

**How Pauline are the Pastoral Epistles?
...and why does it matter?**

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Reggie M. Kidd
Prof. of NT, RTS/Orlando • rkidd@rts.edu
Christian Study Center of Gainesville
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The so-called Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus) raise acute questions about the legacy of the Apostle Paul. Some scholars consider these letters to be Paul's own applications of his thinking about practical church matters so that leaders of his churches in the next generation will know how to carry on his ministry.¹ Other scholars consider these letters to represent a second generation falling away from Paul's original dynamic vision of "new creation" in Christ.²

After surveying these options, this class will propose a reading of the Pastoral Epistles as Paul's own creative contextualization of his prime theological values in terms that reflect the chief religious and ethical aspirations of the world in which the apostle's heirs will have to minister when he is gone.

Titus's Self Presentation³

Written for a "missionary" or "church-planting" situation. Paul's delegate has been left behind in Crete to:

- 1) put in place elders/overseers who can refute false teaching;
- 2) lay down a pattern of teaching that establishes the right fit between lifestyle and truth.

The issue of Christians' relation to "culture" is addressed more forthrightly here than in any other place in Paul's writings (probably in the entire NT): living "sensibly, justly and godly in the present age" (*sophronos, dikaios, eusebos* — 2:12; see also 1:8, with a probable sidelong glance at 1:12). It surfaces in this letter that Paul's teachings contain the seedbed for what French commentator Ceslas Spicq dubbed a "Christian humanism" (ideas latent in Gal 6:10; Rom 12:17b-18; Php 4:8).

¹ Defenders of authenticity among the introductions: Donald Guthrie (IVP, 1990), Carson, Moo & Morris (Zondervan, 1992, 2005), Luke Timothy Johnson (Fortress, 1986) — among the recent commentators: Ben Witherington (IVP, 2006), Philip Towner (Eerdmans, 2006), Luke Timothy Johnson (Trinity, 1996), Gordon Fee (Hendrickson, 1988)

² Defenders of inauthenticity or pseudepigraphy among the recent introductions: Helmut Koester (Fortress, 1982), Werner Kummel (Abingdon, 1973) — among the commentators: James D. G. Dunn (Abingdon, 2000), Jouette Bassler (Abingdon, 1996), Jerome Quinn (Titus: Doubleday, 1990; 1 & 2Tm: Eerdmans, 1999), Dibelius/Conzelmann (Fortress, 1977)

³ Concerning Titus, you may wish to consult Reggie M. Kidd, "Titus as *Apologia*: Grace for Liars, Beasts, and Bellies," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 21.2, Dec. 1999, pp. 185-209. (Available in .html or .pdf format via http://www.rts.edu/Site/Staff/rkidd/rkidd_writings.aspx.)

Theme verses: 2:11-14:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live in a sensible, just and godly manner in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus: who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

1 Timothy's Self Presentation

Written for an established church. Purpose: to give Timothy ammunition in putting down false teaching from (apparently) elders (or aspiring elders) within the church (see Acts 20:30). Note how little of the letter deals with the heresy head on — Paul's interest is in structuring lives within the community in such a way as to create a climate of plausibility for true godliness.

Theme verses: 3:14-16:

I am writing these things to you...so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

2 Timothy's Self-Presentation

Purpose: simultaneously to call Timothy to Paul's side as he faces probable martyrdom (4:9,13,21) and to call Timothy to courage for ministry in his teacher's absence.

Theme verses: 1:7-8:

... Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control. Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God....

Shared Concerns with Previous Letters: a *modus operandi* of working through coworkers; Paul himself as model for imitation; concern for good order in the churches; opposition to what he considers to be false teaching; concern for his churches' reputation with outsiders; affirmation of marriage and creation order; reserve about women's role in worship; the belief that grace both justifies and transforms; and a basic "already/not yet" construct of salvation history.

Distinctive Features of the Pastorals:

- **Individual Letters to Pauline Coworkers** — Compare with Philemon. And not just any coworkers, but two of the most "Greek" (Titus, Gal 2:3; Timothy, Ac 16:1-3)

- **Style & Vocabulary** —

Basic similarities with each other: use of “faithful saying” formula (1Tm 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2Tm 2:11; Tt 3:8); no final greetings; no mention of amanuensis (scribe) or co-author

Smoother Syntax

Noticeable lessening of inferential particles and conjunctions (e.g., “therefore,” “since,” “with the result that,” “but now,” “is it not?”)

