**Lesson 1 - Timothy 1-2**

**1:1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our savior.** Paul begins most of his letters by underlining his title as **apostle**. It was a title dear to him because, although he had not known Jesus during the Master’s earthly life, his vision of the glorified **Christ Jesus** accredited him with authority equal to that of the Twelve (1 Cor 9:1)[[1]](#footnote-1)

**1:3. That you stay in Ephesus to instruct certain people not to teach false doctrines.**  From the warm greeting, Paul now turns to a primary concern of his: the false teachings that have been circulating in Ephesus even prior to his departure.

Usually Paul adheres to the letter-writing practice of his day by following the greeting with a thanksgiving. But instead, he plunges into his directives to Timothy, signals the seriousness of this commission. Why was it necessary for Paul to repeat his **request** that Timothy remain in Ephesus? From the description of what follows we may assume that his work was difficult, that some of the faithful were stubbornly resistant, and that Timothy may have been tempted to abandon the work in search of more fertile fields. (**Ibid**. p. 34)

**Going Deeper – Endless Genealogies**

The addition of **endless genealogies** points to Jewish speculations, of which there are many examples from this period, allegorizing the lives of the patriarchs and even the events of creation, for example, in the writings of Philo, the Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, in the book of *Jubilees*, and in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Philo wrote a whole book on Abraham, using the events of his life as allegories for the values of Stoic philosophy. It would have been tempting in Greek cultural centers like Ephesus to embellish the gospel message with Greek myths and Jewish allegories, with the hope of converting more of the Gentiles. Second-century gnostics carried on speculations about genealogies, as we know from Irenaeus quoting our passage. So what we have here may refer to an early form of Jewish gnosticism. (**Ibid**. pp. 35-36)

1**:5. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith.** The aim of Paul’s charge (instruction or command) is **love**, which builds up (Remember in 1 Cor. 8:1 he says “knowledge inflates with pride, but love builds up”). Heresy from bad teaching can only weaken and divide; God’s truth, his light, engenders love (13:6; Eph 4:15). Here, Paul’s emphasis is on what charity can achieve over against the banal discussions that lead to dissensions rather than unity. This text influenced Augustine, who hailed love as the ultimate principle for biblical interpretation. (**Ibid.**)

**Going Deeper - Divine Love**

Agapē (“love, charity”) appears ten times in the Pastorals, an indication of how central it is in the administration of the Church. When there is a crisis in the Christian community, the intervention of proper authority is not—or should not be—tyranny but the preservation and promotion of love, which “rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor 13:6) and is indeed its embodiment (Eph 4:15). The community of Ephesus later in Rev 2:4 was in danger of losing its lampstand (i.e., ceasing to be a church) because of the withering of its charity.

The word agape, very rare in secular Greek, came into the New Testament via the Septuagint. There it translates Hebrew *’ahabah*, which covers various kinds of love—for spouse, for kin, for friends. But in the New Testament agapē is reserved for the highest form of love—divine love—in which by grace human beings can participate.

How is love related to authority in the Church? The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (299) notes that at the Eucharist the priest should wear his stole, the symbol of authority, beneath the chasuble, the symbol of charity, which covers all (Col 3:14), including office and authority. (**Ibid.** Montague p. 37)

**1:9-10. The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient.**  Paul then elaborates what kind of sins the law is meant to expose or, more exactly, what kind of sinners it is meant to identify. The list resembles others by Paul (1 Cor 5:11; 6:9–10; Gal 5:19–21). It is not exhaustive (**and whatever else is opposed to sound teaching**) and roughly follows the order of the Ten Commandments. (**Ibid**. p. 39)

**Going Deeper – *arsenokoitai* is Greek to Me**

The second behavior type in verse 10 is a translation of the Greek word *arsenokoitai*. The English renditions are varied enough to confuse the modern reader. For example: “males who engage in sexual activity w[ith] a pers[on] of his own sex,” “sodomites” (NAB, RSV, NRSV), “them that defile themselves with mankind” (KJV), “perverts” (NEB), “those who are immoral … with boys or with men” (JB), “men who practice homosexuality” (ESV). The term “Practicing homosexuals” is probably a better translation, given the understanding today of the difference between attraction and behavior. Even more exact would be “those who practice homosexuality,” since anyone who engages in homosexual activity would be included, whatever their predominant inclinations may be. There is no reason to limit the meaning here to pederasty. Homosexual behavior is condemned in the Old Testament (Gen 19:5; Lev 18:24–30; 20:23) and in the New (Rom 1:26–27; 1 Cor 6:9). (**Ibid**. p. 40)

