

PAUL'S LETTER TO TITUS

1:1–4. Background to Paul's Letter to Titus

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, themes that seem to fit better in later historical contexts, and 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 determine authorship; for example, the use of scribes may account for some differences. Also, much of the distinct vocabulary in the pastoral Epistles may be due to distinct topics not addressed in the other letters, many of the topics associated with later historical contexts also appear in the teachings of Paul's other undisputed letters, and some of the passages in the pastoral Epistles are classically Pauline. The travel and companion discrepancies with records in Acts can be explained if the pastoral Epistles are referencing unrecorded journeys of Paul in the east after his initial imprisonment in Rome (where Acts ends) and prior to his death in Rome years later. If this is the case, then these epistles are a window into the last years of Paul's life. Until more explicit or conclusive evidence is amassed, there is no need to abandon tradition concerning authorship.

First Timothy and Titus were likely written while Paul traveled after his first imprisonment in Rome, and 2 Timothy appears to have been written during Paul's second imprisonment in Rome, just prior to his death. Similar to leaving Timothy to build up the Church in Ephesus, Paul apparently left Titus to build up the Church in Crete, which according to tradition was Titus's birthplace.

Titus was a Greek convert and had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem at the end of his second missionary journey. Titus's gentile roots and lack of circumcision caused some concern among the Jews who had converted to Christianity (Galatians 1:1–3). Paul resisted them, considering the Gentiles free from the law of

Moses through Christ (Galatians 1:4). Titus helped Paul with the Saints in Corinth and was sent to Dalmatia while Paul was in prison at Rome near the end of his life.¹

Paul indicates at the beginning of his letter to Titus that his ministry is “according to [or ‘for’] the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of truth,” which Paul hopes will lead the elect to “eternal life, which God . . . promised before the world began” (Titus 1:1–2). Latter-day Saints understand that the promise of eternal life may have been given in the premortal life, similar to the promises given at baptism and at other covenant moments in this life. The Joseph Smith Translation of John 1:1–2 indicates that “in the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. . . . The same was in the beginning with God,” suggesting that the gospel was preached in the premortal existence. Paul goes on to say to Titus that God has “in due times manifested [*ephanerōsen*, ‘revealed’] His word through preaching,” indicating his belief that the gospel has already been revealed multiple times, not just in his own day (the Greek word *kairois*, “seasons,” translated here as “times,” is plural even though many modern translations render it in the singular; Titus 1:3). Likewise, 1 Peter 3:18 indicates that Jesus, after His death and while still in the spirit, “preached unto the spirits in prison” (compare Doctrine and Covenants 138:18–20, 30–31). The collective teaching, then, is that the gospel has been revealed many different times—including in premortality, throughout mortality, and in the postmortal spirit world—all through Jesus Christ and His representatives. All who accept the gospel at any of these times, even in premortality, are given the promise of eternal life, as Paul declares, becoming God’s elect or chosen.

1:5–11. Qualities of Elders and Bishops

Prefiguring the pattern of elders being ordained by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (who were already Apostles) in connection with the establishment of the Church in modern time, Paul as an Apostle authorized Titus to ordain elders as he established the Church in the cities throughout Crete (Titus 1:5). Like he did in his first letter to Timothy, Paul outlines with Titus qualities he expects leaders to have.

Anenklētos, “blameless,” conveys the meaning “above reproach” (verse 6). The counsel that an elder should be “the husband of one wife” has been interpreted in various ways: (1) an elder should be married, (2) an elder should never be married more than once his entire life, (3) an elder should not practice polygyny, (4) an elder should be emotionally and sexually faithful to his wife. Number 1 is a possibility. Number 2 is unlikely given Paul’s advice in 1 Corinthians 7:39. Polygyny was a practice among some Jews of Paul’s day, so number three is also a possibility. The phrase “the wife of one man” is used in 1 Timothy 5:9 to refer to a widow’s fidelity, so number four is also a possibility.

The sudden shift to bishops in verse 7 and the overlap of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 can cause some confusion concerning the relationship of the titles elder and bishop in the early Church. *Presbuteros*, “elder,” simply means a mature man, and *episkopos*, “bishop,” means simply “overseer.” The meanings of such titles are certainly not mutually exclusive and possibly held in tandem—an “overseer-elder.”

