

**Russell Kelfer**

**Dear Tim,  
Letters to a  
Faithful Man**

**# 1215-A**

**Series: I Timothy**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • [www.dtm.org](http://www.dtm.org) • [dtm@dtm.org](mailto:dtm@dtm.org)



# Dear Tim, Letters to a Faithful Man

## THE MAIL CAME

The young man must have had a lump in his throat as he unrolled the parchment and read what was inside. This was no ordinary communication. Mail, of course, in those days, was not a simple matter and wasn't taken lightly. There were no free coupons from the Pizza Hut; no "You are a winner" numbers from Reader's Digest; no "Your immediate offering will be appreciated" letters, either. Every scroll was vital news. But even in that day, this was top priority correspondence. This was a letter from Paul, his *father in the faith*. And when Paul wrote a letter, *it seemed to Timothy almost as though God had written it*. There was an incredible ring of eternity to every word, a glimpse of the Creator leaping from every line. Filled with faith, brimming with exhortation, crying with confirmation—every word echoed Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

And this letter was written *directly to him*. It was not one of those precious epistles written "to the saints at..." and then directed to some church. This one basically began, "*Dear Tim*". Here was a letter written to a faithful man from his loving spiritual father. Every word, then, must be digested; every instruction must be followed; every question must be answered. Here was a personal letter from the man who had so touched his life with the message of God that he could never be the same again.

*The Approximate Locations of Paul and Timothy when I Timothy was written is seen on the next page.*

The year was probably sometime between 63-65 AD, and Paul had apparently been released from his first imprisonment, an incident that would have been highly unlikely after the burning of Rome, which took place shortly following those dates.

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It's no wonder that Timothy's joy is still like a glowing ember in his heart, ignited with the news that his mentor has been freed at last. Paul had called him to Philippi with the good news, and had then headed for Asia Minor, leaving Titus on the Isle of Crete to help establish churches there (Acts 2:11, Titus 1:5).

History indicates that Paul probably proceeded to Ephesus and on to Colosse (Philemon 22), before returning again to Ephesus. It was there, perhaps, that Timothy rejoined Paul with news from the churches at Philippi. No doubt he said something like this, as he called the young man to his side: "Tim, I'm leaving for a while, but I want you to stay here. Your ministry is needed here. I'll go on to Macedonia and hopefully come right back, but something tells me there is a good likelihood I'll be detained" (Philippians 2:24, I Timothy 1:3).

So the Apostle left for Macedonia. A great deal of time *did* pass, and while he was there (perhaps in Philippi), he penned an epistle to this young man who had come to be like a son to him. You can all but hear Timothy read it aloud as he opens it. In our language, it would have begun, "*Dear Tim*".

Why did Paul write these letters? Was it that he feared he would not be able to return as he planned? Perhaps. Was it just to express his love and his confidence in this young man he so admired? Not entirely. Paul wrote these letters because the young church was beginning to experience growing pains, and the symptoms were not at all encouraging. Strange doctrines were beginning to surface everywhere. Judaists were posing as

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teachers of the law, all the while spreading the venom of endless genealogies and fables, implying that all matter was evil, and that the hope of a physical resurrection was thus a myth at best.

From these came the natural result of such heresy—new restrictions that prohibited marriage and forbade the eating of certain foods. These false teachers were trying to bring the church back under the law; and to some degree, at least, they were succeeding. And while some were wolves, as it were, from the outside, practicing the earliest forms of Gnosticism, some were actually leaders in the church itself, who had been drawn astray by listening to those whose teaching was not grounded in the words of Christ.

There was another need in the Ephesian church, as well; the need for knowledge about how the church was to be organized and operated; how its leadership was to be chosen; what role women were to play in its ministry; and what kind of special attention should be paid to widows and others in the church body with special needs. Thorny issues? Indeed. Yet, they were issues that *could not be ignored, or the church would lose its way and lose its power*. Listen carefully, for this letter, *though addressed to Timothy*, was written to us, as well.

It is a love letter from God's elder-statesman warning against the inroads of the enemy, some subtle, some more obvious, yet all deadly. They are inroads that often would come, not like bolts of lightning, inviting church dissension, but often masqueraded as subtle, sugarcoated substitutes for the real thing, doctrinal saccharin, if you will.

They would look good, sound good, and feel good, but like invasions of a deadly virus, would find their way into the bloodstream of the Body of Christ. Before anyone realized what was happening, they would snuff out its very life.

So this was much more than a personal greeting from a loving discipler. It was a manual for church administration, with a chapter or two on strategic doctrinal priorities. It included a study of how to deal with those who encourage the church to get entrapped in needless squabbles and petty doctrines, while the world around it was on a collision course with hell. It was a reminder of what does and what doesn't matter in eternity.