**1:15a. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. This saying is sure / trustworthy** appears five times in the Pastorals, twice with the complement and deserves full acceptance. Like Jesus’ frequent “amen, amen, I say to you,” Paul uses the formula to introduce an article of faith or a liturgical statement or in any case a truth universally accepted by all Christians. Similar phrases occur twice in the book of Revelation: “These words … are trustworthy and true” (Rev 21:5; 22:6). They have roughly the same meaning as the English idiom “you can count on this” or “this word shall surely come to pass” or “this prophecy is true.” The object of the saying here is an article of faith, equivalent to Matt 9:13 (Jesus came to call not the righteous but sinners) and John 3:16 (God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to save it). That Christ Jesus “came into the world” (a favorite Johannine expression) suggests that his entire life, ministry, and death was not merely for the Jews, but for all humankind.

**1.15b.** **I am the foremost of sinners.** Paul calls himself the foremost among all sinners. Not the first of the worst for all time, surely, but the first as type. He is not really comparing himself to anyone (Judas, for example), but simply expressing his overwhelming sense of being the prototypical sinner, much like the publican who said, “O God, be merciful to me a [literally *the*] sinner” (Luke 18:13). But the other side of the coin is that Paul’s sin reveals God’s patience, the Lord’s longsuffering mercy for those who would follow Paul in receiving it. If God could show his mercy to a sinner like Paul, how could he refuse it to anyone else who would believe in Christ? Such faith not only brings forgiveness of sins but everlasting life. (**Ibid**. p. 44)

**1:20. Whom I have delivered/handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme**. Giving over to Satan is a technical term for excommunication.

**Going Deeper – Tough Love**

In 1 Cor 5:5 Paul had prescribed excommunication for the incestuous man who refused to repent. There it was a moral issue, and the discipline was aimed at his reform (“that his spirit may be saved”). Here the issue appears to be a matter of doctrine and of direct opposition to the authority of the apostle. When all attempts to correct an erring member of the Church fail and there is danger that others will be led into sin, heresy, or disbelief, then the apostolic authority, with the power to bind and loose (Matt 16:16–19; 18:18), merely confirms what the individual has in reality chosen: withdrawal from the community. Within the Christian community, the individual enjoys multiple protections against Satan, but outside it he or she is vulnerable to the devil’s attacks or the chastisements of “the angel of the abyss” (Rev 9:11).

This therapy of privation, like the prodigal son’s hitting bottom, should be a wake-up call to return to the Father’s house. Here in 1 Timothy, this medicinal purpose is less evident but is implied in the verb **to be disciplined**, that is, “that they may learn or be taught,” as a disobedient child might learn from correction by his or her parent. “Blasphemy” means desecration of something sacred, even a direct insult to God. Such, in Paul’s view, is the sin of those who obstinately reject the faith and the discipline handed on to them by the apostles. (**Ibid**. p. 47)

**2:1. I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men/everyone**. This prayer is not just for one’s family or the local congregation or even for the Church. It is for everyone. Christians considered prayer for one another and for the Church a sacred duty (Acts 12:5; James 5:14–15). This was not difficult and sprang spontaneously from the Jewish soul schooled in the value of intercessory prayer. But Jesus had also told his disciples to pray for their *enemies* (Matt 5:44), and the Church could never forget that he himself p 52 had done so as he was dying on the cross (Luke 23:34), thus fulfilling the prophecy of the suffering Servant (Isa 53:12)[[2]](#footnote-2)

St Paul’s instruction to pray for kings and others is particularly interesting if one bears in mind that when he was writing this letter, Nero was on the throne—the emperor who instigated a bloody persecution of Christians. St Clement of Rome, one of the first successors of St Peter at the see of Rome, has left us touching evidence of intercession for civil authority: “Make us to be obedient to your own almighty and glorious name and to all who have rule and governance over us on earth […]. Grant unto them, O Lord, health and peace, harmony and security, that they may exercise without offence the dominion you have accorded them […]. Vouchsafe so to direct their counsels as may be good and pleasing in your sight, that in peace and mildness they might put to godly use the authority you have given them, and so find mercy with you” (*Letter to the Corinthians*, 1, 60–61).

