

# Table of Contents

Introduction and Methodology .....	2
Timothy's Biographical Information .....	3
The Historical Situation of Paul .....	5
Occasion and Purpose of the Letter .....	6
Structural Analysis of 1 Timothy 1:18 .....	9
Translation, Exposition, and Interpretation .....	10
Apostolic charge .....	10
Entrusted to Timothy .....	10
In accordance with prophecy .....	10
Prophetic instrumentality .....	12
Fight the good fight .....	13
Summary .....	13
Application .....	14
Endnotes .....	17
Bibliography .....	19

## Introduction and Methodology

In 1 Timothy 1:18, Paul writes the following statement to Timothy, his son in the faith:

This charge I entrust to you, my son Timothy, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, in order that by them you may fight the good fight.

A number of questions immediately arise: What is this "charge" that Paul refers to? Why was it necessary to give Timothy a charge "in accordance with" prophecies? What does it mean to "fight the good fight?"

This exegetical study will endeavor to find answers to these questions by examining several factors. First, Timothy's biographical background will be considered in order to gain a better knowledge of his person and character. Then, the historical events which inspired Paul to write his first letter to Timothy will also be examined. There is an ongoing debate regarding the historical data of Paul's life and other elements (linguistic and theological) which bring the authorship of 1 Timothy into question -- while this debate is manifestly germane to the topic, it is also beyond the scope of this study to examine it in minute detail. However, in the course of surveying Paul's life, the historical aspects of the debate will receive brief treatment. This historical and biographical information will be augmented with the literary context of 1 Timothy 1:18 by investigating the overall occasion and purpose of the letter. An exposition, translation,

and interpretation of the Greek text will be undertaken by exploring key words and the literary relationships between certain phrases. Finally, the above findings will be applied to practical Christian concerns.

Ultimately it will be shown that prophecy is a means to an end. Specifically, via its positive, charismatic effect, it is a means of supernatural strength by which one stands for Christ and His truth by opposing proponents of false doctrine.

#### Timothy's Biographical Information

Timothy was Paul's youthful colleague, friend, and traveling companion.<sup>1</sup> According to Acts 16:1-3, Timothy was from Lystra, which was a Lycaonian town within Galatia (a Roman province in the south-central region of Asia Minor).<sup>2</sup> He is described as "the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:1). Timothy was also "well spoken of by the brothers in Lystra and Iconium."<sup>3</sup> Paul and Timothy probably first met during Paul's initial missionary effort in the area (ca. A.D. 46-48, see Acts 13:49-14:25).<sup>4</sup> In all likelihood, Timothy's mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois became converts under Paul's ministry at this time.<sup>5</sup> Upon the recommendation of local believers, Paul decided to take Timothy on his travels when he visited the region for the second time (ca. A.D. 49-50).<sup>6</sup>

In his service to Paul and to the gospel, Timothy was regarded as a faithful and consistent co-worker/assistant. It is obvious from his letter to the Philippian church that Paul held Timothy in

high esteem, counting him among his most trusted and dedicated associates:

I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare . . . . But you know of [Timothy's] proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father (Phil. 2:20,22).

Paul apparently had no reservations about assigning difficult ministry tasks to Timothy (e.g., at Thessalonica, Ephesus, and especially at Corinth).<sup>7</sup> The Pauline corpus also provides a glimpse of some of Timothy's recurring personal struggles, such as timidity and a resultant need for encouragement:

Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid (1 Cor. 16:10).

For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you . . . . And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord (2 Tim. 1:6-8).

In addition, he apparently suffered from chronic stomach trouble (1 Tim. 5:23). For these very reasons Timothy is frequently characterized as a sickly young man "who is lacking personal forcefulness" when faced with challenging conditions.<sup>8</sup> There is probably some truth to this portrait of Timothy, but as Gordon Fee states, "it is also probably a bit overdrawn."<sup>9</sup> It seems doubtful that someone as young (by ancient standards) as Timothy who carried out missions to Thessalonica and Corinth (apparently alone) could be

altogether void of courage or physical stamina.<sup>10</sup>

### The Historical Situation of Paul

As for Paul, there is some difficulty in reconstructing the historical events which inspired his first letter to Timothy. The details of Paul's whereabouts and activities which are provided in 1 Timothy and the other Pastoral Epistles do not easily fit into the timeline of events described in Acts and Paul's earlier letters. As a result, some scholars have labeled this as a discrepancy in the biblical record, suggesting that all three of the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) are therefore the work of a pseudepigrapher and not Paul. One answer to this problem is a hypothesis that Paul endured two Roman imprisonments. According to this theory, he was acquitted and released from the first, which afforded him a period of freedom; the historical data recorded in the Pastoral Epistles occurred during this time.<sup>11</sup> Later, he was imprisoned again and condemned to death. Historical and geographical data contained in the Pastoral Epistles therefore encompass a series of events which transpired after the close of Acts.<sup>12</sup> Biblical support for this theory does exist -- in Philip-  
pians 1:19,25 and 2:24, Paul appears to expect freedom from his first imprisonment to be imminent:

For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ . . . . And convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith . . . . and I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall be coming shortly.

