

# **Commentary on the Pastoral Letters**

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## Introduction to the Pastoral Letters

1 Timothy

2 Timothy

Titus

Philemon

Paul won his case before Caesar in AD 60 and was released. We have no record of where he traveled, but in these letters to Timothy and Titus, we find references to persons and events that we cannot reconcile with the narrative in Acts. This is the primary reason we believe he was not executed until after a second trial around AD 66. Clearly, Paul wrote the second letter to Timothy during this second trial when he knew his time was gone.

The problems he addresses in his earlier letters are now past; there are new threats to the churches and to the gospel. We find Paul writing in a different style because of this. It's also because he is addressing the shepherds, not the churches as a whole.

This introduction would be incomplete if we didn't take a moment to note that in these letters we see the birth of Gnosticism. We may never know the exact connection, but we find a strong intellectual link between the Talmudic traditions and Gnostic teachings regarding Christ. Talmudic tradition builds on the False Messianic Expectations, which asserted that the Messiah must make national Israel preeminent. Not merely raise her to her former status when David was the king and ruled that part of the world, but the Messiah must make Israel rule the *entire* world. That is the essential error of Talmudic Judaism, though seldom admitted to outsiders. Since Jesus failed this expectation, as far as they were concerned, He could not be the Messiah; He could not be the Son of God. Thus, He was just a man and His ministry saved nothing.

While trying to seduce a particular church, the Judaizers would not at first blaspheme Christ, but allow that He was a good rabbi. The tree that grows up to destroy a stone foundation first finds a crack where the seed can germinate. In the end, their objections inevitably led to reasserting the Talmudic false traditions. Either they perverted the message of Christ through peculiar Hellenized Jewish mysticism, or they asserted that He was not divine. It was a short step from this to the essential Gnostic heresy: Either Jesus was divine and not human, or He was human and not divine. This was the fatal flaw adopted from Hellenistic philosophy that the two realms could not intersect, that God could not or would not do that in a single human. Thus, the Judaizers paved the way for the Gnostics to corrupt the Early Church.

## Introduction to 1 Timothy

Timothy had become the acting apostle at Ephesus. Paul met him at Lystra during the First Mission and appears to have taken him on staff for his Second Mission. Of a Greek father and Jewish mother, Paul had this young man circumcised because he was already well known

among the synagogues of that area. This permitted Timothy a front-row seat in Paul's hardest work, teaching and debating in the synagogues. Against Paul's lack of talent, Timothy saw the relentless spiritual power of Paul's truth first hand. We sense Timothy had the talent Paul lacked, but suffered his own limitations. The younger man suffered some from a weaker constitution and was often the youngest among the men present in almost every situation. Still, he must have absorbed that spiritual confidence that made him such a valuable asset to Paul's ministry.

Paul's purpose in this first letter is encouraging Timothy. There are admonitions interspersed with brief and powerful words of worship. Paul offers a brief reminder of things Timothy surely knew about the organization, offices and basic management of churches. However, he mentions them as a means to addressing peculiar issues. Paul surely meant it as a reference document that Timothy could produce to stop arguments, because the whole letter addresses serious problems.

### **1 Timothy 1**

Paul begins with the standard formal greeting. The letter is addressed to a true son in the faith, but Paul adds the unusual element of praying for Timothy to find mercy, along with grace and peace from God. It appears that Timothy gets little mercy from anyone else.

It's quite likely Paul went from Rome straight to Macedonia in keeping his promises. He also asked Timothy to stay in Ephesus where he had been working already and not to come join him right away. Ephesus needed him far more than either of them needed to see the other. There was a great deal of hassle over false teachings. Paul mentions two particular items in passing.

First were the silly fables of events and teachings not in Scripture. Second was the Jewish fascination with endless genealogical records, as if such things could bring spiritual insight. Both were a source of debate over details, when none of it mattered at all. Both were tied to the Judaizers who had not rested a moment since Paul first dealt with them. The entire Talmud at that time was oral, dismissed by Jesus as mere human traditions and contrary to Scripture. It was a matter of reciting teachings and events falsely ascribed to Moses and other major figures, and the mental habit of smart-aleck speculation. They tried to back it all up with questionable genealogies to grant themselves some authority as inheritors of some valuable legacy.

Paul reminds Timothy why God left a record of the Law in the first place. The Law of Christ was sacrificial love; if one could simply get their love for God and for their fellow man in proper shape, the Law of Moses was fulfilled. That older Law simply indicated something of love's nature. For those who just couldn't grasp sacrificial love, the Law was a restraint upon their conduct, making them less harmful. Some of these were the very people so eager to teach that Law. They might understand the words of the Law, but nothing of the Law itself. The Law Covenants were good only if used lawfully to promote God's standard of justice. People who yearn for God's justice on His terms use the Law as an entrance into grace. Those who see the Law as the whole of God's revelation in itself have no internal law written on their hearts, but

are filled with a desire for advantage, not justice. Paul lists the resulting behavior. In so doing, he warns Timothy what sort of people were seeking to Judaize the church. Timothy needed to shut them up, and reassert the centrality of the gospel of Christ.

Paul was a good authority on the Judaizers because he had been their greatest predecessor, Chief Prosecutor and Persecutor of the church from the day Christ died. However, the Lord reversed all that, making Paul an Apostle of grace. It was Paul's mission to declare to the whole world that Christ came among humans to turn sinners around. If God could do it with Paul, He could do it with anyone. Part of the reason He chose Paul was to show all the Jews and everyone else in the world how grace works. When the elect see it, they can't resist it. Paul can hardly contain himself at the unspeakable joy of such a thought.

