

Africa Bible Commentary Series

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Africa Bible Commentary Series

1 & 2 TIMOTHY AND TITUS

Samuel Ngewa



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1 & 2 Timothy, Titus

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the pastors and Bible teachers whom the Lord has provided me with an opportunity to train for service in the kingdom of God. All those who call me Mwalimu (Teacher) are a blessing to my heart, beginning with the students I taught at Mukaa Bible School, and continuing with the students at Ukamba Bible College, Scott Theological College and now at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology. May the Lord bless his people through each of us as we use this book to understand, preach and teach The Book better.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE AFRICA BIBLE COMMENTARY SERIES

The church of Christ in Africa rejoiced at the launch of the *Africa Bible Commentary (ABC)* in 2006. This one-volume commentary was unique in being a product of African soil. Seventy African scholars representing many countries and denominations contributed commentaries on each of the sixty-six books of the Bible as well as articles on various themes of relevance to the African context.

But even as the *ABC* was being released, the ABC Board was looking ahead. A one-volume commentary does not provide enough space to deal with many important issues. Thus was born the Africa Bible Commentary Series.

This series provides more depth of study, width of explanation, and variety of application than was possible in the *ABC*. The contributors are Anglophone or Francophone African scholars, all of whom adhere to the statement of faith of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa.

Besides the African authorship, there are a number of other features that make this commentary series distinctive. First, each commentary is divided into preaching units to help pastors develop a series of sermons on that particular book of the Bible. The main text deals with issues that could come up in such a series, while more complex academic issues relating to the original languages and academic controversies are discussed in the comprehensive endnotes. Each unit ends with questions that can be used to stimulate discussion of the themes in that unit. Each book in the series also contains a number of case studies and brief articles expanding on the practical application of points mentioned in the text.

It is hoped that this combination of features will make these books valuable to pastors, students, and small group Bible study leaders, as well as to ordinary Christians who are interested in getting a fuller understanding of God's Word.

The Africa Bible Commentary Series will be published under the HippoBooks imprint, named in honour of the great African theologian Augustine of Hippo. This imprint is owned by a consortium of African publishers from across the continent (currently WordAlive in Kenya, ACTS in Nigeria and Step in Ghana). The aim is to ensure that the series will be widely available in Africa. In the West, the books will be distributed by Zondervan.

The general editor for the New Testament series is Dr. Samuel Ngewa of the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST), Kenya, while the editor for the Old Testament series is Dr. Nupanga Weanzana of Bangui Evangelical School of Theology (BEST), in Bangui, Central African Republic.

The Africa Bible Commentary Series is based on Today's New English Version (TNIV). Its main goal is to relate the best biblical scholarship to the African context. This is no easy task. May the Lord bless the work of our hands and use it to strengthen his church in Africa. May our words also bring insight and encouragement to our fellow-believers around the world.

Samuel Ngewa
Easter 2009

FOREWORD TO 1 & 2 TIMOTHY AND TITUS

We will long remember the launch of the *Africa Bible Commentary* in Nairobi in July 2006. The symbolism of that impressive ceremony crowned five years of arduous work by seventy theologians, all sons and daughters of Africa. Pastors, students and preachers at last had access to a resource that would expound the Word of God in words that were intelligible to Africa. We can say without too much exaggeration that armed with this one-volume commentary the African reader will be able to grasp the essential message of the gospel from Genesis to Revelation.

But there is a need to go further, to dig deeper into the Word in order to arrive at a fuller and more precise understanding of God's revelation. Thus was born the idea of producing a series of Bible commentaries, dealing with each book of the Bible in far greater detail. True there are already many such commentaries, but almost all of them were produced in the West and use a vocabulary and categories that are alien to African readers. It can even be said that these commentaries are among the most difficult books for Africans to read. The Africa Bible Commentary Series will be like many of these commentaries in terms of its spirit of loyalty to the text and faithfulness to God's revelation, but it will place a high premium on readability and on applications to the spiritual life of Africa. It will not be content merely to explain concepts but will focus on the relevance of those concepts for the life of the church.

