

## Paul's Epistles to Individuals

### Lesson 1 – Introduction

Paul wrote letters to several audiences, including to the Christians in specific churches (Corinthians, Ephesians, Thessalonians etc.), to Christians in more than one church in a region (Galatians), and to individual Christians. This study will focus on those letters which were written to Timothy, Titus and Philemon.

#### I. Timeline:

Although the timing of these letters is not conclusively known, some scholars argue the following as a possible timeline:

Letter	Date	Location
Philemon	62 AD	Rome
1 Timothy	66 AD	Macedonia
Titus	67 AD	Nicopolis
2 Timothy	68 AD	Rome

The order of these letters in the New Testament is likely not the order in which they were written. Chronologically, Paul most likely wrote Philemon first around 62 AD, while imprisoned in Rome. This personal letter was likely written in the same general timeframe and during the same period of imprisonment as when Paul wrote Ephesians and Colossians. 1 Timothy was probably written next with Titus shortly thereafter. 1 Timothy was written around 66 AD during a period of liberty after Paul's Roman imprisonment of 61-63 AD. 2 Timothy was apparently written from prison (**2 Timothy 1:8**) with Paul ready to die (**2 Timothy 4:6-8**), possibly about 67-68 AD. Paul was probably martyred sometime shortly thereafter.

It should be noted that there are various theories as to the timeline and location of the writing of these letters. None of this information can be known conclusively. For example, scholars suggest that Nicopolis was Paul's location when he wrote to Titus who was in Crete. This is based on **Titus 3:12** – *"When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there."* Although this is a possibility, the fact that Paul refers to the city in a future tense and uses the word "there" rather than "here", creates the strong possibility that Paul had not yet arrived in Nicopolis when he wrote the letter. The certain determination of the time and location of the origin of these letters is unnecessary to the Christian and any discussion here is only for the purpose of understanding context and Paul's circumstances.

#### II. Authorship:

Even though all four of the letters considered in this study internally identify the author as Paul, some scholars and commentators assert that Paul was either dictating the words to another writer or was not the author at all. Those who claim that the letters to Timothy and Titus are forgeries attempt to justify their position by asserting that the "well-developed and organized Christian church", with Deacons and "defined creeds" could not have formed that quickly in Paul's ministry. They also suggest that Marcion of Sinope, described as a "Bishop" in the early church (ca. 85-160), did not include these letters in his

collection of Paul's writings. Both of these positions are rooted in the catholic concept that the church is the root of the Word of God, rather than the Word of God being the root of the church. The motivation for discrediting the validity of any part of the Bible is to empower its disbelief in favor of the doctrines of men, which in the case of these letters is specifically condemned (**1 Timothy 6:3-5, 2 Timothy 3-4 and Titus 1:10-16**). The author is the Holy Spirit, who inspired Paul to utter these words, regardless of who actually penned them.

### **III. Paul's Relationship with Timothy:**

Timothy was from Lystra, born to a Greek father, (**Acts 16:1-3**) and had been taught of God by his believing mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois (**2 Tim. 1:5**). Paul considered him to be his offspring in the faith (**1 Tim. 1:2, 2 Tim. 2:2**), and his trusted companion and fellow laborer in Christ. Timothy assisted Paul in Philippi (**Phil. 2:22**). He was also with Paul in Berea (**Acts 17:14**), later in Athens (**Acts 17:15**), Corinth (**Acts 18:5**), and later in Paul's third journey, Timothy is again with him in Ephesus and he was sent by Paul to Macedonia and Achaea to minister to the churches in those areas (**Acts 19:21-22, 1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10-11**). He was with Paul when the letter to the Romans was written from Corinth (**Rom. 16:21**), and journeyed with Paul as he moved from Greece through Macedonia (**Acts 20:4**) and on to Troas (**Acts 20:5**). Timothy is mentioned as being a support to Paul during his imprisonment in several epistles (**Col. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, and Phile. 1**). Paul intended to send Timothy to comfort the brethren in Philippi, citing Timothy's sincere work and capabilities (**Phil. 2:19-23**). Timothy is consistently characterized by Paul in complimentary terms. In Paul's later years, looking back on years of experiences, Paul lovingly refers to Timothy as his beloved and true "child in the faith". He was not Paul's biological child but he was "beget" by Paul (taught by him) in Christ.

### **IV. Paul's Relationship with Titus:**

Titus is not mentioned so much as Timothy but in Paul's letter he is addressed similarly as Paul addresses Timothy. Paul calls Titus his "*true child in a common faith*" (**Tit. 1:4**). He trusted Titus to stay behind in Crete to appoint elders in every city (**Tit. 1:5**), which was a very important duty. Titus was a Greek who had not been required to be circumcised in part to withstand the false teachers who claimed circumcision was a Christian requirement (**Gal. 2:3-4**). He was sent by Paul to Corinth and cited as an example of exemplary conduct there (**2 Cor. 12:18**). He was a source of comfort to Paul in Macedonia as he reported the Corinthians' longing and zeal for Paul, even after Paul had stung them with his first letter and his own joy regarding the Corinthians (**2 Cor. 7:6-15**). Titus was also involved in the collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem (**2 Cor. 8:6-17**).

### **V. Paul's Relationship with Philemon:**

Although little is known of Philemon, it is understood from the letter that he was a faithful Christian, called a "fellow worker" who had the financial means to have slaves. His household likely includes family members who are certainly likewise Christians, Apphia and Archippus. Their exact relationship cannot be known with certainty. Paul has sincere love for Philemon and a personal connection because of Philemon's commendable love for the brethren (**Phile. 1-7**). The quality of Philemon's love for others is important considering the specifics of why Paul (and Timothy) write this remarkable letter.