



Pastoral Epsitles

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PASTORAL EPISTLES

The New Testament letters, which bear the names of Timothy and Titus, have been called “The Pastoral Epistles” for more than a century. These letters were written to men who were in charge of Christian Churches. They were not “pastors” in the usual, present day sense of the term. They were not ministers of local congregations, but rather apostolic legates or representatives who maintained a spiritual and unique relationship to the Apostle Paul. Their task was to perform special assignments from time to time.

However these epistles may be termed “pastoral” because they deal with the care and organisation of the flock of God; they tell how to behave within the household of God; they give instructions as to how God’s house should be administered, as to what kind of people the leaders and pastors of the Church should be, and as to how the threats which endanger the purity of Christian faith and life should be dealt with.

THE CITY OF EPHEBUS

Both 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy were written to Timothy while he was serving the Lord in Ephesus. 1 Tim 1:3.

Ephesus was both the provincial capital and the religious centre of the province of Asia. Because of the setting of its harbour, it was in Paul’s time in commercial decline; this was still offset, however, by its past importance and the presence of its temple of Artemis (Diana), one of the Seven Wonders of the World and a tourist attraction that netted no small gain to enterprising hawkers of religious souvenirs. (Acts 19:23-41).

The cult of Artemis was an oriental fertility rite, with sensuous practices. The Ephesian church was very important in Paul’s missionary strategy: hence his concern to root out the error in this key centre.

Paul had had an extensive ministry at Ephesus on his third missionary journey, about eight years earlier. Acts 19:1 – 20:1.

Some time after being released from Rome, he travelled with Timothy and Titus to the island of Crete. They soon found that the churches in Crete were in a state of confusion because of the activities of false teachers. They therefore stayed for some time in order to help correct these difficulties. When Paul felt he should move on to other places, he left Titus at Crete to carry on the work and took Timothy with him to Ephesus. Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 1:3. Sadly, they found that the church at Ephesus was troubled by the same evil teaching as in the churches in Crete, except that in

Ephesus it was far more serious. It no doubt reminded Paul of the warning he had given the Ephesian elders eight years earlier. Acts 20:29,30. Paul himself dealt with the leaders of the trouble (1 Tim 1:19,20), but when he had to depart from Ephesus he left Timothy behind to help restore order and stability to the church.

Paul travelled on to Macedonia. While there he heard that the churches in Ephesus and Crete were still being troubled by this wrong teaching. From Macedonia he then wrote to Timothy and Titus to encourage them to do the work he left them to do. These two letters, 1 Timothy and Titus, are therefore alike in many ways.

CRETE

The Epistle to Titus was written to Titus in Crete. Titus 1:5. It is the fourth largest island of the Mediterranean, lying directly south of the Aegean Sea. The nucleus of the Church in Crete, probably, was started by the Jews from Crete who were at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:11. There is no New Testament mention of an apostolic visit to Crete other than by Paul on his visit to Rome, Acts 27:7-12, and that implied in the Epistle to Titus. Paul was inclined to avoid building on other men's foundations. So it seems likely that the Cretan churches, in the main, were Paul's work. Otherwise he would not have assumed the authority over them indicated in this Epistle.

The Cretans were such habitual liars (Titus 1:12) that the Greeks coined a special verb for lying – "to Cretize". It is plain from Paul's letter that even the Christians were an unruly, hot-headed, volatile bunch who needed firm handling.

AUTHORSHIP

The epistles claim to be written by Paul to his younger co-workers, whom he left in charge of the churches in Ephesus and Crete respectively. However since the early nineteenth century doubt of Pauline authorship was first expressed by F. Schleiermacher so that at present some New Testament scholars worldwide consider them written by a pseudepigrapher (although a disciple of Paul) around the turn of the first century A.D. There are three arguments raised against Pauline authorship: historical, ecclesiastical and linguistic.

1. Historical argument

Fee writes:

"One of the difficulties of the Pastoral Epistles has been to locate them historically in what is otherwise known of the life of Paul. The problem is a combination of several factors. First, the picture of Paul that emerges from 1 Timothy and Titus portrays him travelling freely in the East. He and Titus have evangelised Crete (Titus 1:5); he has apparently travelled to Ephesus with Timothy and hopes to return (1 Tim 1:3; 3:14); at some point in all of this he intends to winter in Nicopolis, on the southern Adriatic (Titus 3:12). But in 2 Timothy he is again in prison, this time in close

confinement in Rome, where he expects to die (cf. 2 Tim 1:16-17; 2:9; 4:6-8, 16-18).