Timothy was such a miracle, too. At some point, someone prophesied over Timothy and Paul wanted him to keep the prophecy close to his heart, to take courage in it as he faced all these challenges. Timothy understood the nature of grace and faith, how the binding commission from Heaven was inescapable. That there could be anyone who comes into full possession of this, and then moves away from the Word, is simply impossible to fathom. Yet, here Paul mentions two, Hymenaeus and Alexander, who walked away from the established faith and teaching. Their presence was like a messy shipwreck in the harbor of the church body. They had gone so far as to blaspheme the Lord; Paul had turned them over to Satan. That means in part that he had placed them under the strictures of Law, not dealing with them in grace, because they didn't understand grace. Thus, the church would ostracize them as enemies and offer no spiritual protection.

## **1 Timothy 2**

Worship is life and breath for a Christian. Paul addressed what seems to have been the same sort of problems in worship that churches faced everywhere. We can discern two particular issues here, both tied to mortification.

Prayer is a gift from God, an open invitation to conversation on His level. He speaks Spirit to spirit and the mind can hardly follow the conversation. Much of what happens in prayer is convincing the mind to obey what God commands, to bring to bear upon the intellect the full power of spiritual communion. This changes the conscious thoughts through a fresh exposure of the bedrock of conviction built into our souls by the birth of our spirits. Paul uses several different words, all meaning prayer from various angles. We seek the welfare of all mankind. Not as they seek for themselves, but as God would offer. There is much He has granted to fallen mankind through His divine Law Covenants, in which men can find the means to life as good as it can be on this plane.

A particular emphasis is upon holding up civil government leaders. Not government impersonally, but people are the specific emphasis Paul gives here. We seek their true welfare, a peaceful reign under God's Laws. In so doing, we season our minds to seek peace – Paul uses a form of the Greek word *hesuchios*, to remain seated. This, as opposed to the common reflex of

fallen men to think rising up in protest and other forms of activism would accomplish anything important. Believers are to avoid such strategies, relying instead on the Lord to handle politics. Unspoken is the obvious assumption that Paul, only recently released from confinement, realizes that praying for peace and living peacefully do not always please fallen men, rulers in particular. Nonetheless, we intend no offense, whether they understand or not.

This approach is the lifestyle pleasing to God, a lifestyle that by its very example calls men to repentance. In our worship, we give prominent place to praying for those around us so that we are empowered to witness God's truth to them, for the life that cries out repentance is the life that lights up the path to grace. There is only one doorway to grace for all mankind and that is Jesus Christ. To this end was Paul chosen to testify and carry that message to the Gentiles. It is only fitting that those who embrace Jesus as Lord would emphatically embrace His way of peace, including not getting too wrapped up in this world's affairs.

Such an otherworldly focus bears other consequences and manifestations. Women who walk spiritually aren't concerned with a fashionable appearance. Paul was no grumpy Pharisee trying to crush womanhood; his prescription here regards primarily women attending worship. If there is one place a woman's priorities should be correct, this should be it. Church meetings were not the place to compete for admiring or envious eyes of others, but to deflect attention away from the self. However, this would naturally extend to life in general. Men would pray to learn how to live unobtrusively by not competing for the sort of manly attention sinners craved; women would pray the same for their own context. With worship in particular, some of the Hebrew way of things was not simply a Judean cultural bias, but a fundamental commandment from ancient times before Abraham walked the earth. It was a constant battle to get these new Gentile Christians to understand such things.

In worship, it would not do to have women chattering amongst themselves when all attention belongs to Christ. In a world where plenty of heathen religions placed women in the leadership role, this was foreign to God's revelation since Eden. Women are not permitted to take spiritual leadership because of what the narrative of the Fall tells us. God made Adam first and made Eve from him and for him. If women take that as an insult, they are rejecting God's revelation. In addition, while Adam was a fool, he knew instinctively the spiritual consequences of that awful choice to heed Satan's lies. Eve did not understand. She was not equipped to decide such things. It still isn't a woman's job today. We have seen where Paul allows women to lead in organizational matters, but in worship and spiritual matters, they must defer to men. Men are the spiritual covering (father, husband, or other male family head).

Her defining spiritual role, in which she reflects the glory of God, is to lead children or each other, not adult men. Paul uses a word that is not merely "giving birth," but implies the whole gamut of motherhood as a role. It hints of the text in Genesis, which promised that the Messiah would be born of a woman. Her role is utterly essential, one for which her man is unsuitable, as she is for his. As with men in their roles, so women must cling to the same spiritual power:

unconditional commitment to God, sacrificial love, purity of heart, and mortification of the flesh.

### **1 Timothy 3**

Given what we know of Ephesus and the surrounding region during the first century, we can't imagine how the gospel could fail to breathe life into dozens of satellite congregations. And where His power walks, He always pours out a variety of gifts. We shouldn't doubt that Timothy had some idea how to winnow out those unsuitable as congregational leadership for this growing number of churches. People who sensed the call felt compelled to build a life that reflected the beauty of that precious treasure and this was the flavor of Paul's faithful saying. He chose carefully a Greek term with an established meaning: *episkope*, commonly translated as "bishop." The literal English rendering is "overseer," but the word does not refer to an office, rather a function described as an inspector, investigator, judge, superintendent – a moral and/or spiritual watchdog to keep an eye out for things that don't quite measure up, or things which threaten the integrity of the witness of the body. The term was used most often to describe apostles, but seems to cover supervisory pastors and elders, as well.

As already noted in the previous chapter, this work was closed to women. However, it was closed to an awful lot of men, too. The list of negative and positive traits should have been obvious. How can a man pretend to help others with moral issues when he had too many of his own? Thus, this man would have to be free from moral entanglements, not a skirt chaser, always conscious of his duty and taking it seriously every hour of every day. His must be a life of self-restraint, always making time and space for the needs of others, and quick to answer their real questions about life. He must master human impulses in favor of his eternal mission. He's the sort of man whose personal home life is exemplary or he'll have nothing to offer the wider church family. He can't be a new believer or he'll simply not understand how much it costs to drive Satan out of one's life. He needs a proven record of holy living even non-believers recognize.

