



Week 18: Beginning the Pastoral Letters (A bird's-eye view)

These Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) are so called because they have more to do with the practicalities of church life than the other letters of Paul. They are basically letters to individuals, rather than to a congregation (although they may have been read publicly) and all three deal with similar problems.

The aim of this study is to get an overall grasp of the contents of these letters. (You can go back and work at the difficult bits later, once you see where they fit in to the whole letter.) First of all, we will study 1 Timothy, and then you can look at the other two on your own. We shall be looking particularly at three themes:

1. how we can serve God in his church
2. the problems caused by false teachers
3. the practical teaching on the life of the church

Day 1. 1 Timothy – a bird's-eye view

1 Timothy 1:1-11; 6:11-21

Timothy has been told by Paul to stay in Ephesus (1:3) and has been given a specific job to do there (1:18). It seems that Paul is writing to encourage him and give him some practical help with this job.

Read the two passages. As you do, make a list of what this introduction and conclusion tell you about the three themes mentioned above.

Pray for your own church — for its regular activities, for those who lead it and for any particular problems it faces at the moment.

Day 2. The qualifications for Christians service

1 Timothy 1:12-20; 3:1-11

1. **Read** 1:12-20, where Paul is talking about his own ministry, in contrast to that of the false teachers (1:3-11). What qualifications does Paul have for his job?
2. **Read** chapter 3:1-11. What qualities is Timothy to look for in those he appoints to leadership roles in the church? Some of these probably don't apply to your situation. Can you think of equivalent qualifications which would apply?

Consider: All Christians are called to serve God in some way. How many of these

qualifications do you have already? Are there any areas in which you ought to take some action? What are you doing with the qualifications you have got?

Take time to pray for those areas of Christian service in which you are already involved (and remember that service for God is not necessarily equivalent to an official title or job. You may wish to ask God if there is anything different he wants you to be involved with. Remember - since gifts are given for the building up of the church, other people are usually better than you at spotting your talents and hidden abilities — ought you to ask someone else for some honest advice?

Day 3. 'Handy hints' for Timothy's ministry

1 Timothy 4:1 – 5:2

1. What advice does Paul give Timothy about his personal spiritual life?
2. What public duties does Paul give Timothy, both here and in the rest of the letter? (Look back to Study 1!)
3. In what ways will the state of Timothy's spiritual life affect his public duties?

Consider: The personal application should be obvious! Look again at Paul's advice on Timothy's spiritual life, and try to translate it into practical terms for your own situation.

As you come to pray, pray not only for yourself, but also for the personal spiritual life of Christian leaders you know.

Day 4. False teaching in the church

1 Timothy 4:1-5; 6:3-10

One of the problems which was very common in the early church was that of people who came into the church teaching variations of the apostolic teaching, often with a Jewish slant.

Read the passages which deal with this subject and from them make a list of contrasts between true and false teaching (perhaps in two columns in your notebook).

1. How did Timothy know what was true teaching? (There's a lot more on this in 2 Timothy— look out for it there.)
2. Can you think of any forms of false teaching which are commonly found today, either within the church or outside it? Can you find anything here to help in knowing how to deal with it?

If one of the sects - such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Moonies - is common in your area, it would be worth finding out a bit about it, perhaps by reading a book on the subject.

Day 5. The life of the church

It's prayer life: 1 Timothy 2:1-10

These Epistles do not give us a 'blue-print' for church life; they are mainly concerned to correct things that were going wrong. You may be able to think of other areas for concern in the life of your church, but it's worth looking at the things Paul picks up to see if they need some attention as well.

1. What is the church to pray for, and why?
2. How is the church to pray? What is the relevance here of instruction on the way they live?

Consider: What is the scope of the prayer of your church or other Christian group. Is it as wide as Paul envisages here? If not, what practical steps could **you** take to encourage a wider interest?

It's social concern: 1 Timothy 5:3-16

The financial needs of widows in the first century may seem remote to us, especially with the welfare state to care for those who have no other means of support, but consider others who may be in need in our society also.

3. What does Paul say here is the responsibility of individual Christians, rather than the church as a whole?
4. Do you think the church has a continuing responsibility in this area? If so, what are the equivalent needs? How might they be met?

Weekend work project

Now go on to look at the other two Pastoral Epistles (2 Timothy and Titus) on your own. You may find it helpful to continue looking at our three themes — start by reading a whole Epistle and noting sections which apply to these themes, and also any other subjects which occur. Then you can go back and work on bits of particular interest in more detail.