The problem arises because this cannot easily be placed in Paul's life as it can be reconstructed from Acts and the earlier letters. To the traditional answer that Paul was released from the imprisonment of Acts 28, returned to the East, and was imprisoned in Rome a second time, it is argued that Paul had intended to travel west from Rome, not east (Rom 15:23-29), that Luke could hardly have been silent about such an event, and that in any case it would have been highly unlikely for Paul to be either released from a Roman detention or, if released, re-arrested. Since the only evidence we have for such a second imprisonment is from the Pastoral Epistles, which is suspect on other grounds as well, such a picture is often viewed as the fabrication of a pseudepigrapher.

But the proponents of the above difficulties simply do not take the historical data seriously enough. If, as most scholars believe, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians were written from Rome during the imprisonment of Acts 28, then it is clear that Paul had changed his mind about travelling west and now hoped to return to Asia Minor (Philemon 22) and that he himself expected to be released from the first imprisonment (Phil 1:18-19, 24-26; 2:24). No sound historical grounds exist to think that such did not actually happen. Furthermore, it seems highly unlikely that a pseudepigrapher, writing thirty to forty years later, would have tried to palm off such traditions as Paul's evangelising Crete, the near capitulation to heresy of the Ephesian church or a release and second imprisonment of Paul if in fact they had never happened. Again the historical data favour the authenticity of the letters.

But what is still not clear from the evidence of the Pastoral Epistles themselves is the actual order of events and the sequence of 1 Timothy and Titus. The most probable solution holds that Paul went to Crete with Titus and (probably) Timothy soon after his release from Roman custody. There they evangelised most of the towns, but they also encountered some opposition from Hellenistic Jews who seemed to be taking a different tack from the struggle over circumcision that had characterized the earlier opposition from Palestinian Judaism (see Galatians 1-2; Acts 15). Paul, therefore, left Titus on the island to regulate things by putting the churches in order. Meanwhile, Paul and Timothy were on their way to Macedonia by way of Ephesus when the stopover at Ephesus turned out to be a small disaster. Some false teachings similar to those encountered earlier in Colossae, and more recently in Crete, were in the process of totally undermining the church in Ephesus. So Paul excommunicated the two ringleaders of this movement, Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1:19-20); but because he had to press on to Macedonia, he left Timothy in charge of things in Ephesus to stem the tide (1 Tim 1:3). On his arrival in Macedonia, he wrote letters to both Timothy and Titus. Timothy was to remain in Ephesus, but Titus would be replaced by either Tychicus or Artemas (apparently it turned out to be the latter) and was to join Paul in Nicopolis for the winter (see Titus 3:12). From there (Nicopolis) Paul

seems to have been on his way back to Ephesus when he was arrested, probably at Troas at the instigation of Alexander the metalworker (see 2 Tim 4:13-15). At what point he touched base at Corinth and Miletus (2 Tim 4:20) is not so clear.

Eventually he was brought back to Rome, where he had a preliminary hearing before a Roman tribunal (2 Tim 4:16-18) and was bound over for a full trial. During this time in custody he felt great ambivalence toward him on the part of his friends. Onesiphorus of Ephesus came to Rome, sought him out, and both ministered to his needs and informed him of the situation in Ephesus, which apparently had continued to deteriorate (see 2 Tim 1:15-18). But others had left him, at least one as a turncoat, but some for legitimate reasons (2 Tim 4:10-12). In this distress he decided to send Tychicus to replace Timothy at Ephesus (2 Tim 4:12). With him, Paul sent a letter to Timothy (2 Timothy), urging loyalty to himself and his gospel and requesting, finally, that Timothy should drop everything and make his way to Rome, before winter closed down Mediterranean shipping, he hoped (see 2 Tim 4:21)."

Fee 1984:3-5

According to Guthrie, there are three possibilities of authorship:

- (a) We may regard the Pastoral Epistles as Pauline but belong to a period outside the Acts history, necessitating a second Roman imprisonment for Paul as suggested above.
- (b) We may go to the other extreme and pronounce the whole of these epistles to be the work of some fiction writer who wishing to impress upon the Church their Pauline origin, invented the historical background mentioned in these epistles.
- (c) They are the work of a later admirer of Paul after this person came into possession of some genuine Pauline notes and wished to preserve them in this way for posterity.

