

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

*HISTORICAL COMMENTARY ON THE FIRST  
EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY.*

SECTION I. PURPOSE OF THE LETTER.

THE suppressed clause in the beginning of the letter (i. 3) contains and conceals (so to say) the purpose which the writer had in mind. The most familiar fact to those who have to study the intimate correspondence of ancient writers possessed of literary power, such as Cicero and his friends, is the frequency of such suppression of an important verb or half sentence. The correspondent to whom the letter was addressed knew what was meant; and the suppression was due to the fact that comprehension on the part of the reader could be counted on with perfect confidence. The meaning of all such passages depends on the proper supplying of the suppressed part. He who cannot supply it has not penetrated to the point of view from which the letter was written; and the intention of the whole letter may be distorted, if the wrong thought is supplied. That is a difficulty which must be reckoned with: we have to go through the process of bringing ourselves into sympathy with the ancient writer by thinking out afresh the thought and intention of the letter as a whole, and thus gathering what it was that the writer expected the original recipient to be familiar with, and what that first reader was expected to have in his mind as he was reading the letter.

Such a suppressed thought is a proof that the document in which it occurs is genuinely a letter, i.e. the expression and product of one human soul communicating with another, sympathizing with that other, and expecting sympathetic

response and comprehension. The more serious the suppression is, and the more difficult it is to supply the omitted words, the stronger is the proof that we have a real letter and not a pretended one. A forger does not express himself in this way, for he does not and cannot count on sympathetic comprehension: the forger is writing to be read by many persons, and not to be read by one alone.

It would not be easy to find a stronger example than the suppressed conclusion of the sentence in the third verse of this chapter—"as I exhorted thee to tarry at Ephesus" for certain purposes which are then enumerated—what is it that Paul was going to put as the conclusion of this sentence? Timothy understood what Paul had in his mind, and the rest of the letter must show indirectly what this was; but the sentence breaks off, while the writer wanders away into a description of the situation in which Timothy and the whole Church at Ephesus were involved, and is then led on to point after point; and he never returns to take up the thread of the sentence. What, then, can be the conclusion of this sentence except the main purpose of the letter as a whole? Now in the letter, though the treatment of the topics is much mixed up, so that very frequently the writer touches upon some topic, diverges to another, and then returns to the former one, yet on the whole there is one guiding thought and purpose: Paul is eagerly desirous and anxious that Timothy may rightly discharge the serious duty imposed upon him, and may perfectly comprehend the difficulties that lie before him, and may know the best means of meeting them.

That this charge and duty have been committed to Timothy is emphasized repeatedly in such words as "this charge I commit unto thee" (i. 18), "command and teach" (iv. 11, v. 7), "teach and exhort" (vi. 2): compare also i. 3, iv. 6, v. 20-21, vi. 17, 20, where the same idea recurs. This

charge is only temporary, to take Paul's place in his absence ; but it may last a long time (iii. 15). The personal conduct on Timothy's part that will enable him to discharge the duty well is described in various details, especially in iv. 7-8, 12-16, v. 1-4, v. 22-23, vi. 11-13, 17, 20. Advice as to his personal conduct often passes by an easy transition into advice as to the kind of teaching which he should give : see, for example, vi. 17-20.

The method by which Timothy will best discharge the duty imposed on him is, first, the regulation of the order and manner of public worship, ii. 1-2, 8-12 ; and, secondly, the right organization of the Church and of the Christian society which makes up the Church on earth, iii. 1-13, v. 5, 9-11, 14, 16-20, 22, 24-25, vi. 1-2.

The duty and charge have been imposed on Timothy by the Holy Spirit and by Paul. Prophecy marked him out and bestowed on him the gift which made him qualified for the charge, and the laying on of the hands of the presbyters had formally completed the selection and appointment (i. 18, iv. 14, vi. 12). But the apostolic authority of Paul had also co-operated ; or rather this was another aspect of the process of selection. The Spirit marked him out both through prophecy and through the apostolic power of Paul, whose apostleship made his act an expression of the Spirit's choice. Three times Paul emphasizes his authority as an apostle and herald of Jesus Christ (i. 1, 12, ii. 7).

