

New Testament Session #7
1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus:
Leadership and Ministry in the Early Church

Who Wrote Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus?

Paul.

OK, now to move on to other topics...

So it's a little trickier than that. There is a lot of controversy surrounding the authorship of the three texts which are known as the Pastoral Epistles. I do believe that Paul himself wrote them, but enough smart and holy people disagree with this that it is necessary to take a deeper look at this issue.

Certain details in 1st Timothy and Titus do not fit with the chronology of Paul's life that we find in the Acts of the Apostles. Therefore if these letters were genuinely written by Paul he would have had to have been free to travel at some point after his imprisonment in Rome which is spoken of in Acts.¹ Based on this the Church has always understood the chronology of Paul's life in the following way; he was imprisoned in Rome (as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles), he survived and was released from this imprisonment, traveled and ministered to the Church, during this time he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus, was imprisoned again, wrote 2 Timothy during that imprisonment, and was then executed.

Over the course of the last two centuries this has been called into question. Some scholars say that Paul did not write any of these three letters. Some say 1 Timothy and Titus were not written by him, but that 2 Timothy was. They argue that there was no post imprisonment ministry, as reflected by 1 Timothy and Titus, but that Paul was executed in Rome without ever having been released. Prior to this though he wrote 2 Timothy. This would make 2 Timothy not the product of Paul's second imprisonment in Rome, but the product of his first and only imprisonment in that city.²

Why do some scholars dispute the Pauline authorship of these works?

Many do so because the vocabulary and writing style of these letters differs somewhat from those letters which are indisputably seen as being written by Paul.³ This argument has some weaknesses. Eta Linnemann, a German scholar has responded to this argument at great length and in incredible detail.⁴ I do not agree with Linnemann's complete rejection of the historical-critical method, but I think she does an excellent job of

¹ Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2006), 33, 55.

² Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 674-675.

³ *Ibid*, 663-664.

⁴ Eta Linnemann, *Biblical Criticism on Trial: How Scientific is "Scientific Theology?"* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications), 74-163, 169-174.

defending the fact that Paul wrote every New Testament letter which claims to have been written by him. For example, a key part of the argument against Pauline authorship of the Pastorals is that certain distinctively Pauline words do not appear in these texts. But many of these words do not appear in every letter which is universally recognized as being written by Paul, and in some of the letters where they do appear they are used only once.⁵

So in effect the argument some scholars make is that these letters can't be written by Paul because certain words are missing, but let's ignore the fact that these words are also missing, or at least rarely used, in some of the letters that we know are written by Paul. The possible weaknesses of the argument are easily apparent, and I believe Linnemann shows that these weaknesses are great enough to dismiss this challenge to Pauline authorship.

As a side note, Linnemann's argument, and the arguments of the scholars she is responding to, shows the incredible value of a knowledge of biblical Greek. She and her opponents make arguments that simply could not be put forward by those of us who don't have these linguistic abilities. It's possible to follow along with what they are doing, but without the scholarly tools they possess it seems impossible to make the type of original arguments they put forward.

Some scholars also argue that the understanding of church structure/authority/hierarchy that we find in the Pastorals is too developed to represent the reality of the church in the mid 60s.⁶ But while 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are important when it comes to understanding the ecclesiology of the New Testament, our study tonight will show us that these letters are consistent with the rest of the New Testament. Those who reject Pauline authorship of these texts based on what they have to say about the church seem to just be dictating what it is St. Paul is allowed to say about the church.

In regards to the authorship of the Pastorals Raymond Brown writes:

Those who believe in inspiration and those who do but without a literalist understanding of the divine communication do not find the notion of pseudepigraphy an obstacle in itself when it is understood in terms of disciples continuing the Pauline tradition and assuming the mantle of the apostle to speak loyally in his name to new problems facing a later generation. It is hard to see, however, how a proposal that that the writer of the Pastorals was intentionally deceptive and consciously desired to counteract Paul's heritage can be fitted into any notion of inspiration, even a sophisticated one.⁷

It would be hard to see how an author who invented a false post imprisonment ministry, and who warped and exaggerated Paul's understanding of the church, could be seen as an acting in a way that was consistent with Paul's authentic heritage. Perhaps if overwhelming linguistic evidence compelled to reject Pauline authorship the argument

⁵ Ibid, 77-79.

