

# NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

## *Lesson 66*

### The Pastoral Epistles

#### 1 Timothy – Part One

#### Chapter 1

## **I. BACKGROUND**

Since the early 1700's, scholars have called 1 and 2 Timothy, along with Titus the "pastoral epistles" or "pastoral letters." "Pastoral" is used to label these three books because the letters emphasize instructions for the teachers and leaders of the church. In these letters, we find Paul writing about church structure and organization, the need to maintain doctrinal soundness, the inspiration and usage of scripture for the church, and other church/pastor-type issues.

Paul is named in each letter as the author, and early church history supports his authorship. One early church heretic, Marcion (86 – 160) opposed the general church view that Paul wrote the letters. Marcion's brand of heresy ("Gnosticism") was fairly directly condemned in the Pastoral Epistles. It is not altogether surprising that Marcion might seek to reject their authenticity.

Since the 1800's a modern school of thought has arisen to reject Paul's authorship. This modern rejection stems from: (1) analysis of the vocabulary used in the pastorals versus Paul's other writings; (2) claims that the style differs from Paul's other letters (although scholars are not in agreement in how the style differs); (3) The theology does not have Paul's emphasis on the cross, but instead focuses more on good works; and, (4) the books so blatantly confront Marcion's Gnostic brand of heresy, they must have been written in the era when Marcion was expelled from the church at Rome (144ish).

We will note some answers to the skeptical concerns, but more full treatment is available in commentaries like Hendriksen's (Baker Books, 1957).

### (1) and (2) – Vocabulary and style

The difference in vocabulary is relative. While there are a few words found in the pastorals that are not found in Paul's other writings, the same can be true of most all of Paul's letters should we focus on them in that way.

Similarly, should one go back and review the lessons I have written over the last three years for this class, one would certainly find vocabulary differences and even style differences, yet rest assured, I have banged out these lessons on the computer keys, week by week!

### (3) – Theology

The theology differences between these letters and the others Paul wrote is not alarming. Why would Paul write Timothy the same basic theology Paul wrote about in other letters when Timothy was with Paul, and indeed listed as co-author in many of those very letters! Paul would not need to go back over the basics of justification by faith to Timothy when the letters that so expound that doctrine are written by Paul and Timothy, or Paul with Timothy present.

### (4) – Gnosticism

It is a bit naïve to suggest that Gnosticism spontaneously erupted in the church in 100 a.d. None of the early Gnostics walked into the church one day and declared the Gnostic heresy. Like so many other heretical doctrines, the gnostic heresy crept into the church growing, a little here and a little there. The beginnings of the gnostic heresy were present during the ministry of Paul, as we have already seen in our study of Colossians. Assuming the pastorals were written around 5 years later, it is not at all surprising to see Paul writing about the same concerns as they have twisted and developed over those five years. This is especially true of 1 and 2 Timothy written while Timothy was working with the Ephesian church, the “mother church” in the area that included Colossae.

### *Who was Timothy?*

Accepting then Pauline authorship, we should next remind ourselves of what we know about Timothy, the recipient. We first met Timothy while Paul was on his second missionary journey recorded in Acts 16<sup>1</sup>, around the year 47 a.d. Timothy’s mother was Jewish and father was a Greek pagan. Paul was on his first missionary journey when he met Timothy. To assist Paul in his ministry among Jews, Timothy was circumcised. He then

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<sup>1</sup> In 2 Timothy 3:10-11, Paul notes that Timothy knew “all about” the persecutions and “kinds of things” that happened to Paul on his first missionary journey in “Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.” Timothy would have known about the “kinds of things” because they happened in the area where Timothy lived among the people Timothy knew. The reference in 2 Timothy is not an anachronism, but a clear reference that Timothy did not live his life in a void from his community.

joined Paul for travels to the various churches in the area of southern Galatia. Timothy was with Paul on a number of Paul's journeys and stays with various churches. We also noted from Acts and Paul's other letters that Paul would frequently leave Timothy behind to carry on additional work and instructions at various churches.

### *When did Paul write the Pastorals?*

Paul wrote the pastorals at some point *after* the conclusion of Acts. Acts provides a good framework for placing the earlier letters of Paul studied thus far. Acts ends, however, with Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Yet it seems very apparent from scripture that Paul was released from that imprisonment. Paul anticipated such a release and writes accordingly.

We are not without some basis for understanding what happened to Paul after Acts ended. We have church history to provide some details, but even more, we have the Pastorals to indicate some of what happened between Acts 28 (61-2ish a.d.) and the death of Paul (as early as 65 or as late as 67 a.d.).

Paul seems to have gone back to Asia Minor leaving Titus on Crete (Tit. 1:5). We can surmise that Paul may have made his promised stop at Colossae to see Philemon, Onesimus and others (Philem. 22). When Paul left that area to go to Macedonia, he asked Timothy to remain behind at Ephesus to aid that church (1 Tim. 1:3-4). This is a likely time and place that Paul wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Paul was rejoined by Titus in Nicopolis (Tit. 3:12), on the West coast of Greece. Paul likely went as far as Spain to do missionary work "in the west"<sup>2</sup> before returning to Asia Minor. While in Troas, Paul apparently left his cloak (2 Tim. 4:13). Paul goes through Corinth (2 Tim. 4:20) and is soon in Rome again. Somewhere along this way Paul is arrested and returns to Rome. This second Roman imprisonment is very different from the first. It is brief and severe. (2 Tim. 1:16, 17; 2:9).