This combination of the Spirit and the human authority in the same action places the thought on the same plane as that on which the book of the Acts moves (compare, e.g., Acts xiii. 2-3, xv. 28). The point of view and outlook in the Pastoral Epistles is strikingly similar to that which we observe in the Acts. This is due to the fact that although the Acts was composed as a single book finally about A.D. 80, yet in those parts where Luke writes on the authority of

others and not on his own, it presents to us as a whole the views and needs of A.D. 57-59, when he gathered the information which he faithfully reports.<sup>1</sup>

The difficulties with which Timothy would have to contend in the execution of his charge are often touched upon, and evidently were constantly in the writer's mind. They will be briefly described in general terms in the following Section IV. For the present our purpose is to show that the charge imposed on Timothy is the guiding thought of the whole letter. Paul found that this thought was constantly weighing on his heart. Timothy was to take his place and was trusted to do the work which he himself did, when present, as founder and director of the Church in Ephesus. It is true that Timothy had been selected because he was the suitable man for the duty ; he was marked out by the Holy Spirit ; he was filled with the gift and the grace of the Spirit (iv. 14) ; he had been much with Paul, and had seen Paul's manner of confirming the Churches and guarding against evil and degeneration. I do not doubt for a moment that the advice given in this letter represents just the course which Paul himself had taken often in the practical difficulties of Church work, and with which Timothy had become familiar during years of companionship. It has, therefore, seemed strange and incredible to some scholars that Paul should write to urge on Timothy's attention ideas and methods which he knew so well, and his acquaintance with which was the real cause of his selection. But such scholars forget what human nature is. Paul could not

<sup>1</sup> Many prefer to take the view that, because the Pastoral Epistles approximate markedly to the point of view and standard of thought which are found in the Acts, therefore the Epistles must have been written at the same time as the book of the Acts was finally composed. Especially those who regarded the Acts as a second-century book must necessarily take this view. The present writer's reasons will appear in the sequel, and have partly been stated in the EXPOSITOR, February to May, 1909.

shake off the thought and the anxiety about Ephesus, merely because another, however much beloved and trusted, was charged with the duty. The thought of Ephesus was always with him, by day and by night. The hope that Timothy would keep all the important points in his memory, and the wish that Timothy should bear everything constantly in mind, led Paul to dictate from time to time instructions, warnings and advice. The letter has not the appearance of having been composed at one effort, like Galatians: it is more like Corinthians (though so much shorter), having apparently been dictated in parts, according as various anxieties occurred and recurred to Paul's mind from time to time.

This vague anxiety, which was the cause of the letter, also makes it discursive. Paul's thought moves back and forwards. One topic suggests another in an undetermined and casual way. He knew that it was not necessary to write an elaborate series of instructions to Timothy, and that to compose such a formal treatise would seem almost like an intimation of distrust. Yet the anxiety always drove him on to write, to mention various details, and to intermingle with them expressions of his own trust in the perfection of Christ (vi. 14-16), of his own unworthiness of the mercy which he had found and of the authority which had been bestowed upon him (i. 12-17), and other thoughts which presented themselves to his mind.

The guiding thought of the whole letter constitutes the unexpressed conclusion of the sentence, i. 3, from which we started. The protasis of that sentence has for its apodosis the letter as a whole: "As I exhorted thee to tarry at Ephesus, when I was going into Macedonia, therefore I send this letter to express what I would have thee bear in mind, and to give suggestions from my Divinely granted authority—authority bestowed upon one who was utterly

unworthy of it, but still authority given fully and freely by Christ Jesus Himself of His own perfect grace.

One consideration may be added to these introductory remarks regarding the purpose of this letter. Apart from Paul's natural anxiety for Timothy's success in his charge, an anxiety which prompted him to make suggestions from time to time, it was not without its advantages that Timothy should be able to refer to Paul's written word of instruction, especially if he had to differ from a member of the Church older than himself. Such a person he must not rebuke, but exhort as a father (v. 1). If the exhortation could be supported by quotation from a written letter bearing on Timothy's charge, it would be all the more courteous and respectful from a young man to an old man. Not that this letter has in any respect the character of a communication intended for the whole congregation under the guise of a letter to Timothy. It is the direct communication of Paul's heart with Timothy's; in it soul speaks to soul; but therein lies its effectiveness and its permanent value for the Christian world; that is what makes it so natural, so living, and so eternal in its truth.