Contrariwise, when Paul mentions his incarceration in 2 Timothy, he entertains no such notion:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:6-7).

A sizable contingent of Bible scholars take issue with this "two-imprisonment" theory by pointing to Paul's farewell to the elders of the Ephesian church in Acts 20:24-38, which "broadly hints that [his impending] imprisonment culminated in Paul's death."<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, there is a high degree of finality to Paul's words, but it should be noted that the Ephesian address alone can neither confirm nor deny the possibility that Paul was initially imprisoned and then released. Moreover, Acts is "absolutely silent about Paul's possible release from the Roman prison."<sup>14</sup> In any case, these issues concerning the historical data of Paul's life and questions of authorship with regard to 1 Timothy and the other Pastoral Epistles cannot be explored in more detail here. It is sufficient to recognize that the details surrounding the composition of Paul's first letter to Timothy are in dispute. For the purposes of this study, it will be assumed that Paul composed 1 Timothy between Roman imprisonments.

#### Occasion and Purpose of the Letter

Given this two-imprisonment framework, Gordon Fee suggests the following sequence of events leading up to the writing of 1 Ti-

mothy:

Paul went to Crete with Titus and (probably) Timothy soon after his release from Roman custody. There they evangelized most of the towns, but they also encountered some opposition from Hellenistic Jews . . . . Paul . . . left Titus on the island to regulate things by putting the churches in order. Meanwhile, Paul and Timothy were on their way to Macedonia by way of Ephesus when the stopover at Ephesus turned out to be a small disaster. Some false teachings . . . were in the process of totally undermining the church in Ephesus . . . . Because [Paul] had to press on to Macedonia, he left Timothy in charge of things in Ephesus to stem the tide (1 Tim. 1:3). On his arrival in Macedonia, he wrote letters to both Timothy and Titus.<sup>15</sup>

As Fee indicates, 1 Timothy was written because Timothy was acting as Paul's "personal representative" in order to put an end to the "influence of some false teachers."<sup>16</sup> The promulgation of doctrines which twisted or contradicted the message of the gospel was a fairly common problem in the early church -- certainly, the Apostle Paul had more than his share of "run-ins" with false teachers and their ilk. What distinguishes the situation in Ephesus from that of other churches (e.g., the Galatian church's problems were caused by "false brothers" who had "infiltrated" the ranks of the community of faith -- see Gal. 2:4) is that the false teachers appear to have come from *within* the Ephesian church. This fulfilled a prophecy given to the eldership of the Ephesian church by Paul which is recorded in Acts:

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse

things, to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).

When this prophetic warning is considered along with the internal data of 1 Timothy, it appears that the false teachers who were undermining the community of faith at Ephesus actually came from among the elders of the church. 1 Timothy 1:3,7 and 6:3 suggest that the proponents of false doctrine in the Ephesian church were teachers, and according to 3:2 and 5:17, teaching was the task of the elders:

An overseer, then, must be . . . able to teach.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, Paul found it necessary to address in detail the characteristics and qualities which must be exhibited by those who wish to be considered for church leadership as deacons or elders (3:1-13, 5:17-25). Among these important characteristics are "gentle," "not pugnacious," and "uncontentious." In direct contrast, Paul accuses those who advocate a "different doctrine" of having "a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words," thereby causing "envy, strife, abusive language, [and] evil suspicions" (6:3-4). Whereas overseers must be "free from the love of money" (3:3), Paul states that proponents of false doctrine are guilty of supposing that "godliness is a means of gain" (6:5). He has drawn a direct, pointed contrast between the ideals of church oversight in the Ephesian community of faith and

the practice of false teachers within the same community; the positive traits which Paul attributes to valid church leadership repeatedly find their antithesis in the characteristics of those in the Ephesian church who are actively promulgating false doctrines. By way of contrast, Paul is exposing the inappropriate behavior of some overseers in the Ephesian church who had become proponents of error.

This brings the situation in Ephesus into clearer focus -- "the problem is that *the church is being led astray by some of its own elders.*"<sup>18</sup> Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that Paul's overarching purpose in 1 Timothy is concerned with orthodoxy or the proper stewardship of faith per the instructions contained in chapter 1, verses 3 and 4:

As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.

