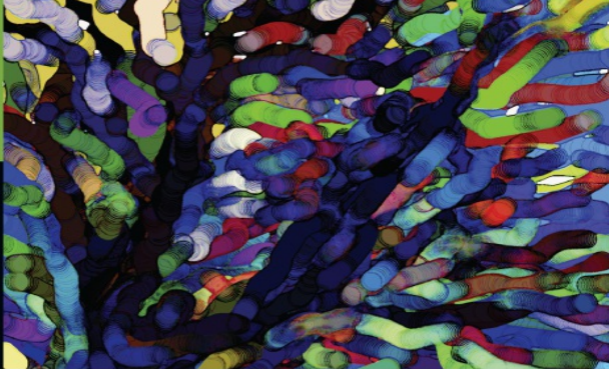


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JOHN R. W. STOTT

The Message of

# 1 Timothy & Titus

THE NEW TESTAMENT SERIES EDITOR: JOHN R. W. STOTT

**The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus**  
**The life of the local church**

**John Stott**

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## General preface

THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY describes three series of expositions, based on the books of the Old and New Testaments, and on Bible themes that run through the whole of Scripture. Each series is characterized by a threefold ideal:

- to expound the biblical text with accuracy
- to relate it to contemporary life, and
- to be readable.

These books are, therefore, not ‘commentaries’, for the commentary seeks rather to elucidate the text than to apply it, and tends to be a work rather of reference than of literature. Nor, on the other hand, do they contain the kinds of ‘sermons’ that attempt to be contemporary and readable without taking Scripture seriously enough. The contributors to *The Bible Speaks Today* series are all united in their convictions that God still speaks through what he has spoken, and that nothing is more necessary for the life, health and growth of Christians than that they should hear what the Spirit is saying to them through his ancient—yet ever modern—Word.

ALEC MOTYER  
JOHN STOTT  
DEREK TIDBALL  
*Series editors*

## Author's preface

It was as a comparatively young man that I began a serious study of the Pastoral Letters, so that I found no problem in sitting beside Timothy and Titus, listening through their ears to the elderly apostle's admonitions. But now the situation has changed. I am almost certainly older than the apostle was, and it is natural for me to sit beside Paul. Not of course that I am an apostle. But I think I feel something of his concern for the future of the gospel and for the younger generation whose responsibility it is to guard it and pass it on. It is an interesting hermeneutical question whom one may or should identify with when reading Scripture.

My first attempt to expound all three Pastoral Letters was during the fall term of 1972, when I was invited to lecture on them at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School outside Chicago. But before that during the sixties I had preached through them in All Souls Church in London. Then 2 Timothy was the set text for the biblical expositions at the great student missionary convention at Urbana in 1967, and at the Keswick Convention in Britain in 1969. Those studies of 2 Timothy were expanded and published in 1973 as one of the early *Bible Speaks Today* books under the title *Guard the Gospel*. 1 Timothy then became my set text for the Australian Church Missionary Society's Summer Schools in 1986, and for 'Commission 88', the East African student missionary conference, which was held outside Nairobi at the end of 1988.

So this penultimate *Bible Speaks Today* book in the New Testament series (due to be completed with an exposition of Matthew's Gospel by Michael Green) focuses on 1 Timothy and Titus. I address the question of the authenticity of the Pastoral Letters in an introductory chapter. In this preface I limit myself to their relevance to the contemporary world and church, especially the relevance of 1 Timothy and Titus.

### The relevance of 1 Timothy and Titus

To draw up a list of topics to which these two letters make a substantial contribution is to compile an extraordinarily heterogeneous assortment. I have sub-titled the exposition of 1 Timothy 'The life of the local church'. For it contains apostolic instruction on the priority of prayer, on gender roles in the conduct of public worship, on the relations between church and state, and on the biblical basis for world evangelization. The apostle goes on to write about local church leadership, the conditions of eligibility for the pastorate, and how young leaders can ensure that their ministry is accepted, and not despised or rejected on account of their youth. Other subjects include the doctrine of creation, and its application to our everyday behaviour, the principles governing the church's social work, the remuneration and disciplining of pastors, the superiority of contentment over covetousness, the call to radical holiness, and the dangers and duties of the rich.

The exposition of Titus I have sub-titled 'Doctrine and duty', for, although the context is still the local church, the emphasis has shifted. Paul's chief concern now is that, in the three spheres of the church, the home and the world, our Christian duties in this present age will be enforced by the comprehensive doctrine of salvation, and especially by the past and future appearances of Christ.

But the apostle's overriding preoccupation throughout all three Pastoral Letters is with the truth, that it may be faithfully guarded and handed on. The pertinence of this theme, at the end of the twentieth century, is evident. For contemporary culture is being overtaken and submerged by the spirit of postmodernism. Post-modernism begins as a self-conscious reaction against the modernism of the Enlightenment, and especially against its unbounded confidence in reason, science and progress. The postmodern mind rightly rejects this naive optimism. But it then goes further and declares that there is no such thing as objective or universal truth; that all so-called 'truth' is purely subjective, being culturally conditioned; and that therefore we all have our own truth, which has as much right to respect as anybody else's. Pluralism is an offspring of postmodernism; it affirms the independent validity of every faith and ideology, and demands in shrill tones that we abandon as impossibly arrogant any attempt to convert somebody (let alone everybody) to our opinion.

In contrast to this relativization of truth, it is wonderfully refreshing to read Paul's unambiguous commitment to it. He has himself been appointed, he says, 'a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth' (1 Tim. 2:7, RSV); the church is 'the pillar and foundation of the truth' (1 Tim. 3:15); and it is the truth which 'leads to godliness' (Tit. 1:1). The false teachers, on the other hand, 'have wandered away from the truth' and even 'oppose the truth' (1 Tim. 6:21; 2 Tim. 2:18; 3:8; cf. 4:4).

As the apostle develops his thesis, we become aware of the existence of four groups of people, and of the interplay between them, namely Paul and his fellow apostles, the false teachers, Timothy and Titus, and the pastors they are to select and appoint.

First, there is Paul himself, who styles himself at the beginning of all three letters an apostle of Jesus Christ, adding in two of them that his apostleship is by the will or the command of God. And all through these letters his self-conscious apostolic authority is apparent, as he issues commands and expects obedience. Also, again and again, he refers to what he calls indiscriminately 'the truth', 'the faith', 'the sound doctrine', 'the teaching' or 'the deposit'. The plain implication is that a body of doctrine exists, which, having been revealed and given by God, is objectively true. It is the teaching of the apostles. Paul constantly calls Timothy and Titus back to it, together with the churches they oversee.

Secondly, in opposition to Paul, there are the false teachers. They are *heterodidaskaloi* (1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3), engaged in teaching what is *heteros*, different from and alien to the teaching of the apostles. They are essentially deviationists, who have 'wandered' or 'swerved' from the faith (1 Tim. 1:6; 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:18). Paul does not mince his words. What they are spreading is not an alternative truth, but 'lies', 'godless chatter', 'myths' and 'meaningless talk'.<sup>[1]</sup>

Thirdly, there are Timothy and Titus. They stand between the apostle and the church, in the sense that they represent him and relay his teaching to the church. They have been appointed to oversee the churches in Ephesus and Crete

respectively, yet their job specification has been written by Paul. Twice in his first letter to Timothy he tells him that he hopes to visit him soon (3:14; 4:13). Meanwhile, during his absence, Timothy is to devote himself on the one hand to the public reading of Scripture, basing his teaching and exhortation on it, and on the other to Paul's written instructions. Indeed, Paul's written teaching was, in the providence of God, a deliberate substitute for his personal presence and direction of the church. This is why as many as ten times in 1 Timothy and Titus Paul writes 'teach these things', 'command and teach these things', or 'give the people these instructions'.<sup>2</sup> On each occasion *tauta* ('these things') means the teaching which Paul is giving Timothy and Titus. They are not only to hold on to it themselves, guarding the precious deposit of truth (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 6:20), and to fight for it against the false teachers (1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12), but also to pass it on faithfully to the church.

