

Pastoral Epistles: Apostolic Instruction for Pastoral Leaders and Their Followers

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Session 1 – Introduction

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Abstract

In this introductory lecture on the Pastoral Epistles, Dr. Robert W. Yarbrough frames 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus as apostolic instruction designed for church leaders and congregation members alike. He defends Pauline authorship through historical tradition, internal testimony, and the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, rejecting modern historical-critical skepticism. Using the P-M-E-E-C framework and word frequency analysis, Yarbrough demonstrates that the epistles focus primarily on God and Christ to encourage godliness, sound teaching, and perseverance amidst first-century challenges in Ephesus.

Outline

I. Introduction and Global Ministry Context

A. Lecturer Background & Experience

1. Covenant Theological Seminary (St. Louis, MO)
2. Decades of teaching and pastoral ministry internationally (Romania, Sudan, South Africa, Hong Kong, Australia, Korea)

B. Global Scope of the Church

1. Worldwide connectivity and the ongoing movement of the Word of God (2 Thessalonians 3)
2. Need for biblical instruction across diverse cultural contexts

C. Scope of the Lecture Series

1. Focus on the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus)
2. Canonical order followed for study purposes

D. Target Audience and Character of the Letters

1. Written to church leaders (pastors, church planters, missionaries, overseers)
2. Relevant to all believers (virtues and qualifications apply broadly, not esoteric)

II. Biblical Framework: The P-M-E-E-C Acronym

A. Overview of Redemptive History and the Centrality of the Gospel

B. Old Testament – Preparation (P)

1. Comprises ~77% of the biblical canon
2. Lays the foundational groundwork for the coming Messiah

C. Gospels – Manifestation (M)

1. Incarnation, life, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ

D. Acts – Expansion (E)

1. Historical snapshot of church growth over ~30 years (Pentecost to Paul in Rome)
2. Model for ongoing church planting and disciple-making

E. Epistles – Explanation / Explication (E)

1. Applied instruction on living out the gospel in specific local settings (Corinth, Ephesus, etc.)
2. Placement of the Pastoral Epistles within this category

F. Revelation – Consummation (C)

1. Ultimate victory of God, Christ's return, and the finalization of His Kingdom

III. Defense of Pauline Authorship

A. History of Modern Skepticism

1. Origin with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1805) and 19th-century German university scholars (F.C. Baur, H.J. Holtzmann)
2. Core objections: stylistic differences, fit within Acts timeline, and 'divide and conquer' thematic isolation
3. Critical summary and counter-critique (e.g., Luke Timothy Johnson in Anchor Bible Commentary)
4. Negative fruit of historical-critical skepticism: decline in Western church belief and fodder for Islamic anti-biblical polemics

B. Fourfold Argument for Pauline Authorship

1. Historical / Textual Argument: Epistles explicitly claim Paul (Paulos) as author; includes specific autobiographical detail
2. Ecclesiological Argument: Unanimous early church consensus (Clement, Polycarp, Ignatius, Chrysostom) for 1800 years
3. Doctrinal Argument: Fundamental harmony in theology between the Pastorals, Acts, and other Pauline epistles
4. Bibliological Argument: High view of Scripture, divine truthfulness (God does not lie), and biblical inerrancy/infallibility

IV. Historical Setting, Dating, and Purpose

A. Chronological Placement Options

1. Mid-career option: AD 55–60 range within the timeline of Acts
2. Post-Acts release option (traditional view): AD 62–67 following release from first Roman imprisonment, followed by re-arrest and martyrdom

B. Purpose and Occasion of 1 Timothy

1. Written to Timothy in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3) to command prohibition of false doctrine
2. Exhortation to weather pastoral stress, maintain gospel presence, and extend Christ's Lordship

V. Word Frequency Analysis and Core Themes

A. Methodological Premise: Frequency implies focus (Paul focuses on God, not background sociology)

B. Primary Statistical Occurrences in the Pastorals

1. Reference to God and Christ (~40 total occurrences: God = 22x, Christ/Jesus = prominent, Lord = 6x)
2. Faith (pisteuo / pistis) and good/noble works (kalos / agathos = 16x)
3. People and relational terms (man/person, woman/wife, husband, widows)
4. Pastoral instruction and teaching (didascalia): Pastor as shepherd/teacher following Christ's model
5. Distinctive vocabulary: Godliness (eusebia), Christian message (logos), truth (aletheia), work (ergon), and love (agape)

VI. Historical and Cultural Backdrop of Ephesus

A. Ephesus as the 'Disney World' of the Roman Empire: Major metropolis, Temple of Artemis, wealth, and commercial hub

B. Center of Magic and Occult Practices

C. Early Church Growth in Acts 18–19

1. Ministry of Apollos, Priscilla, and Aquila
2. Paul's arrival, baptism of John's disciples, and dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit
3. Demonic spiritual warfare (Seven Sons of Sceva) and public burning of sorcery scrolls (50,000 drachmas value)
4. Commercial and social backlash: Silversmith riot led by Demetrius

D. Perspective on Global Persecution and Church Growth

1. Spiritual conflict against dark forces (Ephesians 6:12)
2. Modern reality of martyrdom (~90,000 Christians/year per Gordon-Conwell Center for the Study of Global Christianity)
3. Tertullian's maxim: 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church'

VII. Background and Profile of Timothy

A. Heritage and Family

1. Native of Lystra; Jewish mother (Eunice) and pagan Greek father
2. Instructed in Old Testament Scriptures from childhood by mother and grandmother (Lois)

B. Ministry Career and Partnership with Paul

1. Joined Paul on second missionary journey (Acts 16)
2. Named in eight Pauline epistles (only Galatians, Ephesians, and Titus omit his name)
3. Paul's primary confidant, co-worker, and trusted apostolic representative

C. Bond Forged in Gospel Suffering

1. Shared hardship, adrenaline, and threat of persecution
2. Exhortation in 2 Timothy to unashamedly endure suffering for the gospel

VIII. Distinctive Literary Feature: Faithful Sayings (Logos Pistos)

A. Meaning and Translation: 'Faithful is the word' / 'You can take this to the bank'

B. Occurrences in the Pastoral Epistles

1. 1 Timothy 1:15 (Christ came to save sinners)
2. 1 Timothy 3:1 (Aspiring to oversee as a noble task)
3. 1 Timothy 4:8–9 (Godliness holds promise for present and future life)
4. 2 Timothy 2:11 (Dying and living with Christ)
5. Titus 3:7–8 (Justification by grace and inheritance of eternal life)

C. Purpose: Solemn affirmation of foundational, dependable Christian doctrine