The term *diakonos* was also well established in Greek usage. Its primary thrust is "attendant," with a strong flavor of one who had no purpose or career except as the helper of another. This was not leadership, but service. Nonetheless, their mission required a certain priority over most other members. Because we have ample examples of women in Scripture bearing the feminine form of this title, it is patently silly to think it refers to spiritual leadership. Only in the rituals of worship were women excluded; the term describes one rather like a Levite in the Old Testament – organizational and logistical support for the activities of the congregation as a whole.

Otherwise, these attendants were to show the same seriousness of commitment to their mission as bishops did. Both would have been ideally full time paid staff. Timothy was reminded to avoid admitting to such service people who didn't take their job seriously. Deacons could afford to be honest at all times because they had nothing to lose and no interest in personal gain. Being a deacon means no ambition. Never offer the job to anyone who actually wants it, but to those

who distinguish themselves as genuine servants before they are offered any title. The same goes with deaconesses; they should be absent from the sort of social posturing so common to ordinary women. Rather, they should exhibit an unusual level of interest in the needs of others. Among married men, deacons must distinguish themselves by a solid family life. Such servants must be exceptionally trustworthy because the reputation of Christ Himself is at stake.

While Paul was hoping to join Timothy shortly in Ephesus, he wasn't sure it would happen that way. What he wrote would remind Timothy that every aspect of the mission was well within his reach, since it was all a matter of Christ using whom He called for His work. This was not something any mere man could do with great talent and skill. The very gospel truth itself was entirely a matter of spiritual power falling upon a helpless, broken world. It's almost a hymn Paul writes here. God Himself took on human form, a human of purity because He bore God's own Spirit, the ultimate paradox of revelation. The one upon Whom angels gazed in worship was declared among Gentiles, so that they could join in this divine worship, in preparation for following Him someday into Heaven.

### **1 Timothy 4**

It is one thing to know that you are saved by grace from your fleshly desires; it is quite another to still seek power by the actions of that flesh. Holiness is not a quality of this world, but something beyond this level of existence that can only be indicated, symbolized and demonstrated. The actions and symbols were not the point. The materialism of the Pharisees was a short step from Gnosticism, and both are reflected in the warning Paul gives here.

The Spirit of God had warned, via Scriptures and in His very Presence, that men would pervert the truth by letting demons lead them astray. The greatest lies of Satan are always just a step away from the truth. Trying to enforce the Kosher Laws on those who were not of Israel was simply wrong, given that the Covenant of Moses died on the Cross. Those laws no longer applied to any human on earth. Prior to Moses, God had said through Noah that all creatures were our prey, and instructed Peter in no uncertain terms that God had removed the temporary limitations of Moses, reopening all food to His children in Christ. But the silly notion that there could be some superior grade of personal holiness by avoiding certain foods or by avoiding marriage and sexual relations were already old corruptions of Moses by the time Jesus began His ministry. The whole idea of these demonic teachings was to trap people's minds on this plane, causing them to mystify the higher plane so that it remained out of reach, subject to fables and man-made legends.

What God has provided is His blessing and to receive these things gratefully was closer to holiness than any form of abstention on any grounds. At its most innocent, this whole thing was confusion over what God gave and what He said to avoid. God's Word is clear on most things and His blessings were well known. We are surely bound to seek and receive them in ways that reflect our commitment to eternity, but the things themselves are gifts of grace to symbolize the vast riches of that eternal life.

There are valid reasons for avoiding some things in this world on medical grounds, of exercising a certain form of restraint and physical training based on mere practicalities, but even that is subject to the calling of God. His blessings often come with limitations, but an individual call to restriction does not constitute doctrine. The highest profit is not a fit body. This body of flesh is not eternal and there is most certainly something better replacing this one when it expires. Spiritual health matters far more than the practicalities of physical health; we use the resources of this passing plane of existence to bring to life the higher truth. The words of Scripture mean nothing, if they don't bring us closer to the Living Word. We suffer enough from the natural results of walking in Him without making up new ways to distract ourselves by arguments arising from human intellectual speculations. Paul reminds Timothy to keep everyone focused on such teaching.

God appointed Timothy; he needed no human approval to walk in the power of the Lord. The same silly notions of Pharisaism-cum-Gnosticism, about how long one had lived and how thoroughly the mind was trained and seasoned intellectually, meant nothing against a living truth which had been around before mankind. God did not need their permission to appoint Timothy, never mind his age or academic background. If he could walk in the power of the Ancient of Days, then his teaching arose from that power, not mere human intellect. As long as Timothy bathed his conduct in studying the Scriptures, preaching and teaching from them, then every other issue could wait for Paul to come settle.

Ignoring the posturing and social jockeying of these corrupt "teachers", Timothy was encouraged to remember and keep fresh the vivid sense of his calling, of the prophecies he received when the council laid hands on him. Those educational pedigrees and talents meant nothing in God's Courts. Paul had better certifications than most and they meant little to him. What mattered was the simple gospel message and the Scriptures, because it was by this that the Lord worked among human souls, building up His Eternal Kingdom.

## **1 Timothy 5**

The gospel had come to Ephesus at least ten years earlier. There would be several congregations and a thriving community of faith. The New Testament model was drawn from that of the first church in Jerusalem, with one exception. Since very few of the Gentile members would have had their extended families involved in the church, virtually every congregation would have been organized as spiritual families, emulating the same care and nurture of the Hebrew extended family. That there were fewer blood ties should hardly hinder the normal familial operations. Whatever else it might be, each congregation was first and foremost a family.

