

Starting Monday 31 May 2021

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The Pastoral Letters

Though these are not pastoral manuals, they do seek to guide Timothy & Titus through their pastoral responsibilities.

Monday 31 May – 1 Timothy Chapter 4: Timothy's personal responsibilities

vv1-5: Paul again warns against false teaching; though ostensibly concerned about "later times", Paul knew Ephesus & its religious sects well. While accepting that heretics believe they are advancing truth, Paul denies that they can distinguish between these two. He singles out those who oppose marriage and restrict the foods they eat, & rebukes them for *refusing what God intended*. Is that rebuke relevant to our concern about climate change?

vv6-10: V8 commends physical exercise – popular then & now. V9 highly commends spiritual exercise, or training for a Godly life, which is valuable in every way, because it yields life in our Saviour, both in the present & in the future. Are we training for a spiritual marathon? In response to v6, are we teaching others to train spiritually?

vv11-16: Paul advises young Timothy: first to read the Scriptures (to which we might add theological counselling); then to preach & teach; &, at greatest length, to focus on himself & developing his spiritual gifts & his teaching. As we seek to refresh our faith after the greatest universal challenge for 75 years, can we improve on that advice?

Tuesday 1 June – 1 Timothy Chapter 5: Discipline within the Church

vv1-8: This may be the chapter that caused 19th Century theologians to ask whether Paul wrote this letter. Though they expected high theology from Paul, perhaps they forgot that this 1st Century tentmaker was also caring & pragmatic. Here he advises Timothy how to address issues of power ("appeal to him as if he were your father"), sex ("in all purity") & money ("they should repay their parents"). Was this written by the Paul we thought we knew?

vv9-16: During his 4 years in Ephesus, Paul preached that the Church was the family of God in Jesus Christ, & accordingly devised a form of social welfare that was both fair & feasible. Though Timothy knew that, he may have needed the authority of this letter to continue Paul's pastoral work. Does our pastoral work need a letter from Paul?

vv17-25: Paul recommends "double pay" (twice the living wage?) for clergy. Yet in UK they receive far less than in US! Why have we departed from Paul's guidance? Within his ensuing guidance to manage elders prudently, Paul urges the teetotal Timothy, to "take a little wine" to aid his poor digestion. Now we know that alcohol is beneficial in moderation, but dangerous in excess, how should we respond to Paul's advice? v

Wednesday 2 June – 1 Timothy Chapter 6: Miscellaneous injunctions

vv1&2: 200 years ago those seeking to abolish slavery had to invoke Jesus's whole ministry to interpret these verses for the 19th Century. 30 years ago those seeking to ordain women had to do the same to interpret 1 Timothy 2:8-15 for the 21st Century. Both groups applied Wesley's quadrilateral – Scripture, Tradition, Experience & Reason – to work out how to follow Jesus Christ in their own time. Can this approach guide us through Paul's pastoral letters?

vv3-5: For the 3rd time in this letter Paul warns about false teachers. Even worse they were apparently querulous & avaricious. Can we avoid both faults in our Church meetings & study groups?

vv6-10: These 5 verses, famously concluding "The love of money is a source of evil", criticise our materialistic society &, by extension, our failure to care for our planet. With Paul firmly on our side, can we achieve carbon neutrality?

vv11-16: Paul urges Timothy to become a true "man of God", running a virtuous race & preparing for the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ. In his well known series of commentaries, Tom Wright suggests that, by using words that mimic those that Romans used to praise their quasi-divine Emperor, Paul was being very subversive. To what extent should 21st Century Christians seek to subvert the quasi-divine status that our society accords to Mammon or wealth?

vv17-19: Instead Paul asserts that those who trust in God & share their wealth with others will store treasure for the future. But, rather than physical treasure in the present age, Paul is offering the spiritual treasure of life in the Kingdom of God to come. How do we respond to that generous offer?

vv20&21: Criticising false teachers yet again, Paul names the main heresy confronting Timothy – 'gnosticism', which recognises knowledge beyond Jesus Christ. But Paul concludes "Grace be with you all". Can we respond Amen?