

Introduction to the Pastoral Letters (1, 2 Timothy, Titus)

Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century first pointed out the “pastoral” character of 1 Timothy, which D. N. Berdot in 1703 designated as “pastoral.” P. Anton, however, in commentaries published in 1753-55, was the first to designate all three (1, 2 Timothy and Titus) as “pastoral letters,” a designation now universally accepted. The letters are not directed to churches but to Timothy and Titus, apostolic emissaries responsible for appointing pastoral leadership (“elders/bishops” and “deacons”) in Ephesus and Crete. The letters deal with themes related to this responsibility.

Author and date. Beginning with the studies by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1 Timothy, 1807) and Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1812), modern studies have achieved a broad consensus that the pastoral letters in their final form were not written directly by Paul. The three letters share a distinctive common style and theological perspective and appear to come from a colleague of Paul, writing in Rome around 85 AD.

Situation Titus and 1 Timothy refer to Paul as free and traveling from the Isle of Crete, by way of Ephesus and Macedonia, toward Nicopolis in Greece (Titus 1:5; 3:12). Titus is written to the Apostle’s emissary in Crete, and 1 Timothy to the other emissary in Ephesus (1:3, Turkey today). Both Timothy and Titus, Paul’s emissaries according to these letters, appear to function more like later bishops, since they exercise a certain authority over local church elders. This phenomenon could explain the development of the distinct office of bishop/overseer in the patristic era, following the death of the apostles and their personal emissaries.

According to 2 Timothy, Paul is in Rome and his martyrdom imminent (4:6-8). The Apostle addresses Timothy, still in Ephesus (4:12-13), asking him to come promptly to Rome.

Titus, because of its more concise form, appears to have been written before 1 Timothy. 2

Timothy, as Paul's testament facing martyrdom, has its own character, but shares stylistic and theological characteristics with Titus and 1 Timothy. For example:

1. "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance," an expression characteristic of the Pastorals (five times) but which does not occur in any other part of the New Testament (1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8).¹

2. Eusebes, godly or religious (with its cognates, 13 times in the pastorals, but never elsewhere in the Pauline literature (1 Timothy 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3, 5-6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:1; cf. 1 Tim. 5:4; 2 Tim. 3:12; Titus 2:12; also characteristic of 2 Peter, 1:3, 6-7; 3:11; cf. 2:9; also see Acts 3:12; 10:2, 7; 17:23; and "ungodly" in Jude 4, 15 (four times!), 18; 1 Tim. 1:9; Romans 1:18; 4:5; 5:6; 11:26).²

3. In the letters from Paul himself "faith" normally is the dynamic act of trusting and committing oneself with Christ, but in the pastoral letters "the faith" refers to sound faith or teaching (correct ideas, beliefs, things to believe), a "deposit" (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:12, 14; Jude 3).³

Bibliography: The Pastoral Letters

- Bassler, Jouette. 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.
- Davies, Margaret. The Pastoral Epistles. New Testament Guides. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.
- Dewey, Joanna. "1 Timothy," "2 Timothy," "Titus." In The Women's Bible Commentary, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon Ringe, 353-361. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. Letters to Paul's Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1996.
- Knight, George W. III. Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.
- Marshall, I. Howard. The Pastoral Epistles. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.
- Maloney, Linda M. "The Pastoral Epistles." In Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 2:361-80. New York: Crossroad, 1994.
- Quinn, Jerome D. "Timothy and Titus, Epistles to." In The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6:560-571. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Quinn, Jerome D. and William C. Wacker. The First and Second Letters to Timothy. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Young, Francis. The Theology of the Pastoral Epistles. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994.

21 Titus. Good News and Good Works for Marginalized People

Outline

Greetings from Paul to Titus, 1:1-4

Designation of presbyters/overseers (bishops), 1:5-9

False teachers incapable of good deeds, 1:10-16

Subversive submission in patriarchal households, 2:1-10

Praxis (good works) and the blessed hope of liberating justice, 2:11-15

Subversive submission to authorities, 3:1-7

Personal advice to Titus: good works, 3:8-14

Farewell and blessing, 3:15

Surprisingly, Titus, a “Greek” (Gentile and uncircumcised, Galatians 2:3), does not appear in the Acts of the Apostles. Nevertheless, as administrator of offerings from the Gentile churches for the impoverished Jewish saints in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:6), he was an outstanding companion of Paul. The Apostle sent him to mediate between factions in the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 7:5-7), and expressed profound affection for his loyal collaborator (2 Cor. 2:13). In Acts, Luke almost overlooks the important offering for the saints in Jerusalem (24:17) and avoids supplying details concerning the local controversies that might create a bad impression of Paul for the Roman authorities. Perhaps because Titus was Paul’s emissary in controversial situations Luke does not mention him in Acts.