In such a setting, we would naturally expect gentle treatment between individuals. Timothy would be new to this apostleship business and Paul reminds him serving as the ranking representative of spiritual authority was neither like the military nor a business. It's a household. Everyone is treated with the same respect as your own blood kin. Elder men who ruled in a household were expected to entertain appeals to their decisions, while younger men



were future leaders. Elder women were respected as if they had once changed your diapers and younger women were unopened treasures.

In such a setting, the issue of widowhood could easily get confused. In ancient times, it was common for women to outlive their husbands, as it was rare that women didn't marry someone one or two decades older. The Hebrew community had a long history of dealing with this as a mark of their justice, ensuring widows were not turned out onto the streets. God commanded her extended family to take care of her and we see this same ethic brought forward into the church.

It's bad enough that a great many people would join the church, initially at least, without their spouses. Some would lose their spouses. In other letters, Paul spoke of letting your unbelieving spouse go, as one who was spiritually dead. Some women would then be separated from their husbands as widows-in-effect. Given that the Old Testament community would have naturally provided for such women, we see the first church in Jerusalem did the same. A woman without local blood kin relations would naturally turn to the church as her new family. We would expect such women to then be free to devote themselves to the business of the church, the same as they would the needs of their own household. Women still raising children didn't have time for that and it was hard to find a place for them. Besides, younger women were still likely to be lonely for male companionship. Only those who had reached the age of sixty were likely free of such things. These were broad generalities, not hard rules. Paul urges Timothy to resist too quickly adding a woman to the list of widows for church welfare programs.

The first church in Jerusalem had an issue with widows that required the appointment of elders. The churches in Ephesus had almost no organic elders; virtually all of them would be appointed. Paul notes that ruling elders carried a heavy burden and doing it well was worthy of special notice. A critical task for Hebrew elders was teaching the Law; elders in Gentile churches would do something similar. Pastors lead in spiritual matters, observing the Heavenly concerns, whereas elders governed by the Laws of God and taught practical matters. Paul said pay these elders for the same reason the Law of Moses forbade muzzling an ox while it threshed the grain. The elders should not have to earn an outside living any more than a clan elder was expected to do physical labor. He retired from such things so he could be free to manage and lead. It would shatter their leadership if they had to worry about every petty challenge to their decisions, so Paul's answer was to require a measure of formality to reduce the silly carping. With their limited immunity came a higher burden of responsibility for elders, so when found in the wrong, deal with it in front of everyone. They surrender some measure of privacy for the sake of leadership.

Paul reminded Timothy to be as unbiased as possible in these matters. He also advised him to drink wine, because water alone was not only regarded as extreme asceticism with most people, but wine would offset the effects of questionable water quality in that part of the world. Timothy need not be embarrassed how it would look. In the real world, we all know a sinner may not be obvious at first, but eventually his evil will slip out. The same with a good man,

whose actions may at first seem a little odd. Once they saw Timothy acting truly magisterial, silly questions become obviously silly.

## **1 Timothy 6**

If we enslave ourselves to this world, we can never hope to be free on any terms.

Slavery was a fact of the ancient world. Christian faith was an invasion of that world, not to change the world, but to change the souls trapped in this world. Becoming a Christian freed the inner man, brought life to the spirit. So while he may yet wear the chains of a slave, prisoner, or endure any other sort of bondage under the laws of men, he could rest assured his fate was ultimately in the hands of Christ, to whom we are all slaves. If this life is all we have, then surely trying to escape such human bondage makes a difference, but the believer is taught to make the most of the situation as the place where God calls us to manifest His power, to make us love the worst of our fellow humans.

Should it be that the slave is bound to a fellow Christian, this was no excuse to treat his master with any less human respect. Yes, they were brothers in the Spirit, but still master and slave in the flesh. Again, our situation is our opportunity to witness. When Our True Lord needs us somewhere else, He can make it happen. Until then, we are grateful for His love and show it to others. All the more so do we love when we consider a master who loves Jesus shares that same love and power with us.

Yet, men are enslaved to so many things that do not involve chains of metal. Timothy was reminded to press the otherworldly perspective and beware of those who resisted it. Motives might be hard to fathom, but we know that people who make too much of this world will reject revelation. They take pride in the powers of the flesh, too often their intellect and logic, seeing nothing wrong with evaluating and rejecting revealed truth as inconsistent with their reason. To them, godliness is all about making their human existence more comfortable. We saw this with the Pharisees and we see it with Gnostics. We see it in their expenditure of time and effort wrangling over precise wording and rules, attempting to come up with some universal logical framework to answer all occasions, as if mankind were equal to such a task. Paul advised Timothy to recognize the type and remain aloof from their pursuits.

Of course, if we find joy in what God provides and give ourselves to finding ways to bless His Name, then we cannot hope for anything better in this life. Those seeking security in worldly possessions will destroy themselves. No one denies that such things are obtainable, or denies that they are pleasant for the flesh. Rather, we proclaim that such an approach to life guarantees this is all you have. It proves you do not understand eternal things. Excessive concern with God's provision on this plane has destroyed the faith of some, filling their hearts with sorrow over the unavoidable conflicts between two different worlds.

Timothy knew better, and Paul could hardly avoid spilling his soul out in praise for the treasures of Heaven, the Fruit of the Spirit. That fruit is worth fighting ourselves to make room

for it. Timothy had confessed before a large audience his commitment to that fruit, but an even greater Witness was watching to help him stay faithful. In due time, He will return to rule directly. We can afford to tolerate mundane misery in exchange for eternity.

