

PASTORAL EPISTLES

The name given to three letters of the apostle Paul: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus. They are called the pastoral epistles because they clearly show Paul's love and concern as pastor and administrator of several local churches.

Historical Setting. The occasion for Paul's writing these three letters was the need to maintain the faith and to insure the faithfulness of the church. He charged the young pastor Timothy, "Guard what was committed to your trust" <1 Tim. 6:20>. This declaration is the heart of the pastoral epistles. Here Timothy, with all the church, is charged to keep the deposit of faith-- the written record or message to be carried on by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

The more immediate need of the first two epistles-- 1 Timothy and Titus-- lay in the fact that many things in Ephesus and Crete, where Timothy was serving, needed adjustment and correction. Paul, intending to advise Timothy and Titus in the faith, determined to advise others at the same time. Paul charged them to avoid heresy, hold to sound doctrine, and maintain purity and piety of life.

Authorship. In the 19th century doubts were expressed about whether Paul actually wrote these three letters. A group of German scholars noted alleged differences in style and vocabulary, church organization, heresies, biographical and historical situations, and theology from those found in the letters that were undisputedly written by Paul.

Linguistic objections to Pauline authorship of the pastoral epistles include certain words, phrases, or forms which appear about twice as often in the pastorals as in Paul's other letters. But this argument is inconclusive because it is impossible to prove. Paul may have chosen to speak in a different vocabulary because he was writing on other subjects and to specific church situations.

Theological objections point to an emphasis on works in the pastorals rather than on grace and faith and an apparent attack on second-century GNOSTICISM. Good works, however, are mentioned as the "fruit" (the natural outgrowth) of the "tree" of faith, and grace is celebrated in several passages <1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 2:11--3:7>. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that in these epistles Paul may not have been fighting a Gnosticism as advanced as some have argued.

Ecclesiastical objections have also been raised to the view that Paul wrote the pastorals. Some scholars charge that a highly structured hierarchical organization, later than the time of Paul, is reflected in the pastoral epistles. However, the elements of church organization found in the pastorals are also described elsewhere in the New Testament <Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1>.

Chronological objections revolve around the discrepancies that supposedly exist between the pastoral epistles and the Book of Acts, with the assumption that Paul was put to death at the end of his one and only Roman imprisonment. The charge is a very good reason for extending the life of Paul beyond the events recorded in Acts. The pastoral epistles would then be the product

of Paul's fourth missionary journey and second imprisonment <1 Tim. 3:14; 2 Tim. 1:8,16>.

All the pastorals are to be taken as written by Paul because their internal evidence reflects the character and temperament of the great apostle. The evidence of the writings themselves indicates that Paul is the writer, since his name appears in the salutation of each letter <1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1>.

Date. The first letter to Timothy and the one to Titus were written during travel and missionary work between Paul's two Roman imprisonments. A date somewhere between A. D. 61 and 63 can be set, because the Second Epistle to Timothy contains Paul's farewell address <2 Tim. 4:6-8>, the last words from the apostle shortly before his martyrdom, generally set between A. D. 65 and 68.

Summary of Theme. The purpose of the pastoral epistles is to admonish, instruct, and direct the recipients in their pastoral duties. These letters deal with the care and the organization of the church, the flock of God. They contain common injunctions to guard the Christian faith, to appoint qualified officials, to conduct proper worship, and to maintain discipline both personally and in the churches. They give instructions in the work of the church and show how threats to the doctrinal and moral purity of Christians should be overcome.

Also see TIMOTHY, EPISTLES TO; TITUS, EPISTLE TO.
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TIMOTHY, EPISTLES TO

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Structure of the Epistles. First Timothy begins with a warning against false doctrine <1:1-11> and a reminder of God's mercy, illustrated by Paul's experience of salvation <1:12-20>. This is followed by instructions on church practices: on prayer <2:1-7>, on public worship <2:8-15>, and on the qualifications of bishops <3:1-7> and deacons <3:8-13>. A salute to Christ concludes the section <3:14-16>.

Continuing with Timothy's responsibilities, Paul warns that false teachers will infiltrate the church <4:1-5>. He instructs Timothy on the characteristics of a fit minister of the gospel <4:6-16>, as well as his duties toward others <5:1-2>, widows <5:3-16>, elders <5:17-25>, and servants <6:1-2>. Following another warning against false teaching <6:3-10>, Paul exhorts Timothy to "fight the good fight of faith" <6:11-21>.

After a brief greeting <1:1-2>, the second Epistle to Timothy begins by recalling Timothy's spiritual heritage <1:3-7>, exhorting him to be strong under adversity and to keep the faith <1:8-18>. In chapter two Paul uses the metaphors of soldier <2:3-4>, farmer <2:6>, experienced worker <2:15>, and household utensils <2:20-21> as models for Timothy to imitate as a strong and worthy servant of the gospel. Paul declares what people will be like in the last days <3:1-9>, although Timothy can take encouragement in the face of adversity from Paul's example and from the Scriptures <3:10-17>.

The final chapter of 2 Timothy takes on a solemn tone as Paul appeals to Timothy to press forward in fulfilling his pastoral calling <4:1-5>. Writing in the shadow of his impending death <4:6-8>, Paul closes with personal greetings <4:9-22>.