2. Ecclesiastical argument

In the Pastoral Epistles we read about overseers, ("bishops" KJV) elders and deacons, 3:1, 8; 5:17. It is claimed by scholars that this shows a more advanced church organisation than existed during the lifetime of Paul. However in Titus 1:5-9 we see that "elders" and "overseers" are terms used interchangeably. Also in Phil 1:1 Paul addresses the "overseers and deacons".

The kind of leadership in the churches had changed by the beginning of the second century. According to the Epistles of Ignatius (AD 115), each local church had one bishop, several presbyters (elders) and several deacons. So it is clear that the type of church leadership mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles agrees with that of Paul's time and not of Ignatius' time. This indicated the Pauline authorship of these epistles.

3. Linguistic argument

Earle writes:

“The most serious argument against the genuineness of the Pastoral Epistles is their difference in style and vocabulary from Paul’s earlier writings. This is the main point stressed today by negative critics.

Harrison found 175 words used nowhere else in the NT and 130 non-Pauline words shared by other NT writers. Working with a word-per-page method, he found an abrupt, sharp rise in new words in the Pastorals. So he concluded that Paul could not have written these later Epistles.

These statistics have carried great weight with many twentieth century scholars. Guthrie answers: “But numerical calculations cannot with the limited data available from Paul’s letters take into account differences of subject-matter, differences of circumstances and differences of addressees, all of which may be responsible for new words”. Cambridge statistician Yule declared that samples of about ten thousand words are necessary as a basis for valid statistical study. This, of course, we do not have in the case of the pastorals. Bruce M. Metzger asserts that Harrison’s use of the statistical method has proved to be unsound.”

Earle 1978:342, 343

Words commonly used in the Pastorals, but not used or rarely used in the ten epistles known to be written by Paul are:

“godliness” 1 Tim 2:2; 3:16; 4:7,8; 6:3,5,6,11; 2 Tim 3:5; Titus 1:1.

“sound doctrine” 1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9,13; 2:1,2.

“temperate” “self controlled”, “propriety” (Gk “sōphrōn”) 1 Tim 2:9,15; 3:2; Titus 1:8; 2:2,4,6.

“guard what has been entrusted” 1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:12,14.

RECIPIENTS OF THE EPISTLES

Fee writes:

“Timothy was a much younger colleague of Paul’s who had become his frequent travelling companion and close friend. According to Acts 16:1-3, Timothy was from Lystra, a Lycaonian town in the Roman province of Galatia in south-central Asia Minor. Paul probably met him for the first time (ca¹ AD 46-48) during his first missionary endeavour in this area (cf. Acts 13:49-14:25 and 2 Tim 3:11). It is altogether likely that he and his mother and grandmother became converts at this time. During Paul’s second visit in this

¹ [ca – about that time]

area (ca AD49-50), on the recommendation of the local believers (Acts 16:2), he decided to take Timothy along on his travels. But because Timothy was of mixed lineage (Jewish mother and pagan father), and so as not to undermine his mission among Diaspora Jews, he had Timothy circumcised. Thus began a life-long relationship of mutual affection (cf. Phil 2:19-24). Paul variously calls Timothy his “beloved and faithful son in the Lord” (1 Cor 4:17 NAB; cf Phil 2:22; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2) and his “fellow worker” in the gospel (Rom 16:21; cf 1 Thes 3:2; 1 Cor 16:10; Phil 2:22). As his son, he became Paul’s most intimate and enduring companion, who followed him closely (1 Tim 4:6; 2 Tim 3:10-11; cf 2 Tim 1:13; 2:2) shared his point of view (Phil 2:20) and could articulate his ways to the churches (1 Thes 3:2-3; 1 Cor 4:17). As Paul’s fellow worker, Timothy had been entrusted with three previous assignments to churches; to Thessalonica, ca AD 50 (1 Thess 3:1-10); to Corinth, ca AD 53-54 (1 Cor 4:16-17; 16:10-11); and to Philippi, ca AD 60-62 (Phil 2:19-24). He also collaborated in six of Paul’s extant letters (1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians; cf Rom 16:21). In the present letters he is on yet another assignment, this time a most difficult one. He has been left in Ephesus to stop some false teachers who were in the process of undoing the church as a viable Christian alternative for that city.

