

THE PASTORAL LETTERS

TRUTH, HOLINESS, AND THE GOVERNANCE OF THE CHURCH

I. The Pastoral Letters, i.e., First and Second Timothy and Titus, describe early advice to bishops about how to govern the church and in general describe enduring issues the church faces throughout the centuries.

A. The letters have from early times been considered written by St. Paul to early bishops that he appointed, although Pauline authorship has been questioned more recently.

1. The letters are by their terms attributed to St. Paul, with First Timothy and Titus seemingly written when St. Paul was more free and Second Timothy written near the end of his life, as he is anticipating death, but also satisfied with his ministry. See 2 Tim. 4:6-18.

2. Some scholarship has, since about the beginning of the nineteenth century questioned whether St. Paul or an associate wrote the letters. These arguments have been based mostly upon two factors: (1) the phraseology of the letters is somewhat different from the rest of the Pauline corpus, with such terms as trustworthy, sound, and piety; (2) the themes are different from the rest of St. Paul's letters, with less emphasis on the cross and redemption and more on church governance; and (3) the order of the church seems more fixed, with bishops, priests and deacons, than some believe that the other Pauline letters reflect. See Fr. Robert Wild, S.J. "The Pastoral Letters" sections 6-7 in The New Jerome Biblical Commentary (1988); Fr. Henry Neyrey, "The Pastoral Letters" in The Collegeville Biblical Commentary: The New Testament (1986) 1198-99. Defenders of Pauline authorship argue that these factors can easily be explained by the different subject matter of these letters, for they are addressed to bishops regarding governance and teaching, rather than to communities. The different phraseology may also be explained by use of a secretary. See Introduction to the Pastoral Letters" in The Ignatius Bible: The Letters of Saint Paul (2003) 545-46; "1 & 2 Timothy" in The Zondervan Handbook to the Bible (1999) 732.

B. If St. Paul wrote the letters, First Timothy and Titus would presumably have been written in the early 60s when St. Paul was either in Rome or on missionary journeys elsewhere after an imprisonment in Rome from 60 to 62. Second Timothy seems plainly to be shortly before St. Paul's death in about 67 A.D. Those who argue for authorship by an associate would put them a little

later, in the 70s A.D. But they would have to be somewhere close to St. Paul's death, for both Timothy and Titus seem to be young men and relatively new at being a bishop.

C. Saint Timothy was an early associate of St. Paul, a representative of his, and a coauthor of several letters.

1. Acts describes St. Timothy as the son of a Jewish mother and a Gentile father in Lystra, a city in central Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. See Acts 16:1. His mother Eunice and grandmother Lois both were Christian, see 2 Tim. 1:5. It is not clear whether his father was living at the time. St. Timothy was apparently taught the Jewish faith from an early age, see 2 Tim. 3:14-15, but was not brought up in the rituals of the Jewish faith, for he was circumcised later. See Acts 16:3

2. He soon joined St. Paul early on his second missionary journey, around 50 A.D., and apparently was with him frequently after that. See Acts 17:14-15, 18. Thus, for example, when St. Paul wished to get a report on how the churches in Corinth, Phillipi, and Thessalonica were surviving persecutions, St. Paul sent St. Timothy to report on the situation. See 1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10-11; Phil 2:19-21; 1 Thess. 3:1-7.

3. The letters of St. Paul to the Phillipians and the Philemon, the First Letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, and the Second Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians list St. Timothy as a coauthor, although St. Paul was the main author. This inclusion of St. Timothy indicates the closeness of their ministry.

4. St. Paul evidently ordained St. Timothy, likely with other bishops during his stay in Rome in the early 60s, or perhaps a little later. The co-authorship of the letters to the Phillipians, Philemon and the Corinthians from the 50s indicates that St. Timothy was with St. Paul before that.

- The First Letter to Timothy indicates that St. Timothy was a comparatively young man to be a bishop at that time. Thus, he was probably in his 30s or perhaps about 40 at the time. See 1 Tim. 4:12, 5:1-2.

- St. Timothy was the bishop of Ephesus, a central city in Asia Minor, the administrative center of the province and a cross-road of much commerce and many faiths. The people there would have been used to combining many traditions, and St. Paul had deal with the issues of people incorporating alien traditions into the faith. He stopped by there briefly on his second missionary journey and more at length on his third missionary journey, where he confronted hostility both in the synagogue and from the idol-makings, but had great success in helping form a

dynamic spirit filled church. St. John would later live in Ephesus, but it is not clear that he acted as bishop of that area.