I thus salute the publication of this first commentary in the Africa Bible Commentary Series. My colleague, Prof. Samuel Ngewa, chose to begin with a commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. This choice was deliberate. The church faces many problems in Africa. It is numerically large but spiritually weak. This is often because those in leadership have not received sufficient nourishment. This commentary will help church leaders to examine themselves in the light of Scripture and to lead the people of God in a way that conforms to Scripture.

There is a Malagasy proverb *Ny biby tsy misy lohany tsy mandeha*, meaning “an animal without a head isn’t going anywhere”. Feeding the head, the leaders of the church, will enable the body of the church to live and grow.

One of the distinctive features of this series of commentaries is the emphasis they place on applications in the context of our churches in Africa. In other words, they are informed by the belief that listening to or reading the Word should always lead to obedience and to putting what one has read into practice.

I would like to express my sincere congratulations to Prof. Ngewa for the way he has written this commentary, for his deep knowledge of the texts and the context, the illustrations drawn from African life which help to illuminate the text, and for his mastery of the ongoing debates between scholars. He gently states his positions with firmness and clarity. He invites his readers to move beyond the debates, which are often technical, and instead to focus on the essential message of each passage and to allow themselves to be affected by it. He presents his ideas, or rather the ideas in the text, as in a sermon, which is appropriate given that these are the Pastoral Epistles. Bravo Prof. Ngewa!

Solomon Andriatsimialomanarivo
Prof. of Theology and Pastor
Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire
April 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As this work goes to press, I praise God for planting in me the desire to contribute to my fellow pastors by writing about three major subjects: the central figure of salvation who truly saves, the shepherds of the flock who truly know their work, and a defence of the gospel that truly balances firmness and love. The first subject was addressed in *The Gospel of John: A Commentary for Pastors, Preachers and Teachers*, the second is addressed in this commentary, and the third will be the topic of my commentary on Galatians.

I started work on a commentary on the Pastoral Epistles several years ago. When I mentioned this to Pieter Kwant, the director of Langham Literature, he invited me to send my material to him. There the race began. I am grateful to Pieter for all his encouragement as we moved ahead to turn my writing into this book.

Pieter's first action was to bring Isobel Stevenson onto the scene. Isobel is a copy editor of high reputation. She has looked at every section of this work, at times with the thoroughness that most people dedicate only to their own work. She pushed me to express my ideas in a way that my readers would most easily understand. It is because I had such an editor stand alongside me that this work is what it is.

Along the way, the Lord also brought Paul Karaimu and Debbie Head to the team, and their contributions, too, have been tremendous. I thank God for all these editors and for their help in making me think more relevantly all the time.

ABBREVIATIONS

Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen, Exod, Lev, Num, Deut, Josh, Judg, Ruth, 1–2 Sam, 1–2 Kgs, 1–2 Chr, Ezra, Neh, Esth, Job, Ps/Pss, Prov, Eccl, Song, Isa, Jer, Lam, Ezek, Dan, Hos, Joel, Amos, Obad, Jonah, Mic, Nah, Hab, Zeph, Hag, Zech, Mal

New Testament

Matt, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Rom, 1–2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil, Col, 1–2 Thess, 1–2 Tim, Titus, Phlm, Heb, Jas, 1–2 Pet, 1–2–3 John, Jude, Rev

Translations of the Bible

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Translation</u>
ESV	English Standard Version
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV	King James Version
Message	The Message
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TNIV	Today's New International Version

INTRODUCTION TO THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

Mutua was enjoying playing soccer with a friend. But suddenly the game was interrupted by his sister's call: "Mutua, you are to come and wash the dishes!" Mutua looked at her: "Who said so?" His sister replied, "Mummy". Mutua continued to play for another fifteen minutes before he slowly walked home to find out what dishes needed to be washed.

Was Mutua a bad boy? Perhaps not. He had probably learned that his mother's words did not carry as much authority as his father's. If daddy had told him to do something, he would have to obey immediately. For mummy, fifteen minutes later was all right.

