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Pastoral Epistles

"May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones." 1 Thessalonians 3:13

Key verses: 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10; 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; 2:9-15; 1 Timothy 3:14-15; 2 Timothy 1:14; 4:2-8; Titus 1:5; 2:10-12; 3:8

Key personalities: Peter, Paul, Timothy, Titus and Early Christians

Timeline: The Church is established and grows by the Power of the Holy Spirit and the multiplying networks of Paul and his apprentices, 45-66 A.D.

The Epistle of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Perhaps the first writing of Paul, written in A.D. 51-52, soon after the church of Thessalonica was planted by Paul to encourage, equip and inspire their faith and be encouragers of one another. He lets them know that Christ will return. Paul also answers some of their problems and eschatological concerns. Then, he writes to them a second time to encourage them again to not be idle, that they were so excited about Christ's second coming they put on hold the growth of their faith and their planning of the future. The Gospel is not just a joyful news; it is a reality that we trust in and put our hope in and obey. We can and should be faithful and trust in our Sovereign Lord.

The Epistle of 1 and 2 Timothy. Timothy is a young pastor who takes over from Paul to the church in Ephesus. Paul takes the approach to help equip and encourage the minister, not necessarily the rest of the Church. Paul shepherds Timothy on how to shepherd the rest of the flock. Paul encourages Timothy to step up to leadership and not listen to his redactors and critics, as they are not from God. Paul gives basic instructions on doctrine--how we are to treat the weakest of our members and how to order one's personal life. 2 Timothy was, perhaps, Paul's last letter written in 66 A.D., and gives his final thoughts and encouragements to always be faithful, run away from and fight ungodliness, and to always remember Scripture is the written Word of God and has all the proper and true instructions for life and church.

The Epistle of Titus. This is also a personal letter written to Titus, in Crete, while Paul was in prison. Paul was also writing to Timothy at this time because he had the time write and encourage. Titus, a Gentile from Greece, was converted to Christianity by Paul. Titus grew to be a church leader and a pastor. He was experiencing the same problems as Timothy, namely false teachers trying to take over his position. To counter the opposition, Paul lays forth the qualifications for church elders, disqualifying the false leaders. He then lays out the importance of the incarnation of Christ, to understand the work of God and the importance of theological truth as a grounding for one's faith and for right living (Titus 1:1-4; 2:11-14; 3:4-7).

Key Happening: A new generation emerges to continue the Church and faith!

The Epistles of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are called the "pastoral epistles," because these writings, at that time, were directed to the pastoral leadership, not the entire church. Paul's other letters were for the entire assembly and any other church; they could be copied and applied anywhere, everywhere. Paul plants these churches; then, he disciples and shepherds the next generation of church leaders. These letters also serve as the bookends of Paul's ministry, 1 Timothy, perhaps his first work, and 2 Timothy, his last. Paul also warns of the heresy of false teachers, divisiveness, diminished the perception of Christ's Divinity and the seeking of real, effectual Truth. Paul places importance in showcasing God's Work in the lives of the leaders who should always teach correctly and apply proper administration in the church, have orderly worship, and proper relationships. Paul also gives the qualification for leadership and teaching in the church (1 Cor. 11:30; Rev 21:8).

Christianity's spread and influence continue, but the Apostles are being martyred and the rest are getting old or incarcerated. So, a new generation emerges to continue the faith and continue the Great Commission of expanding the Church. Yet, the same problems we have today infected the Church then;

the social and political culture that characterized the Roman Empire in those days was counter to the Lord's Work and teachings just as so much of today's society, government, and culture seeks now.

The church grows and moves outward. It is possible that Stephen's followers were a part of the Synagogue in Jerusalem; thus, after he is martyred, they and the other first Christians may have moved to Rome and Asia Minor, now modern Turkey (Acts 6:9-10).

Jews had settled in these regions prior to their Babylonian captivity. Because of their distance to the Temple and the center of Jewish orthodoxy and living in pagan influence, they had been battling unorthodoxy, apathy, and infighting. Now the Christians were emerging; also, being Jews at this time, they were adding their Jewish traditions and mysticisms and Greek philosophical ideas that reflected their culture and personal worldviews. The outcome: A church in division and conflict, like many today, with false teachings that dilute the Gospel were being brought into the Church. This set up the problems Timothy and Titus and others face that Paul addresses (Acts 19:9).