Fourthly, there are the true and trustworthy pastors whom Timothy and Titus are to appoint. In both letters Paul lays down the conditions of eligibility they must fulfil (1 Tim. 3 and Tit. 1). Apart from a consistent moral character and a Christian home life, they must also be loyal to the apostle's teaching and have a teaching gift, so that they will be able both to teach the truth and to confute error (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9).

Here then are the three stages of teaching which lie behind the Pastoral Letters. Over against the false teachers, first, there is Paul's authoritative apostolic instruction, which he passes on to Timothy and Titus; secondly there are Timothy and Titus themselves, who teach 'these things' to others, especially the pastors they are to appoint; and thirdly there are these pastors whose task it is to 'encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it' (Tit. 1:9). These stages are clearly set out in 2 Timothy 2:2, where what Timothy has heard from Paul he is to 'entrust to reliable men' (the pastors), who in their turn will 'also be qualified to teach others' (the churches). It is noteworthy that in this verse reliability (to the Word) and an ability to teach it are the two essential qualifications for the pastorate, which Paul has already laid down in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9.

In these three stages of instruction it is vital to preserve the gap between Paul on the one hand and Timothy, Titus, the pastors and the churches on the other. The true apostolic succession is a continuity not of order but of doctrine, namely the teaching of the apostles handed on from generation to generation. And what makes this doctrinal succession possible is that the teaching of the apostles was written down and has now been bequeathed to us in the New Testament. Just as Paul told Timothy, while he was absent, to attend to Old Testament Scripture and to his written instructions, so we must do the same. For Paul is now permanently absent. His approaching death looms behind all three Pastoral Letters, and especially behind 2 Timothy in which he states explicitly that the time of his departure has come (2 Tim. 4:6). So his paramount concern is to ensure the preservation of his teaching after his death. Now he has been dead a long time. And there is no living apostle who can take his place. Instead, we have his writings. Indeed we have the whole Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments, the written legacy of the prophets and the apostles.

'This ... is the difference between the apostles and their successors,' wrote Calvin:

The former were sure and genuine scribes of the Holy Spirit, and their writings are therefore to be considered oracles of God; but the sole office of others is to teach what is provided and sealed in the Holy Scriptures. We therefore teach that faithful ministers are now not permitted to coin any new doctrine, but that they are simply to cleave to that doctrine to which God has subjected all men without exception.<sup>3</sup>

Much contemporary confusion in the church arises from our failure to make a clear enough distinction between the apostolic and the post-apostolic periods. Our forefathers understood it better than we do. Oscar Cullmann's explanation could hardly be improved:

... the infant church itself distinguished between apostolic tradition and ecclesiastical tradition, clearly subordinating the latter to the former, in other words subordinating itself to the apostolic tradition.<sup>4</sup>

The fixing of the Christian canon of Scripture [*sc.* the New Testament] means that *the church itself*, at a given time, traced a clear and definite line of demarcation between the period of the apostles and that of the church, between the time of foundation and that of construction, between the apostolic community and the church of the bishops, in other words, between apostolic tradition and ecclesiastical tradition. Otherwise the formation of the canon would be meaningless.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, I thank Professor Stephen Williams and Nelson González for their kind help in compiling the bibliography. I am also grateful to Nelson, who has a most uncanny and disconcerting knack of spotting the weak places in my argument; to Dr Alastair Campbell of Spurgeon's College, who is himself writing on the Pastorals; to David Stone, who has produced another of his useful study guides; to Colin Duriez, IVP's ever-helpful General Books Editor; and to Jo Bramwell, for her meticulous copy-editing. They have all read the typescript and made suggestions, to virtually all of which I have tried to respond. Finally, I am extremely grateful to Frances Whitehead for crowning her forty years' service to All Souls Church and to me, by producing yet one more immaculate typescript.

*New Year's Day, 1996*

JOHN STOTT

## Chief abbreviations

- AV The Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible (1611).
- BAGD Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, second edition, revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from Bauer's fifth edition, 1958 (University of Chicago Press, 1979).
- Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History*, translated by G. A. Williamson (Penguin, 1965).
- GNB The Good News Bible (NT 1966–1992; OT 1976, 1992).
- GT C. L. W. Grimm and J. H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (T. and T. Clark, 1901).
- Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, translated by F. M. R. Hitchcock, in W. J. Sparrow Simpson and W. K. Lowther Clarke (eds.), *Early Church Classics 2* (SPCK, 1916).
- JB The Jerusalem Bible (1966).
- JBP *The New Testament in Modern English* by J. B. Phillips (Collins, 1958).
- Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, c. AD 93–94, translated by William Whiston, 1737; from *Ant. Josephus: Complete Works* (Pickering and Inglis, 1981).
- Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, c. AD 78–79, translated by William Whiston, 1737; from *Wars Josephus: Complete Works* (Pickering and Inglis, 1981).
- LXX The Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint, third century BC.
- Metzger Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1971; corrected edition, 1975).
- Moffatt James Moffatt, *A New Translation of the Bible* (Hodder and Stoughton, Old and New Testaments in one vol. 1926; revised 1935).
- MM J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, 1930 (Hodder and Stoughton, 1949).
- NEB The New English Bible (NT, 1961, second edition 1970; OT, 1970).
- NIV The New International Version of the Bible (1973, 1978, 1984).
- NRSV The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (1989, Anglicized edition, 1995).
- REB The Revised English Bible (1989).
- RSV The Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NT, 1946; second edition, 1971; OT, 1952).
- RV The Revised Version of the Bible (1881–1885).
- TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, translated by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Eerdmans, 1964–1976).
- Trench R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (eighth revised edition, Macmillan, 1876).

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## The authenticity of the Pastoral Letters

Ever since F. C. Baur of Tübingen rejected the Pauline authorship of all three Pastoral Letters in 1835, the voices of critical orthodox have confidently followed this tradition. The letters are declared to be pseudonymous or deuteropauline, that is to say, composed by a disciple of Paul who attributed them to the pen of his master.

Yet the older view that these letters are authentically Pauline refuses to go away. During the twentieth century, and particularly during its last fifty years, a vigorous defence has been mounted by both Protestant and Catholic scholars. Some of the most notable are Newport J. D. White (1910), Walter Lock (1924), Joachim Jeremias (1934), C. Spicq (1947), E. K. Simpson (1954), Donald Guthrie (1957), William Hendricksen (1957), J. N. D. Kelly (1963), Gordon D. Fee (1984), Thomas C. Oden (1989), George W. Knight (1992) and Philip H. Towner (1994).

Perhaps the most helpful way to handle this controversy here will be to rehearse briefly the case for and against Pauline authorship, and for and against pseudonymity, and then to consider the possible contribution to the writing of Paul's letters made by his amanuensis.

### 1. The case for Pauline authorship

This case has always rested on two grounds—internal (the claims which the letters make that they were written by the apostle) and external (the acceptance of the letters as genuine by the church from the earliest days until the last century).

