

Reading Paul's Pastoral Letters to Timothy and Titus

These three letters were written during the final period of Paul's life: after he was under house arrest in Rome for the first time (see Acts 28), he was apparently freed and worked for another 5-6 years, and then was arrested again (see 2 Timothy) and later executed.

The letters were written to two pastors (Timothy and Titus) who were struggling to lead their churches through difficult periods of challenge and transition. They represent Paul's pastoral wisdom on what it means to live as a community of the Gospel.

Key Historical Background to 1 Timothy & Titus

- By this time, Paul's mission journeys had reached Rome as he had planned (see Romans 15:22-24; 2Tim 1:17), and the house churches around Greece and Rome had multiplied. However, they were endangered by traveling teachers who were promoting a distorted version of the Gospel. Instead of writing a letter to each church as he had done earlier, he wrote letters to key leaders and charged them to set right the false teachers and work to preserve the Gospel in the church. Thus, these letters focus a lot on correcting false teaching and distortions of the Gospel (see 1Tim 1:3-7; Titus 1:10-16).
- Timothy had been a key co-worker of Paul's from a young age (Paul describes him as "my son" 1Tim 1:2). He was now a leader and pastor of the church in Ephesus (1Tim 1:3).
- Titus was a gentile who had worked with Paul in his early missions (see Galatians 2:1-3). He had represented Paul in some key assignments, like dealing with the troubles in Corinth (see 2 Corinthians 2:13). His assignment on the large island of Crete (Titus 1:5) was to appoint and train leaders in the churches, teach the true Gospel and refute false teachers, and to help the Cretan Christians learn what it means to follow Jesus in every area of life (Titus 1:5, 13; 2:15; 3:8).

Key Themes in 1 Timothy and Titus

- The Gospel should produce a life of holiness and generosity: there is no separation between belief and behavior. Those who say they are Christians but don't show any evidence by their lifestyle or behavior should re-examine whether they are actually followers of Jesus: 1Tim 1:5; 3:1-16; 4:6-10; 5:8; 6:17-19; Titus 1:16 2:1-10; 3:8.
- If someone's lifestyle is not consistent with the Gospel, you should not pay attention to their teaching: Titus 1:16
- It is crucially important to have leaders in the church who have integrity and are totally sold out to following Jesus: 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1:5-9.
- It is vital to deal with moral and theological error so that people understand what it really means to follow Jesus: 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 4:1-10; Titus 1:10-16, 3:9-11