⁶ Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 665-666.

⁷ Ibid, 667-668.

could be made that a disciple of Paul's wrote in a way which was consistent with his ecclesiology and reflected an actual post-imprisonment ministry. But Linnemann's argument appears to show that no such overwhelming linguistic evidence exists. In light of this it seems much easier to hold to the traditional view that Paul did in fact write these three letters.

As a last point, it is worth noting that the case for Pauline authorship is also strengthened by the possibility of Paul's use of scribes whose own writing styles might have contributed to whatever differences in vocabulary do exist when we compare the Pastorals to Pauline epistles whose authorship is not disputed.⁸

Authority, Structure, and Hierarchy in the Early Church

This is going to be a wider ranging presentation than usual. The three Pauline texts of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are crucial parts of this presentation but it is important to see how these texts are rooted in the instructions given by Jesus himself, and how they point to the later practice of the church. We're going to look at the authority of church leaders as something given by Jesus, which we can then see being lived out during the New Testament period, and which was then an essential part of Christian identity in the 1st century after the writing of the New Testament was completed. This means that the three letters of Paul which we'll study tonight are the second of three main sources that we'll use tonight:

1. The Words of Jesus
2. 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus (along with supporting references from other New Testament Epistles)
3. Early post-biblical sources

It is important to realize that what we see in the biblical and post-biblical records of church history is a living out of Jesus' will for his church. We see a carrying out of his instructions. We'll see some differences in the way that authority was exercised in the church over time, as well as some differences in the terminology used to describe this authority. But despite these differences in expression and terminology we see a fundamental consistency between the instructions that Jesus gave and the way the church is structured, and the way authority is exercised within this structure. We can be confident that what the church is now is what it always has been, and that this is how Jesus wants it to be.

Now, let's move on to our actual discussion of ministry and authority in the early church. We'll cover this topic by discussing what I've called seven big ideas:

Big Idea # 1, Jesus Put Peter in Charge

Big Idea # 2, The Other Apostles Were Second in Authority after Peter

⁸ Ibid, 663-664.

Big Idea # 3, The Pastoral Epistles (And Other New Testament Texts Outside of the Gospels) Show us the Continuity Between the Words of Jesus and the Practice of the Later Church

Big Idea # 4, Others Were Meant to Follow in the Footsteps of the Apostles

Big Idea # 5, To Break Union with the Bishops Was to Lose the Fullness of the Faith

Big Idea # 6, The Successors to Peter and the Apostles Possess Tremendous Teaching Authority

Big Idea #7, Changes Have Occurred in the Terminology Used to Describe Church Structure

Big Idea # 1, Jesus Put Peter in Charge

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus said to him in reply, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Matthew 16:13-:19

Here we see that Simon Son of Jonah’s name is changed, he is made the rock upon which Christ would build his church, he is given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and he is given the authority of binding and loosing.

Petros in Greek meant rock, so Simon son of Jonah’s new name literally meant rock. This word was rarely if ever used as a name in Greek so something unusual was certainly going on. Some non-Catholics claim the rock Christ would build his church on is actually Peter’s profession of faith and not Peter himself, but that claim does not stand up. Christ was clearly making Peter the human foundation of the church, completely dependent on Christ of course, but really serving this purpose himself. The image of the Keys is taken from the Old Testament, Isaiah 22:22, where it refers to a man serving in a position that was basically a deputy or an assistant to the king of Israel. So in biblical terms the one who holds the keys is exercising authority on behalf of the one who holds ultimate authority. So as the holders of the Keys to the Kingdom the popes exercise their authority on behalf of Christ himself.