Given the central importance of these instructions, it is not surprising that Paul reaffirms and revisits them in 1:18.

#### Structural Analysis of 1 Tim. 1:18

##### Apostolic charge

- Entrusted to Timothy
- In accordance with prophecy

##### Prophetic instrumentality

- Fight the good fight

Translation, Exposition, and Interpretation

**Apostolic charge (v. 18).** Tau'thn th`n paraggeli'an parati'qemai' soi, te'knon Timo'qee. *This charge I entrust to you, my son Timothy.* It has already been established that tau'thn th`n paraggeli'an refers to the instructions given to Timothy in 1:3-4.

**Entrusted to Timothy.** Paul states that he is *entrusting* or *committing* (from the Greek verb parati'qhmi) these instructions to Timothy. By implication, the verb parati'qhmi also carries the sense of entrusting or committing something to someone for safekeeping or transmission to others.<sup>19</sup> Since the instructions Paul is referring to enjoin the active opposition of proponents of false doctrine in the Ephesian church, the verb parati'qhmi here probably retains both the nuances of safekeeping and transmission. In terms of safekeeping, Paul's charge would have been "a deposit in Timothy's possession. If he guarded it well . . . it would be like a tape or record with an insistent message, 'banish error; teach the truth.'"<sup>20</sup> The transmission aspect of parati'qhmi involved Timothy's practical obedience to Paul's charge -- as he actively instructs the false teachers in the Ephesian church not to promulgate false doctrine, he is transmitting the apostolic instructions he himself has received to the community of faith.

**In accordance with prophecy.** kata` ta`V proagou'saV e]pi` se` profh-tei'aV. *In accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you.*

In the New Testament, "prophecy" (profh-tei'a) parallels the verb "prophecy" (profh-teu'w).<sup>21</sup> Generally, it refers to "the utterance of the prophet, the 'prophetic word.'"<sup>22</sup> Specifically it possesses a futuristic or predictive connotation (e.g., Mt. 2:15,23; 8:17), or it can refer to "an authoritative direction of the prophet" and "the command transmitted through him."<sup>23</sup> The modifying participle proagou'saV serves as a temporal adjective, placing the prophecies made concerning Timothy in a time previous to Paul's first commu-niqué to him.<sup>24</sup>

The preposition kata`, when used in conjunction with the accusa-tive case, denotes similarity, homogeneity, or agreement.<sup>25</sup> The prophecies previously made concerning Timothy therefore share a likeness and homogeneity with Paul's apostolic instruction given in 1 Timothy 1:3-4. Why does Paul go to the trouble of pointing out this accord between his instructions and prophetic utterances previously made concerning Timothy's life?

It is the nature of proqhte'i'a to edify, exhort, and comfort the believer according to Paul's discourse on the charismatic gift of prophecy (I Cor. 14). Given the stress and difficulty which Ti-mothy would have experienced while contending with false teachers in the Ephesian church, Paul must have sensed that Timothy needed

some encouragement. Paul also regarded prophecy as a means through which spiritual gifts were imparted:

Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery (1 Tim. 4:14).

I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands (2 Tim. 1:6).

This same prophetic dynamic had also been at work in Paul's own life when he and Barnabas were launched into their first missionary journey from Antioch (Acts 13:-14). Something similar must have occurred in Timothy's life before Paul left him in Ephesus, where a group of prophets began to declare God's purpose for Timothy's life, and with "the laying on of hands" for the impartation of a spiritual gift, thereby enabling Timothy to fulfill his call. In stating that the instructions of 1 Tim. 1:3-4 are "in accord" with such events, Paul seems to be saying, "Remember, Timothy, that you are in this role by divine edict and impartation for a divine purpose. God is with you, and He has equipped you to do what you are doing."

**Prophetic purpose/instrumentality.**  $\{na\}strateuh\bar{e}\}n\ autai\{V\} th\`n\ kalh\`n\ stratei'an.$  *In order that by them you may fight the good fight.*

The antecedent of the pronoun  $\{V\}$  is "the prophecies pre-

viously made concerning" Timothy. The preposition e]n, in conjunction with the plural dative of autai\$V, should be translated "by them." Paul thinks of the prophecies previously made concerning Timothy as a means by which an end is achieved. Couched within a purpose clause (signified by the use of i{na), e]n autai\$V shows that Paul had a specific purpose in pointing out that his instructions were in accord with prophecies already made concerning Timothy's life and ministry. Paul's intention was for them to become an *instrument*, a *means* by which Timothy is to "fight the good fight."

