

## Week 14

# 1 Timothy – Pros Timotheon A

I am going to say more here because it is a good opportunity to consider how we might go about faithfully interpreting disagreeable texts. 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy is certainly a NT book that pushes people's buttons. You may wonder why I even included it, the answer is: because it's there.

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are called *pastoral epistles*. These letters are not written to a church or to group of churches - as Colossians was (Week 12) or Galatians (Week 5/6) - but to individuals/ pastors/friends. Timothy is young (4:12), but while young, Timothy still finds himself the pastor of a critical and influential 1<sup>st</sup> century church that was facing difficult issues.

Because these books are written to individuals, we should expect to find, and do find, in the Pastorals context specific advice/teachings mixed in with more general teachings that aren't as limited in their application. More so than any other books in the Bible<sup>1</sup> the pastoral epistles are written with very specific situations in mind. The key to interpreting and applying 1st Timothy to our lives is having a strong basis upon which to decide which teachings are context specific and which are general.

So how do you avoid interpreting any text in a manner that conveniently supports your current beliefs or biases? My #1 interpretive rule with the pastorals is simple: if a teaching is supported by other scriptures in the OT and NT then it is far more likely to be considered generally applicable.

It's no secret that Paul's teaching in this letter regarding women or slaves found is painful to the vast majority today. When you read chapter 2 or 6 you will probably wince. So, what are we to do with this letter, or any passage with which we don't agree? Are we to pick and choose which scriptures are inspired and which aren't. This method makes it almost impossible to preach or teach from the Bible with any kind of authority. A preacher would just be preaching the parts of the Bible that she or he feels are Biblical? Feels like opinion to me.

With regard to what I mentioned earlier - interpreting scripture with scripture - Paul himself in Gal 2:28 says something almost completely contrary in a letter to a group of Churches in Asia Minor. I often see passions run high about Paul, it may prove helpful to remember that Paul was brutally attacked for being *too liberal*, not for being too conservative. He made the church inclusive more than any individual other than Christ. Gentiles, women, slaves all were part of the church. Luke and Timothy who were Gentiles had incredible impacts on the church. Onesimus a runaway slave and Gentile became the pastor of the church of Ephesus. Junias, Lydia, Prisca, Phoebe (named 6 times in the NT, 4 of the 6 her name comes before her husbands -Aquila) all female leaders in the NT church. The Galatians passage (cited above)

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<sup>1</sup> Philemon is the only other book of the Bible, besides the pastoral Epistles, that shares this level of personal and specific teaching.

was radical stuff until a century and a half ago in America. That one verse in large part, informs our social ethic today.

Regardless of whether a particular text is context/time bound teaching or universal we can learn from it all. For instance, in chapter 1, Paul is concerned about a particular false teaching and another one in chapter 4 which we may or may not deal with today, but we still encounter teachings that appear contrary to the plain meaning of scripture, or at a minimum not to be informed by the Bible. Or in chapter 3, our list of expectations of leaders may be different, but we still believe leaders should be held to a higher standard. Get your seat belts on and let's go get uncomfortable. Yaa Hoo!

**Sunday, Jan 23**

1 Timothy 1 – on truth

**For Reflection:** There was a time when doctrinal orthodoxy was very important for a pastor, generally speaking it is not now. Paul is concerned about sound doctrine being maintained in the Church Timothy pastors. *What beliefs do you care most deeply about? Which beliefs do you hold more loosely?* In verse 18, Paul encourages Timothy to fight the good fight. *In as much as the life of faith is like a boxing match, how is your good fight going?*

**Lagniappe:** 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

**Monday, Jan 24**

1 Timothy 2 - on church behavior (warning this chapter may raise your blood pressure)

**For Reflection:** There are long and lengthy arguments, enumerating reasons for Paul's teaching on women in the church. I try not get involved in that practice, and am content to remember Paul simply lived in a different time.<sup>2</sup> When you have very specific teaching in very particular circumstance shared with very particular individuals it is helpful to ask what can be taken from the passage in question into our times and circumstances. *What attitudes and behaviors would you want to see cultivated (especially in regard to worship) in the church you attend?* It seems Paul wants worship to be prayerful, peaceful, and culturally/morally appropriate.

**Lagniappe:** Colossian 3:17

**Tuesday, Jan 25**

1 Timothy 3 – on expectations of leaders

**For Reflection:** *If you were creating a list of expectations of a leader in the church what would be your top 3 spiritual/moral expectations?*

**Lagniappe:** James 3:1

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<sup>2</sup> Ironically, in his day, Paul was attacked as a liberal threat to tradition, not as one who was overly conservative. Teachings like Gal 3:28 were radical in his day, radical here in the US 100 years ago.

- Wednesday, Jan 26** 1 Timothy 4 – on truth and good uses of times  
**For Reflection:** *What useless conversations about matters of faith do you get sucked into?* Most Christians don't think of this life as training (vs 7/8). When I wrestled we had two-a-days most of the year. It was hard. In verse 14 Paul writes to Timothy, "Don't ignore your gift!" *What is your gift and how can you use it this week?*  
**Lagniappe:** 1 Corinthians 12:4-7
- Thursday, Jan 27** 1 Timothy 5 – on behavior again  
**For Reflection:** I have often thought that how a culture treats the elderly tells you a lot about that culture. *How do we treat the elderly?*  
**Lagniappe:** Isaiah 46:3-4; Psalm 92:12-14
- Friday, Jan 28** 1 Timothy 6 – on behavior again  
**For Reflection:** *What is your relationship like with money? Do you love it? Has loving money ever backfired in your experience? How is the life of faith a fight?*  
**Lagniappe:** Luke 16:13
- Saturday, Jan 29** Philemon<sup>3</sup> –  
**For Reflection:** *How has your relationship with God made you more useful?<sup>4</sup> In the Kingdom, at your work, with friends, at home?*  
**Lagniappe:** 1 Peter 3:13-15

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<sup>3</sup> Who knew a reference letter would become a Biblical genre? This is a completely unique genre in the Bible. I wonder what was the story of its being included in the canon. / Onesimus is a quiet hero in the Bible. This is someone who had courage and was imprisoned for his faith. This is someone who is willing to go back to his master, even though he can never be a slave again – in his soul. nFor he has been set free by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Obviously, we must take into consideration historical contexts, before canceling Paul. / Isn't it cool that you finished two books in one week?

<sup>4</sup> Onesimus' name means *useful* – this may help you understand verse 11 in all its color.