If one bears in mind the injustices and brutality of the world in which Christians lived when St Paul wrote this letter, the tone of his teaching shows that Christianity has nothing to do with fermenting political or social unrest. The message of Jesus seeks, rather, to change men’s consciences so that they for their part can change society from within by working in an upright and noble way. [[3]](#footnote-3)

**2:8. It is my wish**. Everyone should pray regularly (vv. 1–2) and be sure to have the right dispositions; men need to make sure that they do not approach prayer with their thoughts full of earthly ambition; and women need to be sure vanity does not creep in. “Holy hands” refers to the need to pray with a calm conscience, free from anger and spite. We already have our Lord’s teaching that “if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:23–24).[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Going Deeper – The Context for Women’s Dress Code**

Paul’s counsel to women about their manner of dress must be understood in the context of the Roman culture of the day, which had penetrated widely into Asia Minor. “You are as you dress” was a principle taken for granted. Women who appeared in public unveiled or immodestly dressed were seen as offering the same availability as prostitutes, who also used lavish dress and jewelry to add to their attraction. But in the first century there was in the Roman world a movement of “new women” who were beginning to flaunt this type of dress. In the first century, modest dress of a married woman would be a full-length garment with a discreet neckline. “The way that wives dressed in public sent clear signals to men, thereby presenting themselves as either modest or promiscuous women.”

The Pythagorean and Neo-Pythagorean philosophers counseled: A wife’s adornment [is] … with quietness, white and clean in her dress, plain but not costly, simple but not elaborate or excessive. For she must reject garments shot with purple or gold. For these are used by *hetairai* [courtesans, prostitutes] in soliciting men generally.… The ornament of a wife is her manner and not her dress. And a free and modest wife must appear attractive to her own husband, but not to the man next door, having on her cheeks the blush of modesty rather than of rouge and powder, and a good and noble bearing and decency and modesty rather than gold and emerald. (**Ibid**. Montague p. 61)

Paul first addresses the men. They are to lift up **holy hands**. Jews would regularly lift up their hands in prayer, and this practice continued in the early Church, as we see in our text and in the *Orantes* in the catacombs.

There are no grounds for accusing St Paul of being anti-woman; no one of his time spoke as vigorously as he did about the basic equality of man and woman (cf. Gal 3:28), and certain women (Priscilla and Lydia, for example) played an important part in helping him to spread the Gospel. What he is saying is simply this: the essential equality of man and woman does not mean that they have identical roles in the Church (see the note on 1 Cor 14:33–35). Also, although women are forbidden to teach in a public, official setting (that is the role of the hierarchy) they can and should teach religion in the context of catechesis and family life. (**Ibid**. Navarre pp. 81-82)

The women were also to pray. The note in the NAB is quite misleading here: “Women are not to take part in the charismatic activity of the assembly.” This certainly does not square with what Paul says in 1 Cor 11:5, 13, where he takes for granted that women pray and prophesy during the community’s worship. (**Ibid.** Montague p. 61)

**2:11–14.** **I permit no woman to teach**. In this chapter St Paul is giving general regulations for liturgical assemblies; therefore, this prohibition is not an absolute one: it refers only to public acts of worship. In order to make it clear that he is not just giving a personal opinion, he sets the prohibition into the context of the divine plan of Creation and the biblical account of the Fall; his arguments are not sociological ones, not confined to a particular culture; they are theological arguments.

**Going Deeper – Was Paul A ‘He Man, Woman Hater’?**

Many consider 1 Tim 11-15 some of the most offensive text of the New Testament. In recent times this text has occasioned more literature than any other passage in the Pastorals. The difficulties involved in interpreting this passage are one reason that it is omitted in the Lectionary of the Roman Rite and therefore is never proclaimed publicly at the Eucharist. Anyone aware of the advancement of women in modern times can easily see why. Yet the text does belong to the canon that the Church accepts as inspired Scripture, so in justice we need to look at the text in light of the historical circumstances in which it was written and only then raise the question of what principles underlie it and what implications they might have for the contemporary Church. Many interpreters today regard Paul’s instructions here as a matter of Church discipline that applied to a particular moment in the Church’s life but no longer apply as stated, due to a different cultural situation, like the kosher rule in Acts 15:29. However, we need first to try to understand Paul on his own terms.