Like Mutua, we all attach importance to a statement in proportion to who has said it. That is why it matters who wrote the books in the Bible. Whether we admit it or not, the importance we attach to their message is proportional to our perception of the importance and credibility of the writer. Thus this study of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus (known collectively as the Pastoral Epistles) has to begin with a discussion of who wrote them.¹

The traditional position, which is supported by the opening verse of each of these books, is that these letters were written by the Apostle Paul. However, not all scholars agree with this position.² Some think that these letters were written by some later believer who used Paul's name.³ Still others argue that what we have contains fragments of letters written by Paul, but that most of the content was composed by someone else.⁴

The arguments put forward by those who oppose Paul's authorship fall into four main groups:

- *Historical or biographical arguments.* Some of the events mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles are very difficult to fit into the account of Paul's ministry in the book of Acts. Paul speaks of leaving Titus in Crete to organize the church there (Titus 1:5), but Acts does not mention any visit to Crete.⁵ It is also difficult to fit in the journey to Macedonia that is mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:3.⁶ The imprisonment mentioned in 2 Timothy does not seem to be the same as that mentioned in Acts 23–26 or in Acts 28.⁷ However, these problems only discredit Pauline authorship if we assume that the book of Acts deals with all of Paul's life up to the time of his death. But the book makes no such claim. Given that Agrippa and Festus considered Paul innocent of the charges against him (Acts 26:32), it is likely that he was eventually released from his imprisonment in Rome. He could then have embarked on the missionary journeys referred to in the Pastoral Epistles.
- *Linguistic argument.* The words and style of writing in the Pastoral Epistles are very different from those in Paul's other writings. The letters contain words that are not used in any of his other letters and omit words that are often used there. Some scholars thus insist that these letters cannot have been written by Paul.⁸ This argument is a strong one. But it is quite possible that Paul changed his vocabulary and his style of writing to suit the new circumstances these churches were facing. It is also possible that he dictated his thoughts to a scribe, called an amanuensis, and that the style of these letters is influenced by the person doing the actual writing. Some have suggested that Luke may have been Paul's amanuensis.
- *Doctrinal or theological argument.* The Pastoral Epistles do not mention some of Paul's key teachings in his other letters, such as salvation by faith, believers' union with Christ, and the role of the Holy Spirit.⁹ Some argue that this proves that Paul cannot be the author. This argument, however, raises the question of why Paul would need to repeat these things to Timothy and Titus, two of his key assistants who had worked alongside him and must often have heard him teach on these topics. Furthermore, in the Pastoral Epistles he is addressing a new situation, and we would expect him

to deal with different issues and to express his theology in different terms.

- *Ecclesiological argument.* Some argue that the church in Paul's day was not as structured as the one we meet in the Pastoral Epistles and would not have had bishops, elders and deacons. Thus these epistles must have been written some time after Paul's death.¹⁰ But this argument ignores the evidence that Paul took an active interest in the ways churches were organized. In Acts 14:23 he appoints elders and in Acts 20:17, 28 he meets with the elders of the church in Ephesus. Moreover the type of organization referred to in the Pastoral Epistles is very similar to that adopted at Qumran and in Jewish synagogues. It would thus have been familiar to Paul.¹¹ Moreover, the problems with false teaching in the churches for which Timothy and Titus were responsible may have necessitated organization and strict discipline.

While the arguments against Pauline authorship do raise real questions, there are plausible answers to each of them. We do not need to reject the traditional understanding that Paul was the author of the Pastoral Epistles. Thus in this commentary I will be working from the traditional belief that Paul's imprisonment in Acts 28 ended in his release and that his ministry extended at least four years after this imprisonment. He probably wrote 1 Timothy and Titus some time between AD 63 and 67. Then he was re-arrested, and during this final imprisonment he wrote 2 Timothy, which was his last testament before his execution in AD 67 or 68.

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1 TIMOTHY

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MAKING CONTACT

Africans have often been accused of wasting time. While this may sometimes be true, there is at least one area in which it is more a misunderstanding than a correct evaluation. Traditionally, when an African adult visited a neighbour to borrow something like salt or a burning piece of charcoal to start a fire, it was considered impolite to make the request as soon as one arrived. Instead, there would first be general conversation about how the day was going, how the crops were doing that year, and so on. If neither of the two was in a hurry, this general talk could continue for an hour or more – at times to the point that the borrower forgot what he or she had come for. The conversation established such a strong relationship that when the request was finally made, it was seldom refused. The general conversation was not manipulation of the other person but maintenance of a relationship based on friendship and willingness to share.

