

Liturgy in the Pastoral Epistles

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The public worship of the first-century church has long been a subject of scholarly interest.² However, we still know surprisingly little about what actually took place by way of formal order when the community of faith gathered. For one, gatherings took place mainly in house churches, away from the eyes of society at large.³ Second, although there is much to observe about the practice of the Christian community in the NT, there is comparatively little in the way of a detailed liturgy, and we should be duly cautious about the tendency to assume that a set order for public worship was practiced empire-wide in the early church.⁴ Third, we should be equally guarded about assuming the liturgy discussed by the Apostolic Fathers was practiced the first century, since we cannot establish for certain what traditions they represent, nor how widespread those traditions were.⁵

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² Significant studies in the twentieth century include Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, trans. A. S. Todd and J. B. Torrance (London: SCM Press, 1954); C. F. D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament*, Ecumenical Series in Worship 9 (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1961); Gerhard Delling, *Worship in the New Testament*, trans. Percy Scott (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962); Paul F. Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship: A Basic Introduction to Ideas and Practice* (London: SPCK, 1996).

³ Moule, *Worship in the New Testament*, 66, confesses that in the period of house churches we have little knowledge of how an individual Christian community handled its worship. Cf. Roger Gehring, *House Church and Mission* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 3–5, who surveys scholarship that concludes that the house church was the mainstay for the gathering of the Christian community for the first three centuries of the church, away from the public eye.

⁴ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 36, is right to warn scholars of the tendency, despite the “paucity of information” available about the worship of the early Christians, to “amalgamate the various scraps of information that do exist in order to form a single composite picture.” He also states that since the various churches in the NT “represent only a limited number of the many diverse forms which early Christianity appears to have taken, we simply do not know whether all Christian communities worshiped in this way or not. It is even difficult to be sure, when a series of liturgical references are given in a New Testament source, whether they reflect an actual sequence within a rite or are mentioned in that order for some quite different reason.”

⁵ *Ibid.*, 35. For instance, although the *Didache* prescribing several elements of public worship (7:1–14:3) was probably written or compiled around the turn of the second century and certainly reflects what is known from the NT, we cannot establish its origin with certainty. Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 411–12.

Given these challenges, the most that we can do toward establishing the liturgical content of first-century Christian assemblies is cull and examine those elements of worship discernible in the NT documents, where the authors address specific communities with individual issues or “crisis points.”⁶ With this goal in mind, scholars have given much attention to public worship in writings such as Acts or the Corinthian Letters—those portions of the NT that contain major evidence for early Christian baptism, the Lord’s Table, singing, and gathering in general. But the NT writings such as the Pastoral Epistles, in which the subject of worship does not appear to be a central idea, are often marginalized in the relevant literature. This is unfortunate, for if the NT authors address specific issues—including matters of public worship—in response to ad hoc situations as they arise in Christian communities, then focusing only on the major texts may cause us to overlook or ignore vital lessons of first-century Christian worship discernible in other contexts. The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to call attention to liturgical elements of worship in the Pastorals in particular, and to make observations about early Christian liturgy as seen within these epistles’ unique setting.⁷

Before proceeding, we must briefly establish the backdrop of the Pastorals. As J. N. D. Kelly observes, “In all three letters the writer is greatly preoccupied with heretics, as he considers them, who hawk round a message distinct from, and opposed to, the true gospel, sow strife and dissension, and lead morally questionable lives.”⁸ Paul charges Timothy to remain at Ephesus so that he might “wage the good warfare” (1 Tim 1:18)⁹ against the infiltration and opposition of *heterodoctors* (cf. 1 Tim 1:3; 6:3), whom he describes at length at the beginning, middle, and end of his letter (1:3–11; 4:1–5; 6:3–10, 20–21). In his second letter to Timothy, though obviously written sometime later, Paul is still occupied largely with instructions regarding how Timothy should minister in the context of those who oppose the gospel, whom he describes in 2 Timothy 2:16–19, 23–26, and 3:1–9. Similarly, Paul urges Titus to appoint *presbeuteroi* (“elders”) who are able to deal with the presence of false teachers (Titus

⁶ Philip H. Towner, “The Function of the Public Reading of Scripture in 1 Timothy 4:13 and in the Biblical Tradition,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 7, no. 3 (2003): 52.

