**Session 19: The Other Letters**

**Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus**

**The Duetero-Pauline Letters:**

The letters we discussed last week – Romans, 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon – are considered authentically Pauline letters, scholars are convinces that Paul either wrote them or dictated them to a scribe. The set of letters for this session are called deutero-Pauline and sometimes Tritero-Pauline. These terms indicate that the letters were not written by Paul himself but carry many of the same themes and ways of expressing theology as the authentically Pauline letters. Most likely these letters were written by the students/disciples of Paul who listened to him speak and write and then wrote in the same style. I mentioned these distinctions to help you be aware of the different modes of thought that is common amongst biblical scholarship. These distinctions will not affect the way that you read these letters. Each letter has its own focus and theme.

**Letters revisited:**

I am going to provide a quick summary of the genera of letters from last week to refresh our minds. Letters are written to a specific community or person for a specific reason. In discussing each letter our goal is to figure out that the situation that prompted the writing of the letter. Even though the letter is written to a specific community for a specific purpose, the letters still contains much theology and information for us to reflect on.

**2 Thessalonians:**

Although this letter begins with the standard greeting with Paul’s name included in the list, scholars as early as the 17th century began to doubt Paul’s authorship of this letter. This conclusion may seem strange to us considering that it is one of two letters that contain evidence of Paul stating that he wrote it with his own hand: “This greeting is in my own hand Paul’s. This is the sign in every letter” (2 Thessalonians 3:17). The other example is in Galatians 6:11. The structure of this letter is a perfect example of the common structure of letter writing in the first century: greeting, thanksgiving, exhortation, and conclusion.

The major issue that the Thessalonians are wrestling with is the immanence of the end-times. Following shortly after the death of Christ, and then heightened by the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, Christians had a strong sense that Christ would return very soon, like in the next few years. This sense of the immanent return of Christ permeated early Christian writings and caused some confusion, namely Christ didn’t immediately return. After years of waiting the Christian community began to reflect on Christ’s return and come to new conclusions. The Thessalonians are wrestling with this problem and Paul is guiding them to a new conclusion. Scholars who examine this text notice some of the key factors leading to their conclusion. In 2 Thessalonians 2:4 the Jerusalem Temple is mentioned as still standing, which means that the Temple had yet to be destroyed. But something is on their minds. They recognize that something is about to happen to the Temple and the land leading them to conclude that the end is near.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-6

This passage is the core of Paul’s teaching and contains the central issue for the Thessalonians: Christ is returning soon and therefore we do not need to work (continuing in 3:6-16)

**Colossians:**

This letter is one of the more complex letters we will read. The letter begins by naming Paul as the author, and many scholars claim that Paul wrote this letter while in prison. This conclusion is complicated by a rhetorical devise called a pseudonym. One tactic in ancient cultures was to take the name of another person who had greater authority and attribute the writing to the person with greater authority called a pseudonym. I sense that part of this letter is authentically Pauline theology, but most likely the letter was not written by Paul but most likely one of his disciples. The letter continues in complexity as we wrestle with the issue presented to the Colossians. Much like Galatians, a different sect had moved into Colossae and preached a message close to Christianity. This group was probably a Jewish group who combined elements of Judaism, Christianity, and Paganism into a religious world view. The Colossians were caught up in this new religion. Paul, unlike his response to the Galatians, is much more reserved and works to cultivate them on a new path. In chapter 3 of this letter Paul outlines the false teachings presented by this other group and responds to their claims.

Colossians 1: 15-20: the great Christological hymn of Colossians

These ancient hymns are worth spending some time reading. They predate the letter in which they are written and express the views and beliefs of the earliest Christians.

Colossians 2:16-23: the practices that Paul is responding to, the problems at Colossae.

Colossians 4:15-18: Paul’s concluding remarks

Compare this greeting with the following: 2 Thessalonians 3:17-18, Galatians 6:17-18, 2 Corinthians 11-13, and Romans 16:21-23

**Ephesians:**

Much like the letter to the Corinthians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, Ephesians is a Greek city. Although this letter begins by naming Paul as the author, many scholars are puzzled about the lack of genuine Pauline style in this letter. The letter lacks the personal tone common to other letter, especially considering that Paul spend two years with this community. In addition to this reasoning, the tone of the letter is accentuated by the way that Paul speaks to the people. It seems that this letter was written as a general letter and not to any specific community. Similarly, the letter takes on a more reflective style of reading as though the author is reflecting on a theological point, namely the church. Unlike any of the other letters Ephesians take the theology of the church and brings it a cosmic dimension to it. In Colossians the word church refers exclusively to a local church. In Ephesians the word church refers to a universal or cosmic church.

The main issue of this letter is Christian unity and the universal call to preach to the Gentile (which in Greek literally means all nations). The letter begins by outlining God’s plan for the nations. Progresses into our unity in Christ and our involvement in that plan. Concluding with an exhortation on how to live out that plan. These exhortations contain some of the most charged writings in the New Testament. The passage we all are familiar with regarding wives being submissive to their husbands comes from Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:1-10: God’s plan in Christ

Ephesians 5:21-32

What is the letter really saying? Is it saying that women are to be submissive to their husbands and men have all the power? What is Christ’s example and what does that mean for men?

**Pastoral Letters:**

Some scholars designate the next section of letters – 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon – as the pastoral letters. The pastoral letters are written to address specific concerns usually to a person who is deeply involved in a community. It usually refers to church order and structure, specifically the hierarchy.

**1 Timothy:**

The First Letter to Timothy focuses almost exclusively on pastoral issues: how the various communities are being treated. Each section of this book explains how to care for the people in the community. For us, the group slaves causes some discomfort. But, recall the letter to Philemon. The church is not in a place, historically speaking, to challenge the status quo. Therefore the entire letter focuses on the responsibilities of each group as they are.

1 Timothy 5:3-16

Notice how long is the section on widows. Widows were a strange and powerful group. They were both respected and ignored by much of society. Without a husband, they had no power. They depended on their children or residual income from the husband for support. The Christians spent a lot of time and effort caring for the widows, as the laws demanded. Yet, sometimes the widows were not content with that support and would raise quite a raucous.

**2 Timothy:**

This letter was probably dictated by Paul while he was in prison and forms his last will and testament, beyond Romans, before going to Rome to become a martyr. The letter is full of allusions to his final days and Paul’s sufferings. In Paul’s final moments, he encourages the uniformity and unity that he has preached all along in his other letters.

**Titus:**

The Letter to Titus is another one of those strange books, like Philemon, that was written to a person instead of a community. Titus was converted by Paul and carried Paul’s letters to some of the communities. After reading several of the letters, they seem to have the same focus and approach: problems from other communities trying to spread a false doctrine, the letter corrects them, and then they are encouraged in their faith. This same structure is present in this letter. For this reason, some of the scholars call this letter a Pastoral letter since it was written to speak to people on a pastoral or encouraging note.

A quite note about this letter. In this letter two titles are used that are not common in the other letters: episcopos/ bishop, and presbyter/ priest. Although I put our common way of interpreting the Greek word with the Greek word, they are not synonymous with our current linguistic understanding of these words. An episcopos/ bishop is a person who presides over a community. He is like our modern day bishop but over a community or parish instead of a group of parishes, aka diocese. A presbyter, or priest, is a man ordained to serve and help the bishop. They function as advisors to the bishop and would give him council and help him in administrative functions. The word *presbyter* comes from the Greek word elder, since they would be the elders who are advanced in wisdom and good council.

Titus 2:1-10