#### a. Internal evidence

The internal evidence is plain, and is so comprehensive that the theory of pseudonymity would credit Paul's imitator with historical and literary genius. All three letters begin with the announcement of Paul's name as author, and go on to identify him as 'an apostle of Jesus Christ'. Both letters to Timothy add that his apostleship is by God's 'command' or 'will'. The letters then purport to be addressed to Timothy and Titus, whom Paul has stationed in Ephesus and Crete respectively, in order to silence false teachers (1 Tim. 1:3ff.) and appoint true teachers in their place (Tit. 1:5ff.). Paul also indicates his affectionate relationship with his delegates by calling each either his 'dear son' or his 'true son'. This is the framework; are we really to believe that it was all fabricated?

1 Timothy and Titus, with which we are concerned in this book, contain apostolic directions relating to the doctrinal, ethical and pastoral welfare of the churches. This is especially the case in 1 Timothy in which Paul twice states his intention to visit Timothy personally (3:14; 4:13)—a statement which Professor Moule calls 'a piece of gratuitous irony and in bad taste' if it was made up by a pseudonymous writer.<sup>[1]</sup> Interspersed with his instructions to Timothy the apostle makes a number of personal references to his ordination (1:18; 4:14), his youthfulness (4:11ff.) and his gastric problems (5:23), as also to his own former violent persecution of the church and marvellous conversion and commissioning by the sheer mercy of God (1:12ff.). He concludes his letter with a poignant appeal to Timothy to lead a life appropriate to a man of God (6:11ff.) and especially to guard the deposit of truth committed to him (6:20).

In the letter to Titus, which probably comes next chronologically, there are fewer personal references. Yet Paul carefully adapts his instructions to Titus' particular circumstances in Crete (1:10ff.), and seeks to regulate the Christian behaviour of different groups in the church (2:1ff.). He ends his letter with specific messages to or about four named individuals. He is proposing to send either Artemas or Tychicus to Titus to relieve him, so that he can join Paul in Nicopolis (3:12), and Titus is to help Zenas and Apollos on their way (3:13).

The second letter to Timothy is the most personal of the three; it claims to be the apostle's farewell message to Timothy shortly before his anticipated execution (1:13; 2:2; 3:14; 4:1ff., 6ff.). In addition, he recalls Timothy's tears, the faith and ministry of his mother and grandmother (1:4ff.), and his personal knowledge of the apostle's teaching, lifestyle and sufferings (3:10ff.). He begs Timothy twice to come to him, especially before winter will make navigation impossible (4:9, 21). He then mentions no fewer than seventeen friends by name, adding either news of them or requests or greetings to them.

Are we to suppose that all these specific and personal references were made up? Some scholars do not hesitate to say so. Here, for example, is L. R. Donelson: 'In the interest of deception he [sc. the pseudonymous author] fabricated all the personal notes.'<sup>[2]</sup> Others defend their authenticity, but have to resort to ingenious theories as to how they were first preserved and then incorporated into the letters. It is much more natural to hold that all the specifics about Paul, Timothy, Titus, Ephesus, Crete and other people, places and situations, are authentic parts of an authentic letter. Above all, as Bishop Handley Moule wrote about 2 Timothy: 'The human heart is in it everywhere. And fabricators, certainly of that age, did not well understand the human heart.'<sup>[3]</sup>

#### b. External evidence

Turning now to the external evidence for the Pauline authorship of the Pastorals, we find that their genuineness was almost universally accepted by the church from the beginning. The first probable allusions to them are to be found in letters from Clement of Rome to the Corinthians (c. ad 95), from Ignatius of Antioch to the Ephesians (c. ad 110), and from Polycarp to the Philippians (c. ad 117). Then towards the end of the second century there are a number of indisputable quotations from all three Pastorals in Irenaeus' work *Against Heresies*. The *Muratorian Canon* (c. 200 ad), which lists the books of the New Testament, ascribes all three letters to Paul. The only exception to this positive witness occurs in Marcion, who was excommunicated as a heretic in 144 ad in Rome, on account of his rejection of most of the Old Testament and of Old Testament references in the New Testament. So he had theological grounds for repudiating the Pastorals, not least their teaching about the goodness of creation (1 Tim. 4:1ff.).

This external witness to the authenticity of the three Pastoral Letters continued as an unbroken tradition until Friedrich Schleiermacher rejected 1 Timothy in 1807 and F. C. Baur rejected all three letters in 1835. The question now is whether the case against the Pauline authorship can overthrow the strong internal and external evidence for it.

## 2. The case against Pauline authorship

The arguments put forward against the Pauline authorship of the Pastorals may be summed up as historical, linguistic, theological and ethical. We need to consider each in turn.

### a. History

As we have seen, the text of 1 Timothy and Titus claims to furnish readers with the information they need about the historical circumstances of their composition.

Paul states that, when he went into Macedonia, he urged Timothy to stay in Ephesus in order to curb its rampant heresy, and that similarly he had left Titus in Crete in order to complete what had been left incomplete, especially in the appointment of suitable elders in every town. But when did these events take place, involving Macedonia, Ephesus and Crete? When too did Paul winter in Nicopolis (Tit. 3:12), leave his cloak and scrolls behind in Troas (2 Tim. 4:13), and abandon Trophimus in Miletus when he was ill (2 Tim. 4:20)? It is simply not possible (though valiant attempts have been made) to fit Pauline visits to these places into Luke's record in the Acts. And where are we to place his stay, imprisonment and trial in Rome (2 Tim. 1:16ff.; 4:16ff.)?

It is this difficulty of reconciling the historical and geographical references in the Pastorals with Luke's narrative which has led some scholars to reject the notion that they have been invented and to revive instead the chronology developed by Eusebius in his famous fourth-century *Ecclesiastical History*. He wrote that Paul was released at the end of his two-year period of house arrest, where Luke takes leave of him,<sup>[4]</sup> and that he then resumed his missionary travels, penetrating even as far as Spain as he had hoped,<sup>[5]</sup> before being re-arrested, re-imprisoned, re-tried and finally condemned and beheaded. Although this reconstruction is somewhat speculative, depending almost entirely on Eusebius, it provides a framework into which the historical allusions in the Pastorals can quite easily be fitted, without needing to accuse the author of blunder, fiction or romance.

### b. Vocabulary

In 1921 P. N. Harrison's book *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles* was published. It is very largely a linguistic study. He advances four main arguments against Pauline authorship.

First, of 848 words which occur in the Pastorals as many as 306 are not to be found in the other ten letters attributed to Paul. Further, there is in the Pastorals a higher number (175) of hapaxes (*hapax legomena*, words occurring only once) than in any other Pauline letter. These linguistic peculiarities of the Pastorals create 'very serious doubts indeed' about common authorship.

Secondly, only 542 words occur in both the Pastorals and the other ten Pauline letters. This extraordinarily small common usage strongly suggests that the Pastorals were written by another hand.

