

Back to Eden

Correcting and Restoring Wayward Women & Men in Ministry – 1 Timothy 2:8-3:16



TheEdenPodcast.com

Script of Season 3. Episode 1. 1 Why 1st Timothy Matters, by Bruce C. E. Fleming

Intro:

Welcome to **The Eden Podcast** where we think again about the Bible on women and men and we start with a correct understanding of what happened in the Garden of Eden back in the beginning.

I'm Bruce C. E. Fleming, founder of the Tru316 Project and a former Academic Dean and Professor of Practical Theology.

The focus of this episode is:

Why the Book of 1 Timothy matters.

The hot topic, the hot verse in all of 1 Timothy is 1st Timothy 2:12. People want to go right there and from that verse only they want to know all about "women in church." But if they look only to verse 12 they are taking a scriptural teaching out of context!

Context and content. What is the *context* of 1 Timothy 2:12? It is found in a series of ideas that actually begin back in 1:18. What is the *content* of verse 12? 1 Timothy 2:12 turns out to be only the second half of a Greek sentence. And it is not the important half of the sentence. The important half of the sentence is in verse 11. And if we look only to verse 12, we've missed the main idea.

Getting right what we think 1 Timothy says is most important these days. Especially for its teaching in chapters 2 and 3 on women and men in ministry, and how to correct and restore those who go astray while in the ministry.

Women and men? Correct and restore? When we arrived for ministry in Africa I came across the case of a pastor who had been disciplined and then *restored*. He was removed from the pulpit by his local church and his denomination. They then set about his restoration. After two years *out* of the ministry, he was given a chance to do limited ministry, under supervision. I met him several years after that when we traveled together as delegates to a conference in Lusaka, Zambia, not that far from mighty Victoria Falls.

What had he done? People weren't eager to tell me about that. Later, he told me himself what had happened.

What interested me *most* was the restoration process he was put through. I had NEVER seen that in my home country. In my experience, a pastor deserving of discipline was never restored. Period. He had *no* chance of being restored to ministry again.

And yet, I had read the book of 1 Timothy before. Why hadn't I picked up on the instruction Paul gives there on the discipline and *restoration* of church leaders? Have you been helped to notice it? What Paul writes is very relevant to today.

Maybe my early confusion was due to the way 1 Timothy is presented to modern readers like us. This letter to Timothy looks like just another Bible book with six chapters. It appears to be much like Ephesians which also has six chapters and was written by Paul.

People take 1 Timothy in six chunks. They read it chapter by chapter thinking that thoughts end and begin with the chapter breaks as if it Paul wrote it that way. But he didn't.

Paul did not write his letter to Timothy in a straight line way. The dividing of 1 Timothy into six chapters gives the impression that a one-through-six progression of major ideas is going on in the book. This impression, as you may suppose, is incorrect.

Three Parts. Paul wrote his letter to Timothy in three parts, each one longer than the other. Each part is built on a shared truth. I was never taught this in church. I never read it in any commentary. I never heard this in any class I took.

What are the three parts to 1 Timothy? What is the truth each part is built on?

Here are the parts. The first part takes up most of chapter one. The second is found in the end of chapter one and flows down through chapter three. The last part makes up the second half of the letter.

The Great Truth. Here is the great truth. The great truth in 1 Timothy stood out to me because I'm a punster. *I* tell puns because I can't seem to remember most jokes. No kidding.

People used to introduce a joke they wanted to tell with the phrase, "Did you hear the one about...?" And then they would tell their joke. I found most jokes very forgettable. Do you remember and can you repeat most jokes you have ever heard?

In my senior year in high school I discovered I could make up jokes as I went along. I wouldn't have to remember a collection of forgettable jokes.

It happened when I attended an out of state conference for teenagers over the Christmas to New Year break. I shared a room with an adult counselor for our group. He didn't tell jokes. He made puns. All the time. The response to most puns is a big groan, and then a grin. And after that weekend I found my mind looking for ways to make a word play, or a new pun all the time. I started getting groans too. I was a hit! Or, I deserved a hit.

Paul's great truth was part of a word play. And his pun was intended. Have you ever noticed it? I didn't notice until years later because it is in Greek. And it isn't translated for us into English. Know what it is? It is Paul's word play on the word "Word"!

Paul's word play occurs in 1 Timothy 1 following his amazing call to service. In verse 12, Paul writes, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, because he reckoned me faithful, putting me into service..." This is followed by his praise of Jesus the Word of God. John also called Jesus the Word. In John 1:1 we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

It was the Jesus, the Word, whose words Paul heard on the road to Damascus. It was *Jesus* who was faithful to him in his following years of service. Jesus had made Paul faithful and *Jesus* enabled him to carry out his service.

