1 TIMOTHY 1:3-17

MEMORY VERSE: 1 TIMOTHY 1:15

**READ** 1 Timothy 1:1-20, First Thoughts (p. 14), and Understand the Context (p. 14). Affirm Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy. View the video introduction of 1,2 Timothy and Titus by Johnny Hunt at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible or on the Leader Pack CD-ROM.


**PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 20–21). Tailor the plans for your group using More Ideas (p. 22) and ideas included online at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible/Adults/LeaderExtras. Consider how you will use the difficult topics of false teaching, the law, and the universality of sin to point your group to the wonderful news of the gospel and God’s grace.

**GROW** from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploreTheBible).

**GATHER** the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; □ An item passed down from a family member or friend (p. 20), or a quiz of truth or tall tales for an alternate activity (p. 22); □ A whiteboard and a marker. Prepare to display the following Pack Item: □ PACK ITEM 5 (Poster: First-Century Heresies). Make copies of: □ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verse Bookmark); □ PACK ITEM 10 (Handout: Timothy: A Snapshot); □ PACK ITEM 12 (Handout: Paul’s Letters); and □ PACK ITEM 13 (Handout: First-Century Heresies).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

Daniel Webster is regarded as one of the epic statesmen in American history. On one occasion he was asked about the most profound thought that ever occupied his mind. Webster solemnly replied, “My personal responsibility to God.” As followers of Christ we feel a solemn responsibility to honor His truth. We have been entrusted with the priceless treasure of the gospel. He has given us the sacred privilege of guarding, living, and sharing His truth. 

(In PSG, p. 10) **What family recipes, stories, or traditions have been entrusted to you? How does knowing this information foster a greater sense of responsibility to other family members?**

**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**1 TIMOTHY 1:1-20**

Although Timothy probably became a believer before meeting Paul, the two developed a strong tie (Acts 16:1–2). Paul called Timothy his “true son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2). Timothy traveled with Paul and helped him in various ministries (Acts 17:14–15; 18:5; 20:4). As they passed through Ephesus, Paul instructed Timothy to remain with the church and help them while Paul traveled on to Macedonia.

Paul loved the church at Ephesus. During his missionary journeys, he frequently passed through the city where he experienced magnificent spiritual victories and significant spiritual opposition (Acts 19). Paul’s ministry among the Ephesian Christians produced a strong bond. They urged him to stay with them. While he initially declined (18:18-21), he later ministered among them for three years (20:31).

Having been left in charge of the Ephesian ministry, Timothy had the difficult task of correcting erroneous doctrine that was filtering into the church. Certain people had infected the congregation with false teaching that threatened the believers’ faith. These heretical teachers claimed to offer a better application of Jewish law even though they did not understand or apply the law properly (1 Tim. 1:6–7). Paul countered by reminding Timothy about the correct purpose of the law.

Paul encouraged Timothy to fulfill the potential he and others had observed. Timothy had the personal spiritual heritage (2 Tim. 1:5) and practical experience to lead the Ephesian church through the warfare for their faith. Some persons, like Hymenaeus and Alexander, had become shipwrecked in their faith. These two continued to cause much difficulty for Paul and the Ephesian church for many years (2 Tim. 2:14,17-18). However, Paul encouraged Timothy to stand strong on behalf of the true faith.

**BIBLE SKILL**

*Reading a related passage to gain insight*

Read Romans 5:20–6:4 and 7:14-25. Put yourself in Paul’s shoes as you consider your own life. What is your emotional reaction to awareness of sin? How does it produce humility and a deep sense of need for God’s grace? How does it cause you to be more humble toward other people? Write a prayer expressing your gratitude and commitment to the Lord for His grace.

**KEY DOCTRINE**

*Man*

Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin (1 Cor. 15:21-22).
EXPLORE THE TEXT

ACCOUNTABLE (1 TIM. 1:3-7)

VERSES 3-4
Accountability applies to everyone. In the opening verses of this epistle, Paul acknowledged he had been chosen and sent by God. He not only felt an obligation to be faithful, he also was grateful for God’s grace in saving him and calling him to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul also sensed responsibility for the churches he had helped start and those among whom he ministered.