Unfortunately, this practice is seldom followed today. Our rushed lives are characterized by individualism. Greetings, when exchanged at all, are quick and casual. Heart-to-heart sharing has been pushed out of our lives. Instead of living in relationships we live by ourselves, and when crises come we find we are all alone. We need to relearn the importance of making and maintaining relationships.

The Apostle Paul lived in a culture that knew the importance of relationships, and so he includes greetings before addressing the issues he wants to write about. He begins almost all his letters by identifying himself and those he is writing to, and greeting them pleasantly. When he does not include a greeting, as in the letter to the Galatians, it is a sure sign that there is a serious problem that needs to be addressed

immediately. There is no such problem with those to whom he is writing the Pastoral Epistles, and so all three of them begin with his name, the name of the recipient, and a greeting.

The Author

As discussed in the Introduction, there is some debate about the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles. In this commentary, we will accept the assertion that the author of 1 Timothy is *Paul* (1:1). The book of Acts and his other letters tell us a good deal about Paul, both as a person and as an apostle. He was originally known as Saul, and came from the Jewish tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3:5).¹² He had been a zealous persecutor of the church before his conversion (Acts 8:1–3).

Paul describes himself as *an apostle of Christ Jesus*, that is, as someone who has been sent on a mission by Christ Jesus. He describes himself in the same way in all his letters, except those addressed to situations in which there are no major problems (specifically, Philippians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians and Philemon).

The role of an “apostle” (a Greek word) is closely related to the role of the person the Jews referred to as a *shaliach*.¹³ A shaliach was sent out to faithfully represent the person who sent him. His actions were backed by their authority and he was authorized to respond to different situations in terms of what he knew of their likes and wishes. The title thus combined authority and faithful service. Paul sees himself as working in this way in relation to Christ.

In the Bible, the term “apostle” is used specifically to refer to the twelve men whom Jesus himself appointed to preach and lay the foundation for his church (Mark 3:14 NIV). Paul qualified as an apostle like these men because he received the same commission from Jesus when he encountered him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9; see also 1 Cor 9:1; 2 Cor 12:11–12). He was recognized as an apostle by the Jerusalem Council (Gal 2:1–10).

In a looser sense, people like Barnabas, Apollos, Silas and Timothy are also sometimes called apostles because they, too, were preaching and founding churches (see Acts 14:14; 1 Cor 4:6, 9; 1 Thess 1:1; 2:6–7).¹⁴ This usage has led some African preachers to call themselves apostles, and to claim that they have the same authority as Christ’s original

apostles. Such preachers sometimes forget that the role of a shaliach was not just to speak with authority but also to act in the same way as the one who sent him. Christ laid aside his glory (Phil 2:5–8), washed his disciples’ feet (John 13:3–5) and laid down his life for those he came to save (John 10:11; Gal 1:4). Those who claim to be apostles need to be reminded that they cannot claim to speak with authority unless their lives demonstrate the utmost self-sacrifice for the flock.¹⁵

Paul insists that he is an apostle *by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope*. In his other letters, Paul often speaks of himself as being an apostle “by the will of God” (e.g. 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1). Here, however, he uses the word “command” in order to stress that he has received an order that must be obeyed. He is not speaking on his own initiative but has been given a commission that he must carry out. He is like a soldier delivering a message given to him by his commanders – and in Paul’s case, these commanders are none other than God and Christ Jesus. Thus his message in this letter is backed by God’s authority.

It may seem odd that Paul stresses his authority when he is writing to his close friend and faithful colleague. But this was not just a personal letter; it would also be read to the congregation. By stressing his own authority, Paul was strengthening Timothy’s position in Ephesus and supporting the authority of his teaching.

The Recipient

This letter is addressed to *Timothy* (1:2). The name Timothy is formed from two Greek words: *timao*, which means “I honour”, and *theos*, which means “God”. Thus, Timothy means “one who honours God” or “one whom God honours”.

Timothy is first mentioned in Acts 16:1–3, when he became Paul’s companion on his second missionary journey. Thereafter, he is frequently mentioned in Paul’s letters.¹⁶ Paul here refers to him as his *true son*. The word translated “true” is the one that would normally be used to refer to a legitimate child, born to parents married to each other. Paul uses it to show that Timothy is a genuine convert, a true believer who has proved his faithfulness as he has been mentored by Paul. The words *in*

the faith indicate that this is the sphere in which his faithfulness has been proved.