The letter to Titus, as the other two “pastorals” (1, 2 Timothy), probably was not penned directly by Paul but by a colleague. The three pastoral letters appear to have been written no earlier than 85 AD, some 20 years after Paul’s death. The language and the theology of the pastoral letters differ a great deal from the letters by Paul himself. However, inspired by God’s Spirit and preserving a certain unity with Paul’s spirit (1 Cor. 5:3-5) and continuity with apostolic teaching, they may well preserve many traditions and memories of the Apostle himself.

1. The Poor and the Physically Challenged. Just as Titus strove to assure the arrival of the offering for the impoverished saints in Jerusalem, the letter directed to him details the Christian praxis manifested in “good works” for needy people (the poor, the physically challenged, the sick, the elderly; 1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14). “Good works,” in fact, constitute the purpose itself of Christian redemption (2:14; Ephesians 2:8-10), and are understood as a response to concrete and material human needs (3:14; see Matthew 25:31-46; Ephesians 4:28).⁴ The letter even speaks of God as a “philanthropist,” referring to God’s “goodness” and “love for human beings” (Greek: philantropía, 3:7). Titus, like the other pastoral letters, commends a praxis that avoids the interminable verbal disputes characteristic of so many religions and ideologies (1:10, 14; 3:9-11; see 1 Timothy 1:4; 4:7; 5:13; 6:4-5, 20-21; 2 Timothy 2:14-19, 23-24; 4:3).

Crete was a prosperous island and its large Jewish community flourished under Roman hegemony and rule. However, the Christian assemblies commended to Titus’ care included mainly older women (many apparently widows or unmarried, 2:3-5), young men (apparently unmarried, 2:6-8), and slaves (2:9-10; cf. aged men, 2:2 --> Colossians, Household codes). Despite the negative comments about the Cretan pagans and certain Jewish teachers (1:12-14), Titus says nothing explicitly about persecution. However, the Cretan churches’ constituency and the letter’s emphasis on good works to the needy suggests Christian communities somewhat

marginalized that did not share fully in Cretan prosperity. Titus's teaching on justification by grace (3:7) may thus well echo Paul's emphasis on God's vindication of the oppressed and inclusion of the marginalized (see "Liberator/Savior," 1:3-4; 2:10-11, 13 ["redeem/free," 14]; 3:4-6; --> Galatians, Romans). God's liberating justice was to be reflected in qualifications of the churches' leaders ("elders/overseer-bishops," 1:3-9) who were to be "just" (1:8) in the sense of avoiding violence ("not a striker," 1:7) and showing solidarity with visiting strangers (hospitable, 1:8; cf. Sodom's inhospitality--attempted gang rape of visiting angels, Genesis 19!). God's liberating justice and faithful solidarity with the needy also was to be reflected in the lives of the entire baptized, Spirit-empowered, community (2:12), thus avoiding the complacent "self-righteousness" to which Jesus ironically referred (3:5; --> Mark 2:17). Titus also maintains the common apostolic apocalyptic "blessed hope" of God's final decisive intervention with liberating justice, putting an end to all oppression and violence (2:13; --> James 5:1-6).

2. Women. Much of Titus's practical instruction is included in a domestic code (Haustafel) for patriarchal houses (2:1-2; for other examples see Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Peter; the word "family" never occurs in the original texts of the Bible). The socio-economic level of the churches may be indicated by the fact that the code primarily is directed toward women (2:3-5) and slaves (2:9-10), weak and poor elements in patriarchal societies (also see the young men in 2:6-8). The absence of instructions for the owners of the slaves may indicate churches with few wealthy members. No woman is mentioned by name in Titus (see chapter on 2 Timothy).