The congregation in Ephesus loved Paul, and he returned their affection. Consequently, he told Timothy to remain in Ephesus while Paul went to Macedonia. Timothy enjoyed a special relationship with Paul as his “true son in the faith” (1:2) and traveled with the apostle frequently. For Paul to leave Timothy in Ephesus spoke to the importance he placed on this ministry.

While Paul had to travel from Asia Minor to the region around Philippi, near Greece, he did not want to leave the church at the mercy of false teachers. Paul urged Timothy to stay with the Ephesian church so he could instruct certain people not to teach different doctrine. He did not identify these people at this point, although he named Hymenaeus and Alexander in verse 20.

Similarly, Paul did not specify which doctrine that was at stake, although other verses suggest it related to application of Jewish law (vv. 7-11). Likely, Paul was addressing the overall teaching he had given the Ephesian church.

The terms urged (related to Paul’s entreaty of Timothy) and instruct (related to Timothy’s response to the false teachers) contain a sense of urgency. The matters at hand were important for the spiritual well-being of the believers.

The false doctrines mentioned in verse 3 appear to involve different issues than the myths and endless genealogies listed in verse 4. Similar admonitions regarding Jewish fables and useless genealogies can be found in Paul’s letter to Titus (1:14; 3:9). Some scholars believe the issue of myths related to attempts to create a syncretistic approach to Christianity, blending Jewish fables and pagan myths with the gospel.

Myths stood in opposition to Paul’s emphasis on God’s plan, which referred to the gospel of Christ. A myth is by nature fictional, while God’s plan is absolutely true. Similarly, endless genealogies may have included the Jewish penchant for basing religious value on the ability to trace one’s heritage back through many generations.

Neither myths nor endless genealogies were edifying for believers, but instead tended to promote empty speculations. This phrase addresses useless controversies that are worthless and contrary to sound doctrine. These abstract disputes might have appealed to people who loved philosophical gymnastics, but they had no value compared to God’s plan—the gospel—which does not rely on rhetorical argumentation but operates on faith.

VERSES 3-4
3 As I urged you when I went to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach false doctrine
4 or to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. These promote empty speculations rather than God’s plan, which operates by faith.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR
MAJOR THEMES IN 1 TIMOTHY

- **Sound teaching**—Paul expressed his concern for sound teaching (1:3-11; 4:13; 6:3-5).
- **Church leadership**—Paul set forth qualifications for pastors and deacons (3:1-13); he also gave specific instructions to Timothy (4:11-16).
- **Conduct in the church**—Paul wanted Timothy to know how people should conduct themselves in the household of God (3:14-15). He gave specific instructions concerning prayer (2:1-7), orderliness in worship (2:8-15), caring for widows (5:3-16), and honoring elders (5:17-22).

VERSE 5

5 Now the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

VERSE 6-7

6 Some have departed from these and turned aside to fruitless discussion. 7 They want to be teachers of the law, although they don’t understand what they are saying or what they are insisting on.

VERSES 6-7

While the content of Timothy’s teaching was the gospel, the goal of this instruction should be love. This not only meant that Timothy should teach in a loving manner, but that the result of the instruction would be love. Paul certainly wanted the people to love one another, but the emphasis was for Timothy’s teaching to produce the kind of love attributed to God alone.

Obviously, God is the ultimate source of agape love. On the human side of this equation were three qualities that demonstrated the kind of person who can love with godly love. Godly love is expressed by someone with a pure heart. The word heart represented the emotional and the cognitive aspects of a human being. The idea of a pure heart involved a purified affection and cleansed intentions.

Godly love also proceeds from a good conscience. This concept does not infer sinless perfection but the commitment to right behavior. Coupled with these two qualities is a sincere faith. Sincere was distinguished from useless fables and genealogies (v. 4).

7 They want to be teachers of the law, although they don’t understand what they are saying or what they are insisting on.

Verse 7 refers back to the people described in verse 6 by the pronoun some. The people who had left the sound doctrine of Christ wanted to be teachers of the law. The term law meant the Jewish law of the Torah and the Talmud. They had fallen into the trap of desiring position and prestige by exerting theological authority. However, they did not understand what they were saying or what they were insisting on. The latter phrase is reminiscent of Jesus’ condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees who
demanded that people follow all of their teachings but refused to do the same in their personal lives (Matt. 23:1-7).