Thirdly, the number of genuinely Pauline words which are absent from the Pastorals is 1,635, of which 580 are peculiar to Paul. This omission of so much distinctively Pauline terminology 'constitutes a very serious objection indeed' to an acceptance of the Pauline authorship of the Pastorals.<sup>[6]</sup>

Fourthly, if instead of comparing the vocabulary of the Pastorals with that of the other ten Pauline letters, it is compared with that of the apostolic fathers and the apologists of the first half of the second century AD, the opposite result is obtained. Of the 175 hapaxes in the Pastorals, as many as 94 recur in the early church fathers. Thus, 'the author of the Pastorals does speak the language of the apostolic fathers and the apologists, while diverging from that of the other New Testament writers'<sup>[7]</sup>

P. N. Harrison's main argument is linguistic, both in *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles* (1921) and in his 'companion volume and supplement', *Paulines and Pastorals*, forty-three years later (1964). His painstaking statistical tables, when one recalls that he had no access to a computer, must be judged a *tour de force*. At the same time, he was a great deal too self-confident when he pronounced his conclusion 'rigorously proved scientific fact'.<sup>[8]</sup>

Harrison has had as many critics as converts. Dr Bruce Metzger took him to task in 1958 for ignoring the work of British, German and Swedish scholars who had questioned the validity of arguments which are based purely on statistical study of literary vocabulary, and which are applied to 'relatively brief treatises'.<sup>[9]</sup> Similarly, Professor C. F. D. Moule has written that 'there is no cogent reason for denying Pauline authorship to a letter merely because its vocabulary and style mark it as different from others which are firmly established as genuine'.<sup>[10]</sup> For there are several possible reasons for changes in Paul's language and style. Donald Guthrie summed these up as 'dissimilarity of subject matter', 'advancing age', 'change of environment' and 'difference in the recipients'.<sup>[11]</sup> Besides, as Harrison himself conceded, complete uniformity of vocabulary and style must not be expected in every author, 'least of all in one with a mind so versatile, pliable, original, fresh, impressionable and creative as the apostle'.<sup>[12]</sup> So saying, he seems to contradict his own thesis. As E. K. Simpson justly observed, 'great souls are not their own mimes'.<sup>[13]</sup>

There are two other possible explanations of the linguistic peculiarities of the Pastorals. The first is Paul's use of a secretary in his correspondence, to which I will return later. The second is the surprising degree to which, especially in 1 Timothy, Paul made use of 'pre-formed' material such as doxologies, credal confessions, and hymns, much of it

introduced by tell-tale formulae like ‘this is a trustworthy saying’ or ‘knowing this’. Dr Earle Ellis, who has drawn attention to this phenomenon, calculates that pre-formed material accounts for about 43% of 1 Timothy, 46% of Titus and 16% of 2 Timothy.<sup>[14]</sup>

### c. Doctrine

Some scholars are quite rude in their evaluation of the theology (or lack of it) which they discern in the Pastorals. A. T. Hanson, for example, declares that ‘there is a complete absence of unifying theme’ in the Pastorals, even ‘an impression of relative incoherence’. And the reason for this, he continues, is that the author of the Pastorals ‘had no theology of his own. He is a purveyor of other men’s theology.’<sup>[15]</sup> But this uncomplimentary judgment has been challenged by other scholars, including Dr Frances Young, who finds little difficulty in assembling the theological teaching of these three letters.

Some critics complain that they cannot find in the Pastorals either the trinitarian doctrine of the earlier letters, or the gospel of salvation. But without question the Pastorals set forth the gracious, redeeming initiative of ‘God our Saviour’, who gave his Son to die as our ransom, to redeem us from all evil, and to purify a special people for himself. He justifies us by his grace and renews us by his Spirit, in order that we may live a new life of good works. Dr Philip Towner has argued that salvation as a present reality is the ‘centre point’ of the message of the Pastorals,<sup>[16]</sup> and that the present age, which is the age of salvation, is illumined and inspired by the incarnation and the parousia, the Christ-events which inaugurate and terminate it.<sup>[17]</sup>

Very different is the assessment of Professor Ernst Käsemann who writes that he cannot regard as Pauline letters in which the church has become ‘the central theme of theology’, ‘the gospel is domesticated’, and Paul’s image has become ‘heavily daubed by church piety’.<sup>[18]</sup> One can only respond that this is an extremely subjective judgment. Paul’s earliest letters already evidenced his high doctrine of church and ministry, and Luke tells us it was his policy to ordain elders in every church from the first missionary journey onwards.<sup>[19]</sup> His further instructions in the Pastorals about the selection and appointment of pastors, about the conduct of public worship in the local church, and about the maintenance of sound doctrine, are entirely compatible with this. It is simply not true that the church structures envisaged by Paul in the Pastorals are those of the second century, including the rise of the monarchical episcopate associated with Bishop Ignatius (c. AD 110). In the Pastorals there is no threefold order of bishops, presbyters and deacons, for bishops and presbyters are still the same person and office.

### d. Ethics

It was Martin Dibelius who first applied the epithet ‘bourgeois’ to the Christian lifestyle envisaged in the Pastorals. And ‘of course if bourgeois’, Professor J. H. Houlden added, ‘then certainly *petit bourgeois*’.<sup>[20]</sup> Robert Karris has also written about the ‘middle-class ethic’ of the Pastorals.<sup>[21]</sup> What these scholars are referring to is the atmosphere of respectability, of conformity to prevailing social values, which they feel permeates the ethical instruction of the Pastorals. And it is quite true that the author is concerned about the church’s public image, and about its *eusebeia*, which sometimes means personal godliness but at other times seems to be a synonym for ‘religion’.

On the other hand, there is great emphasis in the Pastorals, as in all Pauline letters, on the paramount Christian qualities of faith and love, and on the purity, the good works and the future hope to which they give rise. Commitment to Christ still has radical consequences; we are pilgrims travelling home to God, and summoned to live this life in the light of the next (e.g. 1 Tim. 4:8; 6:7f., 19).

Dr Towner, in his monograph *The Goal of Our Instruction*, subtitled *The Structure of Theology and Ethics of the Pastoral Epistles*, registers a salutary protest against those who interpret the Pastorals as giving evidence of a ‘bourgeois Christianity’, ‘a Christianity which sought little more than to live comfortably in the world’,<sup>[22]</sup> and a self-centred Christianity without mission. On the contrary, the ‘Christian existence’ for which Paul called is a combination of theology and ethics, which originates in the Christ-event and the salvation he achieved, and which directly counters the perversions of behaviour introduced by the false teachers. Instead, it lays down concrete duties for different groups, and is constantly motivated by the Christian mission.<sup>[23]</sup>

Having considered the language, doctrine and ethics of the Pastoral Letters, we should be able to agree with Dr J. N. D. Kelly that ‘the anti-Pauline case has surely been greatly exaggerated’.<sup>[24]</sup> The differences of vocabulary do not necessarily demand a different author; there are other possible explanations. In regard to theology too, ‘the critics seem to have overplayed their hand. Not only are the discrepancies fewer than they claim, but several of the more important are found on inspection to represent developments of ideas already present in the earlier correspondence.’<sup>[25]</sup>

There is still the possibility of pseudonymity, however, to which we now turn.

## 3. The case for and against a pseudonymous author

Everybody is agreed that in the Graeco-Roman world the practice of pseudonymity, that is, the false attribution of literary works to a great teacher of the past, was widespread. What is not so generally agreed is whether pseudonymous writing was always with a view to deception.

### a. An attempted reconstruction

P. N. Harrison posited as the pseudonymous author of the Pastorals 'a devout, sincere and earnest Paulinist', who lived in Rome or Ephesus, and who wrote the Pastorals at the beginning of the reign of the Emperor Hadrian (ad 117). He knew and had studied every one of the ten Pauline letters, and in addition he had access to 'several brief personal notes' written by Paul to Timothy and Titus. 'He believed honestly and wholeheartedly the Pauline gospel as he understood it.'<sup>26</sup> Faced with the doctrinal and ethical challenges of false teaching, he and 'the best minds in the church' longed for 'a return of the old apostolic fervour and sanctity' and for 'a rekindling of the heroic courage' of Paul. They considered that the best way to promote this would be 'a letter written in the spirit, bearing the name, and recalling the very familiar words, of the great apostle.'<sup>27</sup> If this is correct, the Pastoral Letters are 'neither "genuine" (meaning the firsthand work of St. Paul), nor "spurious" (meaning the work of a forger), but "pseudonymous" (meaning the work of one who made no secret of the fact that he was writing under an assumed name)'.<sup>28</sup>

P. N. Harrison was also convinced that the very personal passages in the three Pastoral Letters were not fiction, composed by the pseudonymous author, but genuine Pauline fragments which the author, not knowing their original contexts, incorporated into his work. Harrison thought he detected five of these and suggested how they could all be fitted into the Acts narrative.

