

Paul's 2nd Epistle to Timothy

Introduction

Historical Evidence

The Pauline authorship and authenticity of this Epistle was never doubted by the Greek speaking Fathers of the Church. Use of the Epistle in preaching and commentary indicates a high probability that it was known very early in Church history. Pothinus (c87-c177), Irenaeus (c 120 – 200) were aware of the work, as was Polycarp (69 – 155) who appears to have known all Paul's Epistles except Philemon. Later Christian writers such as Eusebius (c260 – c340), Tertullian (160 – 220+), Clement of Alexandria (d. 215) , these all had no doubts concerning the authenticity of the Epistle. It is also listed in the Muratorian Canon but not in the Marcion catalogue.

The various objections raised in the first half of the 19th century by German theologians have been adequately answered, however, there is the question of Paul's use of the '*Hapax Legomena*', and I offer some thoughts below.

As I point out in the Introduction to Paul's Epistle to Titus, Paul, from the start, had a predilection for these 'once only' words and his use of them became more noticeable as time passed by. I have traced words in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, where possible, the sources of these words using the Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon. A surprising observation is that so few are derived from the LXX or the Apocrypha, many are recorded as being in ancient Greek literature, but from around Paul's time four names appear regularly. This is not to say that Paul read or knew any of the writings but what is suggested is that all four had a common 1st century vocabulary. The writers are Strabo (60BC – 20), Philo (20BC – 50), Josephus (37 – 100) in both his History and Jewish Wars, and later Epictetus (55-135). Philo, Josephus, and Paul were Jews; Strabo, Philo and Epictetus were Stoic philosophers, and Paul was raised in Tarsus – the main centre for Stoic teaching outside Athens. Tarsus had a university with Athenodorus as senior academic, he having been tutor to Augustus (63BC - 14), Athenodorus was succeeded by Nestor who was the tutor of Tiberius (42BC – 37). A Stoic contemporary of St. Paul, who was disposed of by the same insane tyrant as Paul, was Seneca (c.4BC – 65)¹, who became tutor to Agrippina's son – the future Emperor, Nero (37 – 68). As bishop Lightfoot said - "*Stoicism was the only philosophy which could even pretend to rival Christianity in the earlier ages of the Church*", and the Roman form of Stoicism had Imperial patronage, was probably the ethic of most of the important men that Paul met, and these most likely would have a household pedagogue to teach Stoicism to the family. So with his background in Tarsus, his verbal intercourse with the higher status men and his knowledge of the Stoic moralists, he would have gathered together a fashionable vocabulary. Stoicism had no appeal to the Roman masses and was only taken up by the ruling upper classes. Paul knew very well the destitution of Stoicism but used the Stoic jargon to his advantage knowing that this manner of speaking was considered enlightened throughout the Roman Empire. Bishop Lightfoot gives examples from Philippians where there might be coincidences with Stoic philosophy but adds "*Stoicism has died out, having produced during its short lifetime only very transient and partial effects; Christianity has become the dominant religion of the civilised world, and leavened society through its whole mass.*"

In conclusion it would seem that the Fathers of the Church, while being perfectly aware of the stylistic differences in Paul's works, were not inclined to change the status of any of the Epistles, having regard to the current fashionable style of composition, the purpose of the Epistle, to whom sent and the circumstances of their sending.

1 See St. Paul and Seneca by bishop J.B. Lightfoot in his essays on 'The Apostolic Age' – available from the Internet Archive.

Paul's 2nd Epistle to Timothy

Reason for Writing

Timothy, having been left in Ephesus, his hardships had been increased by the activities of charlatan teachers and Paul gives encouragement to Timothy continue in patience, love and endurance. Paul advises Timothy on the way forward in the knowledge that he, Paul, would not be long in the world and that his younger collaborator would find himself alone.

Place and Date of Writing

The letter was written in Rome, in prison and probably in much more severe conditions than that of his earlier imprisonment. Paul had already had a first hearing in court when no one came to support him but his case had been deferred for further consideration. However, he was not confident of any mercy. Nero committed suicide in 68 and so this Epistle was probably written in 67.

Paul's last words to the world:-

The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.