In churches today, teachers and preachers are accountable to the church and to God. James warned against seeking the role of teacher lightly since those who guide others are held to a higher standard (Jas. 3:1). Neither passage suggests being a teacher of the Word is a bad occupation, but rather that preachers and teachers must be faithful to proclaim sound doctrine in the love of Christ.

How can believers ensure that their teachers are sharing sound doctrine that is biblically accurate?

IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL (1 TIM. 1:8-11)

VERSES 8-11
Paul’s rejection of false teachers of the law did not mean he rejected God’s law. He and Timothy knew the law was good. The term we includes Paul and Timothy, although it certainly included the church in its larger context. Paul’s point dealt with the need to use the law legitimately, especially in light of the gospel. Timothy was to resist false doctrine by teaching a proper understanding and application of God’s Word.

Paul used the word know twice in verses 8-9 to affirm Timothy’s understanding of the right application of the law, as opposed to the lack of understanding by the false teachers (v. 6). The apostle believed the law was like a schoolmaster, teaching people the difference between right and wrong according to God’s standards. (See Gal. 3:24-25.) As such, a righteous person is not dependent on the law because by nature a believer has the imputed righteousness of Christ.

(In PSG, p. 14) How does the law point to our need for a Savior? How does Jesus provide what the law could not?

Paul contrasted a righteous person with others who lived contrary to God’s law. He proceeded to list the types of persons whose sins are condemned by the law. This accounting was not meant to be exhaustive, but offered examples of unrighteous persons who need the law’s correction.

The use of various pairings combines similar ideas for emphasis, much like Hebrew parallelism. The lawless are people who lived outside the law. This group is similar to the rebellious who did not see themselves as subject

VERSES 8-11
8 But we know that the law is good, provided one uses it legitimately. 9 We know that the law is not meant for a righteous person, but for the lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinful, for the unholy and irreverent, for those who kill their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 for the sexually immoral and homosexuals, for slave traders, liars, perjurers, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching 11 that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which was entrusted to me.
to the law. The second pairing includes the *ungodly*, meaning people who do not show reverence for God, and the *sinful*, denoting persons who disregard God’s standards.

The third grouping links the *ungodly* and the *irreverent*. The word *ungodly* describes profane individuals, while *irreverent* associates being profane with worldliness and a rejection of the divine.

Although separated into two items, the connection is obvious between persons who *kill their fathers and mothers* and *murderers* in general. Both descriptors demonstrate the vile nature of each group. Verse 10 continues the list of perversion. Paul linked the *sexually immoral and homosexuals*. He saw persons who committed heterosexual immoralities and those who were homosexual as being equally sinful. Both types of immorality were condemned.

Breaking from his pattern of coupling pairs of sins, Paul concluded by mentioning *slave traders, liars, and perjurers* specifically. The sins of lying and perjury could be linked since both involve telling untruths, one in relationships and the other in legal circumstances. Paul’s condemnation of slave traders provides strong evidence against persons who claim Paul supported the practice of slavery in some of his teachings on submission to authority (1 Tim. 6:2; Titus 2:9).

Verses 9 through 11 comprise a single sentence and should be studied as a unit of thought in context with the rest of the passage. Verse 10 concludes Paul’s listing of sinful types of people with the broad inclusion of whatever else is contrary to sound teaching. Paul then defined sound teaching as that which *conforms to the gospel*. Whatever is contrary to that gospel is *contrary to the sound teaching*.

**IN RESPONSE TO HIS GRACE (1 TIM. 1:12-17)**

Verses 12-14

12 I give thanks to Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful, appointing me to the ministry — even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man. But I received mercy because I acted out of ignorance in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

13 God’s grace is not merely sufficient, it continually increases more abundantly.

14 Paul was completely aware of his past sin. He had been a *blasphemer*, speaking against Jesus. He also was a *persecutor*, actively oppressing people who followed Jesus. In spite of Paul’s past character and behavior, he *received mercy* from God.
When Paul contemplated God’s mercy toward him, he was overwhelmed by the way His grace overflowed. God’s grace is not merely sufficient, it continually increases more abundantly. Paul was overwhelmed that even as sin increased, God’s grace abounded even more. (See Rom. 5:20.)