⁷ The Pastorals have been traditionally treated together. While recognizing that they are individual letters, the verbal and structural parallels between Titus and 1 Timothy, in addition to their similar provenance, purpose, and content, allow us to approach them as a unit for purposes of this study. 2 Timothy is also connected, of course, by similar recipient and content. For space considerations, this essay assumes Pauline authorship.

⁸ J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Black’s New Testament Commentary 14 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1960), 10.

⁹ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 107, states that these words “would be an apt summary of what is involved in carrying out [Paul’s] charge, specifically that aspect of it which involves correction of false teachers and their false teaching.”

1:10–16; 3:9–11).¹⁰ There are certainly other themes playing in the background of the letters, most significantly the establishment of proper leadership (1 Tim 3:1–13; 2 Tim 2:2, 14–21; Titus 1:5–9), the doctrine of salvation (1 Tim 2:3–7; 2 Tim 1:8–10; Titus 2:11–14; 3:3–7), and personal admonishment (1 Tim 4:12–16; Titus 2:7, 8; esp. 2 Tim 1:5–7, 13–14; 2:1–2, 8–13, etc.). Paul also speaks much about his own calling and mission (1 Tim 1:12–17; 2 Tim 1:15–18; 4:9–18). In a significant way, however, all of these themes are tied to the heretical attack or potential assault on the churches,¹¹ so that most of Paul’s concerns can be read as a safeguard or censure against heresy.¹² In sum, although the specific occasion of each letter differs,¹³ each letter may be read as instructions to an apostolic delegate for establishing the “household of God” (οἶκος θεοῦ; 1 Tim 3:15) in the face of opposition, current or potential, while the apostle himself is absent.

Taking this background into account with regard to the elements of worship in the Pastorals allows us to frame the question of liturgy in the following way. Within the context of rampant heresy, what elements of Christian worship did Paul *prescribe* to the recipients of these letters? Or, what formal elements of Christian worship were important to Paul to emphasize in this specific setting? This essay will address the question first by identifying the specific elements of worship Paul mentions in the letters. Next, the essay will explain the significance of those elements in light of the challenges the believers were facing in their communities. And finally, it will draw some preliminary conclusions that suggest direction for further research.

Elements of Liturgy in the Pastorals

The term “liturgy” is used in this essay not as a rigid, standardized pattern of worship in the churches, but merely to speak of those *public elements of worship* that take place when

¹⁰ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), lxi–lxxvi, shows that the false teachers and their doctrine are practically identical in all three letters, at least to the extent that we can treat the letters as a defense against the same kind of heresy.

¹¹ For example, Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, lxxvi–lxxx, explores the themes of the Pastorals under the heading “the response to the heresy.”

¹² Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 13, states that “in the special crisis threatening the churches for which [Paul] was responsible, the ministry must be one of his chief weapons for combating error and defending the true faith.”

¹³ F. Alan Tomlinson, “The Purpose and Stewardship Theme within the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, edited by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 53–54, 60–63, 82–83, explores the nuances of purpose in the three letters. The motivation for Paul’s first letter to Timothy is the most urgent regarding the presence of false teachers in established churches, while his letter to Titus reflects the situation of newly established churches preparing for the same attack. In 2 Timothy Paul instructs Timothy in establishing the churches in light of Timothy’s own departure to be with Paul in Rome.

God's people gather as the body of Christ.¹⁴ In the fabric of epistles written specifically with church conduct in mind, one would expect liturgical allusions. For example, in 1 Timothy we can detect what appears to be preformed confessions or hymns (cf. 1 Tim 2:5–6 as a creed; 1 Tim 3:16 as a hymn or confession).¹⁵ Some have suggested the presence of allusions to the Eucharist¹⁶ or to Christian baptism.¹⁷ As important as these elements are to Christian worship, however, they are not emphasized by the apostle in these letters, if they are indeed present at all. Here we are concerned only with those elements that Paul explicitly urges or prescribes.