## SECTION II. THE AUTHOR OF THE LETTER.

Such a letter as this could not be a forgery. It adds wonderfully to our conception of the width of Paul's mind and nature. It is quite true that, if we shut out the Pastoral Epistles, we can frame for ourselves from his other letters a picture of the remarkable and extraordinary personality from whom they emanated, and that these Pastoral Epistles stand outside of, and are not in perfect harmony with that picture. But it is not right method to assume that the narrower conception, broad and deep as it is, represents the entire breadth of Paul's nature and mind. There is revealed in the Pastoral Epistles a practical sense of the

possibilities of work among common human beings, which is necessary in order to complete our comprehension of Paul's life and work. He was not merely the man who could think out the lofty theology of Romans and Ephesians, or write the exquisite panegyric on the virtue and power of "love" to the Corinthians, after condemning so strongly the fault and the lovelessness of individuals among them, or rebuke in such a tremendous indictment the error of the Galatian congregations. In all those letters we feel that there stands out before us a personality almost too great and too lofty for the common world of humble, low-class, immoral, vulgar paganism: we can only with difficulty understand how a Paul of that kind could ever make himself intelligible to such a world: not merely the letters, but also the speech of such a man, must have contained "things hard to be understood"<sup>1</sup> by the men and women of the pagan world. It is the Pastoral Letters which, beyond all others, show us how Paul could understand the common man, and bring himself down to the level of his needs, and how the marvellous and instantaneous effect described in the Acts and briefly mentioned in Galatians was produced by his first appearance in the Galatian cities.

Those scholars who reject the Pastoral Epistles as un-Pauline are shutting themselves off from a most valuable help to the understanding of Paul. They must, in the construction of history, suppose that there existed some such other side of Paul's nature in addition to what is shown in the greater letters. Why not accept the side as it is shown in the Pastoral Epistles?

Finally, we must take into account that the transition is easy from the one Paul to the other. There are many passages in both letters to Timothy which are conceived in the spirit and expressed in the tone of the earlier Pauline

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter iii. 15.



letters. There is no other writer in the New Testament to whom the two letters could for a moment be attributed ; they have practically nothing in common with the other books except the one common Christian faith and practice ; but they have much in common with the other Pauline letters, both in thought and in word. In the post-Apostolic works there is nothing which resembles them or throws any light on them.

While one must not underrate the difficulties involved in the theory of Pauline authorship, one must also remember that true scholarship is a process of triumphing over difficulties ; and that the widening of knowledge means the union in one view of facts which at first sight seemed unconnected and barely consistent with each other. It is far more difficult to frame any rational theory how these letters came into existence, if they are not the work of Paul, than it is to understand them as composed by him and as completing our conception of his character.

### SECTION III. WORDS PECULIAR TO THE PASTORAL EPISTLES.

The totally different purpose and character of these letters from those to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians and other Churches furnishes a partial explanation of the marked change of language and the number of new words. In all his writings Paul shows himself an innovator and a creator linguistically. To express a new system of thought he created a new method. In the Pastoral Epistles he is attempting to create a terminology that shall correspond to the practical facts of an early Church society in one of those rather amorphous and unorganized original congregations, which were redeemed from paganism, but not habituated to a higher plane of action and life. Many of his new words are the brief expression of something which in his earlier

letters he describes as a process, but which now had become so common a phenomenon in the practical management of a congregation that it demanded a special name. Take, for example, the very first word in this letter that is peculiar to the Pastorals. It occurs in i. 3: "I exhorted thee to tarry<sup>1</sup> at Ephesus that thou mightest charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine," *ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖν*. This fact that there were in every congregation persons, coming from without or springing up from within, who taught doctrines which Paul did not regard as healthy or right, is a fact that he, in his earlier letters, mentions more than once. In Galatians i. 6-9 he alludes to such teachers, as preaching among the Galatian Churches, and says that he had warned the Galatians against them on his previous visit, i.e., as early as 51 A.D. He describes the teaching in that case as the announcing of another gospel. Again, in 2 Corinthians xi. 4, he describes the same thing as actually occurring in Corinth a few years later: there are persons who preach there another Jesus, and a different Gospel and another Spirit. That kind of un-Pauline teaching was therefore a continual danger in the Pauline Churches; and in 1 Timothy i. 3, vi. 3, it is briefly described by the single verb "to be a teacher of some different teaching." That a fact which was so frequently met with in Church management should force Paul to create a single word for it is not only not un-Pauline, but is thoroughly true to Paul's mind and character.