5. According to an ancient work called "The Acts of Saint Timothy," he was martyred by being stoned to death under the Emperor Nerva in 97 A.D.

D. St. Titus was also an associate of St. Paul, who sent him on several missions.

1. The letter to the Galatians indicates that he was a Gentile, who joined with St. Paul at an early date, wither on or before his first missionary journey. See Gal. 2:1, 3.

2. In the mid or late 50s, St. Paul sent him to the Corinthians to ensure that the church there was well governed, and received a good report from him. See 2 Cor. 7:6-7, 13-16, 8:6 12:18.

3. It appears that St. Paul likewise ordained St. Titus a bishop, this time of Crete, probably during St. Paul's first imprisonment in Rome in the early 60s.

- Crete has had settlements from prehistoric time. It was apparently the site of the ancient, prosperous and mysterious Minoan civilization and was the location of many legendary figures such as: (1) the two King Minoses, who in mythology were respectively the judges of the dead and a great lawgiver; (2) the Labyrinth and the Minotaur, who was killed by the Greek hero Theseus; and (3) Daedalus and Icarus, his son who got himself killed by flying too close to the sun with wings made of feathers and wax. The Bible records that inhabitants of Crete came to settle in Moab and Philistia under the providence of God. See Duet. 2:23, Jer. 47:4; Amos 9:7 (all using the ancient name Catphor.)

- Crete had received the gospel early on, shortly after Pentecost. See Acts 2:11. However, as the letter indicates, the city had a reputation for a low moral life, especially as regards to dishonesty.

- St. Paul and the crew carrying him to Rome in 60 A.D. landed in Crete. St. Paul warned the captain not to set sail immediately from Crete, but he did so anyway, and the storms that arose almost destroyed the boat and the crew; however, because of the prayers of St. Paul, they eventually arrived safely in Malta.

- As the letter indicates, St. Paul had left St. Titus in Crete to guide the church, and especially to appoint trustworthy priests to deal with the difficult situation. St. Paul's advice to St. Titus indicates that he had a lot of disciplinary issues to deal with.

- The Second Letter to Timothy indicates St. Titus was with St. Paul in Rome near the end of St. Paul's life, but that St. Paul send him to Dalmatia near Macedonia. It is generally believed that, after St. Paul's death, St. Titus returned to Crete to govern the church there.

4. We have few records of the life of St. Titus, but it appears that he remained as the bishop of Crete until an old age and died peacefully there in Heraklion (also called Candia), the current capital of the island, which is now part of the country of Greece. The ruins of a church in Gortnya, the Roman capital of Crete, bear the name St. Titus.

II. The First Letter to Timothy deals with a variety of pastoral matters, especially with regard to church offices and keeping the faith sound, both with regard to excluding foreign teachings and insisting on sound morals.

A. There is not a clear order to the letter, but in general, it deals with four issues: (1) opposing false teachers who would introduce extraneous teachings; (2) maintaining proper prayers and modesty; (3) dealing with bishops priests and deacons; and (4) upholding a sound moral life, both by example and teaching.

B. There is a brief introduction, in which St. Paul, as is custom, refers to himself as an apostle and wishes Timothy grace and peace. He does use a term of endearment, "my child in the faith" and adds mercy to the customary greeting of grace and peace; the idea may be an emphasis on firmness, but also gentleness.

C. In the rest of chapter 1 and again in chapter 4, St. Paul exhorts St. Timothy to take on false teachers.

- During his last time in Ephesus before his final journey to Rome, St. Paul had warned about "wolves" who would "pervert the truth." See Acts 20:29-30. Here, he condemns the importation of such things as concerns with genealogies (probably from Jewish sources), a negative view of marriage (probably from Greek gnostic sources), and myths and strict dietary rules from either source.

- In verses 3 to 11 of chapter 1, he describes the people who promoted "myths and endless genealogies" as basically naive, wanting to be teachers too soon, and indicates by his own example how people without understanding can be brought back.

- However, chapter 4, he blames other false teachers who forbid marriage and impose strict dietary requirements for bad faith and even listening to evil spirits. There is less hope for them.

- St. Paul here encourages St. Timothy to be firm and not to be worried that he is younger than the false teachers, and thus perhaps less able to command worldly respect. In verses 18 and 19 of chapter 1 and again in verses 7-16 of chapter 4, St. Paul tells him that a holy life and the prophetic power of ordination will guide him and give him the ability to overcome the enemies.

- The call is that all people must be united to the Church, "the pillar and bulwark of the truth." 1 Tim. 3:15.