Concerning liturgical elements specifically named by Paul, the Pastorals contain three. First, in 1 Timothy 2:1–8, Paul exhorts the church to practice *public prayer*: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people” (2:1). This exhortation occurs at the inception of a significant number of topics he intends to set forth, and by virtue of its being “first,” the idea of public prayer is given special significance.¹⁸ Likewise the heaping up of several terms for prayer—“supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings” (δέησις, προσευχή, ἔντευξις, εὐχαριστία)—serves to emphasize its importance.¹⁹

The evidence for these prayers being offered in the public assembly, hence a liturgical matter, is at least three-fold. (1) This section of the letter that begins with the injunction to pray climaxes at 3:14–15, where Paul states that he writes “these things” (ταῦτα) so that

¹⁴ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 18. I am using the term “liturgy” in the less formal sense as defined by Chapell, who states that “the biblical word for all that’s included in our worship is ‘liturgy’ (*latreia*, see Rom 12:1), and it simply describes the public way a church honors God in its times of gathered praise, prayer, instruction, and commitment.”

¹⁵ Linda L. Belleville, “Christology, the Pastoral Epistles, and Commentaries,” in *On the Writing of New Testament Commentaries: Festschrift for Grant R. Osborne on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 8, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Eckhard J. Schnabel (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 326–35.

¹⁶ A. T. Hanson, *Studies in the Pastoral Epistles* (London: SPCK, 1986), 96–109. For example, the words in 1 Tim 4:3, βρωμάτων ἃ ὁ θεὸς ἔκτισεν εἰς μετάληψιν μετὰ εὐχαριστίας τοῖς πιστοῖς, “foods which God created for sharing with *eucharistia* by believers.”

¹⁷ For example, I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*. The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 321, mentions that the words in Titus 3:5, λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας (“washing of regeneration”) contains “a reference to baptism” (*pace* Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 781–82).

¹⁸ The words Παρακαλῶ οὖν πρῶτον πάντων (“I exhort, therefore, first of all”) can be taken in the sense of first importance, or merely first in a series, but either way there is special emphasis placed upon that which is first (cf. Towner, *Letters*, 165).

¹⁹ Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 60, states: “The precise distinction between these terms need not be pressed; his object is to insist on the centrality of prayer rather than to provide a systematic analysis of its types.”

“you might know how one ought to behave *in the household of God*,”²⁰ or in the assembly of believers. It follows, then, that (2) the words “I desire then that in every place [παντί] the men should pray” suggest that these prayers should take place wherever the body is gathered, most likely in the individual house churches.²¹ (3) There is a definite correlation between 1 Timothy 2:8, where men (ἄνδρας) are exhorted to pray, and 1 Timothy 2:9–15, where women are instructed to “cease disrupting the church by their improper dress and their emphasis on externals.”²² The correlation emphasizes the notion that the public assembly is in view.

A second liturgical element specifically named by Paul is *public reading*: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture to exhortation, to teaching” (ἕως ἔρχομαι πρόσεχε τῇ ἀναγνώσει, τῇ παρακλήσει, τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ; 1 Tim 4:13). The word ἀνάγνωσις (*anagnōsis*) simply means “reading.” However, in a culture where literacy was rarer than it is in the modern West,²³ the word was commonly used to refer to public reading.²⁴ That Paul refers to a standard or familiar public reading, rather than private, is made explicit by the definite article²⁵ and by the fact that ἀνάγνωσις is joined with two other public exercises, exhortation and teaching.²⁶

The third liturgical element is by far the most ubiquitous in the three letters, namely *public proclamation*: “Until I come, devote yourself . . . to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13). Again, both activities are punctuated by the definite article. For the purpose of this essay, the term “proclamation” is used to subsume any public utterance beyond the mere reading of the text, in which the Scriptures are declared, explained, and applied. However, the terms “exhortation” (παρακλήσις) and “teaching” (διδασκαλία) refer to different kinds of proclamation. The word παρακλήσις (*paraklēsis*), which can have the idea of consolation,

²⁰ Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 35. Cf. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 74ff, who treats 1 Tim 2:1–4:5 under the major heading of “Correction of Improper Conduct in the Ephesian Church.” Full English quotations of Scripture from ESV; emphasis mine.

²¹ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary 34 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 95.

²² Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 105.

²³ Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 157–58. A large segment of first-century society lived and died without ever having to read. However, Millard explains that among Jewish males it was expected that they learn at least to read the Jewish Scriptures in the synagogue, and those who did probably learned to read nothing else.

²⁴ BDAG, 61B. Cf. Acts 13:15; 2 Cor 3:14; Towner, “Public Reading,” 44. Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 105, notes that reading in the first century was a technical skill.