VERSES 15-17
The saying to which Paul referred may have been a faith declaration common to the church of his era. In any case it certainly referenced Jesus’ declaration that He came to save the lost (Luke 5:32). Such a statement was trustworthy. Timothy and the church at Ephesus could place complete faith in Jesus’ redemptive purpose. This proclamation was deserving of full acceptance. The message of God’s grace in Christ should be embraced completely and without reservation.

Paul confessed he was the worst of sinners. His previous listing of grievous sinners (vv. 9-10) was not an arrogant accusation but a humble admission of his awareness that he was their chief.

Paul’s self-awareness of being the worst of sinners magnified God’s mercy. If Christ could demonstrate His extraordinary patience toward someone like Paul, He could extend grace to anyone. Paul saw his salvation as an example so others might believe in Christ and receive eternal life. God’s grace abounds to all people who place their faith in Jesus.

Paul concluded this section with a benedictory salute to God who had extended such undeserved grace. Exalting the characteristics of the Lord, Paul glorified Him as the King. He is the eternal King, existing in time past and in time to come. He is the immortal King, living forever. He is the invisible King, observable not by human senses but revealed through His Son. He is the only God, unlike and unaccompanied by any other. He is the King who deserves honor and glory forever and ever. To which we can shout with Paul, Amen.

Believers are an exhibit of God’s grace and mercy for all to see.

Like Paul, believers are an exhibit of God’s grace and mercy for all to see. We cannot look down on other people as if their sins are somehow worse than ours. We cannot see ourselves as deserving of God’s salvation. We can only confess our sinful unworthiness and receive God’s grace by faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. As we do so, we join Paul in praising Him for His mercy and grace.

How does our awareness of sin cause us to glorify the Lord for His grace?

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LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

WELCOME: As the group settles in, share something that has been passed down to you from a family member or friend (e.g. recipe, tradition, photo). If you brought an actual item, show it or pass it around now. Share why this is important to you.

ASK: What family recipes, stories, or traditions have been entrusted to you? How does knowing this information foster a greater sense of responsibility to other family members? (PSG, p. 10)

CONTEXTUALIZE: Distribute copies of Pack Item 10 (Handout: Timothy: A Snapshot) and Pack Item 12 (Handout: Paul’s Letters). Using these handouts and Understand the Context (p. 14; PSG, p. 11), introduce 1 Timothy. Describe Paul and Timothy’s relationship. Affirm Paul as the author of this epistle. Briefly review Paul’s many biblical letters. Describe the culture of Ephesus, highlighting the pagan idolatry, sexual immorality, and greed surrounding the temple of Artemis, which is known as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

EMPHASIZE: Explain that Paul called Timothy to be strong and courageous in proclaiming the truth of the gospel in his cultural setting.

TRANSITION: We, as believers, have been entrusted with the gospel. Having received God’s grace, we’re called to share the truth of the gospel faithfully with others.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Direct someone to read 1 Timothy 1:3-7, while the group listens for how Paul described the speech of false teachers.

ASK: Why was Paul so concerned about what the false teachers were saying?

EXAMINE: Refer to Pack Item 5 (Poster: First-Century Heresies) and Pack Item 13 (Handout: First-Century Heresies). Say: Paul was concerned about more than minor theological differences. False teaching and speculations were pulling people away from God’s work.

ILLUSTRATE: On a board or poster, make two columns: “True Gospel Teaching” and “False Teaching.” Direct the group to list characteristics of each type of teaching, based on 1 Timothy 1:3-7.

CONNECT: Call for a volunteer to read Acts 20:29-30. Guide the group to consider how this information would impact their understanding of true gospel teaching.

DISCUSS: Encourage the group to discuss the questions on PSG page 13: What responsibility does a teacher have to the people he or she teaches? What responsibility does the person being taught have to the one teaching?

READ: As a volunteer reads 1 Timothy 1:8-11, instruct the group to consider the purpose of the law.

ASK: How does the law point to our need for a Savior? How does Jesus provide what the law could not? (PSG, p. 14). Allow for discussion and guide the group to consider the reasons for the law listed under Verses 8-11 in the PSG on page 14.
EXPLORE: Direct the group to the Key Doctrine found on PSG page 15. Ask a volunteer to read the key doctrine and another volunteer to read the corresponding verses (1 Cor. 15:21-22). How would you restate or explain this doctrine in one or two sentences? How does this doctrine impact your understanding of 1 Timothy 1:8-11?