- There is also a call to show mercy to those who act in ignorance. Verses 12-18 of chapter 1 recount how God has shown mercy to St. Paul, forgiving him for his own previous blasphemies and persecution. The message is one of hope that those teaching falsehoods can be converted, even as they must be dealt with firmly. Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 5 also instruct St. Timothy to deal with the people as members of his household, not mere subjects.

D. Chapter 2 focuses on offering prayers for rulers and avoiding vanity at gatherings.

1. The call for prayers in the beginning of chapter 2 is noteworthy, for the Emperor was either Nero (in the early 60s) or one of the five Emperors (Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasianus, or Titus) from 67-81, who gained the throne from manipulation and violence. Thus, the prayers were for rulers who were not virtuous, but still were responsible for public order.

2. There is a focus on praying that all people be saved without exception. The letter emphasizes God's desire for universal salvation, although there is also a warning that such salvation is not guaranteed.

3. There is advice for men and women in prayer. Men are to be "without anger or argument," for liturgical or theological disputes were probably (then as now) distracting people from worship. Women were to be modest in dress and speech,

not trying to show off. Chapter 11 of First Corinthians described similar themes.

E. Chapters 3 and 5 deal with church offices, bishops, priests, deacons, women involved in the church and enrolled widows.

1. Chapter 3 describes the qualifications of bishops (episcopoi, which also means overseers), deacons (diaconoi, which also means ministers) and women in the church, who may have been the wives of deacons.

- The qualifications of the bishop and deacon (e.g., irreproachable, temperate, able to teach) are enduring. There is a warning against greed and heavy drinking, which are frequently issues.

- The bishops and deacons would be "married only once." At that early time in the Church, almost all young men were married, and thus the clergy would generally be as well, although St. Paul himself was not. However, by saying they should be married only once, the implication was that if their wives died they should not remarry. Celibacy, although not required for the sacrament of Holy Orders in itself, has always been preferred and, since about the fourth century, required universally for bishops. In the Latin rite, celibacy was sometimes required and sometimes no for the first millennium of the church. As the second millennium dawned, it began becoming more universal, and was universally required by the Fourth Laeteran Council in the twelfth century.

- The women referred to here could have been women who were prominent in the church, or the wives of the deacons and possibly bishops who would tend to have influential roles. There is a call to dignity and temperance.

2. Verses 17-22 of chapter 5 refer to care in ordaining priests (presbytoi, which also means elders) and in dealing allegations against them. St. Paul warns St. Timothy to reprimand both public and private faults, but not to believe accusations too easily.

3. Verses 3-16 of chapter 5 refer a special office of enrolled widows.

- These would apparently be women whom the church would be cared for and who would be hospitable and prayerful. Ordinarily, a woman's children and other relatives would take care of her, as St. Paul indicates Christians must. However, Christian widows may have been abandoned by their families.

- This order of enrolled widows is not the same as current religious orders, for no woman who was under 60 was to be admitted, nor did there seem to be any particular vow of obedience. Rather, this position was more what we would now call consecrated life.

- St. Paul emphasizes the enduring principle that people are morally required to provide for their elderly relatives, saying in verse 8 that those who do not do so have renounced the faith. There is also an emphasis on the responsibility of the elderly and the widowed to use their time well.

F. In addition to the general the insistence that St. Timothy and all the clergy live particularly upright lives, chapter 6 especially emphasizes the upholding of a moral life.

1. Verses 3-5 indicate that doctrinal disputes often come from moral flaws, especially a desire to be cantankerous.

2. Verse 1 and 2 call for dedicated labor. The term for slave here (doulos) could mean a number of levels of workers; but the call is always to give a good example for God.

3. Verses 6-10 and 17-19 especially warn against greed, and include the famous line, "Love of money is the root of all evil."

4. This passage, and in fact the letter, comes to a climax in verses 13-16, a hymn like call to fidelity to Jesus who shows us the way to everlasting glory.

G. Chapter 6 ends with an exhortation to St. Timothy to be firm in the faith, with Jesus Christ as his example, and to avoid useless disputes.

III. The Second Letter to Timothy was written close to St. Paul's death and is a more poignant encouragement for St. Timothy to continue guiding his church along the ways of the faith.

A. The letter has a moving introduction and a poignant conclusion, which reflects St. Paul's last days. In between, St. Paul encourages St. Timothy to lead the church boldly and again warns against false teachers.

B. The greeting again introduces St. Paul as an apostle, refers to St. Timothy as his dear son, and wishes St. Timothy grace, mercy and peace. But there are also some very personal notes of St. Paul's desire to see St. Timothy once more and recollections about his family.