²⁵ Towner, “Public Reading,” 53.

²⁶ Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 207, notes that a word of exhortation would often follow the public reading, as in Acts 13:15.

encouragement, or appeal,²⁷ is most likely used here in the sense of bringing truth of the Scriptures to bear upon the hearers in order to motivate them or to change their behavior.²⁸ It is a kind of proclamation that lays moral weight upon the hearers, calling them to obedience. The term διδασκαλία (*didaskalia*), on the other hand, implies the explanation of the Scriptures on an intellectual level,²⁹ most likely involving questions and answers after the rabbinical style, or some form of doctrinal discussion.³⁰

Paul uses other terms in these letters to speak of the activity of public proclamation in the Christian assembly. Only two verses earlier, Paul tells Timothy, “Command and teach these things” (Παράγγελλε ταῦτα καὶ δίδασκε; 1 Tim 4:11). The word παραγγέλλω (*parangellō*) implies a significant level of authority on the part of the speaker, in which obedience is expected (cf. 1 Tim 1:3; 5:7; 6:17).³¹ Paul also uses words such as κηρύσσω (*kēryssō*), to “proclaim aloud, publicly” (1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim 4:2);³² ὑπομνήσκω (*hypomimnēskō*), to “re-
mind” (2 Tim 2:14; Titus 3:1); and διαμαρτύρομαι (*diamartyromai*), to “make a solemn declaration about the truth of something,” or “to exhort with authority in matters of extraordinary importance” (1 Tim 5:21; 2 Tim 2:14; 4:1).³³

Yet there is an even stronger term used in all three letters, namely ἐλέγχω (*elenchō*), which is often translated “rebuke.” The word can refer to “exposing” sin, “convicting” or “convincing” someone of sin, “reproving,” or even “punishing.”³⁴ The rebuke or censure is probably not what most people would consider a liturgical element, so a few observations are in order at this juncture. First, the “rebuke” (ἐλεγχος) is reserved only for those who “persist in sin” (1 Tim 5:20), who “contradict” sound doctrine (Titus 1:9), or for those false teachers who “upset” whole families through their deception (Titus 1:13). Second, that the “rebuke” is a public element in the Christian congregation is made explicit in 1 Timothy 5:20, where Timothy is instructed to “rebuke” those who persist in sin “in the presence of all” (ἐνώπιον πάντων) “so that the rest” (οἱ λοιποὶ) “may stand in fear.” Third, Marshall notes that the term ἐλέγχω is part of the language of church discipline, citing Matthew 18:15 as well as 1 Timothy

²⁷ BDAG, 766A.

²⁸ Raymond F. Collins, *1 & II Timothy and Titus*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 563, states that the word probably refers to “the exposition of Scripture . . . leading to commands or encouragements.”

²⁹ Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 209.

³⁰ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 563; Towner, *Letters*, 321.

³¹ BDAG, 760A; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 257, states that the word “is a term of authority, carrying connotations of a military or judicial order”; cf. Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 558–59.

³² Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 453. The κήρυξ was the “herald” who was charged with making public proclamations (cf. 1 Tim 2:7; 3:16; 2 Tim 1:11; 4:17; Titus 1:3).

³³ BDAG, 233A.

³⁴ BDAG, 315.

5:20.³⁵ If church discipline is defined as the public rebuke of a person in the Christian assembly who persists in error, for the purpose of calling the person to repentance, “rebuke” language in the Pastorals may be in the context of church discipline. The purpose of the rebuke, therefore, is not necessarily to excommunicate, but to bring him or her back into fellowship with the body. This is the reason Paul instructs Titus to establish overseers with the ability to “rebuke” false teachers, so “that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:3). Finally, we should note that the public rebuke, though at times necessary, was most likely atypical in comparison to the other forms of proclamation.³⁶

In summary, three distinct elements practiced in the public gathering of the church emerge from a reading of the Pastorals: *public prayer*, *public reading*, and *public proclamation*. Furthermore, we can subdivide the liturgy of *public proclamation* into three categories or *levels*. Level 1 is “teaching,” or patient instruction in doctrine involving intellectual discussion. Level 2 is “preaching,” or passionate command, where the moral weight of the instruction from the previous level is laid upon the hearers. Level 3, though probably less typical, is “rebuking,” the public censure or conviction of a person who persists in error despite the teaching and preaching of Levels 1 and 2.