**Fight the good fight.** What does fighting the "good fight" entail? The Greek word for "fight" (noun, stratei'a; verb, strateu'omai) is in the same word family as the word for "soldier" (stratiw'thV). Paul uses stratiw'thV metaphorically in 2 Timothy 2:3-4 to describe those who deliberately and exclusively devote themselves to the cause of Christ, suffering hardship on His account:

Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

Moralists and philosophers of Paul's day often used this military imagery to describe their labor on the behalf of truth.<sup>26</sup> In the context of 1 Timothy, "it provides a particularly apt metaphor for the struggle against opponents" who, in this case, are the propon-

ents of false doctrine mentioned in Paul's initial instructions (1 Timothy 1:3-4).<sup>27</sup> "Fighting the good fight" therefore refers to the need for Timothy to stand for Christ by teaching and preserving sound doctrine and preventing false teachings from further infiltrating the Ephesian church.

### Summary

Paul's overall flow of thought can now be better understood. He has given Timothy the instructions contained in vv. 3-4 *in accordance* with prophecies which had already been spoken concerning him so that these prophecies become an *enabler*, a *catalyst*, or an *instrument* by which Timothy stands for Christ and opposes the cancerous falsity which had infiltrated the Ephesian church.

### Application

Although these words of Paul came to Timothy within a very specific historical context, some biblical principles can be derived from them and applied to modern Christian living.

The first has to do with the impetus behind Paul's instructions to Timothy: Certain men within the church, probably *elders*, were teaching false doctrines. Unfortunately, this problem is not limited to the era of the early church. On any given day, Christians in America can turn on their televisions or radios and listen to respected Christian leaders spout teachings which can only be characterized as "strange doctrines" (1 Tim. 1:3, NASB). This au-

thor once heard a minister (whose name, if mentioned, would instantly be recognized) on a popular Christian telecast proclaiming that God was a horrendous failure. When asked by the hosts of the program to explain himself, he asked rhetorically, "How else could you characterize someone who lost his top angel [Lucifer], had his own creation rebel against him, and whose Son got crucified?" How indeed. "But," he continued, "you're not a failure until you confess that you're a failure, and God would never confess that He's a failure!" It would take pages to catalog the abrogations of orthodox Christian doctrine that are rife within such a notion. Rather than asking the minister to support his assertions from Scripture (and, if he cannot, to retract them), his statement was swallowed wholesale and met with a hearty round of "Hallelujahs." The charge entrusted to Timothy for safekeeping and transmission to others applies to modern believers as well. No matter who they originate from (even respected members of the community of faith, such as overseers or ministers of international repute), the influence of false doctrines must be opposed.

Secondly, the importance and usefulness of prophecy is shown by Paul's flow of thought in 1 Timothy 18. Paul deliberately pointed out that his charge to Timothy was *in accordance* with the prophecies that had already been made concerning him so that he could effectively contend for the truth. Presumably, this would have released the prophetic benefits of edification, encouragement, and comfort in Timothy's life. Thus he would have been strengthened and emboldened to continue and persevere in the work Paul had com-

mitted to him at Ephesus. It is clear from Scripture that prophecy has the effect of engendering courage and confidence in individuals for the purpose of carrying out God's work. For example, the godly reforms of King Asa were inspired by a prophecy he had received:

And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of the land of Judah and Benjamin (2 Chron. 15:8).

Within a short time, the entire nation of Judah joined him in his reformation, vowing on pain of death to seek the Lord with all their heart and soul (2 Chron. 15:12-13). Paul must have had this value and effect of prophecy in mind when he expressed his desire that Timothy "fight the good fight" by means of the prophecies he had received; modern Christians would also do well to bear it in mind. Some may seek to extrapolate this "prophetic instrumentality" into a general principle of spiritual warfare, i.e., a Christian opposes Satan and his minions through personal prophecies they have received. Paul's view is more narrow and focused -- prophetic utterance concerning individuals is not only a valuable aid, but a powerful means by which one may stand as a good soldier for Christ, wholly and exclusively devoted to His cause and His truth in the face of opposition and hardship.

# Bibliography

Arndt, William F., F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 2nd ed., rev. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Bassler, Jouette M. *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

The Bible. New American Standard Version.

Fee, Gordon D. *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*. New International Biblical Commentary. Vol. 13. Ed. W. Ward Gasque. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988.

Gundry, Robert H. *A Survey of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1993.

Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., and Bromiley, G., eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 6. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.

Knight, George W. *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 13, ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988), 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Fee, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Knight, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Fee, 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 412.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 412-13.

<sup>13</sup> Jouette M. Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Fee, 4-5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Dander, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., rev., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 622-23.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Waco: Word Books, 1974), 40.

<sup>21</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey Bromiley, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. VI (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1978), 830.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 830.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 830.

<sup>24</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, 702.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 407.

<sup>26</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1993), 609.

<sup>27</sup> Bassler, 46.