Almost as if he nearly forgot, Paul added a note for Timothy to warn those who came into the Kingdom with a large portion of this world's goods. Whatever it bought them in this life, it meant nothing before Christ. If they took pride in that stuff, they didn't understand. If they were unwilling to use that stuff as a mere tool for eternal purposes, they were not ready to be treated as equal servants of Christ. If they lost everything, it was a cheap price for Heaven's blessings.

Therefore, Timothy was encouraged to stay away from all those highly educated debates and reasoning from the human level, and disdain the wisdom and learning of men. Paul could name several men whose faith and witness were destroyed by the seduction of such things, not least his fellow Pharisees and their Hellenism, which compelled them to reject the very Son of God.

## **Introduction to 2 Timothy**

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul has been arrested again, this time entirely by the secular authorities. A direct persecution of Christians began on the back of Nero's plans to renovate Rome. He had an awful fire started in 64 AD and decided to blame it on the Christians. Rome easily recognized Paul as the Western leader of Christ followers and probably picked him up at Troas. This time the charges were not a minor squabble within a religious minority, but an actual crime against the empire. Paul knew this was the end. This was surely his last known writing.

### **2 Timothy 1**

What sort of letter would you expect from a condemned prisoner? Paul was too busy making sure his friend Timothy was ready to carry on without him. We sense immediately that however much time they had together before the arrest, it was entirely too short of a visit.

We see the common formal opening for correspondence in those days. Paul never forgot that it was Christ who chose him. He thus denied ever wanting to be an apostle; it was God's command. The recipient is easily one of Paul's closest friends on earth. Timothy bore a legacy of faith and devotion to God and to Paul himself.

Paul stood in the firm conviction that he lived everything the Jews claimed to hope for and in this ancient promise he was able to pray for Timothy often. So acute was the loss they both felt when the soldiers cut off their fellowship and took Paul away in chains that there are no words. Timothy was the real deal, so Paul encouraged him to follow his example in keeping the fire of calling burning brightly. Fear had no place in their shared service of Christ, whose power was sacrificial love and mortification.

Humiliating it may be on the human plane, but his arrest hardly embarrassed Paul. It all happened in the process of faithfully serving Christ, so Timothy should also be proud to associate with Paul. This life carries a wealth of suffering, and obeying God only made such things worse, as Christ had warned. It was the mark of God's approval, and it didn't have to make sense to human minds. The worst this world can do to us hardly holds our interest compared to the full realization of our eternal citizenship, because the very living revelation of God walked among us and defeated the death that held men enslaved to his world.

This was what Paul was called to preach and teach to the world. The current discomfort of prison was simply the result of faithfulness in pursuit of that calling. Why should Paul be ashamed? Paul had come face to face with God Himself and suffered not a shred of doubt how it would all turn out in that far greater Day of Judgment. It was time for Paul to pass the torch, to bequeath the deep spiritual truth as a treasure binding Timothy to the Holy Spirit of God. Teach that truth, Timothy.

After so much time and work there in Ephesus, it was heartbreaking to note how many now publicly denounced Paul simply because they preferred the fantasy of social respectability to the gospel truth. Paul names the two strongest leaders of this schism, Phygellus and Hermogenes. They acted embarrassed over Paul's arrest, in contrast to Onesiphorus, who came to Rome and crawled through the humiliating procedure of finding Paul among the many Christian prisoners in Rome. Paul prayed that the Lord would bless the man's entire household according to his just behavior and selfless support, consistent from the earliest days of Paul's work in Ephesus.

## **2 Timothy 2**

Paul reminds Timothy that they are both servants in their Lord's domain. Their Master had serious business for them to attend, and they could not afford to let their guard down, since the job was never finished. It would be easy to note the popular memory verses here and forget that they arise in a particular context. It's too easy to see in this chapter a laundry list of spiritual epigrams and lose sight of the context: Following Christ is an austere calling, by its very nature dismissing the concerns of this life.

Paul asked Timothy not to allow the harness of grace to slacken, but to pull whether Paul is there or not. People pass, but the mission never dies, so Timothy was encouraged to harness someone else whom God had granted the same power of commitment. Paul offers a string of parables to bring the mission to life. Timothy was a soldier in Christ's Army and soldiers adapted to a very hard life. Soldiers in those days were enlisted directly by their commander and shared a strong personal bond. Their commander took care of their daily needs, while the soldiers avoided entangling themselves in mundane affairs.

First things first: For an athlete who trains hard, ability means nothing if you break the rules of competition, so he learns them before his training advances very far. Even Romans understood that the tenant farmer was the first to eat from the harvest, or there wouldn't be a farmer for

next year's crop. In everything we do in the Kingdom, we must seek to clarify the priorities. It was good to ask now and then, "What was the point?" Jesus was literally royalty, yet He died on the Cross. Then He rose again. For this gospel message, Paul felt chains and government hostility was a small matter, since it hardly restrained the Word of Truth. We endure human suffering because that's how we bring this eternal life to others.

Paul offers what we believe was a hymn, because the words lend themselves well to versification. If we die His death, we live His Life; if we endure His suffering, we share in His reign. If we disown Him, He disowns us. But if we fail Him for whatever reason, we know He will not fail us, because that would mean failing Himself.

As a part of the hard work, Timothy was commanded to restrain church leaders from getting bogged down in intellectual exercises, debating over the precise meaning of words like Pharisees. All that does is confuse the congregation that needs to be fed; the Pharisees never fed anyone literally or figuratively. The Word of God does not yield to such mental exercises. Instead, Timothy should set the example of due diligence to what the Scripture demands of us, since its purpose is application, not interpretation. All that theologizing was harming the mission and Paul names two men who never seemed to get enough of it. In their drive to seem so smart, they were telling folks that those who died in Christ were not going to rise again, that there was no Day of Resurrection. Their brilliant ideas were destroying the faith of many.

