9:15; Rom. 15:15–16). Paul shares his exemplary testimony of faith in Christ at the end of the book's opening chapter, which culminates with this confident declaration: “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” (1:15). The apostle begins his letter this way not primarily to introduce himself or to make a vain show of his humility but to remind Timothy of the merciful gospel that he had received and was charged to defend.

The most obvious **audience** for Paul's letter is Timothy, the apostle's “true son in the faith” (1:2 NIV). The two men had first met in Timothy's native Lystra, which Paul visited on both his first (see Acts 14:8–22) and his second (see Acts 16:1–3) missionary journeys. During the latter visit, Paul asked Timothy to accompany him on the rest of his evangelistic travels. Naturally, the apostle was present for the younger minister's ordination to gospel ministry—a pivotal experience to which Paul pointedly refers in a couple of his exhortations (see 1 Tim. 4:14; 6:12). By the time of this letter, the two missionaries had known each other for nearly twenty years and were nearing the end of their mentoring relationship. In addition to addressing Timothy directly in his opening greeting, Paul gives his pastoral protégé three specific “charges” (see 1:3–5, 18–19; 5:21).

As personal as 1 Timothy is, however, Paul's letter is not private. The apostle assumes that Timothy's church in Ephesus will hear this epistle read aloud—as was customary (see Col. 4:16)—and thus benefit from its

instruction. By including public guidance for the congregation in Ephesus in his letter, Paul strengthens Timothy's hand for ministry, helping him to address doctrinal deviations and other difficulties he is likely to face. First Timothy has enduring relevance for all churches in all places and for every church leader in advancing the Christian faith. As we read this epistle, Paul becomes our mentor too.

The **context** for 1 Timothy goes beyond Paul's personal relationship with Timothy to include Ephesus, the impressive pagan city he was called to serve through gospel ministry. Ephesus was the leading metropolis in Asia Minor in those days, with an estimated population of more than two hundred thousand. The city was especially famous for its worship of the goddess Diana, also styled as "Artemis of the Ephesians." After two years of Paul's preaching in a local synagogue and then in a public lecture hall (see Acts 19:8–10), the gospel had made such inroads that it aroused the ire of Demetrius and other local silversmiths who depended on idol worship for their livelihood. A famous riot ensued, which fortunately was dismissed peacefully (see vv. 21–41).

By the time Paul and Timothy and their companions had left Ephesus, a thriving congregation had been established. The church's deep affection for Paul is evident from the forty-five-mile overland journey its elders took in order to give him their tearful farewells at the harbor in Miletus (see Acts 20:17–38). The apostle's stern warnings about false doctrine on that poignant occasion (see vv. 28–31) anticipate one of the main concerns of 1 Timothy: theological speculations that will lead people astray. Although the events recorded in Acts took place some years before Timothy returned to the Ephesians to serve as their pastor, they provide invaluable context for understanding Paul's letter.

First Timothy's key word is *faith*, which appears nearly twenty times. Its **key verses** come in the middle of the letter: "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" (3:14–15). Paul indicates that the instructions in this epistle are intended to help Timothy, the Ephesians, and all Christians everywhere to know how to live, worship, and serve in the absence of the apostles. Up until the time Paul wrote this letter, the churches in Ephesus and in other cities had been dependent on the personal ministry

of Paul and his fellow apostles. Going forward, however, they would be led by godly pastors—qualified and ordained men who would benefit from clear instructions about what kind of spiritual leaders to appoint, how to pray and praise, how to avoid “different” and therefore spiritually dangerous doctrines (1:3; 6:3), how to relate to diverse congregants, how to apply the gospel to various life situations, and other practical matters that would affect the spiritual well-being of their churches.

As we have noted, Paul’s first letter to Timothy has a pervasive concern with contending for true faith against false doctrine—what the apostle refers to as “wag[ing] the good warfare” (1:18). Paul knows that the best way to protect people from falsehood is to teach them the simple truth. To that end, he mentions many important **theological themes**, including the immortal attributes of the invisible God (see 1:17), the proper use of God’s law (see 1:8–11), the tragedy of humanity’s fall into sin (see 2:13–14), the mystery of the incarnation (see 3:16), the saving grace of Christ’s mediatory atonement (see 2:3–6), the mercy of regeneration (see 1:13–14), and finally the hope of Christ’s coming kingdom and eternal reign (see 6:13–16). Although none of these doctrines is developed at length, the epistle teaches its readers nearly all the central dogmas of the Christian faith.