### ***b. Pseudonymity in the ancient world***

Dr Bruce Metzger has distinguished between 'a literary forgery' and 'a pseudepigraphon'. The former 'is essentially a piece of work created or modified with the intention to deceive'.<sup>29</sup> To which of these two categories would the Pastorals belong if they are pseudonymous? Scholars tend to insist that 'forgery' is an inappropriate word to use. Like P. N. Harrison they hold that the pseudonymous author of the Pastorals 'was not consciously deceiving anybody; it is not indeed necessary to suppose that he did deceive anybody'.<sup>30</sup> In this way Christian scholars defend the concept of pseudepigraphy on the ground that it was an accepted literary genre and a wholly innocent practice. Professor C. F. D. Moule writes of 'what may be called well-intentioned pseudonymity. With no intention to deceive', according to those who hold this view, 'the pseudonymist writes in the name of the apostle, genuinely believing that he is conveying a message that would have been acceptable to the master ...'.<sup>31</sup> But he goes on to write of the insoluble problem of reconciling this concept of 'honest' pseudonymity with the fabrication of the personal Pauline references in the Pastorals.

Dr Metzger too has serious qualms about pseudepigraphy. He asks three searching questions. Ethically, 'is a pseudepigraphon compatible with honesty and candour, whether by ancient or modern moral standards?' Psychologically, 'how should one estimate an author who impersonates an ancient worthy ...?' Theologically, 'should a work that involves a fraud, whether pious or not, be regarded as incompatible with the character of a message from God?'.<sup>32</sup>

It is difficult to maintain the notion of pseudonymity as an accepted and innocent literary procedure.

### ***c. Contemporary Christian responses***

First, although it has become a commonplace ever since Baur for defenders of pseudonymity to maintain that it was an acceptable practice, and that there was no intention to deceive, they yet offer 'no historical evidence for their assertions that New Testament pseudepigrapha were recognised as such and were regarded as innocent compositions ...'.<sup>33</sup> On the contrary, as Dr L. R. Donelson concedes, 'we are forced to admit that in Christian circles pseudonymity was considered a dishonourable device'.<sup>34</sup> A pseudonymous work was either believed and therefore esteemed, or exposed and therefore condemned. There seems to be no evidence that some pseudonymous works were both exposed and esteemed. Several commentators quote the judgment of Serapion, the early third-century bishop of Antioch. Concluding that the *Gospel of Peter* was not genuine, he stated this principle: 'We, brothers, receive both Peter and the other apostles as Christ. But pseudepigrapha in their name we reject ...'

Secondly, the claim that a pseudepigrapher did not intend to deceive, and indeed did not deceive, appears to be self-defeating. If nobody was deceived, what was the point of the subterfuge?

Thirdly, in spite of confident assurances about the innocence of pseudepigraphy, many of us find that our consciences are not so readily pacified. We remember that Scripture lays constant emphasis on the sacredness of truth and the sinfulness of false witness. We are not comfortable with the notions of a deceit which does not deceive and a pseudepigraphon which is not a forgery. 'The dictionary definition of "forgery" is fraudulent imitation,' writes Dr J. I. Packer, 'whatever people's aims and incentives may be. 'Frauds are still fraudulent, even when perpetrated from noble motives.'<sup>35</sup>

## **4. The case for an active amanuensis**

A number of scholars refer to a work by Otto Roller whose short title is *Das Formular* (1933). It investigates Paul's letters in the light of letter-writing practices in antiquity, especially his use of an amanuensis. I rely on Professor Moule's summary.<sup>36</sup> Roller's conclusion was that verbatim dictation would have been too laborious for most authors, and extremely inhibiting to 'a torrential thinker like Paul'. It is more probable, therefore, first that the apostle would write part of each letter in his own hand (as at the end of Galatians), secondly that elsewhere he would tell his amanuensis what he wanted to say, letting him frame it in his own words, and thirdly that the apostle would read the end-product, amend it as necessary, and sign it personally. Professor Moule proposes this as a solution to the linguistic problem of the Pastorals, in that Paul would have allowed his secretary to fluctuate between free composition and a near-verbatim reproduction of Paul's own phraseology.

This general thesis has been considerably elaborated by Dr E. Randolph Richards in his work *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (1991). From a thorough study of letter-writing practices in Graeco-Roman antiquity, and especially of the letters of Cicero, he demonstrates that the writer 'could grant to the secretary complete, much, little or no control over the content, style and/or form of the letter'.<sup>[37]</sup> He then reduces this spectrum into a fourfold classification. The secretary might serve as 'recorder' (taking down the author's dictation verbatim), 'editor' (working from his instructions, or from an oral or written draft supplied by him), 'co-author' (co-operating with him fully in content, style and vocabulary), or 'composer' (having the whole task delegated by him). The first procedure Dr Richards calls 'author-controlled', the fourth 'secretary-controlled' and the middle two 'secretary-assisted'.<sup>[38]</sup>

For our purposes the first is eliminated, since verbatim dictation would leave no room for changes in vocabulary. So is the last, since a free composition would destroy Pauline authorship altogether, whereas we are asking whether the secretary hypothesis could explain the phenomenon of Pauline and non-Pauline words alongside one another. The reality is likely to be found in the middle two 'secretary-assisted' processes. The difference between them is only one of degree,<sup>[39]</sup> yet the second ('editor') seems to me to take precedence over the third ('co-author') for a reason we must now consider.

It has often been observed that in most of Paul's letters he associates a colleague with him in its writing, e.g. Sosthenes,<sup>[40]</sup> Timothy,<sup>[41]</sup> and Silas and Timothy.<sup>[42]</sup> Although Paul calls his missionary associates 'co-labourers', it would be misleading to call them 'co-authors'. For Paul was careful to affirm his own apostolic authority as the author, and to distinguish his colleagues from him (since they were not apostles) by referring to them as 'our brother Sosthenes' or 'Timothy our brother'. The Thessalonian letters are significant in this respect. Although they both begin with 'Paul, Silas and Timothy', and although the first person plural 'we' is used much of the time, it is nevertheless plain that the leadership role and apostolic authority were Paul's. So he frequently lapses from 'we' to 'I'.<sup>[43]</sup> The end of the second letter puts the matter beyond doubt: 'I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.'<sup>[44]</sup> So the letter was essentially *his* letter, written with *his* apostolic authority. Paul, Silas and Timothy were not joint authors, although there is no reason to deny that Paul may have involved them in the writing process, by encouraging them to contribute their thoughts to it.

An amanuensis, however, was different: Not only did he undertake the actual mechanics of the writing, but Paul may have given him some liberty in clothing the apostle's thought with words. It is possible that this was the arrangement when Tertius wrote down the letter to the Romans.<sup>[45]</sup> But the only specific New Testament reference to this practice is the apostle Peter's statement that he had written his first letter 'with the help of Silas',<sup>[46]</sup> literally 'through Silas', whom he regarded, he adds, as 'a faithful brother'.

However much or little an amanuensis would contribute to the letter, we may assume that the apostle read it when it was complete, amended what needed to be changed, and endorsed its final form by his personal signature, so that the letter was decidedly his and not somebody else's. Each author-amanuensis duo would develop differently, and presumably the more 'faithful' the brother was perceived to be, the more responsible his contribution would become. A. T. Hanson was a bit cynical to write about the Pastorals that 'the more you attribute to the secretary, the less Pauline they are'.<sup>[47]</sup> But the principle is clear: we expect that the amanuensis contributed enough to explain the variations in style and language, but not enough to take over from Paul either the authorship or the authority of the letters.