We can rest assured God keeps His promises. Those whom the Lord has given His Life will remain His; such are marked by a struggle to flee unjust living. These contentious theologians were calloused in their hearts, showing indifference to the underlying meaning of Scripture. They thought themselves better than the common rabble, yet were filled with sin. Homes were filled with all sorts of containers; God uses all kinds of people to carry His revelation. It mattered not what they were made of, because the Master decides their purpose and those who flee from sin show themselves chosen for honor. Those who don't seek humbly His cleansing power are little different from chamber pots.

There was trouble enough from fleshly weaknesses typical of immaturity, too eager to act before thinking. But trusting too much in thinking was another kind of death. Real maturity was not in so-called principled debate, but in kindness, waiting on folks to arrive at that teachable moment. Perhaps those with Pharisaical impulses would repent, and escape the harness of Satan.

## **2 Timothy 3**

The Fall was fundamentally an act of will, placing the self, particularly the intellect, on the throne of decision. Almost every horrific sin can be justified by human logic. By sterile orthodoxy, the church finds itself involved in a vast wealth of satanic business. In accordance with man's intellect and reason, the theologian becomes a judge over Scripture, rather than letting Scripture be the record of God's judgment on mankind.

Paul warns Timothy of the Last Days. The term “final days” is intentionally ambiguous, but typically indicates the entire period between Christ’s Ascension into Heaven and His Return. It is not meant to portray a shortness of time, as if any of the Apostles literally expected Jesus to return in a matter of a few years. Rather, it was the flavor of the last period of God’s dealings with fallen men. There are no more coming covenants; Jesus was the final and ultimate revelation of what God wanted to tell mankind. After that comes the End.

Time means nothing to God personally and He has warned us that during this Last Age of His revelation, things will get steadily worse. The Elect should not be surprised by any horrific thing men do. Paul warns that it starts with one great error – the Fall. Humans will be so in love with themselves, along with their talents and abilities and their grand accomplishments, that they will run to every sin imaginable. Once the self is on the throne, you cannot set limits that one does not choose to recognize internally. Like the hamster running himself to death on the little wheel in a cage, never really getting anywhere, man imagines he can do anything, but can’t hold back his own mortality. That mortality is the result of man making himself his own god in the Garden. It’s not that men could never do good things, but their motivations were all wrong. When you turn in your heart to live for the Spirit, such people become painfully obvious by their inability to absorb what only the spirit can and Timothy was warned to keep his distance from them.

Paul wasn’t imagining evil that might come someday. The sins he saw in the Judaizers marked the Gnostics later. A favorite tactic was to take advantage of the idleness of wealthy women. These learned doctors would put on the show of making a social call, talking circles around these ladies trained to treat them as socially important. These men would play on the vanity of such women and the whole scene was no different from mere sexual seduction. Paul seems to hint that he wonders if that wasn’t part of what took place. Still, the problem was the amount of money and social esteem given to support these self-important Christian Pharisees who strung these ladies along without ever doing them any good. They might as well be sorcerers in Pharaoh’s courts, like the ones who resisted the truth of Moses’ prophecies. There comes a time when parlor tricks with sticks and snakes won’t work, because the wrath of God is serious business. Pushing the envelope of sin among real Christians will always get you in very public trouble.

Timothy had been able to observe Paul’s ministry up close and in person. He was there to see whether the teaching and acting were consistent, a commitment that more than matched the words, even to the point of facing death. Paul was stoned and left for dead at Lystra, Timothy’s hometown. Paul would have been dead long ago had not God Himself intervened to keep him on the mission. Persecution is the natural element of those who serve Christ. So is putting up with schemers who twist the ministry for their personal ends; Paul never escaped from them for long. They were liars who lied to themselves along with everyone else.

Timothy was encouraged to stick with what he knew from the start. He grew up acquainted with the Old Testament, the scriptures of his day. Everything had to be consistent with what

they taught. Biblical theology is the only theology; the rest is just human speculation, a Christian equivalent of the Talmud. Christ was the standard for understanding them and Timothy knew Christ. Whatever a man could know and needed to know of God was found in that Living Word. Whatever a man needed for living in obedience to God was already there in the record. Whatever contradicted that was death.

## **2 Timothy 4**

For Paul, everything that mattered on this plane of existence was the message of Jesus Christ. That message was how the Laws of God pointed to a higher spiritual truth and a Spirit Realm, which could only be discussed in parabolic language. We enter that realm when the Creator breathes His own life and Spirit into ours; from then on, we strive to make the higher dimension apparent to all as the means by which the Father gives life to others. Paul's whole existence here was struggling mightily to teach and preach this message, all the while eagerly hoping to leave this world as soon as God permitted. It was this same God who lived and breathed in Paul's soul, seeing not only his conduct but also the intimate desires of his heart.

Timothy knew this message as well as any other man on earth, including Paul. As a servant passing on his vestments to another, he charged Timothy to do the same work as Paul had done in service to that message. Whatever it took, let no one escape accountability to it. The message carried its own power. Many preferred something more appealing to their human mind. The greatest lie is but a short step from the truth. Too many teachers were already popular for sounding in every way like good scholars of the Scripture, but whose whole message was aimed at the human intellect. They appealed to the fallen mind with well-crafted ideas built from the words of the Bible, yet devoid of spiritual power. Paul predicted this would become the dominant form of popular leadership in churches. How right he was! Timothy was to distinguish himself from such nonsense.

Paul felt he was like a drink offering about to be poured out before the Lord, the paradox of such rich content now sacrificed in what seemed such a wasteful manner. Regarding his service, Paul had no regrets. He felt like a mighty relay runner who faithfully guarded his treasured message and was now passing it on to the next runner, Timothy. Words could scarcely bear the load of what joy Paul felt as he approached the end of his time. Being in a Roman prison meant nothing, since this whole plane of existence is the real prison that Paul was eager to escape.