Now comes the word play. In verse 15, Paul begins with the Greek phrase, *pistos ho logos*. The meaning of these three words following his testimony of the previous verses is clear. *Pistos* means "faithful." Next, there is no verb but it is proper to add the verb "is." So we have, "Faithful is ..." Next is the article, or the word "the." And last we have the word "word." Together they read, "Faithful is the Word." Who is the faithful Word? Jesus!

This is the great truth that makes possible all that is good in 1 Timothy. Jesus, the faithful Word, revolutionizes and heals everything he touches, for good! Paul uses this powerful little phrase three times in 1 Timothy. Each time it is the great truth of that section of his letter.

What about the pun? Oh yes. The word *logos* does not always stand for Jesus. It can also mean "a saying." Taking this other meaning of the word "word" Paul adds an appropriate "saying" and makes the word *logos* do double duty. He adds a saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the chief."

Any word that is used in a pun can stand on its own. It doesn't have to be used in a word play and usually isn't. *Pistos ho logos* can be, and is, used on its *own elsewhere* in his letter to Timothy to mean "Faithful is the Word" who is Jesus. Paul does this in 1 Timothy 3:1 and 1 Timothy 4:9.

Each time he uses *this* phrase to point to "the faithful Jesus" who changes the lives of those he touches. He changed the life of Paul. He could change the lives of the church leaders who had gone astray. He changed Timothy's own life from early on, and before he had gotten into trouble as had Paul and had some of the teachers where Timothy was.

I used to make nervous those around me who were used to my making puns. They were always waiting to see what word play I would make next. As a youth group leader and later as a teacher of high school students, I found this kept my listeners alert. And usually I made *no* puns in what I was saying.

In a similar way, I'm afraid many translators of 1 Timothy have *mistranslated*, or missed in their translations of 1 Timothy 3:1 and 4:9. They look for another saying to be attached to Paul's use

of “the faithful word” in those places. But, in those verses Paul uses the statement on its own and adds no sayings. It makes perfectly good sense as it is. “Jesus is the Faithful Word.” That’s the primary meaning of Paul’s words *pistos ho logos*. The additional *saying* in chapter 1 only makes use of a word play to drive Paul’s point home, the first time he uses it.

Three sections. Around this great statement, then, *pistos ho logos*, Paul organizes his letter to Timothy into three major sections. The first section is about Paul, himself. The second section is about three groups of people who have the responsibility to serve, inside and outside the body of Christ. The third section is about Timothy.

Section 1. About Paul (1 Timothy 1:1-17)

Section 2. About those with responsibilities (1 Timothy 1:18-3:16)

Section 3. About Timothy (1 Timothy 4-6)

The words *pistos ho logos* are used near the *end* of the first section. They are used in the *middle* of the second section. They are used near the *start* of the third section. So we find, the “faithful Word” and *Paul* in 1:15, the “faithful Word” and the corrected *overseers* in 3:1, and the “faithful Word” and *Timothy* in 4:9

In Section One of 1 Timothy, which runs from 1:1-17, Paul tells how he had been a great sinner. He lists his three sins. He was shown mercy because he acted in ignorance and unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13). God took this into account and Jesus, the “faithful Word,” made him faithful to serve (1 Timothy 1:15)!

Right afterwards, in Section Two of 1 Timothy, which runs from 1 Timothy 1:18-3:16, Paul writes about *three* groups of people. First, he gives advice about those were those inside the church who had gone astray on purpose (1 Timothy 1:18-20). Second, he gives advice about those outside the church who had the power to persecute believers (1 Timothy 2:1-7). Third, he gives advice about the other teachers in the church who had gone astray (1 Timothy 2:8-15). Jesus, the “faithful Word,” could correct and restore them (1 Timothy 3:1)!

In Section Three of 1 Timothy, which runs from 1 Timothy 4:1-6:21, Paul focuses on Timothy. *He* had believed in Christ and was faithful from his youth. This, too, was because of the work of Jesus. *He* was made fit for service by the “faithful Word” (1 Timothy 4:9).

Advance notice. May I give you advance notice? Did you notice where the major sections of 1 Timothy really begin and end? Did you notice the three times where the main statement is located? Compare what others have been saying about the meaning of 1 Timothy and you’ll see they follow the chapter breaks. They miss Paul’s three sections. And they break apart the passage into bites that break up the meaning of Paul’s letter to Timothy.