It is not within my purpose or my power to discuss every

<sup>1</sup> It is a curious example of pedantry that the word for "tarry" (*προσμεῖναι*) is reckoned by some among the words peculiar to the Pastorals and therefore un-Pauline. The sense of verbal propriety is defective in a scholar who finds any difficulty in understanding that any writer may occasionally, or even only once, use some compound of a Greek verb, which he often employs in the simple form. Moreover the word occurs about Paul in Acts xviii. 18.

“ un-Pauline ” word in the Epistle ; but on the whole one must feel strongly that those who label these new words as “ un-Pauline ” are missing a very instructive side of Paul’s life and character. This single case may serve as an example of the way in which the language of Paul developed (or varied, as some may prefer to express it) with his purpose and his subject.

#### SECTION IV. DIFFICULTIES WHICH TIMOTHY ENCOUNTERED IN HIS CHARGE AT EPHESUS.

The difficulties which Paul specially feared and which kept him always in anxiety for his son Timothy were of two kinds : in the first place, a false conception of Christian belief and teaching ; in the second place, a wrong type of conduct and morality among the congregations.<sup>1</sup>

The principal passages which allude to the false conceptions of belief and thought and teaching in Ephesus and Asia generally are i. 3-8, 19, iv. 1-5, vi. 3-5. Naturally, this idea of the danger caused by false teaching easily turns into emphatic statement of the importance of right teaching : the latter idea is always close to the surface of Paul’s mind as he writes : his greatest anxiety is that Timothy should always give the right teaching and pronounce the right judgment in all the difficult situations and cases that come before him : this idea is very clearly stated in i. 5, iii. 16, vi. 6-7, 14-16, 17. Right rule and order in the society of the Church is the best preservative of truth in doctrine. Good government keeps the Church active and pure.

Owing to the overwhelming importance of right teaching, and the prevalence of wrong teaching, a word was coined by

<sup>1</sup> It would, doubtless, be better to speak of “ congregations ” in the plural. As being in charge for Paul at Ephesus, Timothy was to exercise surveillance over all the congregations and Churches of the Province Asia. Ephesus was the central point and heart of the whole Church organization of the Province.

Paul to express in brief the process of false teaching : the thing demanded a name and a verb, as has been stated in Section III.

One of the errors in teaching which Paul mentions most frequently, and which he evidently hated most strongly, was the love of abstract discussions on abstruse points, verbal quibbling and logomachy, and the attention to mere words rather than the realities of life. This was the vice of education at that period : it set words and form above realities and matter. Even physical science was not experimental and practical, but consisted almost wholly in abstract theories and words. Explanations of physical and moral phenomena were frequently couched in the form of genealogies. Even the explanation of changes of name in cities or rivers, which, so far as they were real changes and did not merely rest on misapprehension, were usually due to changes in population, language and nationality, were expressed in pseudo-historical fashion by genealogical fictions. Many examples of this way of putting history in the form of genealogical fictions may be found in the treatise attributed (falsely) to Plutarch on Rivers ; but the custom was not merely a late one. It was quite early, and it springs naturally from the vice of imagining that, when one has expressed a phenomenon in some new form of words, one has given an explanation of it. The subject might be traced throughout Greek thought, and even earlier than Greek thought. The genealogical fiction as a substitute for history is extremely old, and is an almost universal characteristic of primitive thought.<sup>1</sup>

In the very ancient document incorporated in the Pentateuch as the Tenth Chapter of Genesis we find a history and geography of the known world expressed in that form.

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. *Luke the Physician*, in the essay on Dr. Sanday's Modern Criticism of the Life of Christ.

In a choral ode of the *Agamemnon* Aeschylus expresses the moral process of degeneration through arrogant pride, and the destruction in which this degeneration inevitably ends, in the form of a genealogy.