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### Dear Tim...

Our goal these next few weeks will be to read this letter with young Timothy and see what the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, might have been saying to him *and to us*. Our objective will be to have the same kind of teachable spirit that this youth had, the same kind of pliable heart, the same kind of tender conscience. The man who meant more to him than perhaps anyone in the world had entrusted to him a ministry, and *now he was instructing him in how to conduct that ministry*. It was and it is time to listen carefully. Timothy opens the scroll and begins to read his letter, so filled with love, yet so laced with instruction. It begins like this:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,

To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer

nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work—which is by faith. (I Timothy 1:1-4 NIV)

Paul begins his letter in the style of his time by revealing in the opening sentence who the letter is from, as well as giving his credentials for making the statements he is about to make. It will be a letter, as we shall see, written *to* Timothy, but intended to be shared with the entire fellowship of believers in the Ephesian church.

### Paul...

It was customary in Paul's day for letters to follow a traditional pattern. Even secular correspondence in that day almost always was characterized by a five stage progression. If you look at each of Paul's letters, both the Pastoral Epistles and the others, as well, you will see that pattern emerge.

Incidentally, I and II Timothy and Titus are referred to as the pastoral epistles. They are *personal epistles*, because they were written to individuals, as opposed to the letters Paul wrote directly to churches at large; and they are *pastoral epistles* because their primary function has to do with the care and organization of the

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flock of God, and the responsibilities of the shepherd in caring for the sheep. They were referred to in that light as early as 1274, when Thomas Aquinas gave them such a distinction, but the title itself “Pastoral Epistles” actually was affixed to them in 1726 when a great scholar named Paul Anton gave a series of famous lectures, using that as his title. Since that time, they have been called by that name.

The pastoral epistles, as with all of Paul’s writings, were typical in their outline format. They followed the general pattern all letters of their day followed. Here is an example:

- I- The Greeting (Romans 1:1, I Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, Colossians 1:1)
- II- The Prayer (Romans 1:17, I Corinthians 1:3, II Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2)
- III- Thanksgiving (Romans 1:8, I Corinthians 1:4, II Corinthians 1:3, Ephesians 1:3, Philippians 1:3)
- IV- Special Contents (The main body of the letters)
- V- Salutations, Greetings (Romans 16, I Corinthians 16, II Corinthians 13, Philippians 4, Colossians 4)

Much of the written correspondence in Paul’s day followed that format. First, the greeting, then the prayer or wish for the well-being of the recipient, then an expression of thanksgiving or gratitude, finally the reason for the letter, and then final greetings or special instructions. As you can see, all of Paul’s letters were identical in structure; only the content varied.

Let’s open the scroll together. Imagine with young Timothy, picturing in your mind Paul *dictating these letters*, perhaps as he paced the floor, burdened over the issues involved or anxious to express *just the feeling* he wanted to impart. Most people in his day did not take writing instrument in hand and sit down to write a letter, nor did they sit down at their trusty IBM with “Word Perfect” software and whip up an epistle.

The typical letter was dictated to a secretary, or someone who was entrusted to put in writing what the sender was saying. Paul apparently had some kind of a visual problem, making it even less likely that he would, in fact, hand write his own correspondence. In fact, we do know the name of at least one of his secretaries. In Romans 16:22, Tertius, his secretary, slips in his own greeting.

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In I Corinthians 16:21, Paul says “This is my own signature, my autograph, so that you can be sure this letter comes from me.” Colossians 4:17 and II Thessalonians 3:17 are good reference points to substantiate that principle. While automatic “spell-checkers” hadn’t been invented yet, Paul had one called the “Holy Spirit”. There would be no mistakes. This would become the Word of God.

So the letter was dictated by none other than Paul himself, and while some critics question the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, both the overriding judgment of the vast majority of scholars plus the plain, simple statement of fact in the letter itself are enough for us to put to rest that theory at the outset. The letter was written by Paul, and that fact was the first and most important statement made in the letter.

Paul here uses his Roman name, Paulos, meaning *little*. Having been born a Roman citizen, as he was commissioned to minister to the gentile world, he assumes and uses that name almost exclusively. Paul could relate to both worlds to which he went, and even the name he used to address them indicated that he understood his mission and his ministry. And the very meaning of his name called attention to his own insignificance, using as his only claim to fame, his calling of God.

AN APOSTLE

His calling of God is what he refers to next, his eternal credentials. He proceeds in a most unusual manner as he goes on:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope.