Timothy is often pictured as a very young man, somewhat sickly, full of timidity, and lacking in personal forcefulness. Hence in these two letters Paul is frequently viewed as trying to bolster his courage in the face of difficulties. Although there may be some truth to this picture (see 1 Cor 16:10-11; 2 Tim 1:6-7), it is probably also a bit overdrawn. He was young by ancient standards (but at least over thirty by the time of 1 Timothy), and apparently had recurring stomach trouble (cf 1 Tim 5:23). But a person of his youthfulness who could carry out (apparently alone) the earlier missions to Thessalonica and Corinth was probably not totally lacking in courage. In any case, the exhortations to loyalty and steadfastness in 1 and 2 Timothy are probably the result of two factors; his youthfulness and the strength of the opposition.

Of Titus, much less is known. Curiously, he is not mentioned in Acts. From Paul we learn that he was a Gentile, whose lack of circumcision was a key factor in Paul’s securing the right of the Gentiles to a Law-free gospel (Gal 2:1,3). He, too, was an early co-worker of Paul’s (the event in Gal 2:1 probably dates ca AD 48-49) who became a trusted compatriot throughout Paul’s life. To him Paul had entrusted the ticklish situation in Corinth, which included both the delivery of a very difficult letter (see 2 Cor 2:3-4,13; 7:6-16) and the gathering of the Corinthian gift for the poor in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:16-24).

According to the letter that bears his name, Titus had been left on Crete, after Paul and he had evangelised the island, to set the churches in order. But he was soon to be replaced by Ateamas (Titus 3:12) and was to join Paul in Nicopolis. Apparently he had done so, because according to 2 Timothy 4:10 he had gone on to Dalmatia, presumably for ministry.

Although one cannot be certain, Titus was probably older than Timothy (Titus 2:15). He also seems to have been of strong temperament. Paul calls him his “true legitimate son”, which at least means that his ministry is a legitimate expression of Paul’s, most likely it also indicates that he is Paul’s convert (cf 1 Cor 4:14-15; Philemon 10). It should be noted that the pictures that emerge in the Pastoral Epistles are consonant with what we learn elsewhere. A pseudepigrapher, of course could have so read Paul’s earlier letters and painted his own pictures accordingly. But that would have come very close to his having done research, which is highly unlikely. Moreover, the various movements of Titus (Titus 3:12; 2 Tim 4:10) are not the stuff of pseudepigraphy, which would be expected to have drawn a consistent, easy-to-follow picture of events. These matters about Timothy and Titus, at least, favour the authenticity of the letters”.

Fee 1984:1-3

OCCASION AND PURPOSE

1 TIMOTHY

1. The purpose of this letter was to urge Timothy to stay in Ephesus as his personal representative in order to stop the influence of some false teachers. 1:3.
2. In contrast to Galatia and Corinth whose problems were caused by “false brothers” who “had infiltrated our ranks” (Gal 2:4 cf 2 Cor 11:4), in Ephesus the false teachers are insiders. It seems that Paul’s prophecy spoken to the elders of Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:30) had been realised. It seems that the church was being led astray by some of its own elders. Consider the following facts:
 - (a) Those who were in error were teachers. 1:3,7; 6:3.
(Teaching was the work of elders. 3:2; 5:17.)
 - (b) A significant part of the epistle concerns the character, qualifications and discipline of elders. 3:1-13; 5:17-25. The character required in elders is in marked contrast to the character of the false teachers.
 - (c) These false teachers had affected some women, apparently younger widows, who had opened their homes to them and even helped to spread their teachings. 2 Tim 3:6-9; 1 Tim 2:9-15; 5:3-16 (esp. vv 11-15).
 - (d) Probably the church in Ephesus was composed of many house-churches (cf 1 Cor 16:19; 1 Tim 2:8) where the instruction is to men “everywhere” i.e. in every place where believers gather in and around Ephesus. Each of the house-churches would have one or more elders. So the danger was not that a single large gathered church being split down the middle, but

rather various house-churches capitulating to leadership that had gone astray. cf Titus 1:11.