- **Timothy.** He was Paul's assistant as well as a church planter and a pastor himself. He was from a godly family and knew the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul pours his life and wisdom into him, showing an example of godly mentoring and discipleship (Acts 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15).
- **Titus** was a Greek of pagan origins and converted to Christianity. He showcases that as Christians, we are together in community. Paul had a strong sense of community, togetherness, and cooperation and chose the right people for the job. When we love one another, we prove and exhibit Christ (John 13:34-35; 2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6-14; 8:6-23; Gal. 5:22; 2 Tim. 4:10; 1 John 2:10; 3:14-16).
- **Gospel/good news.** This means victory as in "God delivers," and that salvation is from, and only from God, and Christ as Lord. This refers to the person and Work of Christ, how He delivered us out of sin and into our new life. It is by His life and sacrifice that we have the Kingdom and abundance of life here and forevermore. This also refers to how God delivered Israel out of bondage as proclaimed at Sinai (Rom. 10:9-10; 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7; Heb. 2:3; 4:6).
- **Truth.** The Gospel contains the knowledge of who, why, and what concerning Christ, and it is true--the ONLY Truth. Paul sets the record straight of any confusion. It is not bound to or by any human reason or tradition and can't be corrupted, but we can misrepresent it. We must never do that (Eph. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:15; James 1:18).
- **Whatever you do... name of the Lord.** This means actions reflect faith. With our lips and lives, all we do must have as a focus the glorifying of Christ and the furthering of His Kingdom. This is also a reminder that God is Sovereign. He is our hope and reason, so we must line up our lives to Him. This is an attack on the pagan religious services that were influencing them; they emphasized ritual observances and negated personal holiness. All aspects of our lives must reflect His Lordship over us! (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Thess. 5:8)
- **Overseers** refers to, and implies the leaders of the leaders, such as bishops (Acts 20:17, 28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-2; Titus 1:5-7). This word, however, also applies to all those who are supervising others, such as elders, pastors, or anyone in any leadership capacity. We are all to carry out the principles of these offices. Many Greek philosophers and some Jewish leaders were very strict and controlling; this created a negative, non-enriching atmosphere that led to discord and strife. In contrast, real leaders are real examples that exemplify true virtue (Matt. 16:24-27; Mark 10:42-45; Philp. 2:6-11; 2 Thess. 3:9)!
- **Greedy** refers to the breaching of trust with others, catering solely to our personal needs; in so doing, we usurp God's will in favor of ours, for manipulating others. Leading is never by compulsion; rather, it comes from a willing heart. This is not about pastors not needing to get paid, as fair compensation is biblical; any worker is worth a decent wage. It is about how dishonesty devalues the Kingdom (1 Cor. 9:9-14; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

We in leadership must not be arrogant, or abuse one's power, be controlling; rather, we are to lead by example, to encourage, and to serve.

Humility is essential in leadership to shepherd and show others with wisdom and influence them--not just tell them. (Job 41:34; Psalm 10:5; 18:27; 101:5; 131:1; 6:17; Prov. 16:18; 21:4; 30:13; Mark 10:42-45; John 13:1-17; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Peter 5: 1-4)!

As leaders, we are responsible to care for God's people with faithfulness and honor, and never out of severity or improper motivations (Matt. 23)!

Timothy and Titus faced many divisive challenges to their leadership. They were called by God and placed by the apostle Paul while this opposition sought Jewish mysticism-and Gnosticism. The opposition embraced "secret symbols," used by other false religions for greater self-fulfillment that demanded that people go through ridiculous rituals and initiation rites. Then, legalistic Jews picked up on this and combined it with their formalities. This is what Paul referred to as a part of *the apostasy* in his other Epistles. These are so esoteric and illogical they do not make sense. It is ironic for those who sought knowledge by their arrogance because the knowledge they sought was completely absurd and showed them to be fools as Paul points out. Christ was not supreme in their quest or worship. The bottom line with these false teachings was that they were also, of course, blasphemy to our Lord (2 Thess. 2:3-7; Rev. 17:1-5)!

Consequently, Paul wrote to correct and to instruct people to stay away from what is false and rather embrace His effectual empowerment and Truth. Thus, the overarching call of God is to have a correct view of Christ, so our lives are aligned with His precepts and character. This way, we can be on guard, and live in a proper, pleasing way to glorify our Lord, so that people will see Christ exhibited in us (2 Pet. 2: 12-16; Rev. 2: 1-7)!

Real Christianity involves a cost and a commitment. Christ must be adored and honored first and foremost--over all else!

This type of literature is a *Greek Epistle*, or commonly known to us as a *personal letter*. However, it is more than that. It is more like a mini theological *treatise*--a letter with an essay inserted, such as a chapter of Romans inserted into a personal letter of encouragement and support. Like all of Paul's works, the words and instructions in this letter are passionate, personal, and real, not just theoretical ideas or theological corrections. At the same time, this is no discussion. He admonishes those who follow false teachings and condemns the false teachers.