Switching from the plural to the singular **woman**, Paul says that she must first of all **receive instruction**. In the Mediterranean culture of the day, although there were notable exceptions, women were generally not as well educated as men. This was probably true in the Judeo-Christian communities as well. Some rabbinic doctrine held that women should not be instructed in the Torah. In this atmosphere, it was likely that men would be more knowledgeable about the Scriptures than were women. If that was so, it goes a long way toward explaining why Paul would want women to “receive” teaching. Quite the opposite of some rabbinic doctrine that women should not be instructed in the Torah, Paul insists that women should learn and come to understand the gospel more fully. **Silently and under complete control**, then, does not mean that the woman is never to speak. The NJB captures the sense well and less provocatively: “During instruction, a woman should be quiet and respectful.”10 Even less does it mean that women are to be submissive to all men. It simply means that a woman is to be submissive with a quiet demeanor to the one who is teaching with authority in the Church. (**Ibid.** pp. 64-65)

It is helpful to remember that the text is concerned not with every teaching role in the Church but only those who teach with apostolic authority, what today we would call the hierarchy. But this does not let those with pastoral authority off the hook either. Their model for the care of the Church is not even Adam’s original grace. It is Christ’s loving care for his bride, for whom he laid down his life (1 Pet 5:3).

If this is the correct way to understand this difficult passage, it means that leadership and teaching authority in the Church is not modeled after secular society but on Christian marriage—and this within the context of the broader sacramental symbolism of the Church as the bride of Christ.

**2:15. Woman will be saved through bearing children.** It is possible that St Paul wants to stress that marriage is a holy calling (some heretics were arguing the contrary: cf. 1 Tim 4:3); but that does not mean that motherhood is the only way to salvation for women; elsewhere he speaks of the excellence of virginity (cf. 1 Cor 7:25–38).

What the Apostle says here should be interpreted in the light of conditions at the time. However, some present-day documents of the Magisterium point to aspects of it which have perennial value. Nowadays there is a tendency to undervalue motherhood, so we find Pope John Paul II teaching that “the true advancement of women requires that clear recognition be given to the value of their maternal and family role, by comparison with all other public roles and all other professions […]. While it must be recognized that women have the same right as men to perform various public functions, society must be structured in such a way that wives and mothers are *not in practice compelled* to work outside the home, and that their families can live and prosper in a dignified way even when they themselves devote their full time to their own family” (*Familiaris consortio*, 23) (I**bid**. Navarre p. 82)

1. Montague, G. T. (2008). [*First and Second Timothy, Titus*](https://ref.ly/logosres/cathcomm75ti?ref=BibleNAB.1Ti1.1&off=4&ctx=avior+God+(594)%0a1%3a1+~Paul+begins+most+of+) (P. S. Williamson & M. Healy, Eds.; p. 30). Baker Academic. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Montague, G. T. (2008). [*First and Second Timothy, Titus*](https://ref.ly/logosres/cathcomm75ti?ref=Page.p+51&off=838&ctx=+to+God+for+them.a%0a%0a~This+prayer+is+not+j) (P. S. Williamson & M. Healy, Eds.; pp. 51–52). Baker Academic. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [*Saint Paul’s Letters to the Thessalonians, and Pastoral Letters*](https://ref.ly/logosres/navarrentstandard73th?ref=Bible.1Ti2.2&off=515&ctx=ayed+for+regularly.%0a~St+Paul%E2%80%99s+instructio) (p. 78). (2005). Navarre, Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [*Saint Paul’s Letters to the Thessalonians, and Pastoral Letters*](https://ref.ly/logosres/navarrentstandard73th?ref=Bible.1Ti2.8&off=827&ctx=on+1+Tim%2c+ad+loc.).%0a~Everyone+should+pray) (p. 81). (2005). Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)