So who was the amanuensis in the writing of the Pastorals?

P. N. Harrison asked himself in 1921 whether Paul's amanuensis on this occasion might have been Luke, since nobody else was with him.<sup>[48]</sup> But he raised the possibility only to dismiss it. So Professor C. F. D. Moule, who had already in his book *The Birth of the New Testament* (1962) asked himself if there might have been some Lucan involvement in the writing of the Pastorals, developed in a 1964 lecture a theory of Luke's 'free composition' of the Pastorals. He suggested 'that Luke wrote all three Pastoral epistles ... during Paul's lifetime, at Paul's behest, and, in part (but only in part) at Paul's dictation'.<sup>[49]</sup> He then went on to list some very interesting parallels between Luke-Acts and the Pastorals.<sup>[50]</sup>—'significant words' (e.g. soundness, godliness and honour), 'significant phrases' (e.g. love of money, true and false riches, Christ the judge of the living and the dead, and the athlete finishing the race), and 'significant ideas' (e.g. the 'triple phrase of majesty', angels being mentioned with God and Christ, and a retributive notion of justice). Perhaps then Luke could be called the 'framer' of the Pastorals.<sup>[51]</sup> Pseudepigraphs were normally composed after the death of the person named, whereas Luke wrote (according to this theory) in Paul's lifetime and at his behest.

Other scholars have taken up and developed Professor Moule's suggestion that Luke was Paul's amanuensis in drafting the Pastorals. Particular mention should be made of Dr Stephen Wilson's book *Luke and the Pastoral Epistles* (1979). He builds on Professor Moule's theory, although he thinks that the Luke who wrote the Acts and later the Pastorals was not Paul's companion of the same name. He draws attention to similarities of language and style between Luke-Acts and the Pastorals, and to a number of theological parallels (though with differences of emphasis), e.g. eschatology, salvation, Christian citizenship, church and ministry, Christology, law and Scripture. His over-confident conclusion is that 'certainly, given a choice between Paul and Luke as the author of the Pastorals, Luke is a far more likely candidate'.<sup>[52]</sup> His tentative hypothesis is that Luke wrote the Pastorals a few years after Acts, making use of Paul's 'travel notes' which he had found. In this way the Pastorals were volume 3 of a trilogy, following the publication of Luke's Gospel and Acts. The alternative would be 'common authorship' with Luke writing under Paul's direction, as Professor Moule had proposed.

## 5. Conclusion

Our investigation leads us to a fourfold conclusion.

(1) The case for the Pauline authorship of the Pastorals still stands. Both the internal claims and the external witness are strong, substantial and stubborn. The burden of proof rests on those who deny them.

(2) The case against the Pauline authorship is far from watertight. The arguments adduced—historical, linguistic, theological and ethical—can all be answered. They are not sufficient to overthrow the case for the Pauline authorship.

(3) The case for pseudonymous authorship is unsatisfying. The belief that well-intentioned, even transparently innocent, pseudepigraphy was acceptable lacks evidence. It also raises serious moral questions about the practice of deliberate deceit.

(4) The case for Paul's constructive use of an amanuensis (whether Luke or Tychicus or somebody else) is reasonable, and may well account for some variations in style and vocabulary. At the same time, the amanuensis must not be allowed to oust the author, nor the author be robbed of his leadership role and apostolic authority.

The most likely scenario is that Paul the apostle wrote the three Pastorals, towards the end of his life, addressing contemporary issues, and communicating through a trusted amanuensis.



## A. The Message of 1 Timothy

### The life of the local church

#### Introduction (1 Timothy 1:1–2)

Most readers find Timothy a very congenial character. We feel that he is one of us in all our frailty. He was very far from being a stained-glass saint. A halo would not have fitted comfortably on his head. No, the evidence is plain that he was a real human being like us, with all the infirmity and vulnerability which that entails.

To begin with, he was still comparatively young when Paul addressed this letter to him, for he told him not to let anyone look down on him on account of his youth (4:12), and some two years later he urged him to ‘flee the evil desires of youth’ (2 Tim. 2:22). So how old was he? It seems unlikely that the apostle would have invited Timothy to join his mission team before he had reached his late teens or early twenties,<sup>[1]</sup> in which case now, about thirteen or fourteen years later, he would be in his mid-thirties. The ancients regarded this as being still within the limits of ‘youth’ (*neotēs*). According to Irenaeus, ‘thirty is the first stage of a young man’s age, and extends to forty, as all will admit’<sup>[2]</sup> Nevertheless, Timothy evidently felt inexperienced and immature for the heavy responsibility which Paul was laying upon him.

Secondly, he was temperamentally shy, needing affirmation, encouragement and reassurance. So a few years previously Paul had urged the Corinthians to ‘put him at his ease’ when he came to them.<sup>[3]</sup> And in his second letter to Timothy he felt the need to exhort him not to be ashamed of Christ, since God had not given us ‘a spirit of timidity’ (1:7f.). It is not unfair, therefore, to think of him as ‘timid Timothy’.

Thirdly, Timothy was physically infirm, and suffered from a recurrent gastric problem. For Paul referred to his habitual ailments, in particular to his stomach. He even prescribed a little medicinal alcohol: ‘Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses’ (5:23).

So this is the profile of Timothy which we can construct from a number of Paul’s references to him. He was young, diffident and frail. These three handicaps might have been thought to disqualify him from taking charge of the churches in and around Ephesus. But they endear him to us, and the grace of God was sufficient for his need: ‘You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus’ (2 Tim. 2:1).

Paul was expecting to visit Timothy in Ephesus soon, and would then of course, as an apostle, assume responsibility for the churches. But he seems to have anticipated the possibility of being delayed, and so sends Timothy these written instructions, so that during his absence Timothy would know how to regulate the life of the churches (3:14f.; 4:13). This letter, therefore, although addressed to Timothy personally, is not a private communication. It is written to him in his official capacity, and throughout it Paul is looking beyond Timothy to the churches. One clear hint of this is that his final greeting is couched in the plural: ‘Grace be with you’ (*meth’ hymōn*, 6:21). Augustine in the fourth century and Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth both used the adjective ‘pastoral’ in relation to one or other of these letters, although not until 1703 did D. N. Berdot refer to the three of them as ‘the Pastoral Epistles’.

It is an appropriate expression, since the letters are concerned with the pastoral care and oversight of local churches. The apostle addresses six main topics. The first is the church’s *doctrine* and how to preserve it intact, uncorrupted by false teaching (1:3–20). The second is the church’s *public worship*, its global intercession for all humankind, together with the roles of men and women in the conduct of it (2:1–15). Thirdly, the apostle writes about the church’s *pastorate*, and in particular the conditions of eligibility for presbyters and deacons (3:1–16). Fourthly, after outlining the church’s moral instruction, which arises naturally from the doctrine of creation and calls for personal godliness (4:1–10), Paul addresses himself to the church’s *local leadership*, specially how younger leaders can ensure that their teaching is listened to and not despised (4:11–5:2). Fifthly, the apostle handles the church’s *social responsibilities*, not only to widows, but also to elders and to slaves (5:3–6:2). His sixth and final concern, in reaction to those who think ‘that godliness is a means to financial gain’, is the church’s attitude to *material possessions* (6:3–21); he addresses both the covetous and the wealthy.