Feminist interpreters commonly criticize Titus's instruction to the young women to be submissive to their husbands and work in the home (2:5). However, the Bible nowhere pretends to provide us with universal "morals" or "ethics" unrelated to specific historical contexts, and such instructions, like those directed toward slaves, are only wisdom for their specific historical context. Other biblical texts give quite different teaching to women, slaves, and other oppressed

groups in other historical contexts. The “canon” should function inclusively to insist that we examine all the pertinent texts and not limit ourselves to those texts which most reflect the customs of the patriarchal cultures (see chapter on Jude). Women and slaves, by rejecting the religious authority of kings and patriarchs in order to affiliate with Christian base communities, actually had demonstrated shocking freedom and independence. Domestic codes in the pastoral letters seek to assure the authorities that in the house meetings the leaders exhorted the women and the slaves not to foment further rebellion, but uphold the tradition of submission in certain areas. In the house churches members even prayed for the kings and the patriarchs (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Consequently, many discern a kind of “subversive” submission in such instructions that made survival possible for the minority communities threatened with persecution and violence. Such contextual teaching regarding submission in certain areas does not constitute a universal “ethic” for all times and places.

Modern readers commonly consider the domestic codes [Haustafeln] offensive, but it is important to interpret them in the light of:

(1) their literary context in each book where they occur: 1 Peter’s defense of immigrants; Titus’s emphasis on good works for the poor, the physically challenged, and the sick; 1 Timothy’s unique emphasis on widows’ importance in the churches;

(2) their historical-cultural context, where the decision of women and slaves to affiliate with the house churches constituted a remarkable expression of freedom and rebellion against the Empire’s authority, with its idolatrous homage to Caesar, and also against the patriarchal houses, where the father determined the religion of all members;

(3) the context of the entire biblical canon, the text for instruction in the new communities, where slaves and women could learn of books with other teachings, such as the Exodus, a virtual manual of liberation for slaves!

We cannot enter into the minds of the codes' authors who taught submission, but we may perceive a certain wisdom in their tactic of "choosing battles": they sought to strengthen the base communities and help them to grow and to protect them from persecution. They insisted that house-churches maintain their right to exist as a counterculture, subversive to both Empire and patriarchal houses. In their contexts, however, in the cases of women and slaves, they accepted limitations in the expressions of freedom.

3. Sexual Minorities and Foreigners. Although Titus speaks of marriages with submissive women (without naming any), the letter only mentions by name seven single men: Paul himself, Titus and Jesus Christ (1:1-4), Artemas and Tychicus (3:12), and the lawyer Zenas and Apollos (a couple on a mission, 3:13). In a letter that stipulates that each elder should have one wife and believing children (1:5-6; also 1 Timothy 3:2), Paul, his emissary Titus and his four colleagues in mission (as Jesus' emissaries) did not conform to this norm (not universal ethics!).

Moreover, although Jude (v. 14) cites the Apocryphal Jewish 1 Enoch, the letter to Titus goes even further, citing the pagan Cretan poet Epimenides of Knossos, Crete (sixth century BC), even describing him as a "prophet" who testified against his own countrymen truth significant for the churches (Titus 1:12-13, see HCSB and NIV notes). William Percy⁵ points out that, according to Greek sources, Epimenides was a kind of Cretan gay shaman who traveled to Athens to help the magistrate Solon in his reforms, including the institution of homoerotic love, in accord with the Cretan model--yet Paul's famous sermon in Acts (17:28) also cites him favorably! Commonly the Titus citation from Epimenides is taken as a kind of ethnic slur:

"Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons" (Titus 1:12).

In the Hellenic world Cretans were considered liars, since they claimed that Zeus' tomb was in Crete. The letter to Titus apparently exploits the readers' xenophobic prejudice to support its argument against false teachers in Crete (vv. 10-14). The caricature's bitter hyperbole makes it difficult to believe that the author of Titus had any hope of persuading the Cretans to submit to his authority.

In patriarchal societies prohibitions of various types of sexual "uncleanness" were usual, since such societies sought to guarantee maximum fertility and legitimate heirs. As with Jesus (Mark 7:1-23; Matthew 15:10-20; John 13:10) and Paul (Romans 14:14-23), Titus subverts traditional sexual ideologies regarding "uncleanness" with its radical affirmation: "To the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1:15). According to this letter, when we refuse solidarity with the poor and fail to help them with good works, that is what now constitutes an "abomination" (1:16).