Peter's primacy is shown in a number of biblical texts in addition to Matthew 16, but these texts should be seen as supportive texts which reinforce what is taught most clearly in Matthew's Gospel.

All the bishops in union with the Pope share in this teaching authority. Peter was given greater authority than the other apostles, but the others were given real authority as well. All bishops are successors to the apostles and share in this authority. A key passage for understanding this is Matthew 18:15-:20:

Big Idea #2, The Other Apostles Were Second in Authority after Peter

Jesus said to his disciples: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that 'every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Here all of the apostles are given the authority of binding and loosing. So they had a share in the authoritative teaching role that was given to Peter, as well as a share in the exercise of church discipline which was given to him. The privileges and authorities granted to all of the apostles were not as great as those given to Peter, they weren't given the power of the keys or made the rock upon which Christ built his church, but they do to a real extent share in some of the same authority given to Peter.

Big Idea # 3, The Pastoral Epistles (And Other New Testament Texts Outside of the Gospels) Show us the Continuity Between the Words of Jesus and the Practice of the Later Church

In the Gospels we see the basic foundation of Church authority being established during the pre-Passion ministry of Jesus Christ. The remainder of the New Testament helps us to see how this authority was exercised during the first days of the church over the course of the decades that followed Christ's resurrection. We'll look at the Pastorals first and then consider other relevant texts.

In 1st Timothy we find these passages:

This saying is trustworthy: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. 1 Tim 3:1

Similarly, deacons must be dignified, not deceitful, not addicted to drink, not greedy for sordid gain. 1 Tim 3:8

Command and teach these things. Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. Until I arrive, attend to the reading, exhortation, and teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands of the presbyterate. 1 Tim 4:11-:14

In 2 Timothy we have these words to consider:

For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands. 2 Tim 1:6

And in Titus we hear:

For this reason I left you in Crete so that you might set right what remains to be done and appoint presbyters in every town, as I directed you. Titus 1:5

When we piece together what these verses tell us we get a picture of leadership and authority in the early church. There were to be those who served in distinct leadership positions, these individuals were to be carefully selected men (1 Tim 3:1, 3:8), they were to be appointed through the laying on of hands and prayer (1 Tim 4:14, 2 Tim 1:6), and it was understood that having the leadership of men selected in this way was an ordinary aspect of Church life and something was lacking when their ministry was not present (Titus 1:5). These are basic elements of Catholic thought and practice. Within the church there is a distinction of roles, and the church is meant to be guided by those who are the inheritors of the authority granted to the Apostles.

Elsewhere in the New Testament we have, among others, these verses to consider:

So the disciples determined that, according to ability, each should send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea. This they did, sending it to the presbyters in care of Barnabas and Saul. Acts 11:29-:30

After they had proclaimed the good news to that city and made a considerable number of disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch. They strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." They appointed presbyters for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith. Acts 14:21-:23

Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order not to lose time in the province of Asia, for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if at all possible, for the day of Pentecost. From Miletus he had the presbyters of the church at Ephesus summoned. Acts 20:16-:17

The Acts of the Apostles confirms what we read in the Pastoral Epistles. We see distinctive pastoral roles, as well as the deliberate effort to designate individuals to serve in these roles.

Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then, gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work mighty deeds? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 1 Cor 12:27-:30

1 Corinthians confirms the reality of distinctive pastoral roles. Additionally, 1 Corinthians' important teaching about those who serve in different roles making up the body of the church shows us the fundamental equality of those in different roles.

Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the holy ones in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and ministers: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:1

Paul's opening words in his Letter to the Philippians again shows us the existence of distinctive leadership roles within the church.