It is, therefore, unnecessary to see in Paul's mention of "fables and endless genealogies," or in his warning against teachers of a different doctrine, any allusion to elaborate Gnostic theories and systems of teaching that belong to the second century. The faults against which he cautioned Timothy were rife in his own time. They sprang up naturally and quickly in the hot-bed of mixed Gentile and Jewish thought, which existed in every Pauline congregation throughout the Aegean lands.

Paul regarded the tendency to quibbling and logomachy as almost the most dangerous enemy in the Greek cities like Corinth. His first letter to the Corinthians is in its first part largely prompted by the desire to combat this evil, to ridicule and to extirpate it. He perceived that the Corinthians, as they were learning a little, tended to pride themselves on their philosophic acumen; and he pointedly contrasts the simplicity of true teaching with the pretentious verbal discussion of false philosophy. Their philosophic discussions were empty and mere words: the truth was reality and power.

The "profane and old wives' fables" of iv. 7, the "questionings and disputes of words" mentioned in vi. 4, "the profane babblings and the antitheses of the falsely-so-called knowledge," to which he so sarcastically alludes in vi. 20, all bring before us what is fundamentally the same evil. That evil was rife in Corinth and in the cities of Asia. It had to be satirized and stamped out.

The words which Paul uses in his sarcastic descriptions of this evil are often peculiar to the Pastoral Epistles; but almost every time that he mentions the subject he intro-

duces some new term ; and probably, if he spoke about it fifty times, he would add a great many other terms not elsewhere employed in the New Testament. Such is the wealth of language that is characteristic of him ; but the variety of his terminology is due to the intensity of his feeling on this matter.

The other class of difficulties against which Timothy would have always to contend was false morality and wrong conduct. The pagan converts had been from infancy habituated to an extremely low standard of living and speaking. It was not so difficult to stir them up on some great occasion to lofty action and noble effort, in other words, to convert them to the truth ; but the real difficulty lay in keeping them up to that higher standard permanently in their every-day life. That difficulty was, for the time, insuperable. People could not suddenly throw off their earlier character and habits, and rise to a continuous new life. The old habits would constantly tend to recur. The same difficulty faces every missionary in a pagan land : conversion of individuals does not raise them in their ordinary conduct to the level of people who have behind them generations and centuries of Christian education and life (except in the case of rare and remarkable personalities). All that can be done is to raise men a little, and to trust to the effect of time and the growth of better habits in the new generations. Throughout chapter v. and the first half of chapter vi., especially, Paul recurs often to these faults of life, small and great, which mark the society of the Asian cities. Some of them are the faults of human nature generally, as the love of money (vi. 9-10), and the tendency of young widows, desiring to be married again, to gad about from house to house, and to become tattlers and busybodies (v. 11-13). Others (as in i. 9-10) are of a darker kind. It is to be noticed that the faults into which the women were

prone to fall are on the whole of a much slighter kind than those which were a danger to men: the standard of life was higher, apparently, among the women than among the men.

W. M. RAMSAY.

### THE DATE OF Q.

Now that the use of Mark by Matthew and Luke (or of a document so nearly identical with it as to be practically indistinguishable) is accepted as an almost certain result of criticism, attention is gradually being fixed more and more intently on the non-Marcian sections of the First and Third Gospels. No excuse, therefore, is needed for an attempt to suggest reasons for fixing the date of the document underlying these sections.

It is generally agreed that the use of a common source written in Greek <sup>1</sup> is the necessary explanation of the great agreement between these Gospels in sections containing matter not found in Mark. To this document the name of Q is usually given, and among recent attempts to discuss it those of Wellhausen (*Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien*) and Harnack (*Rede und Sprüche Jesu*) are the best known and the most generally useful. Harnack, indeed, has gone so far as to reconstruct the probable text of Q, on the basis of a comparison of Matthew and Luke, and the elimination of features likely to be due to their idiosyncrasies.

Although these attempts are certainly on the right lines, and are likely to yield profitable results to those who follow them up, it is perhaps not out of place to utter a preliminary word of caution to those who seem inclined to speak of Harnack's

<sup>1</sup> Many think that this Greek document was a translation of an Aramaic or Hebrew original, and some that the latter was known to Matthew and Luke and occasionally consulted by them. But this, though perhaps probable, does not alter the fact that Q, as directly used by them, was a Greek document.