

## 1 and 2 Timothy

1 and 2 Timothy, along with Titus, constitute the ‘pastoral’ epistles – pastoral in the sense that they are addressed to individuals who are responsible for or are attempting to provide pastoral and shepherding care to particular churches (Timothy in Ephesus, Titus in Crete). The letters thus contain lots of information and advice about the organization of the early ecclesias, and the dangers that they faced. The Pastorals are also unique because they are thought to be amongst Paul’s last recorded letters, with 2 Timothy being written perhaps only a matter of months before his death.

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The letters to Timothy and Titus are certainly different from Paul’s other writings. The very fact that they are addressed to individuals rather than whole ecclesias (as also is Philemon) means that Paul’s style is likely to be less guarded and his register less formal. There are plenty of the characteristic phrases and terms of Paul here which we know from his other letters and which form a link between the Pastorals and the other letters. But there are also some differences – vocabulary not found elsewhere, and places where Paul uses a different word from the one that might seem to be his normal choice from the other letters. For some scholars this is evidence that Paul ‘could not’ have written these letters. However, there is nothing that cannot be explained by the following points:

- these letters have a different audience
- they have a different purpose
- they were written several years later after Paul had trav-

eled extensively to new areas (which can easily cause vocabulary shifts)

- they address a more developed stage of early church history (just by virtue of the fact that the ecclesias were growing and changing rapidly)

## Community Organisation

There is definitely more information about ecclesial organization (bishops, deacons, appointing elders, widows) in these letters than elsewhere in the New Testament. Again, some scholars have made this point work overtime, insisting that the letters must reflect a later age beyond Paul. This is by no means a logical conclusion, however, when the following points are considered:

### Roles and Responsibilities in 1 Timothy

|         |             |  |
|---------|-------------|--|
| 2:1-8   | Men         | Responsibility to pray<br>(cf 2:1,8 framing the passage)         |
| 2:9-15  | Women       | Adornment with good works, childbearing,<br>not to teach         |
| 3:1-7   | Bishops     | Blameless and experienced,<br>ruling his own house well          |
| 3:8-13  | Deacons     | Exercising restraint & purity of conscience;<br>be proved first  |
| 5:3-6   | Widows      | Focus on God and dependents                                      |
| 5:9-13  | Widows      | Must be over 60,<br>reputed for good works to be 'in the number' |
| 5:14    | Young women | Marry, bear children, guide the house                            |
| 5:17-19 | Elders      | Double honour if they 'rule' well;<br>not to be accused lightly  |
| 6:1-2   | Servants    | Honour their masters (even if they are believers)                |

Note also the reference to elder men and women and younger men and women in 5:1-2; widows to be supported by their families in 5:16

Although more incidental in nature, there are plenty of references to terms of ecclesial organization and roles and responsibilities elsewhere in the New Testament

The particular subject matter of the Pastorals (Paul helping Timothy and Titus to install or initiate a certain level of ecclesial organization) necessitates that such terms will be used frequently. Since the subject matter and audience is different for the other New Testament letters, it is no great surprise that such terms are used much more incidentally.

The early church grew very rapidly indeed, as Acts in particular makes plain. House churches may have outgrown themselves quite rapidly, and the burgeoning numbers may have necessitated a greater level of organization. This may simply be a matter of practical expediency: today, larger ecclesias tend to have more organization than smaller ones – they simply need to in order to function in an orderly

## Helping Others

Exhortations for Timothy with respect to his ministry on behalf of others

From the first letter...

- Stay at Ephesus and charge them to maintain true doctrine (1:3)
- Remind the brethren to avoid false doctrine and asceticism (4:6)
- Command and teach the things Paul is writing about (4:11)
- Give instructions about ecclesial roles and responsibilities; ensure they are executed (5:7,9,11)
- Publicly rebuke those who sin (but don't entertain an accusation against an elder without multiple witnesses) (5:19-20)
- Teach and exhort good behaviour between masters and servants (6:2)
- Charge those who are rich not to be highminded or to trust in riches (6:17)

From the second letter...

- Commit to faithful men who can teach others the things taught by Paul (2:2)
- Remind people and charge them not to strive pointlessly about words (2:14)
- Be gentle to all, meekly instructing those who are opposing themselves (2:24-25)
- Do your best to visit Paul soon! Salute Prisca and Aquila (4:9,19,21)

manner. The size of the communities in Ephesus and Crete may have brought particular demands.