Nor, indeed, did we ever appear with flattering speech, as you know, or with a pretext for greed--God is witness-- nor did we seek praise from human beings, either from you or from others, although we were able to impose our weight as apostles of Christ. Rather, we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children. With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us. You recall, brothers, our toil and drudgery. Working night and day in order not to burden any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers. As you know, we treated each one of you as a father treats his children, exhorting and encouraging you and insisting that you conduct yourselves as worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2:5-:12

Paul talks about the gentleness with which he exercised his authority, but also affirmed the reality that his authority could if necessary be used in a more corrective and authoritative manner.

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who are laboring among you and who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you, and to show esteem for them with special love on account of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-:13

Here Paul encourages Christians to respect the authority of their leaders.

Therefore, although I have the full right in Christ to order you to do what is proper, I rather urge you out of love, being as I am, Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus. Philemon 8-9

Paul again refers to the right that he has to direct in a forceful manner while expressing his desire to be able to use this authority in a gentle manner which avoids conflict.

Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint (him) with oil in the name of the Lord. James 5:14

St. James refers to those serving in distinctive leadership roles within the church, and their role in coming to the aid of the sick and ill members of the church.

So I exhort the presbyters among you, as a fellow presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ and one who has a share in the glory to be revealed. Tend the flock of God in your midst, (overseeing) not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful profit but eagerly. Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is revealed, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you younger members, be subject to the presbyters. And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for: "God opposes the proud but bestows favor on the humble." 1 Peter 5:1-:5

St. Peter encourages those who possess authority to use it gently (we seem to be hearing that theme a lot don't we), while also encouraging the members of the church to respectfully follow those given particular forms of authority.

Big Idea # 4, Others Were Meant to Follow in the Footsteps of the Apostles

The Pastoral Epistles and Acts show us one generation of leaders appointing the next. This reality is described more fully in post-biblical writings from the early Church:

Through countryside and city [the apostles] preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers. Nor was this a novelty, for bishops and deacons had been written about a long time earlier. . . . Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry" (Letter to the Corinthians 42:4-5, 44:1-3 [A.D. 80]).

Those who succeeded the apostles, particularly Bishop of Rome, had real authority. This authority was not meant to disappear with the death of the apostles. Around the year 95 AD St. Clement; listed as the 4th Pope, the 4th bishop of Rome, wrote a letter to the Church in Corinth addressing some problems that had arisen among the Christians there. The Bishop of Rome intervening in a situation of division with the Church that arose in

Greece is one example of the authority used by the Bishops of Rome from the beginning of the Church. The nature and extent of Papal authority has over the years legitimately developed and changed to a real extent, but we can see the reality of Rome's primary leadership role from the very beginning of the Church. In his letter Clement wrote of the steps the apostles had taken to ensure that there would continue to be an orderly succession of leadership within the Church.

In the early Church it was clear that those who were not in union with these successors to the apostles were not truly part of the Church. St. Ignatius of Antioch discussed this in a series of letters he wrote around the year 107 AD. While he was being transported to Rome for imprisonment and execution he was able to write letters to a number of different Christian Churches. In this letter he speak of the absolutely necessity of Christians to maintain unity with their ordained leaders; the bishops, priests, and deacons.

Big Idea # 5, To Break Union with the Bishops Was to Lose the Fullness of the Faith

Take care to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and with the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and with the deacons, who are most dear to me, entrusted with the business of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father from the beginning and is at last made manifest." (Letter to the Magnesians 2)

"Indeed, when you submit to the bishop as you would to Jesus Christ, it is clear to me that you are living not in the manner of men but as Jesus Christ, who died for us, that through faith in his death you might escape dying. It is necessary, therefore—and such is your practice that you do nothing without the bishop, and that you be subject also to the presbytery, as to the apostles of Jesus Christ our hope, in whom we shall be found, if we live in him. It is necessary also that the deacons, the dispensers of the mysteries [sacraments] of Jesus Christ, be in every way pleasing to all men. For they are not the deacons of food and drink, but servants of the Church of God. They must therefore guard against blame as against fire." (Letter to the Trallians 2:1-:3)

The influence of Ignatius's teaching can clearly be seen in the Catechism # 1576 which says "Since the sacrament of Holy Orders is the sacrament of the apostolic ministry, it is for the bishops as the successors of the apostles to hand on the "gift of the Spirit," the "apostolic line." Validly ordained bishops, i.e., those who are in the line of apostolic succession, validly confer the three degrees of the sacrament of Holy Orders." The sacramental ministry given to the church through the sacrament of Holy Orders is only preserved when those who have received this gift from the successors of the apostles pass it on to others.