For example, my commentary here starts and ends with 1 Timothy 1:18 and continues down through 3:16. Have other commentators kept the last verses of chapter 1 with chapters 2 and 3? Have they seen that Paul’s developing argument is based his own three sins?

Reason for the letter. What job did the Apostle Paul give to Timothy in Ephesus? He left him in Ephesus to: “instruct certain people not to teach erroneous doctrines...” 1 Timothy 1:3. Just who was teaching what? And what was Timothy to do with them?

To understand Paul’s first letter to Timothy, we need to look into the history of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. Paul first made a *brief* visit to the important city of Ephesus on his second missionary journey.

He taught in the synagogue there and was well received. He left behind him at Ephesus, the wife and husband *ministry* duo of Priscilla and Aquila. They had come with Paul to Ephesus after being with him many months as he taught in Corinth (Acts 18:19-26).

Later, Paul returned to Ephesus and stayed there for several years. Paul taught in public and in the house churches. One group of believers was meeting in the home of Priscilla and Aquila (1 Corinthians 16:19).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul revealed that the Spirit of Christ chose certain ones among them to serve the rest (Ephesians 4:11). The responsibility of those who served the others was to equip the rest of God’s people to do his work (Ephesians 4:12a).

Later in his ministry, Paul discovered that some, who were gifted by the Holy Spirit to teach and equip the other believers in Ephesus, had wandered into *false* teachings. Their teaching and their behavior led other people astray and caused controversies to grow in Ephesus.

Paul assigned Timothy to correct the ones who could be corrected. Here’s an extract from his letter to Timothy, from 1 Timothy 1:3b-7:

... stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain ones 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. ... Some have wandered away ... and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.

Paul started his letter with “Dear Timothy” (1 Timothy 1:2). We’re looking into a private letter. Since both Paul and Timothy knew the believers at Ephesus, Paul did not need to write out every name or every detail for Timothy about what was wrong.

Paul also expected the *others* in Ephesus to *learn* the contents of his letter and to cooperate with Timothy. This means that 1 Timothy was a public letter. At the end of the letter, Paul wrote, “Grace be with all of you” (1 Timothy 6:21).

In this important letter which we find in our Bibles labeled as 1 Timothy, Paul first wrote about his own life in 1 Timothy 1:1-17. Then, he wrote about those who had strayed. In 1 Timothy 1:18-3:16 he told Timothy how to deal with them. Finally he devoted the last half of his letter, chapters 4-6 primarily to Timothy.

Recognizing the *beginning* and *end* of the three sections to 1 Timothy helps us greatly in understanding what Paul is advising Timothy to do with the men and women overseers who were going astray. When we know where a section begins and ends then we can study the way that section is put together.

In Ephesians 5-6 for example, recognizing that Paul wrote the second half of his letter in six sections allowed us find the beginning and end of the section in which the verse on submission everybody wants to study is found. Since all six sections start with the Greek words for “therefore walk” or a variation of them, we can learn from the context of Ephesians 5:22, that says “wives to your husbands.” The context is 5:15-6:9.

That whole passage is a virtuoso use of several Hebrew rhetorical patterns. The focus is on verse 21 and verse 32. The topic is the *reciprocating submission* of all believers one to another in Christ.

Verse 22 is only a sub-point, in a sub-point, relating to the main points. Verse 22 is not a main teaching point. And when we look closely at Ephesians 5:22 we see it doesn’t say what so many people are claiming it says.

In a similar way, the hot topic, the hot verse in 1 Timothy is 2:12. People want to go right there and from that verse *only* they want to learn how to treat women in church. But what is the context of verse 12 of chapter 2? It actually begins back in 1:18. And we have to go back there and follow the thoughts as the progress.

1 Timothy 2:12 turns out to be only the second half of a Greek sentence. And it is not the important half of the sentence. The main idea is in verse 11.

When we look closely at 2:12 we come to understand it explains to Timothy how to correct only a group of the women overseers, a subset of all the women overseers, who were going astray in their teaching and practice. Jesus the faithful Word could restore them. That is their turning point, as spelled out in 1 Timothy 3:1 in Greek. I’m sorry to say you won’t find it clearly stated in your English translation. Yet.

We have discovered that we need a true version of what Genesis 3:16 really says and means. We *also need* a true version of this part of 1 Timothy.

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There is also a Study Guide on this episode for use in personal study or in small groups and more. You can find it in the blog posts on Tru316.com or write me at Bruce@Tru316.com. And thanks for joining me on **The Eden Podcast!**

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