Examination of the Liturgical Elements

Having established the specific elements of public liturgy, how does each element contribute to the overall message of the Pastorals? Specifically, how do these elements edify the church as members face the challenge of the presence of false teachers in their Christian community?

Public Prayer

When Paul says, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people” (1 Tim 2:1), the word “then” (οὖν) connects his exhortation to the correction of false teachers in chapter 1, specifically verse 3. Conflating the flow of thought would give the following sense: Just as I urged you (παρακαλέω) to stay

³⁵ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 169.

³⁶ Several times in the Pastorals combinations of proclamation ministries appear that serve as brief summaries of the kinds of proclamation prescribed by Paul for those who minister within the gathering of the church. Among these, words of “preaching” are often paired only with “teaching” rather than “rebuke”: 1 Timothy 4:11, παραγγέλλω + διδάσκω; 4:13, παράκλησις + διδασκαλία; 5:17, λόγος (laboring in the word, i.e., preaching) + διδασκαλία; 6:2, διδάσκω + παρακαλέω. However, the overseers in Titus 1:9 must be able to “exhort” and “rebuke” (παρακαλέω + ἐλέγχω), and Titus is challenged, “Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority” (λαλέω + παρακαλέω + ἐλέγχω) (Titus 2:15). In 2 Timothy 4:2, one of Paul’s final exhortations to Timothy contains the truckload of terms: “Preach the word. . . reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (κηρύσσω + ἐλέγχω + ἐπιτιμάω + παρακαλέω + διδαχή). These word combinations may reflect the fact that “rebuking,” although it may not have been in the typical first-century “order of service,” was certainly a necessary part of the overseers’ skill set, as they could be called upon in any given assembly.

at Ephesus to take care of false teachers (1 Tim 1:3), I now urge you (παρακαλέω) first of all to pray (2:1).³⁷ This means that the liturgy of prayer is urged as a direct response to the matter of heresy plaguing the Ephesian churches.

We will focus on one question in this complex pericope: How does Paul mean for public prayer to serve as a primary liturgical element that strengthens the church against heretical attacks? Mounce believes that the focus of the passage is really on the *content* of the prayers—that they should be for “all people” (2:2) because God desires “all people to be saved” (2:4) through the sacrifice of Christ (2:5–6). “Prayer,” he argues, “is not the topic of this paragraph but rather the stage upon which Paul bases his teaching on the topic of salvation.”³⁸ Granted, the *content* of the prayer is important, and Paul says more about salvation than about prayer itself. Furthermore, what he says about salvation may be a direct offensive against the doctrine of the false teachers. But Mounce’s view makes Paul’s injunction to pray almost incidental. If the content of the prayer is the point of the passage, then why does Paul mention prayer at all? Why does he not simply offer a lesson in soteriology? Furthermore, why does he bracket verses 1 through 8 with the call for prayers to be made if the activity of prayer is not of primary importance?

Collins reasons that Paul is asking the churches to pray for the “stability of the social order” in Ephesus, which is necessary if Timothy would achieve the purpose for which Paul left him.³⁹ He takes this emphasis from 1 Timothy 2:2, where the purpose of prayer is “that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” Collins’s view treats the act of prayer as more than a mere *stage* for doctrine (Mounce). Prayer to Collins is rather like a *vehicle* that brings about a desirable effect among church members. Praying for all people, especially government rulers (2:2), is one of the ways that God’s people “can lead a serene life without being swallowed up in chaos.”⁴⁰ However, while it is important for the church to live responsibly in the social environment where Christ has placed them, Collins’s explanation is overly pragmatic, and does not immediately explain the emphasis on salvation in the context.

While retaining the idea of prayer as a *vehicle*, it seems that the purpose for the prayer in this context is closer to Towner’s notion that it

supports the church’s universal mission to the world. That is, Paul urges Timothy to instruct the Ephesian church to reengage in an activity it had apparently been neglecting—prayer in support of Paul’s own mandate to take the gospel to the whole world.⁴¹

³⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 61–62.

³⁸ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 76: “Prayer is the context, salvation the content.”

³⁹ Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus*, 52.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴¹ Towner, *Letters*, 163.