3. The nature of the false teaching is difficult to define with precision, but we can ascertain the following:

(a) **It affected behaviour**

It involved not only speculations and disputes over words, but also arguments and quarrels of various kinds. They were proud, arrogant and derisive. But the bottom line was greed. They believed religion was a way of getting money. 1:3-7; 6:3-10; 3:1-13.

(b) **It affected doctrine**

In some way the false teaching related to a use of the Old Testament (1:6-10 cf Titus 1:14-16; 3:9), which in turn partly accounts for its asceticism (4:3 cf 5:23; Titus 1:14-16) as well as its “myths and wearisome genealogies” (1:4; cf 4:7; Titus 3:9).

It seems that these teachers were Jewish who were caught up in the mythological treatment of Old Testament genealogies. 1:4,7; Titus 1:10, 14.

Also there were elements of Greek dualism which believes that only spirit is good and pure, and that all material things, including the human body, are intrinsically evil. It also advocated asceticism in order to punish the body and deny its gratification. In Ephesus the false teachers were denying sexual relations within marriage. 4:3. Also because of Greek dualism, the false teachers denied a future bodily resurrection. 2 Tim 2:18. If a person believes that the body is evil, he has no interest in a future resurrected body.

4. **Gnosticism**

Is there any heresy which fits all this material? There is, and its name is Gnosticism, a false philosophy that incorporated some of the beliefs of Christianity. This name comes from the Greek word “gnosis” which means “knowledge”. Gnostics believed that they could be saved by special so called “higher” knowledge which they had received. The seeds of Gnostic teaching began during the time of the Apostles and developed into a very highly-developed system of beliefs in the second and third centuries.

The basic thought of Gnosticism was that all matter is essentially evil, and spirit alone is good.

Although he was a liberal theologian, William Barclay was an authority on the customs and beliefs of the New Testament world. He describes the Gnostic beliefs. “Gnosticism was entirely speculative. It began with the problem of the origin of sin and of suffering. If God is altogether good, he could not have created them. How then did they get into the world? The Gnostic answer was that creation was not creation out of nothing; before time began, matter

existed. They believed that this matter was essentially imperfect, an evil thing; and out of this essentially evil matter, the world was created.”

No sooner had they got to this length than they ran into another difficulty. If matter is essentially evil and God is essentially good, God could not Himself have touched this matter. So they began another set of speculations. They said that God put out an “emanation,” and that this emanation put out another emanation, and the second emanation put out a third emanation and so on and on until there came into being an emanation so distant from God that he could handle matter; and that it was not God but this emanation who created the world.

They further provided each one of the emanations with a complete biography. So they built up an elaborate mythology of gods and emanations, each with his story and his biography and his genealogy. This belief even entered the Church. It made Jesus merely the greatest of the emanations, the one closest to God. It classed him as the highest link in the endless chain between God and man”.

It seems that the churches at Ephesus and Crete were facing a heresy – not of pure Gnosticism, but of a combination of Gnosticism and Judaism. (1 Tim 1:4,7; Titus 1:10,14). Paul needed to give the following warnings to Timothy (and the Ephesian Church) in order to counter this new heresy.

(a) **Gnostics believed that a higher, special knowledge could save.** So Paul counsels Timothy to “turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge (Gk “gnōsis”), which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith”. 1 Tim 6:20 NIV.

Also Paul tells Timothy that, contrary to the ascetic practices of the Gnostics, God has provided marriage and all foods to be enjoyed by those who “know (Gk “epiginōskō”) the truth”. 1 Tim 4:3-4 NIV. Also “God...wants all men to...come to a knowledge (Gk “epignōsis”) of the truth”. 1 Tim 2:4 NIV. Paul says that these Gnostics “can never arrive at a knowledge (Gk “epignōsis”) of the truth”. 2 Tim 3:7 RSV.

(b) **Gnostics were proud of their speculative, saving knowledge.** Timothy is warned against the man who is proud of his intellect but really knows nothing and has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words. 1 Tim 6:4. He is told to avoid “foolish and stupid arguments because they produce quarrels”. 2 Tim 2:23.

(c) **Gnostics believed that salvation was only for a special elite.** Paul emphasised that God wants all men to be saved and all men to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Tim 2:4. God is “the Saviour of all men, especially those who believe”. 1 Tim 4:10.