The authority the Catholic Church sees as belonging to the bible is tremendous. Not enough can be said about the importance of the bible or the authority of the bible. But the Catholic Church has never held that the bible is the only authority. In the late 2nd century St. Irenaeus wrote about divisions that had been brought about in the Church as the result of the work of false teachers. He discussed how essential it was to understand the role of

the bishops, particularly the bishop of Rome, in combating these false teachers. The authority of the bishops coexisted with the authority of the bible and both were to be used to fight false teachers. In a work he wrote entitled “Against Heresies” St. Irenaeus spoke about the tremendous level of teaching authority possessed by the bishops who were the successors to the apostles. He put particular emphasis on the role of the Bishop of Rome.

Big Idea # 6, The Successors to Peter and the Apostles Possess Tremendous Teaching Authority

Since, however, it would be very tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, by vainglory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, assemble in unauthorized meetings; [we do this, I say,] by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere. (Against Heresies 3:3:1-2)

In other words; to be in union with Christ it is necessary to accept the teaching given to the most prominent Churches by the apostles. The Church in Rome is to be looked to as the primary example of authoritative teaching which Christians are bound to accept.

Since therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. Revelation 22:17 For she is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers. On this account are we bound to avoid them...and to lay hold of the tradition of the truth. For how stands the case? Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary, [in that case,] to follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the Churches? (Against Heresies 3:4:1)

The successors to the apostles were given sufficient instruction and authority that they could refute the errors of the heretics even without using the scriptures. Of course the scriptures have also been given to the Church as part of the tradition handed on by the apostles, but the authority of the scriptures is meant to go hand in hand with that of the bishops of the Church.

Big Idea #7, Changes Have Occurred in the Terminology Used to Describe Church Structure

Some explanation is also needed when it comes to New Testament terminology of Church leadership. Today priests are considered to be part of the presbyterate which comes from the Greek word πρεσβυτερος [presbyteros]; or elder. (see James 5:14, Titus 1:5, and many other locations in the New Testament) Bishops are referred to as part of the episcopate which comes from the Greek word episkopos, or overseer. (see Acts 20:28, Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:7, 1 Peter 2:25) Sometimes these words seem to be used interchangeably in the New Testament so what differences, if any, there were between these positions can be hard to determine. It seems to me (and this is only one informed way of explaining a complex reality, different Catholic theologians would explain this in other ways) that during the first generation of the church that presbyters and bishops were terms used interchangeably to refer to the same position and that the apostles themselves were above these men. At some point the title bishop became exclusive to those who were successors to the apostles, and the title elder was used to refer to ordinary priests.

These changes in terminology means that it would probably not be helpful to sum up the Pastoral Epistles by writing “Archbishop Paul sent his auxiliary bishop Titus to Crete to ordain parish priests”, but we can see modern Catholic and Orthodox practice as being consistent with the authority exercised by Paul and Titus. Over the course of the centuries there has been development in how authority is exercised by the Church’s hierarchy. There have been definite changes in the terminology used to describe this authority and the positions held by those who exercise it.

But from the Gospels to Acts, from Acts to the New Testament Epistles, from the New Testament Epistles to the writings and practices of the early church, and from the writings and practices of the early church to the teachings and structure of the modern Roman Catholic Church we can see the same basic reality when it comes to the extent of authority possessed by the leaders of the church.