As the ecclesias grew, so, in due course, did false doctrine, and (for instance) Judaizing attempts to infiltrate it. There is a stepped-up focus in the Pastorals, not only on organization, but also on the combating of false doctrine (this is a matter now, not only for Paul to fight, but also the churches themselves). This may have brought with it a more urgent need for strong leadership, and therefore the laying down of principles concerning ecclesial elders and so forth.

It is in the first letter to Timothy in particular (and also in Titus) that Paul gives instruction about the prerequisites for particular ecclesial roles such as 'bishop' (literally, 'overseer') and 'deacon' ('servant'), and also unfolds key aspects of particular roles or callings that believers find themselves in (as sisters, for instance, as elders, as men, or as servants). A break-down of all this is provided in the table.

It seems that we cannot precisely reconstruct what the particular role of a bishop vis a vis a deacon or an elder was in the first century ecclesia, or exactly what it meant to be 'taken into the number' as a widow (1 Tim 5:9). It is therefore difficult to map these roles in a definitive way into roles in the modern-day ecclesia. From this we might conclude that it is not necessarily the purpose of these passages that we reconstruct from them a rigid ecclesial 'bureacracy' for all time. What is clear however, is that there is much to be learned by considering the qualifications and serious preparation that these roles entailed. There was nothing haphazard or accidental in ending up in one of these roles – and it is clear that they were responsibilities to be aspired to (even though they were roles of service) rather than to be avoided. Even if we cannot write a rule-book for ecclesial organization on the evidence of the Pastoral epistles, there is an enormous amount we can learn.

## False Doctrine

It is an all together more upsetting picture when we consider an-

other of Paul's major topics in the letters to Timothy. Paul talks repeatedly about those who undermine and oppose the faith (and themselves!) by bringing in new doctrines, by empty theorizing and 'babbling', by entangling themselves with elaborate arguments about words, genealogies and so forth, and by legalistic

## Dangers and Opponents

From the First Letter...

- Other doctrines, fables, genealogies which gender uncertainty (1:3-4)
- Doctrines which are just pointless noise ('vain jangling'), alleged legalistic expertise, desire to teach complex legal matters (1:6-7)
- Abandoning conscience, putting aside faith, like Hymenaeus and Alexander (1:19-20)
- Seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; lying and hypocrisy; behaving without conscience; prescribing abstinence from marriage and particular foods (4:1-3)
- Profane and old wives' fables (4:7)
- Not providing for one's family (5:8)
- Turning aside after satan (5:15)
- Other teaching; rejecting the words of Jesus. Pride, strifes of words, perverse disputings arising from corrupt minds. Interest in material gain in name of godliness. (6:3-5)
- Riches and love of money causing arrogance / false-trust (6:9-10,17)
- Profane and vain babblings; false science (6:20)

From the Second Letter...

- Those who have turned away from Paul, like Phygellus and Hermogenes (1:15)
- Persecution / 'trouble' for the gospel's sake (2:9-10)
- Pointless striving about words (2:14)
- Profane and vain babblings which grow and consume. Teachings like those of Hymenaeus and Philetus who say the resurrection is past already which undermines others' faith (2:16-18)
- Foolish and unlearned questions which create strifes (2:23)
- Unwitting rejection of gospel truth (2:25)
- Perilous times in which people are overtaken by pride and selfishness, moral bankruptcy, with only a form of godliness. Being led by lust and the love of learning, but never 'knowing' the truth. Corruption of the mind to resist the truth. (3:1-8)
- Ever increasing evil men and seducers who deceive and are deceived (3:13)
- Lustful accumulation of teachers; 'itching ears'; rejection of truth in favour of fables (4:3-4)
- Love of the present world (like Demas who forsook Paul) (4:10)
- Withstanding the words of the apostles (like Alexander the coppersmith) (4:14-15)

stipulation. And he even goes as far as to name some of the ringleaders in these disturbing trends, particularly in the second letter.

