AUTHORSHIP OF THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

INTRODUCTION

The intent of this paper is to present the different viewpoints regarding the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles. There are some that would consider this to be a trite or simple conclusion based on the fact that Paul identifies himself in 1 Timothy 1:1 with the standard Pauline salutation and greeting to Timothy in the books of 1 and 2 Timothy. The same greeting and identification is also found in the book of Titus. In this quest, it is important to understand what the Pastoral Epistles are, what they represent within the New Testament canon, and ultimately why Pauline authorship is disputed by some. As theologians and scholars, we may know the truth and what we believe, but it is equally important to know the beliefs and positions of others, so that arguments and objections can be understood completely and answered carefully and Biblically.

WHAT ARE THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

The term “Pastoral Epistles” commonly refers to the books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. This term was first used by Berdot in 1703 when he was writing about Titus.¹ Later Paul Anton used this term in 1726.² These epistles were written to two individuals, Timothy and Titus, rather than to a group of believers at a particular location as was common with a majority of the Pauline Epistles. A cursory reading of the text shows that the books were concerned with church organization, government, and leadership. Both I and II Timothy were written to Timothy, who was at the church of Ephesus and Titus was written while he was in Crete.³ These books are unique in the fact that they were written to individuals with such responsibilities. Philemon was


2. Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1,2 Timothy Titus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), p. 20. There seems to be some conflict regarding the actual usage of the term because Lea and Griffin do not even mention Berdot and Knight says that Anton’s usage was posthumously in a published work.

3. I Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:5
written to an individual, but he did not possess the same set of responsibilities as Timothy and Titus. The purposes of these books are very similar. Knight in his commentary gives two similar purposes for the three books, “Two broad concerns characterize all three letters: (1) Paul warns Timothy and Titus about a false teaching and exhorts them to stand against it. (2) Paul gives instructions to the Christians of Ephesus and Crete, through Timothy and Titus concerning their conduct and church life. These books are rich in practical wisdom and full of encouragement. The Pastoral Epistles were not just merely personal communication but rather teaching and exhortation contained within the letter itself. It would be fitting to give some evidence regarding the date of these books but this will be discussed later in the paper, depending on what position one holds regarding authorship also brings the date into question as well.

THE AUTHORSHIP ISSUE

Disputations of the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles began in the nineteenth century and continue to this day. The first known challenge regarding authorship was made by Schleiermacher in 1807 mainly on the basis of language and biographical statements. Other challenges appeared, until the most notable challenge was put into print by P.N. Harrison and his work entitled The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles. The issue of authorship will ultimately affect how one interprets the Pastoral Epistles. It is also noted that the Pastoral Epistles are under attack more than any other of Paul’s writings. In dealing with authorship issues, questions arise regarding the issue of authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles.

To simplify the issue of authorship is no easy task considering that these disputes have been occurring since the early 19th century. However, we can narrow down the categories to two possible solutions for the authorship issue: 1) Paul did indeed write these Epistles as it states


5 Knight III, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 10.

in the salutation of each book. 2) The epistles were written by a pseudonymous author who used Paul’s name to bring greater authority to these epistles.

NON-PAULINE AUTHORSHIP

This particular viewpoint is held by those who would consider themselves to be somewhat conservative but not as conservative as their counterparts who hold to an opposite position. The position itself is categorized by several possible factors that must be considered when weighing the evidence regarding authorship of the Pastoral Epistles. The first objection to Pauline authorship is based on Vocabulary and word usage. According to P.N. Harrison, the vocabulary of the Pastorals is as follows: “The vocabulary of the Pastorals consists of 902 words, of which 54 are proper names. Of the remaining 848, 306 or over 36 percent are not to be found in any one of the ten Paulines.”

One cannot make an informed decision solely on the basis of vocabulary and word usage. Harrison also cites grammatical peculiarities that he claims are not Pauline, but rather a different method of literary craftsmanship. Grammatical peculiarities that are found within the pastorals are the absence of words, phrases and or constructions that are deemed to be familiar or Pauline in nature. Another argument would be a stylistic argument, one that says that the other ten Pauline Epistles contained a particular style or stylistic elements to show that these writings were Pauline in authorship. A familiarity is obtained by a reading of the text and possible further study to ascertain some of the patterns that are used by the author. The argument made in this case is that there are certain prepositions and particles that are missing which would indicate a stylistic or difference in authorship. In making a comparison between the Pastorals and the other Pauline writings, it is noted that the Pastorals are sober, didactic, static, conscientious, domesticated. It has also been said that the Pastorals lack intellectual mastery and logic.


