

INVITATION TO 1 TIMOTHY

After being held prisoner in Rome for at least two years, the apostle Paul was released. He continued his work of bringing the good news about Jesus to new places and guiding and strengthening the communities he'd founded. A particular challenge awaited him in the city of Ephesus, where he'd lived for two years and helped start a strong community of Jesus-followers. Just before his arrest and imprisonment, while he was on his way to Jerusalem with the offering for the poor, Paul had a sense that some of the leaders in Ephesus would distort the genuine message they'd heard, to try to get rich and win personal followings. So he arranged a special meeting to warn them about this (see pp. 1555–1556). After he was released from prison, Paul discovered that some of these leaders had done just what he'd anticipated. They'd misapplied some Jewish practices and borrowed others from the philosophies of the day to create a regimen they expected believers to follow to supplement their faith in Jesus. Like those who opposed Paul in other places, they didn't allow certain foods, forbade marriage and stressed controversial speculations as the means to spiritual progress. At the same time, they were tolerant of immoral behavior. It appears their teaching was being spread particularly by younger widows, who had lots of energy and free time because they were being supported by the church. Paul was apparently only able to make a brief visit to Ephesus after his release before traveling to Macedonia on other business. He couldn't address the problems he'd discovered by writing directly to the leaders in Ephesus, since many of them were now unsympathetic to his message and questioning his authority. So Paul left his co-worker Timothy in Ephesus and wrote him a letter that he hoped would give him the power and influence to begin setting things in order until he

could get back to Ephesus in person. While the letter is addressed to Timothy, it's clear that Paul expected him to share much of it with the community. Paul begins by restating why he's left Timothy in Ephesus. He defends his own apostleship in the process. He states that he's deposed two of the community's leaders, Hymenaeus and Alexander, because they've departed from the genuine teaching about Jesus. He urges the community to respect those in authority and strive for peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness—the opposite of the moral and social chaos the upstart leaders have created. Paul explains what kind of people the community should have as its leaders, so it can reject those who aren't qualified and replace them with those who are. He also shows how to avoid the problem of younger widows going about from house to house spreading bad influences: only godly older widows should be supported; younger ones should remarry and devote themselves to family life. Paul includes a special warning toward the end of the letter about the dangers of greed, which seems to be behind much of the trouble in Ephesus. His letter alternates between instruction that's directed primarily at the community and some very personal words to Timothy (for example, Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young). It's likely that Timothy read much of the letter out loud to the others in the community. In fact, as Paul offers a final encouragement to Timothy, he also includes a greeting to them. He hopes they'll recognize the qualities of genuine leadership he's modeled over the years as he's invested so much in them. Throughout the letter Paul uses the phrase Christ Jesus—that is, Messiah Jesus—which emphasizes the kingly rule of Jesus. This helped remind the church that Jesus is their real leader and is the clearest model of authentic leadership.