Paul was evidently severely concerned at the speed with which the cancer was growing. On one hand there was the pull back towards a legalistic Judaism (a perversion of true Old Testament faith) which is encountered often in the epistles. The danger of worldliness and materialism in particular is also singled out in the Pastorals. But perhaps the most frequent and caustic criticism goes against strife about words. The hallmark of such disputes is that they are pointless (notice how Paul uses terms like 'to no profit' and 'vain'). When discussions and disagreements in Scriptural exposition and doctrine become heated, this would be a good test to apply. Does the furthering of this dispute have a positive goal, and will it lead to spiritual profit? Or is it more about pride, legalism or intellectualism, or simply because we happen not to like somebody who takes a differing view? A full documentation of all the dangers and opponents Paul identifies is provided in the table, which will enable this

theme and related ones to be studied further.

In contrast to these metaphorical and literal dead-ends, Paul has much to say about sound doctrine and the importance of clinging on to and standing up for it. He uses the word ‘sound’ quite frequently, and he talks of the importance of ‘continuing’ in the word of the gospel.

A special feature of the Pastoral epistles in this regard is Paul’s quotation of ‘faithful sayings’ – maxims or watchwords of doctrine and faith which enshrine key doctrinal truths. He quotes a number of these in the letters to Timothy, although I plan to deal with them as a group when looking at the letter to Titus in a few months time.

## **Paul’s Advice to Timothy**

The relationship between Paul and Timothy was a very close one. It seems Paul was well acquainted with the family, had known Timothy from a relatively young age, and had worked with him closely in the mission field – sharing in both triumph and sorrow – for a good number of years. From the evidence of Acts and the other epistles, not to mention the letters to Timothy themselves, it is possible to reconstruct a profile for Timothy reasonably well, but perhaps the most revealing description, and all that is needed for this piece, is Paul’s naming of Timothy as ‘his own son in the faith.’ (1 Tim 1:2).

Paul gives advice and exhortation in all of his letters, but the advice in the Pastorals is unique because it is individually rather than ecclesially focused. If we can presume to put ourselves in Timothy’s shoes, even in small part, we can hear the apostle to the Gentiles giving us individually his own personal advice for our discipleship and ecclesial service. Of course, if we happen to be on the younger side, and involved and committed in ecclesial life and missionary work, the message only grows in intensity. The table pulls all these personal exhortations together.

There is a distinction in this advice between the first and second letters which arises from the change of Timothy’s own circumstances. Although Timothy is already an experienced mission-

## Biographical Information about Paul

### 1 Timothy

1:11-14, 16; 2:7; 3:14-15; 4:13

Apart from telling us about how Paul saw his role as an apostle now that he had been converted, these tell us relatively little about his personal circumstances other than that he hoped to visit Timothy soon. They do make it clear how intensely important he saw his calling, and how great the responsibility and authority to which he had been appointed.

### 2 Timothy

1:8, 11-12, 15-18; 2:8-10; 3:10-12; 4:6-8, 9-21

These references give far more details on Paul's sufferings, his opponents, personal reflections, his readiness to die for his Lord, and so forth. Notice how his plea that Timothy should 'do his diligence' to come to Paul soon frames the whole discussion in 4:9-21.

ary when Paul writes the first letter, there is a sense that his particular responsibilities at Ephesus are to some extent new in their fullness. This is a major solo assignment for him, and Paul encourages him to be strong and to enthusiastically embrace the challenges ahead through personal discipline and dedication.

In the second letter Timothy has experienced something of the disillusionment of the reality of trying to deal with people and lead them to new spiritual heights. He has also felt the full force of the opposition to the gospel that exists in some quarters. Paul encourages him to remain strong in the face of persecution; he identifies with the genuine struggle and 'tears' (2 Tim 1:4) that Timothy has experienced in his ministry, and he tries to provide solace in the midst of whatever sadness and disillusionment he has come to know. It is an older, more experienced, but also more weather-beaten Timothy to whom Paul writes.

Paul's advice is not of the 'take it or leave it' variety. His use of the term 'charge' as he 'charges' Timothy to do this or that sets the tone for the gravity and imperative of personal discipleship and public ecclesial service. In turn, Paul then instructs Timothy that he should 'charge' the brothers and sisters amongst whom he works that they too should commit to uphold sound doctrine and give their lives to God's service.

## The Autobiography of Paul

Paul has a lot say about himself – whether directly or tangentially – in the letters to Timothy, especially the second. When considering Paul's advice to Timothy, we found there was a definite change in mood between the two letters in terms of the type of advice that Paul needed to provide (encouragement in Timothy's struggles and tears, versus the enthusiastic challenging that Paul could summons in the earlier letter). There is also a development when we look at what the two letters reveal about Paul.

