

A LOOK AT A BOOK: 1 Timothy

Advice to Young Preachers

August 5 and September 9, 2012

Theme

First and Second Timothy and Titus comprise the Pastoral epistles, so called because Paul wrote them to young pastors. They contain instructions concerning the administrative responsibilities of Timothy and Titus in the churches.

Authenticity

Modern higher critical scholarship casts more doubt on the authenticity of these epistles than on any of the others claiming authorship by Paul.

Pseudonymity

In favor of authorship by Paul is the claim in the first verse of each Pastoral Epistle that Paul is writing. Against the claim, it is argued that pseudonymous writing was an accepted literary practice (“pious forgery”) in ancient times and in the early church. But the facts are that pseudonymous writing was only an occasional practice and that it was not acceptable in the early church. Paul warns against forgeries in his name (2 Thessalonians 2:2; 3:17). The early church expelled an elder from ecclesiastical office for writing pseudonymously and was quite concerned with questions of authorship, as shown, for example, by the debate over the authorship of Hebrews and by hesitancy in adopting a book of unknown authorship into the New Testament canon.

Furthermore, it is very improbable a late admirer of Paul would have called him “the foremost of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). The Pastorals are much closer in style and content to Paul’s other epistles than are the noncanonical and indubitably pseudonymous books to the authentic writings of those in whose names they were forged. Added to the claim of the Pastorals themselves that they were written by Paul and the concern of the early church with questions of authorship is the very strong and early tradition that Paul himself wrote the Pastorals. Only Romans and 1 Corinthians have stronger attestation.

Vocabulary and Style

Doubt about Paul’s authorship stems primarily from differences in vocabulary and grammatical style that appear when the Pastorals are compared with other Pauline epistles. Comparisons consist of statistical tables, sometimes drawn up with the aid of computers. This “scientific” objection to Pauline authorship, however, does

not take into account differences in vocabulary and style caused by differences in subject matter and addresses and changes in a person's writing style because of environment, age, experience, and the sheer passage of time. Perhaps even more significant is the possibility that stylistic differences stem from different amanuenses and from Paul's giving greater freedom to his amanuenses in the exact wording of his thoughts at some times than at others times.

Marcion's Omission

Doubters of Pauline authorship also contend that the Gnostic heretic Marcion omitted the Pastorals from his New Testament canon because they were non-Pauline. But Marcion had a propensity for rejecting parts of the New Testament accepted by orthodox Christians. He rejected Matthew, Mark, and John, for example, and excised portions of Luke. The statement that "the law is good" (1 Timothy 1:8) must have offended Marcion's radical rejection of the Old Testament, and the disparaging reference to "what is falsely called 'knowledge [Greek: *gnosis*]' " (1 Timothy 6:20) must have antagonized Marcion, who called his own system of doctrine *gnosis* – ample reasons for Marcion's omitting the Pastorals from his canon without any implication they were pseudonymous.

Ecclesiastical Structure

It is claimed that the Pastorals reflect a more highly organized ecclesiastical structure than had developed during the lifetime of Paul. But the Pastorals mention only elders (or bishops), deacons, and widows, all of whom figure earlier in the New Testament period as distinct classes within the church. See, for example, Acts 6:1; 9:39, 41; 1 Corinthians 7:8; Philippians 1:1. Instructions for the appointment of elders by Timothy and Titus (1 Timothy 5:22; Titus 1:5) are due not to advanced, hierarchal church government, but to the starting of new churches under missionary conditions, just as Paul and Barnabas at a very early date appointed elders for the new churches in South Galatia (Acts 14:23).

Conflicting Data

Finally, some maintain that the Pastorals give historical and geographical data that do not harmonize with Paul's career as recorded in Acts and the other epistles. These are supposed to be the telltale mistakes of a pious forger. The conflicting data are that Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus when he traveled on to Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3 – contrast Acts 20:4-6), that Demas had deserted Paul (2 Timothy 4:10 – Demas is still with Paul in Philemon 24), and that Paul had left Titus in Crete (Titus 1:5) and gone to Nicopolis (Titus 3:12) while Titus had proceeded to Dalmatia (2 Timothy 4:10 – whereas in Acts Paul visited neither Crete nor Nicopolis).

Two Roman Imprisonments

The answer to this argument is the hypothesis that Paul was acquitted and released from his first Roman imprisonment; that he enjoyed a period of freedom, into which the travel data of the Pastorals fit; and that he was re-imprisoned and condemned to die as a martyr for the Christian faith, which in the meantime had been outlawed. Thus, the historical and geographical data in the Pastorals do not conflict with Acts, but refer to events that took place after the close of Acts. The Pastorals themselves constitute evidence favoring the hypothesis of two separate Roman imprisonments. So also does Paul's expectation of being released in Philippians 1:19, 25; 2:24, written during the first Roman imprisonment, in contrast with Paul's failure to entertain any possibility of release in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, written during the hypothesized second imprisonment.

Order of Writing

We conclude that Paul wrote 1 Timothy and Titus between the imprisonments and 2n Timothy during his second imprisonment, just before his martyrdom.

A SUMMARY OUTLINE OF 1 TIMOTHY

Theme: The organization and administration of churches by Timothy

Introduction: greeting (1:1, 2)

I. Warning Against Heresy, With Personal Reminiscences (1:3-20)

II. The Organization of the Church by Timothy (2:1-3:13)

- A. Public prayer (2:1-8)
- B. Modesty and subordination of women (2:9-15)
- C. Qualifications for bishops (3:1-7)
- D. Qualifications for deacons (3:8-13)

III. The Administration of the Church by Timothy (3:14-6:19)

- A. Preserving the church as the bastion of orthodoxy against heterodoxy (3:14-4:16)
- B. Pastoring the members of the church (5:1-6:26)
 - 1. Men and women, young and old (5:1, 2)
 - 2. Widows (5:3-16)
 - 3. Elders , with an aside regarding Timothy (5:17-25)
 - 4. Slaves (6:1-2b)
- C. Teaching and urging of Christian duties (6:2c-10)

D. Leading by example (6:11-16)

E. Warning the wealthy (6:17-19)

Conclusion: final charge to Timothy and benediction (6:20, 21)

Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1981)