The Greeting

In many situations where we would say “hello” in English or “habari” in Swahili, people in the Greek-speaking world of Paul’s day would say *chairein*. Paul liked to Christianize this greeting by punning on the word and replacing *chairein* (greetings) with *charis* (*grace*). He would then add the common Jewish greeting, “shalom” or *peace* (which is similar to the greeting “salaam” used by some people in Africa, who greet each other with “salaam alaikum”). Paul used this combined greeting in most of his letters.¹⁷

In 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, however, he adds a third item to his greeting: *mercy*. Ephesus was not the easiest of churches to pastor, and Paul may have “sensed that Timothy needed this nuance of God’s favour because he felt himself in special difficulty and needed not only a strength and enabling but also sympathy, tenderness, and comfort”.¹⁸

The greeting expresses Paul’s prayer that Timothy will know God’s grace, that is, his favour on undeserving sinners and his special encouragement of believers. He is also praying that Timothy will know God’s mercy, that is, his compassion and pity. Finally, he is praying that Timothy will know God’s peace, that is, that his heart and mind will be satisfied with the Lord’s goodness and daily protection.

The blessings Paul prays for would make Timothy a very successful minister, but this does not stop Paul from praying that he will receive them. Paul is not like some African leaders who are afraid that their disciples’ success will overshadow their own. For example, I have known cases where a church leader has asked for the transfer of a junior worker who is so successful that he or she is attracting praise. Paul was not like that. He would be happy for Timothy’s ministry to demonstrate the fullest extent of the blessing that comes from both *God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord*. Paul specifies this dual source of blessing in all his writings except Colossians 1:2, where he only mentions “God our Father”.

Questions for Discussion

1. Any nation or church is only as great as its next generation. If it does not prepare them for leadership, that nation or church will die with the current generation. Yet we often see the generation in power or in leadership guarding their glory to the point of undermining the next generation. Reflecting on this and on Paul's relationship with Timothy, what lessons can we learn for our nations and churches?
2. How can we apply the principles identified in the discussion of Question 1 to our own church when it comes to relationships between older and younger believers, long-time church members and newer members of the same church, and a senior pastor and a newly employed assistant?
3. An apostle was called to exercise authority and model faithful service. We are called to follow the apostles' example (1 Cor 4:16–17). If you are a church leader, reflect on how you model your behaviour on that of the apostles. If you are a church member, do you see the right blend of authority and service in your church leaders? Discuss what you have experienced without condemnation or self-justification, remembering that our goal is to grow together into a greater degree of Christ-likeness.

UNIT 2

1 TIMOTHY 1:3–7

TIMOTHY'S MISSION

One of the most widely read books at the beginning of this century was Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life*.¹⁹ People reading it in public places reported that those next to them would often ask what it was about. The words “purpose-driven” caught people's attention, for even non-Christians long to find a life of purpose and meaning.

When we discover what we are meant to do in life, daily tasks become purposeful and life acquires a new sense of mission. In 1 Timothy 1:3–7, Paul spells out Timothy's mission in order to make sure he understands the task he is meant to accomplish and his role as leader of the church in Ephesus. If Timothy fails, it will not be because he did not know what he was supposed to do.

Paul had been with Timothy in Ephesus, but had left him there when he went on to Macedonia (1:3). Before leaving, he had given him instructions about what to do. But Paul may have feared that with all the other life challenges and emotions surrounding his departure, Timothy would not remember everything he had been told, or that he would be nervous about implementing it. So Paul writes to him to remind him of his mission.

The Push

Timothy was still a young man (4:12) and he may have been hesitant about taking responsibility for the church in Ephesus, with its many problems. So Paul *urged* (1:3) him to do so. He did not merely politely request that Timothy consider taking on this task. (Elsewhere, he speaks

even more strongly to Titus, saying, “I directed you” – Titus 1:5.) This reminder of Paul’s urging reassures Timothy that his mentor is confident that he will be equal to the task.