C. The rest of chapter 1, chapter 2, the last half of chapter 3 and the first half of chapter 4 exhort St. Timothy, who was apparently having some troubles with his people, to be firm in the faith and to teach courageously and patiently.

1. Once again, there is an emphasis in verses 6-8 in chapter 1 on the power of ordination ("the laying on of my hands") and reliance on the Holy Spirit. St. Paul repeats that the mission is not a matter of his works or St. Timothy's, but rather the ministry of Jesus, for which St. Paul is suffering. There is a warning here against St. Timothy or any minister relying upon his own accomplishments.

2. St. Paul describes his own sufferings, including the loneliness. One Onesiphorus, who was so helpful, has apparently died, and St. Paul prays now for him and his household.

3. Chapter 2 then turns back to instructions to St. Timothy and compares the challenges of the ministry to those of a soldier, and athlete, and a farmer. The emphasis is over and over again that patience and hard work are needed for the ministry even more than for these other fields.

3. The last eight verses of chapter 3 and the first 8 verses of chapter 4 then return to that theme of preaching the true faith, whether popular or unpopular, and says that hardship should be expected. Prophetically, he warns that there is always the danger of curiosity and a desire for novelty turning people away from the truth.

- St. Paul describes his own sufferings as an example for St. Timothy. And he tells St. Timothy to be sure he relies in Scripture, which is inspired by God.

D. The latter half of chapter 2 and first half of chapter 3 then warn, as the first letter did, against false teachers.

1. The latter half of chapter 2 warns against "useless debates" and "idle talk" that turn people away from what is really important, adhering to what we know is true and to a moral life.

2. Chapter 3 then warns that people will engage in all sorts of immorality before "the last days," which could mean the end of all things, or could mean the end of each time of the world, or both. If the reference is to the end of each age or a nation or the world, there is a notion that, when immorality becomes prevalent, there is some cataclysm approaching.

3. In verse 8 and chapter 3, St. Paul compares false teachers to Jannes and Jambres, who according to Jewish tradition were the pharaoh's magicians, who opposed Moses. See Ex. 7.

E. In verses 6-22 of chapter 4, St. Paul poignantly reflects upon his own condition, for prayers and also for a sense of unity with St. Timothy.

1. There is an optimism that St. Paul has competed well and fought the good fight; now he is sure of his reward.

2. But there is also a suffering at his loneliness, for he has had to send some of his friends on missions, and others have deserted him. St. Luke remains to the end.

3. After these poignant reflections, St. Paul then returns to practical instructions, for he remains in charge even in the midst of great suffering and impending death.

IV. The letter to Titus instructs Titus on how to deal with several issues and types of people.

A. There is a four verse introduction (long for a 3 chapter letter), which emphasizes that God makes things happen at the times He has set beforehand. The emphasis is that God will guide us if we are faithful, and all things will work according to His plan. See Rom. 8:28.

B. The rest of chapter 1 deals with the appointment of priests, and possibly bishops. Once again, St. Paul emphasizes such enduring qualities as being blameless, patient, hospitable, temperate, holy and not arrogant, greedy, or prone to anger or drink. Here, however, there is a greater emphasis than in First Timothy on the ability strongly to teach the faith in the midst of unsound teaching.

- The unsoundness came either from moral laxity (lying, viciousness, gluttony) from the pagan side or from those who would add unnecessary "myths and regulation," especially from the Jewish sources.

C. Chapter 2 and the first half of chapter 3 then call for Christians live holy lives and thus be good examples to others.

1. He begins with advice to older men and women, calling for them to be temperate and dignified, and avoiding slander and excess drink.

2. He then turns to younger men and women, calling for them to control their desires and care for their household. St. Titus, apparently himself rather young, should give a good example.

3. St. Paul then tells slaves, and by extension, all workers to offer good efforts, so that the faith may be more creditable. Although the institution of slavery exists, St. Paul indicates that even the slaves can be greater than their masters by means of evangelizing them.

4. In verses 1-2 of chapter 3, there is also a call to uphold good governance and neighborliness.

5. The calling to a moral life, however, does not imply salvation by one's own efforts, however. Verses 11-14 of chapter 2 and again verses 3-8 of chapter 3 emphasize how we are cleansed from sin by Jesus Christ.

D. The letter ends with an exhortation for St. Titus to teach all these things firmly and avoid disputes about irrelevancies, such as genealogies.

- St. Titus, and by extension all church leaders should warn a heretic first and try to persuade him. But there comes a point where further discussion is useless, and the leader (here St. Titus) must simply break off contact with him.