Just as importantly, 1 Timothy tells us how to protect these doctrines for the people of God. Although they speak for themselves, doctrines do not defend themselves. Thus, the church requires steadfast pastors and faithful elders to explain scriptural truth and to expose the errors of false teaching. The most prevalent theological aberrations in Ephesus (see 1:3–10; 4:1–4) included Gnosticism (the quest for secret religious knowledge), legalism (an attempt to gain God’s acceptance by keeping his laws), and asceticism (a rejection of God-given pleasures, which are regarded as unspiritual). To combat these and other misguided perspectives, Paul instructed Timothy to ordain qualified teachers and to charge them to maintain the same theological fidelity that the young pastor himself had been charged to maintain. If sound doctrine is vitally important to the life of the church, then so are the elders who safeguard it, as well as the process for selecting them.

The church’s pattern of worship also helps to promote sound theology, so 1 Timothy gives due attention to *liturgy*: the forms of public worship. What we pray and thank God for, how we read and hear holy Scripture, how we give and receive authoritative teaching—these liturgical practices

all have direct bearing on the spiritual and theological well-being of God's people. First Timothy thus lends its support to the ancient maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which means "as we worship, so we believe." The public worship of the Christian church shapes its life of faith and its saving ministry to the world. An exalted example of faith-building worship comes in the famous Christ hymn at the end of 1 Timothy 3, in which Paul celebrates "the mystery of godliness" in the incarnate, risen, and ascended Christ:

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. (v. 16)

As do all Paul's letters, 1 Timothy contains a wealth of **practical application**. Some of this pertains to the structure and organization of the church—its worship and its elders or overseers (see 3:1–7), deacons (see 3:8–13), and their wives (see v. 11). Some of Paul's practical application pertains specifically to the leadership of the pastor, who is called to set "an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (4:12). Indeed, one of 1 Timothy's unique contributions to Scripture is to provide the Bible's most complete description of a pastor's theology, ministry, and spirituality. A minister's moral character is every bit as important as his theology; it is not just what he says that matters but who he is (see 4:7–8, 16). The same is true of other church leaders: their lives and ministries must be characterized by sincere faith, pure love, faithful stewardship, and irreproachable integrity.

Much of 1 Timothy's teaching also pertains to relationships within the wider church community, which Paul sets in its proper social and spiritual context by calling it a "household" (3:15). Men are called to holy, peaceable intercession (see 2:8). Women are called to modesty, industry, and the submissive pursuit of theological understanding (see 2:9–15). The everyday relationships that a pastor has with various men and women in the church, whether they are young or old (see 5:1–2), are analogous to loving family relationships and set the tone for congregational life. These are some of God's "house rules" for the household of faith.

Work relationships matter too. Whether we are masters or servants, bosses or employees, all of us are called to honor God by treating one another with love and respect (see 6:1–2). Mindful of the temptations to pride that come with money and possessions, as well as the good that generosity accomplishes and the godliness that contentment brings, Paul has special exhortations for both the greedy (see 6:6–10) and the wealthy (see 6:17–19)—who are not necessarily the same people. Paul also shows a concern for people in especially difficult circumstances, such as solitary widows (see 5:3–16). Ultimately, the apostle wants Timothy to have the same heart for the Ephesians, and us to have the same heart for the people we too are called to serve, that God has for every single church member—regardless of his or her age, gender, work situation, social background, or financial status.

Here is one simple yet comprehensive way to **outline** Paul's first letter to Timothy:

Greetings: Grace from Paul to Timothy (1:1–2)

Theology: Defending Sound Doctrine (1:3–20)

Warning against False Teachers (1:3–7)

The Good Use of God's Law (1:8–11)

Paul's Calling, Testimony, and Charge to Timothy (1:12–20)

Liturgy: Praying and Listening to God (2:1–15)

Interceding for the Salvation of the World (2:1–7)

Instructions for Men and Women (2:8–15)

Polity: Appointing Godly Elders and Deacons (3:1–16)

Qualifications for Elders (3:1–7)

Qualifications for Deacons and Their Wives (3:8–13)

The Mystery of Godliness (3:14–16)

Ministry: The Pastor's Character and Calling (4:1–16)

Departures from the Faith (4:1–5)

A Good and Godly Servant (4:6–10)

Practice Makes Progress (4:11–16)

Community: Good Relationships in God's Household (5:1–6:2)

Men and Women, Young and Old (5:1–2)

The Care and Conduct of Widows (5:3–16)

Respect for Elders and Their Office (5:17–25)

Masters and Servants (6:1–2)

Final Instructions: Until Jesus Comes Again (6:3–21)

False Doctrine Divides (6:3–5)

Don't Be Greedy (6:6–10)

Fight the Good Fight (6:11–16)

Be Rich in Good Deeds (6:17–19)

Guard the Faith (6:20–21)

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LESSON 1

A TRUE SON IN THE FAITH

1 Timothy 1:1–11

THE BIG PICTURE

The opening verses of 1 Timothy make it clear that this letter is rightly known as a “pastoral epistle”—it has been written by Paul to a young pastor named Timothy in order to encourage and instruct him in his work of gospel ministry for the years to come. Paul, who was called to be an “apostle” by God himself, writes to a man whom he considers his “true child in the faith” (1:1–2). Paul loves this young man and earnestly desires that he will be faithful in his ministry to proclaim the life-giving hope of Jesus Christ.

