

PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO TIMOTHY

1:1–6. Background of Paul's Second Letter to Timothy

Many scholars have concluded that Paul did not write the pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus) due to distinct vocabulary and stylistic differences in the Greek when compared to Paul's other epistles, themes that seem to fit better in later historical contexts, as well as some inconsistency of details concerning travel and companions when compared to Luke's narrative in Acts. However, stylistic differences are not a failsafe means to determining authorship (for example, the use of scribes may account for some differences—some of the passages in the pastoral Epistles are classically Pauline). Much of the unique vocabulary in the pastoral Epistles may be due to distinct topics not addressed in his other letters, many of the topics associated with later historical contexts also appear in the teachings of his other undisputed letters, and the travel and companion differences with Acts can be explained if the pastoral Epistles are referencing unrecorded journeys Paul made in the east after his initial imprisonment in Rome (where Acts ends) and prior to his death in Rome years later. If so, then these epistles are a window into the last years of Paul's life. First Timothy and Titus were likely written while Paul traveled during his final years, but 2 Timothy appears to have been written during Paul's second imprisonment in Rome just prior to his death. Until more explicit or conclusive evidence is amassed, there is no need to abandon tradition concerning authorship.

Timothy became one of Paul's missionary companions when Paul was traveling through Lycaonia (part of the province of Galatia) during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:3). Timothy served with Paul in Philippi and Thessalonica during that second journey and also joined Paul during his third missionary journey in Ephesus, Corinth, Macedonia, and Troas (Acts 20:2–5; Romans 16:21). At some point after Paul's release from his first imprisonment in Rome, Timothy appears to have traveled with him back to

Ephesus. Paul had instructed Timothy to remain there to minister and correct false teachings (see 1 Timothy 1:3). It was while Timothy was in Ephesus that Paul wrote both his first and second letter to him.

At the very beginning of his second letter, Paul notes that he writes “according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:1). This is likely a shortened reflection of his opening remarks to Titus: “According to the faith of God’s elect, . . . [in] hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2). The perfectness of Paul’s hope is revealed in these words. He appears to rest on the belief that anyone who truly puts their faith in Christ should have a certain or sure hope of eternal life, because God promised such and God does not lie.

Paul’s declaration in verse 3 that he serves God “from my forefathers” is likely meant to convey that both he and his ancestors served Him, and thus this phrase could be rendered “as my forefathers” like in many modern translations,¹ suggesting that Paul sees his following Jesus as a continuation of, not a departure from, his Israelite faith.

Paul recalls the tears Timothy shed at their parting (in Ephesus) and expresses a desire to one day see him again (verse 4). He also recalls Timothy’s *anypokritou pisteōs*, “unfeigned or sincere faith,” and the legacy of such faith in Timothy’s family as a source of Paul’s joy (verse 5). It is not exactly clear whether Paul is speaking of Timothy’s mother and grandmother as Christians or whether he is simply speaking of the faith of Timothy’s ancestors in the same way he mentioned the faith of his own ancestors above in verse 3. This is the only mention of Timothy’s grandmother Lois, but his mother, Eunice, was described in Acts 16:1 as a “Jewess, and believed,” suggesting that she may have become Christian.

1:6–12. Be Not Ashamed of the Testimony of Christ nor His Servants

Because of Timothy’s sincere faith, Paul admonishes him to use this faith to *anazōpyrein*, “rekindle,” the gift given him by the laying of hands, a likely reference to the Spirit—that is, the gift of the Holy Ghost—mentioned in 2 Timothy 1:7. This is not a spirit of fear but of power, of love, and of *sōphronismou*, “self-control.” Consequently, Paul tells Timothy to let that spirit empower him to “be not ashamed” of the testimony concerning the Lord nor of Paul himself, who is in prison as a servant of Christ, and also to suffer for the gospel with Paul if need be (verses 8, 12).

Verse 9 can be used to promote the Calvinist idea that one’s salvation and calling is not related to one’s own agency but only “according to [God’s] own purpose and grace.” Latter-day Saints reject this notion. Salvation and calling are indeed not *kata*, “according to, by way of,” our own deeds; rather they are based “in Christ Jesus” by way of God’s plan and grace “given us . . . before the world began.” However, just because one’s deeds are not the basis for salvation or calling does not mean that agency and choices do not play a role. Whether or not we choose to follow Christ, repent, and make covenants, as repeatedly requested throughout all scripture, determines the position in which we place ourselves to receive God’s salvation and calling.