In other words, it is not the mere exercise of public prayers that Paul has in view but prayers that are offered to God with regard to a significant purpose for which he united them together in Christ: the purpose of living out their faith in the gospel within a pagan community while calling upon God to save others, even to save public officials.

Looking at Paul's admonition to pray in this fashion brings us closer perhaps to why the apostle would urge prayers to be made in the face of heresy. Heresies divide, and it is evident through Paul's descriptions of the false teachers that the *heterodox* were a divisive group. Paul offers "the most condensed expression"⁴² of the picture of the opponents in Ephesus, which includes "having a sickly craving for speculations and empty words out of which come envy, strife, slanders, evil suspicions, constant irritation among people" (1 Tim 6:4–5). Paul warns Titus that such teachers were "upsetting whole families" (Titus 1:11). On the other hand, a church body that is focused on its mission to advance the gospel is a unified church. Paul appears to draw this conclusion in Philippians 1:27, for he challenges the believers, "Only let your life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel."⁴³ The intentional, *public* prayer of the body of Christ, in which believers gather together to seek the Lord to fulfill their purpose as his people, has a unifying impact that joins their hearts with one another in the face of doctrinal division.

Further evidence of the conclusion that prayer for the mission of the church unites the body of Christ may be seen in the manner in which Paul instructs the people to pray. First, he calls upon the men (ἄνδρας) as opposed to the women to pray, emphasized by the charge, "I desire" (βούλομαι).⁴⁴ Fee denies that Paul has men in particular in mind, nor even that Paul wants men to pray, but only that *when* the men pray they should do so "lifting up holy hands without anger or quarreling (1 Tim 2:8)."⁴⁵ But if this were the case, Paul could easily have included the women in this admonition with the simple use of ἄνθρωποι (*anthrōpoi*; "people"). Instead, he actually emphasizes the gender distinctions by first addressing the men, and then by turning to the subject of women with the words, "likewise also that women . . ." (2:9), challenging them essentially with the same matter of their holiness and deportment within the congregation (2:9–15). They are to "learn quietly with all submissiveness" (2:11) as opposed to the men, and they are not permitted to "exercise authority over a man" but "remain quiet" (2:12).

With these distinctions in mind, at least two clear pictures emerge. The first is of the men taking leadership in prayer among the people of God. This is not to say that women were forbidden to pray in the apostolic church (cf. 1 Cor 11:4, 13), but that in the context of 1

⁴² Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, lxxii.

⁴³ Paul's evident peace despite his imprisonment, as well as his forbearance against character attacks, appears to be sourced in his desire for the spread of the gospel (Phil 1:12–18). Also, his appeal to Euodia and Syntyche to "agree in the Lord" includes a reminder that these women have labored with Paul in the spread of the gospel (Phil 4:2).

⁴⁴ Lea and Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 94.

⁴⁵ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 71.

Timothy the men were to take the lead in prayer as a position of unique authority.⁴⁶ Second, Paul is not dividing men and women, but urging them both to come together when the church gathers, free from quarreling and strife, with united hearts invoking the Lord to bless their mission.⁴⁷

Public Reading

The exhortation to read the Scriptures publicly in 1 Timothy 4:13 is the earliest reference to public reading as a liturgical element in Christian worship.⁴⁸ Furthermore, there is no further injunction given in the NT that specifically instructs the believers to read the Scriptures when they gather. Surprisingly, Delling denies any evidence that the OT was read as part of Christian liturgy.⁴⁹ But surely we cannot imagine that the OT Scriptures were absent from the public reading, at least in the Pastorals, especially in light of Paul's statement to Timothy, "from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ," followed by his declaration of the effectiveness of the God-breathed Word (2 Tim 3:15–16). Furthermore, Paul appears to expect Gentile recipients of his letters to know the OT Scriptures, including fine nuances of doctrinal allusions that are gleaned only through a consistent diet of OT reading.⁵⁰

On the other hand, was the public reading limited to the OT Scriptures? There is significant NT evidence suggesting that the reading also contained the writings of the apostles. In 2 Corinthians 7:8, Paul's letter had made the entire church grieve. In Colossians 4:16, Paul instructs, "And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea." In 1 Thessalonians 5:27 Paul says sternly, "I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers," and in 2 Thessalonians 3:4 he expects that the believers have both heard and are following his letter. Further confirmation that Paul's letters in particular were written to be read publicly in churches may come from J. P. Heil, who seeks to demonstrate that each Pauline letter was written with the idea of being read in the public liturgy and "aimed to enable

⁴⁶ Even when women pray in 1 Corinthians 11:5, 13 the issue is raised over the symbols of their submissiveness to authority.