This second imprisonment was under the reign of the wicked Nero. History records Nero's killings of his mother, stepbrother, wife, teacher, and countless others. It is Nero who placed the blame on the Christians for the burning of Rome in 64 a.d. causing substantial persecution and deaths.

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<sup>2</sup> Clement of Rome wrote to the Ephesians in 96 wrote of Paul as "a herald both in the east and in the west." (1 Clement 5). The Muratorian fragment (written 150 – 200) is the first listing we have of New Testament books. In that document it also states Paul "set out from Rome for Spain."

Paul's imprisonment leads to his death which history tells us was by beheading three miles outside Rome on the Via Ostia.<sup>3</sup>

One could break 1 Timothy down into a variety of outlines. We will look at the following sections:

1. Greeting and instruction for Timothy's work (1)
2. Instructions on Worship (2)
3. Instructions on Overseers and Deacons (3)
4. Instructions on Timothy's role as minister (4-6).

## II. THE TEXT

### *Greeting and Instruction for Timothy's Work (Chapter 1)*

Paul opens the letter identifying himself as an apostle and Timothy as Paul's "true son in the faith." Paul greets Timothy with God's grace, mercy and peace.

Paul repeats his earlier urging for Timothy to remain in Ephesus continuing the work of stopping the teaching of false doctrine. We can fairly assume that just as Ephesus was the central city for the region, the charge to Timothy would have included working and processing the teachings in a number of churches meetings in homes in Ephesus itself as well as the surrounding towns and villages. The false doctrines are not specified, though they seem to include what Paul labeled "myths and endless genealogies." These myths are not detailed, but we do know that Jewish myths and genealogies abounded in this time period. These were part of what later developed in to gnostic teachings on genealogies that almost seem absurd by today's thought processes.

Paul notes that the heresies have an effect – they "promote controversies rather than God's work." Paul's goal, and Timothy's as well, is the love of God coming from a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith. Paul emphasized that the meaningless

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<sup>3</sup> Clement indicates Paul died "with a great multitude of the elect" (1 Clement 6:1) which is a fairly clear reference to the massive killings of Christians that took place in Rome under Nero. Gaus, a pastor of the Roman church is recorded as writing in 198, "I can point out the trophies of the apostles [the place of martyrdom and burial]. For if you are willing to go to the Vatican or to the Ostian Way, you will find the trophies of those who founded this church." (Eusebius, *Church History* 2:25:5)

talk was not profitable for the congregants, even though those espousing it claimed to be teachers of the Law (i.e., the Old Testament). (1:3-7).

Paul is careful to remind Timothy that the Law is good, but only when not misused. The law gives instruction and guidance to stop living contrary to the glory of God. Thus it teaches against ungodliness in all its forms: murder, adultery and perversions, slave trading, lying, and other such sin. (1:8-11).

Sinners are not without hope, of course. For Paul himself, as he notes to Timothy, was the worst of sinners. In his ignorance and denial of Christ as Messiah, Paul was a violent man who blasphemed God and persecuted Christians. Paul was shown mercy by God, in demonstration of Christ's unlimited patience becoming an example to others. Paul would have us see in him that God works miracles and brings lives of the worst sin into Christ for eternal life.

Recounting God's work in Paul's life causes Paul to break out into one of history's greatest doxologies: "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1:17). This passage contains few words, but great resounding truths about the nature and essence of God.

God is King. He is not a person in a human sense, but he is personal nonetheless. God has an essence as a being. He is not merely a super computer with super power. He is a sentient being who, as king, reigns over all that is or will ever be.

God is also eternal. He exists outside of our space and time. We can read of God being created or coming into being. God is neither the fruit of man's mind nor the cumulative energy of the universe. Personal God is without beginning. This is difficult for created beings (us!) to understand. We are products of our created selves and our creative universe. Yet just because we have trouble understanding it does not in any way make it less true.

Not only is God eternal without any beginning, God is also immortal. There is no end to God. As His existence is outside space and time, God does not age with time. He will not pass one day. We who are redeemed are also living within the framework of eternity. Although our earthly bodies will pass, we have eternity to

live. That makes it a bit easier for our minds to address the concept of immortality of God.

Paul then ascribes to God invisibility. Now that may not seem so profound, but it is! God is not of the universe, but he is nonetheless present in the universe. His presence is not seen in a physical sense, but is not missing. When the hurricanes destroy cities, is God gone? No! When the wickedness of man brings pain and destruction on others, is God missing? No! God is ever present, even though He is unseen. We may perceive God even as we do not visibly see Him.

This is God – the only God. He changed and redeemed Paul. He still changes and redeems the violent, the blasphemous, and the persecutors today. He rescues the ignorant unbeliever offering eternity. No wonder Paul acknowledges honor and glory to God forever. Who else could ever be worthy of honor for eternity? Who else is worthy of glory and adoration forever? No one.

So with such a God before us and behind us, Paul urges Timothy to “fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience.” (1:18-19). Timothy is reminded of several who have not fought the fight (and it is, at times, a fight!), who have not held on to faith and a good conscience but live in rejection and the ship wreck of their faith. Two of these Paul has “handed over to Satan” to learn their lesson not to blaspheme. (1:20). By saying this, Paul references expulsion of these two from the church, a refuge from Satan. The goal for Paul was not permanent elimination of these two from the congregant body of Christ, but rather a time of expulsion to learn the lessons needed.

### **III. POINTS FOR HOME**

1. Watch teaching.
2. Especially watch the purpose.
3. God’s work is love and holiness.
4. God is there... King, eternal, immortal, and invisible.
5. Fight the fight.
6. Keep the faith.