Linguistic Distance from the Earlier (especially the Argumentative) Letters:

Paul’s vocabulary is expanded (2,177 different words in 1st 10 letters; 902 different words in PE, 596 in common with early letters, and 306 new words — 176 of the latter occur only here in NT, at the rate of about 13 per page as opposed to 4-5 per page in earlier Paulines; about 80 of these also occur in the Greek OT).

Distinctive, and Often More Hellenistic Vocabulary

eusebeia (“godliness/piety” — see also Ac 3:12; 10:2; 17:23)

epiphaneia (“appearance” [1Tm 6:14; 2Tm 1:10; 4:1, 8; Tt 2:13] instead of Paul’s more characteristic *parousia* = “presence” [1Co 15:23; 1Th 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 2Th 2:1, 8-9 — though note that at 2Th 2:8, Paul uses both terms together])

hugiainein (“healthy/sound” teaching, Tt 1:9, 13; 2:1-2, 8; 1Tm 1:10; 6:3; 2Tm 1:13; 4:3 — see the metaphorical use in Lk 5:31; 15:27, alone among the gospel writers)

language of character (esp. in the officer lists — helpful parallels in Dibelius/Conzelmann)

“love of money” (the PE use “love of money” or *philarguria/philarguros* [1Tm 6:10; 2Tm 3:2 — and see also Luke 16:14] rather than the normal Pauline “greed” or *pleonexia/pleonektes* [e.g., 1Co 6:10; 1Th 2:2 — and also Luke 12:15])

Of interest to many (including myself) is how frequently the linguistic movement lies in the direction of Luke (writer of Luke-Acts)⁴

⁴ See the studies by C. F. D. Moule (“The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles: A Reappraisal,” in *Bulletin of John Rylands Library* 47 [1965]), and S. G. Wilson, *Luke and the Pastoral Epistles* (London: SPCK, 1979). Witherington treats the PE as coming from the mind of Paul and the hand of Luke. Quinn treats the PE as coming from the same next generation “Luke” who gave us a three-volume account of the origins of Christianity: Luke-Acts-Pastorals.

- **Church Organization** — structure & differential gifting is apparent from the beginning of Paul’s ministry (1Th 5:12; 1Co 12, esp. vv. 28-30; Rm 12; Eph 4), and “overseers/bishops & deacons” are mentioned in Php 1:1, but the PE (at least, 1Tm & Tt) give significantly greater focus to office and to the character required for office.
- **Theology & Ethics**

Approach to Heresy — rather than make his case with the community (see 1Co 15; Gal; Rom; Col) or even praying his case before the communities (Eph), here Paul reminds his coworkers of the basic truths they are to press home, and he does so in fairly condensed creedal statements (1Tm 2:3-7; 3:16; 2Tm 1:8-10; Tt 2:11-14; 3:4-7). He’s not instructing — he’s reminding.

Reaffirmation of, perhaps even further generalization, of Paul’s reserve about women’s public role in worship (compare 1Co 11 & 14 with 1Tm 2)

Expansion of “good works”:

In Gal & Rom “works” (pl.) almost always mean “works of the law” and are almost always bad (Ro 2:6 is controversial); Paul does say “faith working through love” is good (Gal 5:6), and he can use the singular noun “work” in a positive way (e.g., “work of faith”, 1Th 1:3)

In Eph 2:9 Paul reminds readers that salvation is “not by works,” but he turns a corner when he affirms that believers have been (re)created in Christ Jesus “for good works”

In the PE, the “not by works” principle is repeated (Tt 3:5; 2Tm 1:9), but what is most notable is that in Tt & 1Tm “good works” or “noble works” receive strong commendation (Tt 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14; 1Tm 5:10, 25; 6:18)

The Pastorals in the Early Church

2 Peter 3:15

1Clement

Ignatius

Polycarp

Marcion

Chester Beatty Papyrus 46

Muratorian Canon

Acts of Paul & Thecla (mid 2nd cent)

How to account for the differences/similarities?

- If inauthentic/pseudepigraphical:

A generational shift in perspective: old school pseudonymity maintained this was an innocent, even transparent literary device; new school pseudonymity maintains this was a deliberate fabrication, a “white lie” to win a propaganda war⁵

If early, how did the PE get past the people who would have known better?

If late, then 1 Clement (at least) is difficult — and in general, it’s difficult to imagine documents that are so artless in their imitation getting past the church

- If authentic:

Has Paul lost something of the fire?

Are these the sort of letters might we imagine Paul writing to the kinds of people we know Timothy & Titus to have been from the undisputed letters and Acts?

Might they reflect the concerns of the apostle anticipating the continuation of the gospel ministry: a) on European soil; and b) in his absence?

⁵ Forcefully argued by Donelson, Lewis R. *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles*. (Siebeck 1986).