⁴⁷ Lea and Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 94–95.

⁴⁸ Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 105.

⁴⁹ Delling, *Worship in the New Testament*, 92.

⁵⁰ Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 70.

and facilitate the worship of the assembly.”⁵¹ Evidence for this view is suggested in part by the plural endings of Paul’s letters—even the Pastorals and Philemon.⁵²

Again, however, why is Paul concerned in 1 Timothy 4:13 that the church include the liturgy of public reading given the context of doctrinal attack? The answer may seem obvious when considering the nature of the documents—whether OT, apostolic, or likely both—as the antithesis of false teaching. But why the mere *reading* of the Scriptures? Towner’s helpful essay on 1 Timothy 4:13 traces the reading of Scripture from its earliest reference in Nehemiah 8:7–8 to the Qumran community, to Greco-Roman culture and the synagogue, and ultimately to the Christian community.⁵³ Towner suggests based on current social studies that the “reading/hearing of certain significant texts influences the formation, shaping, defining, and redefining of individual corporate identity.”⁵⁴ He explains how important this formation would have been during a time of doctrinal divide:

Scriptures were intentionally read as a way of answering an always present and pertinent question: who are we? . . . Although the question of identity was always the given subtext, the need for a particularly relevant re-expression of the answer clearly became more acute whenever situations that threatened the community’s well-being presented themselves (whether internal in the form of idolatry, rebellion against God, etc.; or external in the form of attacks from the outside).⁵⁵

Towner also reminds us that in the OT the public reading of the Scripture became essential for this very reason of identity in Josiah’s day (2 Chron 34:18–19, 30) as well as in Nehemiah’s (Neh 8:7–8).

With these insights in mind, we can see more clearly why the public reading itself was essential also in the context of the Ephesian church. There is a dynamic at work when the community of faith gathers to hear the sustained, public reading of the Scriptures, uninterrupted by commentary or application. Like the unity created through the church praying together for the Lord’s blessing in their mission, there is a solidarity that unites the Lord’s people as they sit quietly and submissively to hear the documents read that give them their unique identity. It is the affirmation of the truth of the Scriptures in this context that shines as a beacon against the darkness of error.

⁵¹ John Paul Heil, *The Letters of Paul as Rituals of Worship* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2011), 1.

⁵² Although they are written explicitly to individuals, in these letters the pronoun ὑμῶν always gets the last word.

⁵³ Towner, “Public Reading,” 44–48.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Public Proclamation

It would be superfluous at this point to belabor the obvious ways that *teaching*, *preaching*, and *rebuking* are appropriate activities within the context of the gathering of God's people with respect to heretical attacks. As indicated above, terms that refer to *teaching* have to do with intellectual instruction; to *preaching*, passionate command in which moral weight is placed upon the hearer; and to *rebuking*, censure or conviction for those who persist in sin. These three activities are the elements in the public assembly necessary to deepen the understanding of believers, challenge them to live out their faith, and call them out when they refuse to obey.

Nevertheless, two specific observations should be made regarding the liturgy of public proclamation in general. First, we should take note of how closely aligned these three activities are with the purpose of the written Word. When Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is breathed-out by God and is profitable," the specific ways that the Scriptures are profitable connect with the activities of public worship: "for teaching" (διδασκαλία), "for reproof" (ἐλεγχος) "for correction" (ἐπανάρθωσις), and "for training in righteousness" (παιδεία). According to Kelly, διδασκαλία (*didaskalia*) is "a positive source of Christian doctrine" and παιδεία (*paideia*) is used "for constructive education in Christian life."⁵⁶ Together they comprise Christian *teaching*. The word ἐπανάρθωσις (*apanorthōsis*) is a NT *hapax* and approximates the goal of *preaching*, which is to set the hearer into the motion of obedience; the word has the idea of "restoration" in the sense of "improvement."⁵⁷ And ἐλεγχος (*elenchos*) is "refuting error and rebuking sin."⁵⁸ The close proximity of the profitability of the Word with the specific exercises of public proclamation suggests that these activities bring the very Word of God effectively to bear upon the congregation, so that in the proclamation itself the Word is present among God's people. In other words, the truth lends itself to these liturgical elements. The Word was created to be taught, preached, and used as a basis for rebuke.