Authorship and Date. The authorship and date of the Pastoral Epistles remain an unresolved question in New Testament studies. On the one hand, the epistles bear the name of Paul as author <1 Tim. 1:1, 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1> and preserve personal references to him <1 Tim. 1:3, 12-16; 2 Tim. 4:9-22; Titus 1:5; 3:12-13>. Other considerations, however, pose problems for Paul's authorship of the Pastorals. These can be listed under the following categories:

Historical-- The Book of Acts makes no mention of a situation in which Paul goes to Macedonia, leaving Timothy behind in Ephesus <1 Tim. 1:3>, or Titus in Crete <Titus 1:5>.

Ecclesiastical-- The description of church order in the Pastorals (for example; bishops, elders, deacons, an enlistment of widows) appears rather advanced for Paul's time.

Theological-- Some ideas in the Pastorals differ from Paul's thought. For example, "faith" <Titus 1:13; 2:2> suggests orthodoxy or "sound doctrine," rather than a saving relationship with Christ; "righteousness" <Titus 3:5> suggests "good deeds," rather than a status of being justified before God. Likewise, the understanding of law <1 Tim. 1:8-11> differs from Paul's usual teaching on the subject (compare <Rom. 3:19-20>).

Literary-- The vocabulary and style of the Pastorals differ from

Paul's other writings. A significant number of words that appear in the Pastorals are not found in Paul's genuine letters, and the tone of the letters is uncharacteristically harsh at places (for example, <Titus 1:12-13>).

Each of these objections is not of equal weight, although taken as a whole they are impressive. If one assumes, as church tradition often has, that Paul was released following the Roman imprisonment mentioned in <Acts 28> <2 Tim. 4:16> and later went to Spain <1 Clement 5>, (writing about A. D. 96), or revisited points eastward, many of the problems listed above are lessened. In this view, the circumstances of the Pastorals would fall after the events described in Acts. Thus, confronted by a rise in false teaching and by a need to increase church discipline and order, Paul could have written the Pastorals with the help of a secretary who expressed Paul's ideas in somewhat un-Pauline ways. This would date the letters between Paul's first and second Roman imprisonments, or about A. D. 65.

On the other hand, it may be that an admirer of Paul, using genuine notes or letters of the apostle, drafted the Pastorals to address the problems of a later day in the spirit of Paul. This view would date the letters at the close of the first century.

Historical Setting. First and Second Timothy differ in historical context. In the first epistle Paul writes from Macedonia to young Timothy <1 Tim. 4:12>, who has been left in Ephesus to oversee the congregation <1 Tim. 1:3>. The second epistle, also written to Timothy in Ephesus <2 Tim. 1:18>, comes from Rome where Paul is undergoing a second <2 Tim. 4:16> and harsher imprisonment <2 Tim. 1:18, 16; 2:9>. Paul is alone (except for <Luke, 2 Tim. 4:11>), and he knows the end of his life will come soon <2 Tim. 4:6>. One can almost hear the plaintive echo of the apostle's voice as he bids Timothy to "come quickly before winter" <2 Tim. 4:9,21>.

The occasion for both epistles is much the same. Paul is deeply troubled by false teaching <1 Tim. 1:3-11; 2 Tim. 2:23> and apostasy <1 Tim. 1:6; 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-9> which endanger the church at Ephesus. He warns Timothy to beware of fables and endless genealogies <1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:4>, idle gossip <1 Tim. 5:13; 2 Tim. 2:16>, rigid lifestyles based on the denial of things <1 Tim. 4:3>, the snares of wealth <1 Tim. 6:9-10,17-19>, and religious speculations <1 Tim. 6:20>. He warns that apostasy, in whatever form, will spread like cancer <2 Tim. 2:17>. Paul urges Timothy to combat its malignant growth by teaching sound doctrine, promoting good works, and accepting one's share of suffering for the sake of the gospel <2 Tim. 1:8; 2:3, 11-13>.

Theological Contribution. The message of 1 and 2 Timothy can be summed up by words like remember <2 Tim. 2:8>, guard <1 Tim. 6:20>, be strong <2 Tim. 2:1>, and commit <1 Tim. 1:18; 2:2>. For Paul, the best medicine for false teaching and apostasy is "sound doctrine" <1 Tim. 1:10; 4:3>. The gospel is a spiritual inheritance to be received from faithful witnesses and passed on to such <2 Tim. 2:2>. It brings about wholeness or health (which is the meaning of "sound" in Greek), not only in belief, but also in good deeds. So vital is sound doctrine to the health of the church that it is something to be pursued <1 Tim. 6:11>, fought for <1 Tim. 6:12>, and even suffered for <2 Tim. 1:8; 2:3,11-13>.

Special Consideration. The Epistles to Timothy might be considered our earliest manual of church organization. Within them we

find guidelines for the selection of church leaders <1 Tim. 3:1-13>. They also reveal an awareness of the need for standard forms of expressing the faith. For example, the words, "This is a faithful saying," appear four times in the epistles <1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11>. Two creeds, or perhaps hymns, also appear <1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:11-13>. Finally, 2 Timothy presents the first (and only) pronouncement in the New Testament on the Bible as "Scripture" (referring to the Old Testament, <2 Tim. 3:14-17>).

In Greek, the word for "inspiration" <2 Tim. 3:16> means "breathed into by God." As God breathed life into Adam <Gen. 2:7>, so he breathes life into the written word, making it useful for teaching, reproof, and correction. Paul leaves us, therefore, not with a theory about Scripture, but with a description of its purpose and its power for salvation <2 Tim. 3:15>.

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