The Place

The church for which Timothy was responsible was based in Ephesus (1:3), the principal city of the Roman province of Asia Minor. It was a religious centre and the site of a famous temple of Artemis (known as Diana by the Romans). She was the goddess of hunting, the wild and fertility. This temple dated back to 550 BC and was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Paul first visited Ephesus briefly as he journeyed from Corinth to Caesarea along with Aquila and Priscilla, whom he had met in Corinth (Acts 18:2, 18–19). He may have started the church there and then left his companions to care for it.²⁰ Paul’s second and last visit to the city is recorded in Acts 19 and lasted at least two years and three months (Acts 19:8–10; 20:31).

The strategic importance of a great city like Ephesus in Paul’s mission to the whole province of Asia Minor and the surrounding regions may have led him to attach particular importance to the well-being of the church there. That may explain why he asked such a close friend as Timothy to remain there.

We may need to use a similar strategy to Paul when thinking about our churches in Africa. Just as Paul chose one of his best assistants to serve in the Ephesian church and gave him every possible moral and emotional support, so we may need to place our best pastors in urban churches and to keep them in our prayers. Such pastors may be ministering to government ministers, permanent secretaries, the directors of various institutions, judges, and others who occupy all kinds of influential offices. Even the ordinary members of urban churches will be influential when they visit the rural areas from which they came.

Pastors may sometimes be attracted to urban churches because the salary may be higher than in many rural areas. But they should never accept such a pastorate without an awareness of the awesome responsibility that serving there imposes. We as church members should remember to

uphold urban pastors in our prayers, for their good ministry will trickle down to all corners of the African society.

The Job Description

Timothy is to *command* certain people in the church in Ephesus to stop doing something. The verb is the one a Greek commander would use when issuing orders to his subordinates.²¹ As Paul's representative, Timothy can speak with Paul's authority. He must not hesitate to exercise that authority. The problems he has to deal with are so serious that they must be confronted, and cannot be addressed by negotiation.

Timothy is to issue two orders to *certain persons*, that is, to a specific group in the church. First, they *are not to teach false doctrines*. The word translated as "false" carries the idea of "a different kind" in the Greek.²² Some people were teaching ideas that were very different from the true gospel that Paul and Timothy preached. Second, they must not *devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies*. Someone who is devoted to something is highly committed to it. These people were not merely passing on information; they were actively promoting their ideas.

Scholars are not absolutely certain what Paul means when he talks of "myths and endless genealogies". There are three main possibilities:

- Gnostic teachings about the relationship between a benevolent Supreme Being and the supposedly evil material world. The "endless genealogies" are then the genealogies of the spirits, or *aeons*, that supposedly emanated from this Supreme Being.²³ Those who accept this interpretation point out that the asceticism recommended by the false teachers (1 Tim 4:3) fits with the gnostic teaching that material things are evil. The false teaching about the resurrection (2 Tim 2:18) also seems to have gnostic leanings.
- Jewish stories about the Old Testament patriarchs. These are not the stories included in the Bible, but other legends that had accumulated around them. The "endless genealogies" would be efforts to construct or maintain detailed Jewish family trees. In support of this interpretation, it can be pointed out that the false teachers want to be "teachers of the law" (1:7), which would probably be the Jewish law.

- A mixture of gnostic and Jewish teachings. This is the most likely possibility.

But whatever the case, these teachers are preoccupied with speculation about issues that are neither important nor useful to the cause of the gospel. Their ideas are a threat to the church and contrary to the gospel. Devotion to such ideas serves only to *promote controversial speculations* (1:4). People are being encouraged to play with and argue about ideas purely for the purpose of mental stimulation, not because they actually want to find answers to real problems. Such controversies are pointless. They do nothing to advance *God's work*, that is, his plan of redemption through Jesus Christ, *which is by faith* (1:4). Neither human speculation of the kind favoured by the gnostics, nor debates about ancestry and arcane details of the Jewish law have any effect on the past, the present or the future of God's plan of redemption. Redemption comes only by faith.²⁴

We see a variant of this problem when pastors use their pulpit to promote some political party. This is not to say that pastors should not teach that God hates corruption, injustice, crime, and marginalization. When those are the issues, politics and biblical teaching go together. When, however, preachers use their position to support the political party or candidate they favour, what they are preaching is their personal opinion and is not calculated to help their listeners grow more like Christ-like in their attitudes and in their responses to daily challenges. Instead, some members of the congregation will turn their ears off and there will be political controversies within the congregation. Paul would insist that pastors should focus on the issues that unite us and make us grow in God's grace.