Finally, a word should be mentioned about the fact that women are prohibited from public proclamation in 1 Timothy 2:12, for Paul says using διδάσκω (*didaskō*), "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man." Because of the immediacy of the public reading with preaching and teaching in 1 Timothy 4:13, it follows also that the reading may have been deemed as an exercise of authority and prohibited to women also. The complexities of the modern discussion with regard to women in ministry need not be rehearsed here. However, it should be noted that older women are instructed in Titus 2:3 to be καλοδιδάσκαλοι (*kalodidaskaloi*), or "teachers of good (things)," so that they can train the younger women. Marshall calls the obvious distinction here between acceptable "private" teaching and unacceptable "public" teaching "anachronistic," based on NT texts where

⁵⁶ Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 205.

⁵⁷ BDAG, 359A.

⁵⁸ Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 203.

women teach (Acts 18:26) and prophesy (Acts 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5).⁵⁹ Yet the division between public and private ministry in the Pastorals is also supported by the fact that the widow in 1 Timothy 5:5 “continues in supplications and prayers night and day,” though it is the man who is to offer public prayer in 2:8. Regardless of the texts that may be brought to bear on the subject from outside the Pastorals, it appears that the men are those who take the lead in matters of liturgy.

Preliminary Conclusions

Based on the observations of the liturgy prescribed by Paul in the Pastorals, what preliminary conclusions may be drawn toward further research? First and most obviously, the idea that the Pastorals contain these three liturgical elements should be further scrutinized. Prayer, though appearing in a place of importance in 1 Timothy, is not mentioned in the other letters. Public reading is also mentioned only once, and this raises the issue of whether it appears incidentally in 1 Timothy 4:13 as a precursor to preaching and teaching, or whether it truly stands on its own. Only the many terms indicating public proclamation flood all three letters.

Second, the findings in this study should be compared with the presence of liturgical elements in other occasional documents. For instance, in the context of the Colossian heresy Paul urges, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16). However, does this mean that singing should also be considered a liturgical element prescribed in the context of heresy in the church, or is the command to sing in Colossians merely influenced by the letter’s affinity with Ephesians? As another point of comparison, a multiplicity of liturgical elements appears in 1 Corinthians: for example, Baptism (1:13–17), the Lord’s Supper (10:14–22; 11:17–34), and various public ministries such as praying, singing, prophesying, speaking in tongues, and interpreting (ch. 14). Yet in 1 Corinthians Paul is not so much commanding a specific liturgy as he is correcting the liturgical practices that were already taking place.

Third, further work should be done concerning the idea of the public rebuke or censure as a matter of liturgy. Several times, Paul admonishes Timothy and Titus to “rebuke” or “reprove” those who are in opposition to the truth in the presence of others in the assembly. The presence of this aspect of public proclamation appears to be just as much a necessary part of the public assembly as preaching and teaching. Matters of church discipline should not be the rare exception. Rather, overseers should be trained to be just as competent at handling this unpleasant task with compassion, grace, and courage as much as any other aspect of ministry.

Fourth, it is striking that in the assembly where the congregation is facing or preparing for heretical attacks, the men as opposed to the women are called upon to take the lead in matters of liturgy. They lead in public prayer, in all three levels of public proclamation, and, by implication, in public reading. This observation alone does not necessarily indicate that women are to be precluded from all avenues of public ministry. But it does suggest that

⁵⁹ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 455.

when the church was to defend its beliefs, the apostle called upon the men to go to battle for the truth (1 Tim 1:18; 6:12; 2 Tim 2:3). Further investigation is warranted regarding the idea of doctrinal defense as a kind of spiritual warfare to which God calls men in particular for active duty.

Finally, in the face of heretical attack in the gathered assembly of God's people the Scriptures must be primary. If this study is correct, two out of three of the prescribed liturgical elements in the Pastorals are designed to bring the Word to bear upon the congregation. While many churches today emphasize teaching and preaching, the public reading of the text is often seen as merely a decorative part of the worship service, if it occurs at all. Further consideration should be given to the prolonged effects of a consistent, intentional reading of the Word as a matter of shaping the unique identity of the congregation.