1:13–2:2. Hold Fast to the Sound Words of Apostles

As a minister to the Saints in Ephesus, Timothy receives consistent counsel in both of Paul's letters to ensure that they are taught true doctrine as given from Apostles. Paul seems very concerned about the speculations of false teachers. He tells Timothy that through the influence of the Holy Ghost he should "hold fast the form of sound words" that Paul himself gave to him. In other words, Timothy should use the *hypotypōsin*, "form" (perhaps better translated "pattern"), of Paul's words in his ministry so that the Saints are truly nourished by the good and accurate word of God (2 Timothy 1:13–14; 2:2).

Paul mentions a group of Saints (naming two specifically) who have turned away from him in shame and one, Onesiphorus, who "was not ashamed" and sought Paul diligently even while he was in prison in Rome (1:15–18).

2:3–13. Endurance and Hard Work with Jesus Christ Wins the Prize

Paul uses the metaphors of a soldier who is focused on pleasing his commander and not distracted by civilian life, an athlete who abides by the rules of the game and gains the victor's crown, and a husbandman who is the first to eat the fruit of the field. He does this as a means of encouraging Timothy to *synkakopathēson*, "endure hardness" (literally "share in suffering"); to *athlē*, "strive, compete"; and be *kopiōnta*, "hardworking" (2 Timothy 2:3–6). Paul himself suffers trouble and endures all things to bring salvation and eternal glory to others (verses 9–10). Likewise, those who give their lives and suffer with Christ receive the life and reign of Christ (verses 11–13).

2:14–18. Be Careful of False Teachings and Worldly Empty Chatter

Again, Paul returns to the problem of speculation and false teachings. Paul even mentions two people by name who have been teaching that the Resurrection is over, which has undermined the faith of some. He tells Timothy to counsel the Saints in Ephesus to avoid contention over words and shun *kenophōnias*, "empty chatter," that does not profit anyone and will actually increase ungodliness (2 Timothy 2:14–18). In order to do this, Timothy will need to carefully present himself approved to God and be "rightly dividing" (*orthotomounta*, "straightly cutting") the word of truth (verse 15). In other words, Timothy's moral authority to combat those who are corrupting it will come from a life that is in harmony with God and from carefully dissecting the word of God to understand it inside and out.

2:19–26. Becoming Vessels of Honor

Paul uses the analogy of a large house filled with all kinds of vessels to refer to the Christian community. The gold and silver vessels are probably considered honorable because their function is for honorable

things, such as holding or presenting food, whereas the wood and earthenware vessels are probably considered dishonorable due to their typical use of carrying away garbage and excrement. The context would suggest that Paul is likening false teachers to the dishonorable vessels.

Paul's references to a firm foundation of God and the Lord knowing "those being his" because of a seal and their naming the name of the Lord fits well into the context of a house with a foundation containing vessels, due to the ancient practice of placing seals with the owner's name on vessels (2 Timothy 2:19). In this case, those who depart from iniquity and purge themselves from the dishonorable vessels of verse 20 are sanctified and are fully prepared and useful to the Master as honorable vessels that are sealed with the name of Christ and abide in the house or church, whose foundation is sure (see also Ephesians 2:19–22).

In verses 22–26, Paul gives specific examples of things to avoid and things to pursue that will establish one as a vessel of honor, such as avoiding youthful lusts (likely a reference to immature pursuits for simply satiating the senses), speculations, and contention in contrast to pursuing righteousness, peace, and a teaching style that invites people to repentance through gentleness and meekness. Paul's admonition that one should pursue these things with those that call upon God with a pure heart emphasizes the need for community in our pursuit of godliness.

3:1–9. Paul Lists Various Iniquities That Cause Some to Resist the Truth

Paul raises his concern for various iniquities creeping into the Church by giving a dire prediction of the future when difficult times will come from such sins. Paul speaks of the *eschatais hēmerais*, "last days," which can be a phrase referring to the period when Christians, from the apostolic age to the present, anticipate the Messiah's Second Coming (for example, Peter indicates in Acts 2:16–17 that those with him in the moment were fulfilling a last-days prophecy from Joel, and 2 Peter 3:3–4 speaks of the last days just prior to the Second Coming).