That would seem like a strange introduction, indeed, for a personal letter written to a trusted disciple. Why flaunt your office? Why remind Timothy of your credentials? The reason seems clear as the letter progresses: this epistle was *written to Timothy*, but it was written for the whole church at Ephesus to read. The doctrinal issues besetting that church at that time required some form of opposition that was coupled with authority. Paul had that authority. He was an “apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior”. An apostle was simply a “sent one”. The word was used even in pre-Christian times by such orators as Demosthenes to describe a fleet of ships sent out with a load and



with a purpose. He also referred to a naval fleet as “apostles” sent out with a mission. The word and its root are found some 131 times in the New Testament, mostly in the Gospels and Acts. It is a term denoting a specific calling that requires a specific mission. It literally means “authority with assignment”. It is someone sent out with a purpose and with the divine credentials to accomplish that purpose.

Paul was such a man. He was not one of the original twelve, mind you, but one “called after his time” to take to the unbelieving world this incredible message that God had indeed come to earth, died for the sins of the world, and been raised from the dead; *and that he was indeed making salvation from sin available to whosoever will*. No longer was this a Jewish redemption. The message was clear, and the messenger was clearly sent by God with a purpose. *And never did Paul forget that purpose.*

### Are You a “Sent-One”?

For the next few lessons, we will be reading this letter as though we were standing there in Ephesus with Timothy, seeing, if possible, through his eyes, the man, the message, and the ministry this epistle projects.

But there is a degree to which we must also read it *as though we were the one dictating it*. For to a degree, we are also the Pauls of this age, “sent-ones”, if you will, to proclaim to perhaps the *last generation on planet earth* the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the mystery of godliness, which is “Christ in us, *our only hope of Glory.*”

This man, Paul, was a man with a mission. His imprisonment had only heightened the urgency of his message. His persecution had only deepened the conviction of his calling. His loneliness had only served to remind him of the love of His God from which nothing could separate him; “not life, not death, not principalities, not powers.” The more that came into his life to discourage him, the more steadfast in the faith he became. *Why? Because he was a man with a mission.* He had been *called* by God, *commissioned* by God, and *sent* by God to a lost and dying world with the only message that could make a difference.

*And so have you. And so have I.* The day you came to Christ, the Living God commissioned you to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which did so easily beset you, and run with the patience

the race that is set before you.”

He called you not to become, “entangled with the affairs of this world, so that you might please Him who called you to be a soldier of Jesus Christ.” He has called each of us to see this eternal battle for the souls of men for what it is—a *matter of life and death*. He has told us it may cost us what it cost Jesus, and what it ultimately cost Paul—his own life.

And he has, in effect, stated that if we do not consider our relationship with Jesus Christ *that important*, and our commission to be His ambassadors to our own worlds *that urgent*, we really have missed our calling. Oh, we may become successes in the marketplace, even in the church; but we were not called to become successes, we were called to become “sent ones” —men and women so infused with God’s Spirit and so involved in God’s purpose that *to die for our faith would be the highest and noblest privilege God could allow us to have*.

I have often read these epistles and thought to myself, “Oh, to be like Paul”. Perhaps you have thought the same. “What makes a man a Paul?” I’m not sure that I like the answer I have come to. I have come to the inescapable conclusion that the difference between the “Pauls” of this world and most of us is *that he took his calling seriously*. For him, “to live was Christ, and to die was gain.” Thus to die for Christ was gain indeed.

He was a man with a mission. His God had reached down and touched him, and called him to seek and to save those who were lost. It was a predetermined fact that to do so would involve the highest order of warfare known to man. Paul had accepted that calling, and he wrote this letter to be sure that Timothy had done the same. So he began, “Dear Tim”. He might well have begun “Dear Russell,” or “Dear Joe,” or “Dear Susie”. For His message to us is no different. It is first a call to surrender; then, it is a call to battle; and ultimately, it is a call to victory.

It is a call to get on with this business of *being the disciples we are*. It is a commission to become “ambassadors for Christ” with such a singleness of purpose that we will awaken in the morning with only *one objective—to glorify God*. And no price would be too high.

What about you? Aren’t you a “sent-one, too”? Has not your God, at some point in your life, reminded you that your salvation

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carries with it a form of New Testament Apostleship? Or have you decided to try to take the benefits of the Christian life without assuming the responsibilities? You can't do that. I can't do that—not without paying tremendous eternal consequences.

As we begin this look at Paul's letter to his young friend, ought we not to listen carefully to the Apostle's voice as it echoes down through the corridors of history, reminding Timothy, and reminding us of both the high cost, and the great joy that only "sent-ones" can have.

And ought we not to pray,

*"Dear God, take us...that's why we're here.*

*Dear God, break us...make Your will clear.*

*Dear God, make us...into what we should be.*

*Whatever it costs...we **will** follow Thee."*

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(02.09.16)