He added a few final personal notes. Paul begs Timothy to hurry to his side, because it would be their last chance to talk. Demas had been a frequent companion, but had become wrapped up in this world as if it mattered, headed for Thessalonica. Crescans is a new name to us, traveling to Galatia, while Titus had headed back to Dalmatia. Luke alone was still with Paul; he was longing to see the now faithful Mark, who had once failed him. Tychicus had probably carried this letter to Timothy via Ephesus, perhaps to relieve him of his apostolic duties. Paul also asked Timothy to bring the few things Paul valued still. There was that cloak he left at

Troas (hence the guess he was apprehended there) and apparently his copies of Scriptures and other papers.

Alexander was a synagogue leader among the Jews at Ephesus. We sense this man, whom Paul previously delivered to Satan because of blasphemy, had returned the favor by coming to Rome and testifying against Paul, most likely denouncing him as making trouble for the Jews.

Apparently, he had taken up where Paul left off on the road to Damascus, actively opposing the gospel. Those who could have helped were too afraid to face the Roman court on Paul's behalf, lest they be arrested, too. Who could blame them? All that mattered was how Jesus stood with Paul in the Spirit. Nothing of man's evil could keep Paul from enjoying the company of his Savior.

He wrote a few more personal notes for names we recognize: Priscilla and Aquila who shared his secular trade, as well as the previously mentioned Onesiphorus who searched for him in the Roman prison system. Erastus probably could not leave Corinth where he served as chamberlain. Trophimus, who had been with Paul in Jerusalem at his arrest, was left behind ill in Miletus, just a ways south along the coast from Ephesus. A few others we don't recognize were there in Rome with Paul. Thus, Paul ends with a typical blessing, reminding Timothy what it was all about.

## **Introduction to Titus**

Titus was a long-standing companion of Paul; the Apostle protected him from the pressure to be circumcised. Titus handled any number of things for Paul, including the continuing troubles in Corinth. In this letter, we see him working on the Island of Crete. Paul's visit to Crete, as recorded in Acts, had been too short to make much difference. It is one of the strangest places, as we shall learn. We know a few Cretan Jews heard the first gospel message, but as usual, the Jewish converts gave Paul the most heartache. Crete was no different. Obviously, Paul stopped on the island after his first confinement in Rome and left Titus there. Likely Paul wrote this letter near the same time as his first epistle to Timothy. At some point Paul in his travels stopped in Nicopolis, on the northwestern corner of Macedonia. He calls for Titus to join him there, whence it appears Paul would send him farther north up the Dalmatian Coast later. But for now, because this letter arrives in the fall, he had Titus bring his heavy winter cloak, likely the same one he then later left in Troas, asking Timothy (in his second epistle) to bring it to him in prison in Rome.

### ***Titus 1***

In the standard greeting of written correspondence of those days, Paul draws an image of cascading power. God Himself made Paul an Apostle of the Son. Paul's life was then poured out for the cause of bringing the gospel, entering the stream of God's mission to breathe life into the waiting elect. By his preaching, the Word washed away the lies of this world and people



embraced the truth of his message. They would live godly lives, overflowing onto their world. The final splashing pool was the eternal redemption God had promised before Creation. In this flow, Paul greets Titus.

Apparently, Paul did not stay in Crete as long as he would have liked. He left Titus to bring some order from the chaos of scattered households and individual believers. The proper organization, of course, was that each city or town on the island would have a local covenant body, a spiritual tribe, the extended family household structure proper for churches. Over each such household, there must be an elder, a chief of the clan, an administrator of sorts. The Cretans would not have had a background familiar with this way of organizing and had no organic leaders of this type already in their social structure. Therefore, it was on Titus to identify who was best for such leadership.

Paul reminds Titus of what he surely knew, by outlining some of the qualities necessary for such leadership. They should already be walking in stable marriages with households whose children were not rowdy troublemakers. That's what God requires of his vassals, that they be difficult to accuse of moral weakness, devoted to the welfare of His spiritual household. This meant leaders able to balance the various conflicting interests, placing their needs in the same basket with everyone else. The others must be able to trust him. Not simply because of good politics and smooth manipulation, but they must trust him because a leader knows the standards taught in Scripture and is able to convince people of the truth, keeping the whiners and grippers in check.

There was no place that men lived where you didn't find predators who tried to talk folks into all sorts of evil, but wherever there were Jewish converts, they were quickest to use such methods. It was the same old sin of Judaism: greed. They had long used their Hellenized perversion of the Old Testament as an excuse for acting as if material wealth was the only sign of God's favor. Thus, as God's Chosen, plundering Gentiles was their just due. They brought this garbage into the churches and managed to gin up major supporters with their sweet sounding rhetoric. Titus was to shut them up, expose them as liars and block them out of leadership by appointing righteous elders. Paul had many run-ins with Cretan Jews before and quotes a Cretan writer from six centuries before, Epimenedes, who said that his home folks were infamous for their lies. To this, Paul adds that they were also known for brutish hedonism, for so Paul had found them to be. Thus, Titus was to be altogether firm, not giving them any slack or putting up with any nonsense from these people. They were exactly the kind of people to swallow Talmudic idiocy.