READ: Invite someone to read 1 Timothy 1:12-17. As the text is read, guide the group to consider what they can learn about Christ from these verses.

SHARE: Call for the group to list attributes and characteristics of Jesus Christ revealed through these verses. Record them on a board or poster with the title “Attributes of Christ,” along with the verse number for each reference (e.g. “Source of strength,” v. 12). Refer to the PSG under Verses 12-14 (pp. 15–16) if needed.

DESCRIBE: Provide a brief introduction to Paul’s background, focusing specifically on his life prior to his conversion. Refer to Acts 8:3 and 22:4. Summarize Paul’s conversion. Refer the group to Acts 9 if they would like to read more about Paul’s conversion on their own this week.

DISCUSS: How did Paul’s past influence his understanding of the gospel? What role did mercy play in Paul’s salvation? What about grace? Lead the group to discuss the difference between mercy and grace. Direct the group to underline the definitions of mercy and grace given on PSG page 16 under Verses 12-14. Call for responses to what mercy and grace mean to individuals in the group.

DEBATE: Ask whether the group agrees or disagrees with the following statement: It is integral to your testimony as a believer to be open about your past struggles. Consider if this applies to all past struggles and whether this should be shared with other believers, non-believers, or both. Why or why not? Is there support for that answer in verses 12-17?

READ: Invite a volunteer to read verse 15. Why is this considered a non-negotiable truth? What are some other non-negotiable truths of the gospel? Remind the group that salvation is found only through faith in Jesus.

ASK: What are indicators that a person truly recognizes their depravity and sinful state? From the PSG (p. 17): How did Paul’s life become an exhibit of God’s grace and mercy?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Invite volunteers to choose one of the summary statements under In My Context in the PSG (p. 18) and elaborate on what they learned about this idea.

RESPOND: Guide the group through the first question set under In Your Context in the PSG (p. 18): With your group, discuss ways of holding each other accountable for remaining focused on the gospel. Identify actions the group can take as a whole to safeguard against being distracted by controversies and pointless debates.

CHALLENGE: Give out copies of Pack Item 8 (Handout: Memory Verse Bookmark). Invite the group to read this week’s memory verse aloud together (1 Timothy 1:15).

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for His mercy and grace and asking Him to continue to increase our understanding of the depth of His love for us.
PRACTICE

- Memorize 1 Timothy 1:15. As you consider this verse, ask God to reveal any blind spots you have to your own sin. Confess and repent.
- Read 1 Timothy 1:5. Prayerfully consider how your motives as a leader line up with those presented in this verse. Ask God for help in fulfilling the good purposes He has for you in this area.
- Enlist volunteers to write notes of affirmation to teachers and leaders in your church.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
To replace the Focus Attention activity (p. 20), play a round of “truth or tall tale.” Present both myths and weird but true facts, allowing the group to guess if each is the truth or a tall tale. Ask: What methods or tools can help us distinguish truth from untruth? Explain that in this session we’ll discuss the truth of the gospel and the importance of guarding it from distortion.

EXPLORE THE TEXT
- To enhance the discussion on teachers in 1 Timothy 1:3-7, analyze biblical passages on teachers and false teachers. Invite volunteers to read Matthew 7:15-20 and James 3:1. Discuss ways to identify false teachers and also how to recognize and encourage teachers of truth.
- Lead the group to examine the list of sins found in 1 Timothy 1:9-10. Ask: Why might Paul have taken the time to list specific sins? Compare this list to the Ten Commandments. Discuss whether you agree or disagree with the parallels drawn between the two lists in the PSG (p. 14).
- To emphasize the universal need for God’s mercy and grace, instruct the group to turn to the person beside them and take turns reading 1 Timothy 1:15. As a group, discuss whether the gospel is exclusive or inclusive. Call for responses to the PSG questions on page 16: How does a person’s past serve as a means for God to demonstrate His mercy and grace? How does a person’s past become a source of gratitude for salvation?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Direct the group to complete the third activity under In My Context in the PSG (p. 18): Review the information on the inside front cover. Identify one person with whom you can share the gospel. What steps will you take to share with the person you identified (include dates in your steps)? Invite volunteers to pray over each name identified.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
A deep understanding of our own sin leads to a greater appreciation of God’s grace and mercy. Sing or read the lyrics to the hymn, “Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound,” by John Newton.