8 Harrison, P.N., The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles, p. 42. Harrison further states that
Harrison further goes down a road which could be deemed off-limits by some. He goes into great detail regarding the mind of Paul and this could be deemed dangerous because he is delving into areas where there is no real absolute certainty. One human being cannot effectively judge the thoughts and true intents of another human being by just merely reading what someone has put into print or even by having an oral conversation with them. It is true that articulation of speech does lend itself to an attempt at understanding the thought processes and rational of an individual, but these means cannot be depended on when judging another’s thoughts or motives. From a human perspective, this is an impossibility because it would require a degree of omniscience which no one apart from Jesus Christ has ever possessed. In dealing with the authorship matter, it is interesting that one will find that some of the early Church Fathers also rejected the idea of Pauline authorship. Kelly states in his commentary that men like Valentinus who quoted every other book of the New Testament and did not quote or refer to any of the Pastors. 9 Marcion was another of the early church fathers who also rejected the Pauline authorship of the Pastors. Hendriksen, quoting Tertullian states, “I am surprised, however, that when he (Marcion) accepted this letter (Philemon) which was written but to one man, he rejected the two epistles to Timothy and to Titus which all treat of ecclesiastical discipline.” 10

Other men such as Justin Martyr and the apologist Tatian also reject Pauline authorship of the Pastors. 11

“"It is much rather the speech of a man greatly concerned to preserve intact the correct pattern of sound words, which must be diligently memorized, and faithfully recited, and so passed on from lip to lip as the one duly authorized expression of saving truth.”"


10. William Hendriksen, Pastoral Epistles, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), p.4. He further states in regards to Marcion’s rejection, “Now in a man like Marcion, who preached the strictest asceticism, denied the lawfulness of marriage, and issued rigid rules for fasting, such a rejection of the Pastors, in which asceticism is condemned (I Timothy 4:3,4; Tit. 1:14,15) is altogether natural.”
From a historical perspective, proponents of the non-Pauline authorship of the Pastorals, assert that Paul was only imprisoned once at Rome and not twice as is claimed by the traditional or conservative view. They cite that this can be argued from the standpoint of chronology, that Paul’s death was sometime around the year 64 AD and that Clement supports this in his writings. The controversy extends further into the timing of the close of the book of Acts and the death of the Apostle Paul.

There are also those who say that the material in the Pastorals in relationship to church order and structure is far too advanced for the time period. It is said that Paul had no interest in organizing the church, function of the elders is too far advanced for the time period, the situation reflected in the Pastorals would require development over a period of time, and Timothy and Titus being allowed to appoint elders infers or assumes that they have an office of higher authority.12

One of the other common arguments for non-Pauline authorship is from the perspective of pseudonymity. Pseudonymity in this particular case is defined as “when a text is not written by the person whose name bears it in the sense that it was written after his death by another person or during his life by another person who was not in some way commissioned to do so.”13In the case of the Pastorals, it is a commonly held position that these Epistles were composed by a later admirer of Paul who included some genuine notes from Paul in his work. Another possibility is that the Pastorals were written after Paul’s death by a writer who used the apostle’s name to


strengthen the authority of these letters. Even those who would be considered strong proponents of a non-Pauline authorship, like Harrison, refuse to embrace the idea of pseudonymity. Harrison states, “Meanwhile it is certain that those who deny the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral epistles do not as a rule use the terms ‘forger’ and falsarius in this connexion [sic] Nor would they admit for one moment that these terms, with their distinct implication of moral depravity and of the deliberate will to deceive, represent the only alternative to the Pauline authorship of these epistles.”

Dibelius and Conzelmann state the following regarding the perspective of pseudonymity, “Whoever regards the Pastoral as pseudonymous will draw his conclusions concerning the literary character of all three writings from those sections which the features of a letter-writing play a less prominent role”

PAULINE AUTHORSHIP

The position of Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles is often referred to as the traditional or conservative position. This position is supported by the following characteristics: 1) Internal evidence  2) External evidence  3) Historical evidence  4) Linguistic evidence.