In the first letter he is still very active, hoping to do this and that, planning to visit Timothy. In the second letter, his journey is nearer its end – and he knows it. Now Paul's plea is that Timothy should visit him as soon as possible (not the other way

## Paul's Latter Years and the Dating of Timothy and Titus

From elsewhere in the Bible itself we know very little about what happened to Paul after his time in Rome recorded in Acts 28 (when it is usually assumed that Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon were written). We know something about what Paul intended to do (visit Spain, for example), although knowing an intention is not quite the same thing as knowing whether it actually happened. From the writings of the early church 'fathers' and various

documents from the Second Century we can put together a 'tradition' of what happened to Paul – but clearly, this is not in the same league as a Biblical account. We can use the clues from the Pastoral epistles to test the traditions to some extent and to arrive at what amounts to a hypothesis or working model of possible events. Here is one such possible scheme.

Paul is released from his Acts 28 imprisonment in Rome

Mission to Spain (and perhaps France), AD63-64?

He returns to the churches in the

round! He gives this appeal twice). Paul's road is nearing its conclusion, and his final greetings are correspondingly extensive. There is also an element of accounting or ledger keeping as Paul notes those who have forsaken him. In no other letter does he name so many parties who have led and continued to lead others astray, or those who have personally sought to hamper or wreck Paul's ministry of the gospel. No doubt it was a difficult letter to write. There is more personal reflection, and, in the famed 'I have fought a good fight ... henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness' passage (2 Tim 4:8), a certain sense of 'last will and testament'. The passages which form the basis for Paul's biography are noted in the table.

Aegean (perhaps because of Judaizing antagonism in the ecclesias there, and perhaps using Corinth as a base, 2 Tim 4:20)

There are too many churches to write individually, so he writes 1 Timothy and Titus to strengthen his coworkers in their work in the region

He visits Miletus and Troas in spring 66 or 67 (2 Tim 4:13,20)

He leaves for Rome intending to return before winter

He is imprisoned in Rome and writes 2 Timothy

## Appendix: Paul's Exhortations to Timothy

These exhortations addressed to Timothy concerning his own personal conduct and discipleship make a great personal spiritual checklist for all disciples.

From the first letter...

- War a good warfare with faith and a good conscience (1:18-19)
- Know how to behave in the house of God (3:15)
- Refuse old wives fables; exercise yourself to Godliness (4:6-7)
- Be an example in all respects; let no one despise your youth (4:12)
- Give attendance to reading, exhortation and doctrine (4:13)
- Do neglect the gift you have been given (4:14)
- Meditate (on spiritual things / on your responsibility); give yourself wholly (4:15)
- Take heed to yourself; continue in the doctrine (4:16)
- Intreat elders; don't rebuke them. Honour widows (5:1,3)
- Keep yourself pure; do not partake in others' sins. Lay hands suddenly on no one (in judgment? to commit them to ministry?) (5:22)
- Drink some wine instead of water to keep healthy (5:23)
- Flee the temptation of riches; follow righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (6:11)
- Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life (6:12)
- Keep the commandment without spot, unrebukeable (6:14)
- Keep what is committed to your trust; avoid profane and vain babblings and false science (6:20)

From the second letter...

- Stir up the gift of God, by 'putting on' Paul's hands (1:6)
- Do not be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord or of Paul, but partake in the afflictions of the gospel (1:8)
- Hold fast the form of sound words in faith and love, and keep the good thing that has been committed to you (1:13-14)
- Be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus (2:1)
- Endure hardness, like a good soldier of Christ (2:3)
- Consider Paul's message, and remember that Jesus was raised as taught by Paul (2:7-8)
- Study to show yourself approved to, an unashamed workman who can correctly expound the Scriptures. (2:15)
- Shun profane and vain babblings (2:16)
- Flee youthful lusts and follow righteousness (2:22)
- Avoid foolish and unlearned questions (2:23)
- Continue in the things you have learned and been assured of, being aware of who you have learned them from (3:14)
- Preach the word; be instant at all times; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (4:2)
- Be watchful in everything; endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry (4:5)
- Beware of Alexander the coppersmith (4:15)

In the following passages, Paul exhorts Timothy with respect to his ministry for others:

- 1 Timothy 1:3; 4:6, 11; 5:7, 9, 11, 19-20; 6:2, 17
- 2 Timothy 2:2, 14, 24-25; 4:9, 19, 21