Paul lists the kinds of sins that will bring trouble in the future and that Timothy should be vigilant against in the present. The sins in 2 Timothy 3:2–4 are organized into a chiasmic structure based on types, which provides a nice literary enclosure that echoes the enclosure of the last days, present and future, that Paul is addressing.²

"Without natural affection" is likely a reference to the lack of love even in family relations such as between siblings or parents and children (verse 3). "Incontinent" in verse 3 means "lacking self-control." "Fierce" is better translated today as "untamed, brutal." "Heady" in verse 4 is better translated today as "reckless."

Oddly, Paul concludes his list above by claiming the doers of such sins "have a form of godliness" (verse 5). He is likely indicating that many in the Church will hide their sins beneath an exterior of feigned righteousness. Hence, they have a form of godliness but deny its real power in their lives.

Paul indicates that some false teachers who have crept into the Church are of this sort (verse 6). In other words, they are guilty of the iniquities listed above. These have led a particular group of women from the faith, and they are now unable “to come to a knowledge of the truth” (verse 7). Paul compares these false teachers who resist the truth to those in the past who resisted their leader Moses, showing that Paul believes that opposing God’s chosen leaders is tantamount to opposing God’s truths (verse 8). Such will be exposed (verse 9).

3:10–17. The Teachings of Church Leaders and Scripture Help One Avoid and Combat Deception

Although evil men and seducers like those mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:6 will increase in the Church, Paul tells Timothy to just continue in the things he has learned because he has known those from whom he learned (for example, Paul himself) and he has known the scriptures (verses 14–15). The scriptures equip servants of God with the ability to do the good work of teaching, correcting, and training others in righteousness (verses 16–17).

4:1–5. Paul’s Final Charge to Preach the Word

In light of all that he has said in his letter, Paul charges Timothy to simply preach the word and to be ready “in season and out of season” (seemingly meaning “at all times”; 2 Timothy 4:2). But the Joseph Smith Translation adds, “For those out of season,” suggesting that “season” is not a reference to time but to the status of people in the Church. In other words, Timothy should be ready to nourish with the scriptures those who are faithfully abiding in the Church (in season) and those who are struggling or are out of the Church (out of season) who need exhortation. Timothy needs to be ready because the time will come when they will no longer tolerate sound doctrine but will turn to false teachings that suit their own desires and false teachers who will say what their “itching ears” want to hear.

4:5–8. Paul’s Final Farewell

Paul concludes this letter, likely the last of all his epistles, with a declaration that life has been like a drink offering poured out upon the altar to God. It is now time for him to depart (2 Timothy 4:6). He goes with the confidence and assurance that he has finished the race, or in other words, he has endured to the end and expects to receive the victor’s crown of righteousness. Paul’s confidence is born not of any particular personal achievements he has made but simply of his faith in Jesus Christ.

4:9–18. Some Personal Matters

The final remarks Paul makes in this letter are a few items of business and personal items, such as an appeal to Timothy and Mark to come to Rome and be with him since Paul’s previous companions have largely left him alone. His friend Demas (mentioned as a fellow-worker with Paul in Philemon 1:24) has apparently left the faith for the world, and his other companions (with the exception of Luke) are out ministering in other places. Paul’s indication that he sent Tychicus to Ephesus, where Timothy and Mark are located, is likely to provide leadership there when the two leave to join Paul in Rome.³

Paul asks Timothy to bring some items, including a cloak and *ta bilia*, “the books” (likely a reference to his Old Testament writings)—a thing to keep him warm in prison during the coming winter (see 2 Timothy 4:21) and a thing to keep his spirits high (the scriptures).

Paul tells Timothy to be careful about Alexander (likely the same person mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:20) because he opposes the Church and apparently caused Paul great harm. Paul also mentions that no one supported him during his “first defense” (likely a reference to his first imprisonment and appeal in Rome), but in contrast the Lord stood by him and eventually delivered him. He is hopeful the Lord will deliver him again “unto his heavenly kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:18).

Notes

1 See 2 Timothy 1:3 in the New International Version, Easy Standard Version, New American Study Bible, and New Revised Standard Version.

2 Noted by George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 429–432.

3 Tychicus was likely Paul’s earlier letter-bearer to the Ephesians and Colossians. See Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7; and Acts 20:4

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