Internal evidence is often disregarded because of the actual claims of the epistles themselves. Each of the three epistles clearly states the name of Paul within the standard greeting that is found in all of Paul’s writings. Guthrie, in referring to the internal evidence cites a pseudapigraphal work, the Third Epistles to the Corinthians and does this to illustrate the lack of pseudonymity as a common practice among the other writings of the Apostle Paul. Gromacki


17. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 584. He further states that this is not impressive evidence for early Christian practice and until more evidence is forthcoming the defenders of Pauline authorship may rightly claim that the statements in the opening part of each Epistle are contributory data in support of authenticity.
brings out a point that is often overlooked or ignored in reference to the internal evidence. He reminds the reader that the author makes an analysis of his spiritual past and that this agrees with the record found in the book of Acts.\textsuperscript{18}

External evidence is much more decisive in nature. The Pastoral Epistles are quoted by many of the church fathers such as Eusebius, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Polycarp, Justin, Ignatius.\textsuperscript{19} There are also those who would say that P46 contained the Pauline Epistles but excluded or omitted the Pastorals. This omission is taken as a indisputable fact that the Pastorals did not exist within this manuscript therefore they could not be Pauline in origin. There is evidence that the Pastorals did exist within P46 and that the evidence suggests that leaves or pages were added that would have made up the section of the Pastorals, but this was never found and the final portion is now missing.\textsuperscript{20}

Historical evidence is mainly seated in the apparent ‘difficulties’ that some have with the second imprisonment of the Apostle Paul. This does not present any problem to those who hold Pauline authorship because of two facts that are present in Scripture: 1) Paul was imprisoned toward the end of the book of Acts, but had reason to believe that he would eventually be released (Acts 25:25, 26:32, 28:30). 2) Paul did visit Asia another time (II Timothy 4:13, 20) Mounce says regarding this historical situation that “Arguments both for and against a release, as


\textsuperscript{19} B.B. Edwards, “The Genuineness of the Pastoral Epistles,” \textit{Bib Sac} 150 (1993 April-June 1993): p. 131. He further states that if they are not expressly quoted by the early church father, yet by allusions, hints, or at least reminiscences, they seem not to have been less known to them than the other Pauline Epistles.


far as Acts is concerned, are arguments from silence...the historical framework of the PE does not contradict Acts, the silence in Acts is not an argument against the PE.”

In regards to linguistic evidence, Harrison and others use this as one of their leading arguments for their position and that using such evidence from a linguistic standpoint (this evidence was mentioned earlier in the paper) leads to a view of pseudonymity in authorship. Rather than wade through copious amounts of linguistic data, it is better to ask the question, “Does not the whole linguistic approach suffer from a radical defect through taking for granted that the Apostle was personally responsible for every sentence and word in his letters?”

CONCLUSION

It is this author’s position and opinion that Paul was indeed the author of the Pastoral Epistles. This is supported by the personal claims of the Apostle himself as mentioned in the early portions of each book, mentioned his name within a standard greeting that is peculiar to the Pauline Epistles. Others would say that these books were pseudonymous. How can this be attested as a true fact when the epistles themselves actually condemn deception? Harrison and others use great amounts of statistics when making claims to non-Pauline authorship, these statistics are very impressive and at first glance can be very convincing. This argument is weak because it does not allow for a change in writing style by Paul. It takes these statistics as fact with no allowances for any deviation. Wilder stated that “This argument does not consider the many variations in subject matter, occasion, purpose, and addressees may account for many of these differences.” Everett Harrison states in regards to the vocabulary argument that “Harrison (P.N) is not disposed to stress this feature too much, recognizing that a man must be allowed


24. See I Timothy 2:7; 4:1,2; II Timothy 3:13; Titus 1:10; 3:3.

some flexibility in his vocabulary, especially as the nature of his material varies.”26 Hendriksen, in his commentary, makes a strong statement regarding the rejection of the argument from the vocabulary perspective, “The argument based on vocabulary and grammar leads nowhere. Even the staunchest defender of the authenticity of the Pastorals will readily grant that there is a remarkable difference in vocabulary.”27

In conclusion, some things must be brought to remembrance when dealing with such issues. In regard to the argument itself, we must remember that “If the grounds of objections are as overwhelming as they are claimed to be some adequate reason must be given for the extraordinary lack of insight on the part of Christian scholars over so long a period!”28

The Pastorals represent one characteristic approach: avoid useless speculations; be loyal to the faith; choose church leaders who are sound in faith and life.29

The value of the Pastoral Epistles is beyond all doubt. They belong to the most precious memorials of the Apostolic time, which have come to our knowledge. They give us new aids toward a right judgment of the character of the great Apostle to the Gentiles, and his relation to his friends and co-laborers; toward the nearer knowledge of the earliest polity of the Christian church, and of the errors so soon arising within its pale. Thus they serve as invaluable material for biblical biography and the oldest church history.


They contain, besides, a choice collection of counsels and warnings for the teachers and guides of the church, which remain always important through all centuries.\textsuperscript{30}

BIBLIOGRAPHY