Paul makes a mystical statement: Those who have living spirits are drawn to holiness, because the Spirit living in their spirits won't let them resist revelation. Laws and rules cannot bind them, because the living Spirit of God empowers them to know what pleases the Father, what brings glory to Christ. Just about anything they do, even when it's a big mistake, will come out well because the Father sees the holiness of their desires and works miracles through their lives, failures and all. Against this are people who have no spiritual sensitivity. It won't matter how

they pile on the rules and laws, because they simply can't comprehend righteousness with dead spirits. The Judaizers were notorious for trying to drag Gentile believers under the Talmud and couldn't even get the Law of Moses right. The Law of Moses was inherently mystical, more flexible and symbolic than the Jews of Paul's day understood, since they traded their ancient treasure of Hebrew heritage for the arrogance of a cup full of Aristotelian porridge. Without a living spirit, man had only his fallen intellect, leading inevitably to pride and a false legalism to cover evil desires.

Worthy elders who understood what was at stake would be quick to shut down the Judaizers.

## ***Titus 2***

Why do we bother? If our whole aim and focus is Heaven, why do we linger on this awful plane? We remain because it's not about our personal benefit, but of Heaven's business. That business is the message of Christ; for as long as He is pleased to leave us here, everything we do must point to His message. It so happens that such is truly in our best interest.

We do not act according to the ways of this world because our reasoning is not according to that of this world. It's not only the elders on Crete who need to think and act clearly in demonstration of the gospel message, but every member of each church family has a role to fulfill for the Spirit Realm. If there was one place on earth where the gospel life was a radical change requiring the full power of the Holy Spirit, it was Crete. These people were argumentative, selfish and given to boozing it up, so showing the better way was a mighty challenge, a life possible only by grace. What does a healthy teaching produce?

Older men should not wallow in the Cretan lifestyle, but must carry themselves with a full awareness of the context in which they are bearing the name of Christ, taking seriously the mission to which He calls us all. Older women can never forget that they set the pattern for the younger women, so they have to avoid slanderous gossip and teach righteous living. They will encourage family unity and solidarity, because the community's social stability is committed to their care. We sense that the modern feminist wildcat has nothing on the First Century Cretan woman. Young men were tomorrow's leaders, training themselves to be that noble elder who put to shame the average Cretan man. Titus was reminded to make it obvious that his life was the example for the things he taught, leaving everyone struggling to find a bad word to say of him.

What would it say to a pagan Cretan master if his Christian slave carried both the power to change the world, yet was restrained and gentle, more noble and trustworthy than his master? The whole point in denying this world is to break its power and live holy lives. We are focused on the Return of Christ, living as much as possible as if He had already come to find us faithful. The awful price He paid was not to make us libertines, but to free us from our sins, from their power to corrupt us. Titus didn't need a writ from Paul or any other earthly authority to wave about as his warrant to teach the truth; truth is self-evident by its power. No man on this earth can stand against it.

### **Titus 3**

The role of Titus was an apostolic servant of God Almighty. People who didn't recognize God's truth and power in his words would hardly pay much attention to any other authority; Cretans were particularly unruly. Those who sought their place in the Kingdom as loyal servants were required to show earthly respect to earthly rulers. Paul used terms to describe the whole gamut of such earthly authority: those who were appointed to power, those who held power by virtue of privilege or competence and those who exercised authority on behalf of someone else. God saves us to good works and Paul reminds Titus that we as believers spend time dreaming up ways to be a blessing to others.

In the case of Cretans, it would be quite an accomplishment if they could simply refrain from harming others. They should learn to control their tongues and their hands and not follow their Cretan instincts. Instead, they should be inclined to humility and patience with people. All the more so when we consider where we all came from, including Paul himself. We surely infuriated a lot of folks by our selfish and ill-considered choices; we all deserve eternity in Hell.

Our Savior on the Cross showed what an awful price sin carries, also showing God's willingness to cover that price. We can't buy it with what any of us could do with our own human power. The whole thing rests on the initiative of God to wash away our reliance on our human abilities and our pitiful intellect. Our lives are rebuilt so that we put the mind in a servant role behind the Spirit. Just having His personal Presence inside our lives is more precious than we can say. Along with all this, we also gain a right standing before God Almighty, a welcome as His own children, inheritors of Eternity.

This teaching creates an eternal commitment to obeying the Lord. Never let those Cretan believers forget it, because without this they simply cannot maintain personal holiness. Even without spiritual birth, living this way is simply the best life any human could have. Obviously, no Jewish obsession with human pedigree, nit picking over Talmudic legal interpretations and debate by every Jew in every part of the world can accomplish anything compared to one new convert with a sincere desire to please God. When any man starts down that Judaizer path, give him two chances to learn better, and then treat him as a non-believer. His insistence on that stuff is all the proof anyone needs.

Paul closes with a few personal and administrative notes. First, he plans to send one or another assistant to relieve Titus from his duties in Crete. When either of them arrives, Paul wants Titus to join him in Nicopolis. Zenas and Apollos carried this letter to Titus, and Paul asked that he not detain them, but supply them and send them on quickly. This would also be a good example of how to respond appropriately to urgent needs. That's a fruit of the Spirit, too.

## Philemon

There is very little we can add to the obvious message of this brief personal note Paul sent to his friend in Colosse. It serves little purpose to embellish the story with speculation and traditions. The runaway slave came into contact with Paul, found Christ and was sent back with this message as part of the same courier mission that delivered his letter to Ephesus on the way, along with the letter to the entire Christian community at Colosse. The slave belonged to Philemon, the sponsor and likely elder of the church in his house.

Paul would gladly have kept the slave, but was conscientious about his brother's property. A useless slave named Onesimus ("Useful") comes home true to his name, now a brother in Christ to the owner. Wearing his own chains, Paul would have understood the plight of a slave who might feel the need to escape. But the slave gets his heart right and is ready to serve better than most slaves could, because this one was a brother in Christ to his master. Paul asks Philemon to let him assume the slave's debts, while allowing the slave to assume Paul's claim on Philemon. The message is a model of the shepherd's heart.