

New Testament Literature: Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Dave Mathewson concludes his analysis of 1 and 2 Thessalonians by examining how the two letters present a canonical balance between expecting Christ's imminent return and preparing for His potential delay. He then transitions to the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus), evaluating critical debates regarding Pauline authorship, pseudonymity, and the development of early church leadership. Focusing specifically on 1 Timothy, Mathewson refutes the view that it is merely a generic church manual, arguing instead that it is a situational letter written to combat false teachings and social disruptions in Ephesus. Ultimately, he contextualizes Paul's instructions regarding church order and the conduct of women in worship against the background of cultural influences like the 'new Roman woman.'

Outline

I. Introduction and Opening Prayer

A. Course Context and Roadmap

1. Concluding 1 & 2 Thessalonians
2. Transitioning to 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus (the final letters in Paul's collection)
3. Preview of upcoming study from Hebrews to Revelation

B. Opening Prayer

1. Acknowledging divine communication and revelation in Scripture
2. Prayer for diligence in hearing and understanding the text in its original historical context and modern application

II. Concluding 1 & 2 Thessalonians: Balancing Eschatological Expectations

A. Context and Purpose of 2 Thessalonians

1. Response to misunderstandings arising from 1 Thessalonians (and a potential forged letter)
2. Primary goal: Dispel the misconception that believers were already living in the "Day of the Lord"
3. Definition of "Day of the Lord": Old Testament concept referring to God's ultimate return to judge evil and save His people

B. Prerequisites Before the Arrival of the Day of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2)

1. Three necessary events prior to the Day of the Lord: The rebellion, the man of lawlessness, and the removal of the restrainer
2. Interpretive debates surrounding the identity of the restrainer (Roman Empire, God, Holy Spirit, Church, Gospel)
3. Paul's previous oral instruction (2 Thess. 2:5) as the reason for brief written detail
4. Behavioral consequences of eschatological error: Idle behavior, mooching, and refusing to work

C. Canonical Balance Between 1 and 2 Thessalonians

1. 1 Thessalonians emphasizes immanence: Live as if Christ could return in our lifetime
2. 2 Thessalonians emphasizes delay: Recognize that Christ might delay for some time
3. Dangers of eschatological extremes:
 - a. Overemphasizing delay leads to spiritual procrastination and moral carelessness
 - b. Overemphasizing immediate return leads to foolish actions (e.g., radio prophecy predictions during the 1990 Gulf War, liquidation of assets, taking unpaid loans)
4. Canonical synthesis: Believers must wisely live prepared for both possibilities

III. Introduction to the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus)

A. Collection and Canonical Placement

1. The last three letters of the Pauline collection (Philemon grouped with Colossians due to location)
2. Terminology: Traditionally named the "Pastoral Epistles" due to focus on church structure and leadership
3. Alternative designation: 1 Timothy as the true "Letter to the Ephesians" due to its localized address to Ephesus

B. Chronological Sequence of Composition

1. Canonical ordering (by length) does not reflect historical composition sequence
2. 2 Timothy as Paul's final letter, written in prison while facing imminent execution
3. Scholarly uncertainty regarding the sequence between 1 Timothy and Titus

IV. Critical Debates: Pauline Authorship vs. Pseudonymity

A. Arguments Against Pauline Authorship

1. Pseudonymity as a common 1st-century literary device used to bestow authority or honor a master
2. Distinctive vocabulary and stylistic differences compared to core epistles (Romans, Galatians, Corinthians)
3. Perceived theological shifts (absence of explicit justification by faith; gospel defined as a fixed deposit of doctrine)
4. Developed church organization (bishops, elders, deacons) viewed by critical scholars as indicative of a later post-apostolic era

5. Ethical orientation emphasizing civic godliness and peaceful coexistence in Roman society

B. Defense of Pauline Authorship

1. Unanimous testimony of the early Church Fathers attributing all three epistles to Paul
2. Early presence of church leadership: Philippians 1:1 already mentions elders and deacons during Paul's ministry
3. Re-evaluating church structure in the Pastorals: Contains minimal formal hierarchy compared to later 2nd-century structures
4. Linguistic and thematic variations explained by changing local situations, personal recipients, and specific operational needs

V. Purpose and Contextual Framework of 1 Timothy

A. Rejection of the Generic "Church Manual" View

1. Traditional interpretation: A general administrative manual on church governance, polity, and officer qualifications
2. Mathewson's thesis: A highly situational epistle written to combat false doctrine (similar to Galatians and Colossians)

B. The Specific Crisis in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3–4)

1. Timothy commissioned to remain in Ephesus to stop false teachers
2. Nature of false teaching: Speculative myths and endless genealogies diverting believers from gospel faith and growth

C. Chapter-by-Chapter Strategies to Counter False Teaching

1. Chapter 1: Re-emphasizing the gospel of God's grace (illustrated through Paul's conversion)
2. Chapter 2: Restoring proper order and decorum during public congregational worship
3. Chapter 3: Establishing moral qualifications for elders and deacons to ensure spiritual integrity
4. Chapters 4–5: Prescribing respectful treatment of diverse groups (widows, elders, older/younger members)
5. Summary statement (1 Timothy 3:15): Proper conduct in the household of God, the pillar and foundation of truth

VI. Hermeneutical and Cultural Context of 1 Timothy 2 (Worship and Women)

A. Contextual Scope of 1 Timothy 2:8–15

1. Applies explicitly to the gathered church in public worship (not household, workplace, or general civic life)
2. Direct response to specific local disruptions caused by false teachings infiltrating worship

B. Cultural Background: The "New Roman Woman" (Bruce Winter's Research)

1. 1st-century social phenomenon: Wealthy women flaunting independence, wearing provocative/ostentatious attire, and defying social/marital conventions
2. Infiltration into Ephesian worship: Flaunting wealth (braided hair, gold, pearls), disrupting services, and demonstrating disrespect toward husbands

C. Pastoral Strategy and Modern Application Debates

1. Paul's decisive restrictions designed to halt severe local disruption and protect the church's reputation
2. The central hermeneutical debate:
 - a. Universally binding view: Instructions on women teaching and holding authority apply to all churches in all eras
 - b. Culturally/situational view: Instructions were targeted specifically to resolve the 1st-century Ephesian crisis