Paul encourages the young pastors starting out in ministry in the perseverance of their own faith and spiritual growth first, and influences them not to allow falsehoods and pride to take over or, mysticisms or traditions, or occultism in the Church, period. No additions to the faith is needed or warranted. He uses completed and brilliant logic to make his case, just like the Jewish philosopher, Philo. This is a letter on the run or from dictation while he was in prison; it is not a polished Greek work like Luke or Hebrews. Even so, Paul's higher education is clearly evident in the word usages, and in his personal, rhetorical, and literary styles. It is meant to encourage and support us to pay attention to God's Word and correct doctrine, including correct, godly teaching (Heb. 2:5-11).

The Church must not take in the culture as its gospel; instead, the Church is to trust completely in the Gospel--the Word of God--and be examples of the Gospel. We are to be countercultural! Remember, anything that is of God will cause controversy; those who do not know Truth will hate Truth.

Who wrote these Epistles? God, of course. God worked through His human agent, the Apostle Paul, with his unique gifts and situation. Paul is identified as the author of these letters. God's Word--His most precious infallible and inerrant Word--are transmitted by the Holy Spirit through human means by the quill and papyrus to us today. God used human means. Paul often used "Amanuenses" (secretaries) to dictate his letters, especially when he was on the run or in prison and could not "stay put" to do it. Others suggest he gave instructions to a close disciple of his to pen his letters. This is called "posthumously" where Paul's arguments and thoughts are given to the scribe who pens the letter after Paul's passing. Paul is also the man who penned most of the New Testament, including the great composition, Romans (Rom. 16:22; Col. 1:1, 23; 4:18).

Key Takeaway: The Church is called to be counter-cultural; we are NOT TO succumb to the ways and worldliness of the world. Instead, the whole Church--the entire body of Christ--is to be the example of Truth and live out the faith. It is imperative we heed the instructions of Paul, live worthy, grow in our faith, never compromise the Word and pass it on to others! These pastoral letters serve as a warning for us: How much are we influenced by our culture and new or old philosophical ideas and trends? Do they influence our churches? If so, what are we to do? These Epistles apply to us today just as they did to Timothy and Titus in the original audience and situation (Col. 2:18)!

The bottom line is that we must be willing and able to get rid of anything that contradicts or compromises the Word of God! It is OK to search and use insights from varying sources. But, we are to seek from the Bible and places to help you grow closer to Christ personally, and run your church more biblically for His glory. Take heart! It is never too late to repent and turn your life or church around! I have undertaken many spiritual setbacks and made many mistakes, personally. I have followed bad teachers and have forsaken my growth in Him at times. I have been prideful and, perhaps, broken all of the above precepts in this series from time to time. Know this: God is a God of grace and forgiveness; He still uses me, and He will use you, too. However, we can be better. Let us be willing to grow in Him and serve Him in love and faithfulness, setting aside our pride and will; only then will our life in Him will we be dynamic and only then will our churches be healthy and vibrant for His wondrous glory!

The Call to the Church? The purpose of the Christian life and what Spiritual formation is really about is simply to know Christ, encounter Him, worship Him, grow in Him, and then, when we leave those physical doors, make Him known to others. This is why it is critical to have godly leaders, qualified and immersed in the Word to inspire and instruct others. We cannot let a leader, elder or pastors' pride, petty whims, and trends derail us from our core principles distilled from biblical precepts.

Questions to Ponder

1. Have you ever held an apprenticeship before? How important was it to be properly trained and encouraged? How does this apply to the Church?
2. Do you think the Church must not take in the culture as its gospel; rather trust in and be the examples of the Gospel and be countercultural?
3. Does it give you comfort or frustration that the same problems we have today, infected the Church then?
4. What does it take for you to continue to be faithful to our Lord? What gets in the way?
5. What are some of the warnings would Paul today call us to today?
6. Why is it critical to have trained and equipped godly leaders, who are immersed in the Word to inspire and instruct others?
7. 1 Timothy is perhaps Paul's first work and 2 Timothy his last. How do you see Paul's 30 years of ministry in them? How would your bookends of ministry be depicted?
8. How have you seen heresy, false teachers, and divisiveness hurt your church? How do these diminish the perception of Christ's Divinity and the seeking of real, effectual Truth?
9. Why is it important to showcase God's work in the lives of the leaders?
10. How has the Good news of the Gospel made an impact in you? How then you make a response?
11. What can your church do to make sure you and always teach correctly and proper administer of the church, have orderly worship and proper relationships?
12. What is the key to being faithful? Are you Christ's faithful servant? Are you helping further the Kingdom and glorifying Christ? Is His great love in you so it is also being displayed through you? How can you be more for Christ?