

New Testament Literature: Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus)

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Dave Mathewson examines the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus), demonstrating how their specific historical and situational contexts shape proper biblical interpretation. He argues that 1 Timothy and Titus are not generic church organizational manuals, but targeted apostolic responses designed to equip local churches to confront deviant doctrines and establish qualified leadership. Transitioning to 2 Timothy, Mathewson frames the letter as Paul's testamentary last will and testament, wherein the apostle passes the torch of gospel ministry to Timothy amidst pending execution. The lecture concludes by synthesizing Paul's overarching theological legacy, highlighting justification by grace through faith, suffering as apostolic validation, and the corporate nature of the church as a unified, Spirit-transformed community.

Outline

I. Introduction and Context of the Pastoral Epistles

A. Overview of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus

1. Traditional designation as the "Pastoral Epistles" and their place in the Pauline corpus
2. Temporal framework within Paul's life and relationship to the Book of Acts timeline
3. 2 Timothy as Paul's final canonical letter written prior to pending execution in Rome

B. Hermeneutical Approach to New Testament Scripture

1. Distinguishing between original first-century situational meaning and 21st-century application
2. Role of historical and cultural reconstruction in illuminating biblical text nuances

II. Exegesis and Application of 1 Timothy

A. Instructions Regarding Women in the Church (1 Timothy 2)

1. Historical situation in Ephesus and background factors
 - a. Influence of the cultural phenomenon of the "New Roman Woman"
 - b. Response to specific disruptions caused by local false teachings
2. Major Hermeneutical Approaches to 1 Timothy 2:8–15

- a. Universally Binding View: Grounded in creation order; applicable to all churches at all times
 - b. Context-Specific View: Targeted remedy for the Ephesian crisis; limited in direct universal scope
- 3. Hermeneutical resources and balanced dialogue (e.g., Zondervan Counterpoints Series)
- B. Leadership Qualifications: Elders and Deacons (1 Timothy 3)
 - 1. Critique of the "Church Manual" / instructional model interpretation of 1 Timothy
 - a. Letter primary purpose is counteracting deviant doctrines, not providing institutional structure
 - 2. Character and Function of Church Leaders
 - a. Focus on moral character and aptitude to teach sound doctrine rather than operational job descriptions
 - b. Elders: Primary function of spiritual oversight, pastoral care, and doctrinal teaching
 - c. Deacons: Servant role assisting church life; exact administrative boundaries undefined
 - 3. Strategic purpose: Safeguarding the Ephesian church against false teachers and heresy

III. Second Timothy: Paul's Last Will and Testament

- A. Historical Setting and Circumstances
 - 1. Paul's final imprisonment in Rome and awareness of imminent execution (2 Timothy 4:6–8)
 - 2. Shift from congregational correspondence to personal charge to an individual successor
- B. Literary Genre and Central Message
 - 1. Epistolary testament: Parting instructions and last words of a dying hero of the faith
 - 2. Commissioning Timothy to carry on the Pauline legacy and preserve gospel truth
 - 3. Core thematic call: Encouragement to contend for the faith and endure suffering

IV. Titus: Ministry and Subversion in the Cretan Context

- A. Historical and Geographical Setting
 - 1. Titus stationed on the island of Crete to organize local congregations
 - 2. Placement in Paul's itinerary post-Acts 28 (release from first Roman imprisonment followed by subsequent travels)
- B. Cultural Context of Crete
 - 1. Proverbial reputation for immorality and untruthfulness ("Cretans are always liars")
 - 2. Mythological association as the birthplace and burial site of Zeus
- C. Purpose and Subversive Strategy of the Letter
 - 1. Guiding the church on faithful living within an immoral pagan environment
 - 2. Subverting local pagan culture through trust in the God who never lies
 - 3. Promoting genuine Christian virtue and good works as a compelling counter-cultural witness

V. Synthesis of Paul's Theological Legacy

A. Justification by Grace Through Faith

1. Salvation as a gift received through faith apart from works of the law
2. Good works as the necessary fruit of a life transformed by the Holy Spirit

B. Inclusion of Jews and Gentiles as One Unified People

1. Equal standing before God independent of observance of the Mosaic Law
2. Faith in Jesus Christ (the true Seed of Abraham) as the sole requirement for true children of Abraham

C. Suffering as the True Validation of Apostleship

1. Paul's appeal to hardship and weakness as the badge of his divine commission (2 Corinthians)
2. Demonstration of divine power and grace through human weakness

D. Eschatological Tension: The "Already / Not Yet"

1. Already: Definite release from sin's power through union with Christ's death and resurrection
2. Not Yet: Ongoing earthly struggle requiring ethical imperatives to put sin to death

E. Sound Doctrine and Ethical Alignment

1. Truth as the primary weapon against deceptive lifestyles and false teachings
2. Essential integration of right belief (orthodoxy) and holy living (orthopraxy)

F. Corporate Dimension of Salvation and the Church

1. Salvation creates a new reconciled community transcending social and ethnic divisions
2. The church as a visible signpost of God's global reconciliation plan