Here is wisdom for the local church in every generation and every place. Let no-one say that Scripture is out of date. Calvin, when dedicating his commentary to the Duke of Somerset in 1556, called this letter ‘highly relevant to our own times’.<sup>[4]</sup> More than 400 years later we can make the same claim. Truly ‘the Bible speaks today’.

The beginning of the letter is conventional. Paul announces himself as the author, Timothy as his correspondent, and God as the source of the grace, mercy and peace which he wishes him to enjoy. He thus describes the letter’s three *dramatis personae*. He is not content, however, with a bare greeting like ‘Paul to Timothy: grace’; each of the three persons involved is elaborated.

In nine out of his thirteen New Testament letters Paul designates himself *an apostle of Christ Jesus*, and usually adds a reference to the call, commission, command or will of God. Here it is *by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope* (1). Thus Paul claims to be an apostle of Christ on a level with the Twelve, whom Jesus had named ‘apostles’.<sup>[5]</sup> with all the teaching authority which this represented. He had emphatically not appointed himself. Nor had he been appointed by the church. He was not one of the ‘apostles of the churches’<sup>[6]</sup> whom today we might call ‘missionaries’. On the contrary, he was an apostle of Christ, chosen, called, appointed, equipped and authorized directly by Christ, without any ecclesiastical mediation. To put the matter beyond dispute or misunderstanding, Paul adds that God the Father was involved with Christ Jesus in commissioning him; it was by their command that he was an apostle. This formula *by the command of (kat’ epitagēn)* was apparently used on official notices, meaning ‘by order of’,<sup>[7]</sup> and Lock



says it 'suggests a royal command which must be obeyed'.<sup>[8]</sup>

Further, Paul locates his apostleship in a historical context, whose beginning was the saving activity of *God our Saviour* in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus, and whose culmination will be *Christ Jesus our hope*, his personal and glorious coming, which is the object of our Christian hope, and which will bring down the curtain on the historical process. Paul may even imply that the interval between these two termini will be filled with the spread of the apostolic gospel throughout the world.

Paul now designates *Timothy as my true son in the faith*. For if Paul is an authentic apostle of Christ, Timothy is an authentic son of Paul. *Gnēsios* ('true' or 'genuine') was used literally of children 'born in wedlock, legitimate' (BAGD). It is possible, therefore, that Paul is hinting at the circumstances of Timothy's physical birth. Since his father was a Greek, Jewish law will have regarded him as illegitimate. Spiritually, however, Timothy is Paul's genuine child, partly because he was responsible for his conversion and partly because Timothy has faithfully followed his teaching and example.<sup>[9]</sup> By affirming Timothy's genuineness Paul aims to reinforce his authority in the church.

After describing himself and Timothy, Paul refers to the God who binds them together in his family. What unites them is their common share in *grace, mercy and peace*. Each word tells us something about the human condition. For 'grace' is God's kindness to the guilty and undeserving, 'mercy' his pity on the wretched who cannot save themselves, and 'peace' his reconciliation of those who were previously alienated from him and from one another. All three issue from the same spring, namely *God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* (2b). Thus Father and Son are now bracketed as the single source of divine blessing, as they were in verse 1 as the single author of the divine command which constituted Paul an apostle.

## 1. Apostolic doctrine (1 Timothy 1:3–20)

This opening section sets the historical and geographical scene for the letter. It speaks of a visit by Paul to Macedonia and of a stay by Timothy in Ephesus. Since these events cannot be fitted into Luke's narrative in Acts, commentators have assumed from the earliest days of the church that Paul was released after those two years under house arrest in Rome, in which Luke takes leave of him.<sup>[1]</sup> and that he resumed his travels. *I went into Macedonia*, he writes, and at the same time *I urged you to stay there in Ephesus* (3a). We cannot say for certain whether Paul was himself in Ephesus when he exhorted Timothy to stay there. What is clear is that, however and whenever Paul issued his original spoken appeal to Timothy, he is now confirming it in writing. The reason for this arrangement was in general that Timothy might regulate the affairs of the churches of Ephesus, and in particular that he might *command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer ...* (3b).

Paul's preoccupation in this first chapter is with the importance of maintaining true or 'sound' doctrine, and of refuting 'false' doctrine. This differentiation strikes a discordant note at the end of the twentieth century. It is not only that most societies are increasingly pluralistic in fact (an ethnic and religious mix), but that 'pluralism' as an ideology is increasingly advocated as 'politically correct'. This affirms the independent validity of every religion as a culturally conditioned phenomenon, and frowns on any attempt to convert people. Indeed, one of the chief tenets of 'postmodernism' is that there is no such thing as objective truth, let alone universal and eternal truth. On the contrary, everybody has his or her own truth. You have yours, and I have mine, and they may diverge widely from each other, even contradict each other. In consequence, the most prized virtue is tolerance. It tolerates everything except the intolerance of those who insist that certain ideas are true and others false, while certain practices are good and others evil.

No follower of Jesus Christ can possibly embrace this complete subjectivism. For he said he was the truth, that he had come to bear witness to the truth, that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and that the truth will set us free.<sup>[2]</sup> So truth matters, the truth which God has revealed through Christ and by the Spirit. Jesus also told us to beware of false teachers. So did his apostles.

Indeed, Paul urges Timothy to stay in Ephesus precisely in order to stop the spread of false teaching. He calls these teachers' activity *heterodidaskaleō* (a verb he may well have coined), teaching doctrine which is *heteros*, which means not primarily that it is 'false' (NIV) or 'strange' (JB) or 'erroneous' (REB) or 'new' (JBP), but that it is 'different' (NRSV) from the teaching of the apostles. Similarly, Paul complained that the Galatians had deserted the grace of Christ for 'a different gospel'<sup>[3]</sup> and that the Corinthians were being led astray to a 'different Jesus', 'a different Spirit' and 'a different gospel' from those they had first received.<sup>[4]</sup>

The verb *heterodidaskaleō*, which Paul uses both in 1:3 and in 6:3, clearly indicates that there is a norm of doctrine from which the false teachers had deviated. It is variously designated in the Pastorals. It is called 'the faith',<sup>[5]</sup> 'the truth',<sup>[6]</sup> 'the sound doctrine',<sup>[7]</sup> 'the teaching',<sup>[8]</sup> and 'the good deposit'.<sup>[9]</sup> In nearly every one of these expressions the noun is preceded by the definite article, indicating that already a body of doctrine existed which was an agreed standard by which all teaching could be tested and judged. It was the teaching of Christ<sup>[10]</sup> and of his apostles.<sup>[11]</sup>

What Paul does in this first chapter is to refer successively to three teachers or groups of teachers. First, he describes the false teachers and their misguided use of the law (3–11). Secondly, he alludes to himself, previously a persecutor of Christ but now an apostle of Christ, and to the gospel he preached (12–17). Thirdly, he addresses Timothy and urges him to fight the good fight of the truth (18–20). Moreover, the whole passage is extremely personal. Paul begins each paragraph with a verb in the first person singular: 'I urged you ...' (3), 'I thank Christ Jesus our Lord' (12), and 'I give you this instruction' (18).

## 1. The false teachers and the law (1:3–11)

Paul's prediction some five years previously that 'savage wolves' would enter and devastate Christ's flock in Ephesus<sup>[12]</sup> had come true. But who were they? And what were they teaching?