Plēktēn, “striker” carries the meaning of being physically contentious (Titus 1:7). *Philagathon*, “lover of good men,” is best rendered as “a friend of that which is good” (verse 8). As in his letters to Timothy, Paul stresses the importance of church leaders knowing and living the words of the gospel which will give them ability to correct teachers of false doctrines (verses 9–11).

1:12–16. Unto Them That Are Defiled and Unbelieving Is Nothing Pure

Paul quotes an unnamed Cretan prophet who spoke of the Cretans as liars and lazy gluttons (“slow bellies”; Titus 1:12). Paul agrees as it pertains to those Cretans in the Church who are promoting false teachings and turning themselves and others from the truth. Titus and the leaders are to “rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (verse 13). Paul notes the truism that when someone has decided to disbelieve, they view the gospel, the Church, and its leaders and members through a lens of suspicion. The pure no longer appear to be pure in their eyes (verse 15). Additionally, they think they know God but in reality have denied Him (verse 16). In essence, they call that which is good evil and that which is evil good.

2:1–10. Using Sound Doctrine to Strengthen the Members and Confound the Critics

In addition to correcting the false teachers, sound doctrine also strengthens members of the Church (Titus 1:9; 2:1–6, 9–10). Paul tells Church leaders to be a “pattern of good works” and to have integrity, dignity, and sound speech beyond reproach in their doctrine or teaching so that the opposition will have nothing evil to say concerning *hēmōn*, “us” (not “you”)—in other words, the leaders, including Paul.

2:11–3:2. The Grace of God Helps Us Become Clean and Live Righteously

Paul never taught that because of God’s grace one need not worry about how they live. On the contrary, Paul clearly couples righteous works with God’s grace in Titus 2:11–14. Paul appears to teach that the grace of God, through Christ, accomplishes two things: (1) it allows us to be redeemed from iniquity, and (2) it purifies us a people, who are zealous of good works (verse 14). Similar couplets appear elsewhere in scriptures, such as the following: “Who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath [1] clean hands, and [2] a pure heart” (Psalm 24:3–4), and “Unless he . . . [1] putteth off the natural man and [2] becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). The grace of God through Christ not only cleanses us but also empowers us to become godly (Titus 2:12).

3:3–7. Being Justified by His Grace

As the members of the Church interact with civic leaders and “all men,” Paul encourages the members to treat them with gentleness and meekness, for God gave the members mercy even though they were once full of sin and malice one to another (Titus 3:1–2). Every good work of righteousness is expected of the redeemed and purified, as Paul indicates, but he also clarifies that we are not saved by the works of our righteousness but by God’s mercy (verse 5). To actually be saved by the works of righteousness would require one to be perfectly obedient to the law, which no one has done, save Christ alone. Rather, our baptismal covenant—which implies that faith in Christ and repentance (turning away from evil) is occurring—allows us to be “justified by his grace” (verse 7). To be justified is to be given the *status* of perfection right now (which perfection is eventually attained through Christ), even though our actual *state* is imperfection. Justification is the reason an imperfect people can call themselves saints, which literally means “holy ones,” even though they are not yet fully holy. In other words, Paul is saying that as long as we remain in the covenant, God’s grace gives us the status of having already arrived, even though we still have the long journey ahead of us. Having this legal status of being justified gives great hope by allowing one to taste in mortality the joys of eternal life.

3:8–11. Be Careful to Maintain Good Works

Again, Paul reiterates that those who believe in God, those who are saved by God’s mercy, those who are justified by his grace, those who are heirs according to the hope of eternal life should “maintain good works,” and he asks that this be “affirmed constantly” (Titus 3:8). Specifically, he tells Titus and the local leaders to avoid “foolish questions, and genealogies” (the latter likely Paul’s generic term for unresolvable, and thus endless, rabbinic disputes over the law), to “reject” (or avoid) a *hairetikon anthrōpon*, “factious man” or “heretic” (one who causes division, creates sects), that refuses to be corrected.

3:12–15. Some Personal Matters in Closing

Paul concludes his letter to Titus with some personal direction. For example, once the replacement for Titus that Paul has sent arrives in Crete, Paul asks Titus to meet him in Nicopolis, where he is going for the winter. This is likely a reference to the capital of Epirus on the west coast of Greece. The fact that Paul asks that a cloak be brought to him in prison because of the coming winter at the end of his second letter to Timothy suggests that Paul may have been arrested on his way to or while living in Nicopolis (2 Timothy 4:13, 21).

Note

- 1 See 2 Corinthians 2:13, 7:5–16; 2 Timothy 4:10.

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