4. Praxis: Piety and Wisdom. In Titus and 1, 2 Timothy the favorite word to describe Christian behavior is "pious / reverent / devoted / respectful / godly" (Greek: eusebes and its cognates - five times in Titus 1:1; 2:2, 7, 12). The use of this term, popular in the imperial ideology, was not common in earlier New Testament writings, and its adoption as a preferred term in the pastoral epistles indicates a desire to demonstrate common ground between the Christian communities and their cultural context. Like the mandates of submission to kings, patriarchs, and slave owners, the insistence in "piety" sought to demonstrate that the communities were not as extremist as their enemies said.

Another emphasis in the letter is that all should be "sensible/prudent" (sophron, 1:8; 2:2, 5-6, 12) and have common sense. Therefore, its lists of virtues should not be understood with a rigid and legalistic literalism, but with a wisdom that knows how to interpret them appropriately according to their context. As was common in Greek philosophy, the letter counsels avoiding

“excesses”: demonstrating self-control, not being a slave to any vice, having only one wife, not being a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain (1:6-8; the last reflected also in the ten commandments, #10, “Do not covet”; see also Titus 2:12, 3:3).

5. Health and Ecology. Especially in Titus, good teaching is characterized by being “healthy” or “sound” (1:9, 13; 2:1-2, 8; 1 Timothy 1:10): creating health for individuals, communities and the cosmos. In Titus the Gospel sounds like Paul (2:11-14; 3:4-7), since it speaks of justification, but it is a justification “by grace” (3:7) rather than by faith (see chapters on Romans and Galatians). Jesus is described both as Savior/ Liberator and as “God” (2:13; cf. 1:3-4; 2:10-11; 3:4-6). The “blessed hope” (2:13) is not some Neoplatonic escape from the material world, but the apocalyptic hope that God will soon embrace and renew the entire cosmos, including the earth. “Eternal life” (1:2; 3:7) refers to “abundant life” (John 10:10) involving bodily resurrection and a renewed earth and cosmos characterized by justice and peace (“rebirth,” 3:5; Matthew 19:28; see 2 Peter 3:13; Romans 4:13; 8:18-39; Revelation 20-22; Isaiah 11:1-9; 65:25; Hosea 2:18).

6. Democracy and Hierarchy. Titus is an important document in the process of institutionalization in the churches. Significant above all is the fact that at this early stage the term “bishop/overseer” (Greek: epískopos, 1:7) simply describes the function of the “elders” (Greek: presbíteros) but does not designate a distinct superior hierarchical position (see Acts 20:17, 28 and NRSV HCSB note to v. 28). That is, on one hand Titus’ designation of “elders” to “oversee” the churches represents a step in the institutionalization of the churches. Although the elders of the churches were all at the same level, without the hierarchy of a bishop above them, in fact Paul and his emissaries, Titus and Timothy, exercised an authority superior to that of local elders. Therefore, soon after the death of that generation the elders probably chose one of their members as “chair/presider,” who later appropriated the name of bishop/overseer.

On the other hand, during the Reformation, in opposition to the papal hierarchy, John Calvin and his followers utilized the pastorals and Acts 20 to call for a dismantling of traditional church structures and a return to a more simple democratic ecclesiastical government (with elders, or bishops/overseers, at the same level). Before Calvin, Luther had rejected the authority of the Pope, but maintained a hierarchy with bishops superior to the other clergy. In the centuries after the Reformation, in the Calvinist countries (Holland, Scotland, and later the United States) it occurred to political leaders to take the Calvinist ecclesiastical model and apply it to the national political level, establishing democratic republics instead of monarchies supported by hierarchical churches. Thus texts like Titus and 1 Timothy, undoubtedly rather “conservative” in their original historical contexts, later became instruments of radical socio-political change, and church polity transformed national political structures.

Bibliography: Titus (see also above under Pastoral Letters)

Percy, William Armstrong. Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece. Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois, 1996.

Quinn, Jerome D. The Letter to Titus. The Anchor Bible 35. New York: Doubleday, 1990.