From the outset of his letter, Paul clearly establishes the concerns that will become its themes. False teaching is already present in the church at Ephesus, and so Paul exhorts Timothy to confront and engage false teachers and to call them back to faith in the true doctrine of the gospel (1:3–4). He urges young Timothy to minister with a love that comes only from “sincere faith” in the gospel of Jesus Christ (1:5).

It seems that some of the false teaching that Timothy will combat concerns the Old Testament law, which some teachers in and around Ephesus are twisting, abusing, and using for selfish and harmful purposes (1:6–7). Paul reminds Timothy that the law of God is good and that its proper application is to reveal sin and convict the hearts of the “lawless and disobedient” (1:8–10). He charges him to apply the law of God properly—in a way that is always “in accordance with the gospel” that he must faithfully proclaim (1:11).

Read 1 Timothy 1:1–11.

GETTING STARTED

1. Think about someone you know whose words carry weight in your life and heart. What is your relationship with that person? What about that person—or your relationship with them—leads you to prize their words?

2. First Timothy is one of the last letters Paul wrote. What might you expect him to emphasize now that he is coming to the end of his life and ministry?

OBSERVING THE TEXT

3. What phrases in this lesson's passage make it clear that Paul has a close and loving relationship with Timothy?

Paul's Purpose, pg. 5

Paul's purpose in 1 Timothy is to help his spiritual son remain true. In the opening verses of the letter he exhorts him to hold on to the true faith (1 Tim. 1:2), to defend the true doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3–4), to uphold the true use of the law (1 Tim. 1:6–11), and to cherish a true love (1 Tim. 1:5).

4. What dangers do Paul's opening exhortations indicate that Timothy is facing in the context of his ministry? Based on this opening passage, what can you surmise about the challenges that the gospel has encountered in Ephesus?

5. Why might Paul have stressed the proper use of the law as he writes to Timothy? What are some ways that the law could be abused—or misapplied—by some Christians?

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

6. What does Paul say in verse 1 about his call to apostleship? Why is this important for him to affirm at the outset of this letter?

7. How does Paul frame his relationship with Timothy (1:2)? How might this greeting help us to appreciate the overall tone and approach of Paul's letter?

BIBLE CONNECTIONS

12. Read Philippians 2:19–24 for additional context on Paul’s relationship with Timothy. What do these verses tell you about the two men?
13. Colossians 2:16–19 refers to a false teaching that gripped the church at Colossae. What can you glean about this false teaching from Paul’s words in these verses? What has this teaching, and the false teaching in Ephesus, misunderstood about God’s law?

THEOLOGY CONNECTIONS

14. What do Paul’s instructions and exhortations in 1 Timothy 1:3–4 tell us about the importance of correct theology? Why is it important for all believers to study Christian doctrine?

True Love, True Faith, True Doctrine, pg. 17

[First Timothy 1:5] is a reminder that the true children of God must have true love as well as true faith and true doctrine. Who is sufficient for these things? Who is able to defend the truth of God’s Word while at the same time living out the love of the gospel? We can only do this through the saving work of Jesus Christ and the transforming work of his Spirit.

15. The Westminster Confession of Faith explains that, “although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly” (19.6). In what way do we see this right use of the law of God as being “in accordance with the gospel” (1 Tim. 1:11)?

APPLYING THE TEXT

16. In what ways might we shape mentorship and training within the church in light of Paul and Timothy’s relationship? What should our priorities be as we train the next generation of Christian leaders?
17. What do Paul’s exhortations to Timothy tell us about our own need to be on our guard against false teaching—even when we are in “Christian” circles and communities? Why do we need to be vigilant and careful to guard biblical doctrine?

18. How do we ensure that *love*, for God and for others, is what motivates us to defend the faith and to remain true to the gospel of Jesus Christ?

PRAYER PROMPT

As you close your study of this passage, thank God that you, like Timothy, have received the gospel of Jesus Christ and have heard it clearly and truly proclaimed. Pray that you would hold to the true doctrine of the faith and resist false teaching and influences that could lead you astray. Ask God to give you wholehearted love for him and his people as you faithfully cling to the true doctrine of the gospel. Pray for mentors in the church to lead others well.