The Goal

Timothy is not called to issue this command just to establish his authority or to root out error. His ultimate goal must be to promote *love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith* (1:5). Whereas 1:3–4 focused on the negative aspects of Timothy's task, here Paul stresses the positive side. Others may “promote controversial

speculations”; Timothy is to promote love. Stopping the spread of error is only the start of his assignment.

The type of love that Timothy is to promote is *agape* love, the unselfish, self-giving love that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 13. Such love is not selfish and does not count the cost but takes pride in what is achieved for the glory of God and the good of his people.

Love must come from the heart. Today, we think of the heart as the seat of emotions, but in Paul’s day it was the centre of thoughts as well. Those whose hearts are “pure” will not have divided loyalties, but will love God wholeheartedly and love their neighbours as themselves (Luke 10:27). Their love will have no limits. In Paul’s case, his love extends not only to Timothy and those who support him but also to those who oppose him.

Another characteristic of this love is that it comes from “a good conscience”. It must be comfortable in the presence of “the inner judge that accuses us when we have done wrong and approves us when we have done right”.²⁵ Someone with a good conscience does not live with a sense of guilt. Of course, some people feel no guilt because their consciences have been branded or seared by a carefree or rebellious attitude (1 Tim 4:2). But Paul is not speaking about such people. He is speaking of the conscience of someone who is responsive to God and seeks to live a godly life.

The final element in this love is “sincere faith”, that is, faith that is free of hypocrisy and pretence.

The false teachers create controversy that hampers the work of God; by contrast, those who have the type of love described here promote his work. Thus such love is the goal of Paul, Timothy and everyone else who joins them in serving God.

A Case in Point

Some people at Ephesus have not pursued love but have *departed from* it. The Greek verb carries the sense of “failing to aim at something” or “failing to strike something”. These men have failed to strike the right path and so have lost their way. They have replaced meaningful activity with *meaningless talk* (1:6).

As an example of how they have lost their way, Paul speaks of their desire to become teachers of the law (1:7). There is nothing wrong with such a desire – indeed, it is honourable. But these people want to teach the law without obeying it. They are not prepared to pay the price that Paul has paid for preaching the gospel by staying true to it. As a result, all that they have to offer is “meaningless talk” because they do not really understand what they assert dogmatically (1:7). The emptiness of their teaching is even more apparent when it is contrasted with God’s truth as revealed in Paul’s apostolic teaching.

We still suffer from meaningless talk in some of our churches today. There are some preachers who evaluate the success of sermons by whether they made people laugh and enjoy themselves. While there is nothing wrong with making people laugh, a sermon that only entertains and does not lead the listeners to ask themselves what areas they should grow in has not achieved its true purpose. That purpose is to build people up in their relationship with Christ.

Questions for Discussion

1. African life once involved a routine of waking, taking the animals out to graze, bringing them home, talking around the fire, and going to sleep. Today our routines have changed: we wake, go to the office, return home, watch TV, and go to bed. Is that all there is to our lives? To what extent are Christians in Africa modelling how to live everyday life with a purpose, plan and goal, knowing that the ultimate judge is Christ their Saviour?
2. Africans traditionally used stories to teach lessons. Even today, a story is often remembered better than a sermon. Can you remember a story with a moral lesson that you were told by a grandparent or parent or some other mentor? What was the story and what was the lesson behind it? How would you react if your pastor used a story like this instead of a sermon on Sunday? Are there some dangers to watch out for when using stories? If so, what are some of them?
3. In every African society, there was a procedure through which a boy was initiated into manhood and a girl to womanhood. The procedure often involved hardships and risks, which some welcomed

and others dreaded. Have you ever been in a position where you were facing an experience you dreaded and someone came alongside you to encourage you, saying something like, “You can do it”? Did you ultimately find satisfaction and success in the very thing you were afraid of trying? Share what someone said or did to encourage you, or what you have done to encourage someone else. Then think about specific ways in which we as African believers need to encourage each other to venture out for the kingdom of God. How does Paul serve as a model here?