Paul writes that they want to be teachers of the law (7). Thus the *heterodidaskaloi* (false teachers) are now identified as *nomodidaskaloi* (law-teachers). This latter word can denote a perfectly legitimate activity, however. Luke uses it of the scribes who taught the Mosaic law<sup>[13]</sup> and even of the illustrious Gamaliel.<sup>[14]</sup> So what is wrong with teaching the law? There is actually a great need in our day for Christian teachers of the moral law (the Ten Commandments as expounded by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount), for it is through the teaching of the law that we both come to a consciousness of our sin and learn the implications of loving our neighbour.<sup>[15]</sup> Indeed, *we know that the law is good if one uses it properly* (8).<sup>[16]</sup> Evidently, then, there is both a right and a wrong, a legitimate and an illegitimate, use of the law. First, we ask what were the false teachers doing with the law which was wrong?

### a. The wrong use of the law

Timothy is to command the false teachers not to *devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies* (4). *Mythoi* meant legends or fables, which Paul later categorized as 'godless myths and old wives' tales' (4:7), as 'Jewish myths',<sup>[17]</sup> and as an alternative to 'the truth'.<sup>[18]</sup> The word *genealogies*, on the other hand, most naturally refers to those in Genesis, which trace the descent and so the pedigree of the patriarchs. Lock may well be right to urge that these two words 'be taken closely together, *mythoi* being defined by *genealogiai*, legendary stories about genealogies', which were handed down in the Haggada or rabbinical tradition.<sup>[19]</sup>

Two ancient Jewish documents may throw light on what Paul is referring to. The first is *The Book of Jubilees*,<sup>[20]</sup> which is dated between 135 and 105 BC, and which retells from a Pharisaic perspective the Old Testament story from the creation of the world to the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai. It divides this history into 'jubilees' (periods of forty-nine years) and asserts the uniqueness of Israel among the nations. The second book is *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo*,<sup>[21]</sup> although M. R. James calls its attribution to Philo 'wholly unfounded and quite ridiculous'.<sup>[22]</sup> Dating from soon after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, it retells even more of the Old Testament story, from the creation of Adam to the death of Saul. Its chief objective is to maintain the eternal validity of the law against the encroachments of Hellenism.

So both books are tendentious rewrites of a section of Old Testament history. Both stress the indestructibility of Israel and of the law. And both embellish their story with fanciful additions. The author of *The Biblical Antiquities* supplements the biblical narrative 'by means of his fabulous genealogies',<sup>[23]</sup> which occupy chapters 1, 2, 4 and 8. Similarly *The Book of Jubilees* supplies us with the names of all the children of Adam and Eve, of Enoch's family, of Noah's predecessors and descendants, and of the seventy people who went down into Egypt.

It may be, then, that it is to this kind of fanciful literature that Paul is referring when he writes of law, myths and genealogies. It certainly seems that the false teaching was primarily a Jewish aberration, which is confirmed by the naming of 'the circumcision group'.<sup>[24]</sup> At the same time, the law-teachers were not the 'Judaizers' whom Paul had opposed in Galatians, and who taught salvation by law-obedience, for there is no hint in the Pastorals of a recurrence of this controversy. They may have been allegorizers. They were certainly speculators. They treated the law (that is, the Old Testament) as a happy hunting-ground for their conjectures. To Paul their whole approach was frivolous; God had given his law to his people for a much more serious purpose.

At the same time, the false teachers showed Gnostic as well as Jewish tendencies. For example, they were forbidding marriage and enjoining abstinence from certain foods (4:3f.). This indicated a false asceticism which was incompatible with the doctrine of creation and symptomatic of the Gnostic rejection of matter as evil. Some of the early church fathers, especially Irenaeus and Tertullian, followed up this clue. Both claimed that Paul was referring in 1 Timothy 1 to the full-blown Gnosticism of their day at the end of the second century, and both mentioned by name the learned Gnostic leader from Egypt, Valentinus. 'When he [*sc.* Paul] mentions endless genealogies, we recognise Valentinus,' writes

Tertullian.<sup>[25]</sup> Both also gave a brief account of the Gnostic system: that matter is evil; that the supreme God could therefore not have been the Creator; that the gulf between him and the world was spanned by a succession of intermediaries called 'aeons'; that one of them was far enough removed from God to create the material world; and that these constituted 'the fabulous genealogy of thirty aeons'.<sup>[26]</sup>

There are two main problems with this reconstruction. The first is that Paul was not predicting the future phenomenon of developed second-century Gnosticism, but was describing a reality with which Timothy had to deal in his own day, in which Gnosticism had only begun to develop. Secondly, there is no evidence that the Gnostics ever referred to the aeons as 'genealogies', as Irenaeus and Tertullian do. All we can say in conclusion is that Paul's references suggest a false teaching which combined Jewish and Gnostic elements, either 'a Gnosticizing Judaism' or 'Judaizing forms of Gnosticism'.<sup>[27]</sup>

Paul now indicates two consequences of the false teaching, which are enough in themselves to condemn it. It obstructs both faith and love. Myths and genealogies *promote controversies* (4), he writes. The word is *ekzētesis* which can mean either 'controversy' (NIV)<sup>[28]</sup> or 'useless speculation' (BAGD). In fact, it seems to combine both notions.

On the one hand, false teaching promotes 'speculation' *rather than God's work—which is by faith* (4b). 'Work' translates *oikonomia*, which can be rendered either 'stewardship' or 'plan' (REB). The reference seems to be to God's

revealed plan of salvation, of which we are stewards, and to which we must respond by faith. For speculation raises doubts, while revelation evokes faith.

On the other hand, false teaching promotes ‘controversies’, ‘arguments and quarrels about the law’,<sup>[29]</sup> whereas the goal of this command, or perhaps ‘the end of all Christian moral preaching’,<sup>[30]</sup> is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (5). Such love, issuing from the inner springs of our heart, conscience and faith, is uncontaminated by false or even mixed motives. *Some have wandered away from these* (the pure heart, clear conscience and genuine faith) *and turned to meaningless talk*. Both verbs mean either to ‘swerve’ (*astochēō*) or to ‘turn aside’ (*ektrepō*) and indicate the importance of maintaining a straight course.

Thus Paul paints a double contrast, between speculation and faith in God’s revelation, and between controversy and love for one another. Here are two practical tests for us to apply to all teaching. The first is the test of faith: does it come from God, being in agreement with apostolic doctrine (so that it may be received by faith), or is it the product of fertile human imagination? The second is the test of love: does it promote unity in the body of Christ, or if not (since truth itself can divide), is it irresponsibly divisive? ‘Faith’ means that we receive it from God; ‘love’ means that it builds up the church. ‘He judges doctrine by its fruit.’<sup>[31]</sup> The ultimate criteria by which to judge any teaching are whether it promotes the glory of God and the good of the church. The doctrine of the false teachers did neither. It promoted speculation and controversy instead.

### **b. The right use of the law**

We turn now from the wrong use of the law to its right use. The false teachers, who *want to be teachers of the law ... do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm* (7, ‘about which they are so dogmatic’, REB). In contrast to their ignorance, however, Paul sets his knowledge. *We know that the law is good if one uses it properly* (8, *nominōs*, ‘lawfully’). *We also know that law is made ... for lawbreakers* (9, *anomois*, ‘for the lawless’). Putting together these two truths which, Paul says, *we know*, we reach the striking statement that the lawful use of the law is for the lawless. All law is designed for those whose natural tendency is not to keep it but to break it. ‘Not the saint but the sinner is the law’s target.’<sup>[32]</sup>

It may be helpful to approach this question historically, for the Reformers struggled much over the true purpose of the law. Luther expressed his position in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1535). ‘The law was given for two uses,’ he wrote. The first was ‘political’ or ‘civil’; the law was a bridle ‘for the restraint of the uncivilised’.<sup>[33]</sup> The second and ‘principal’ purpose of the law was ‘theological’ or ‘spiritual’. It is a mighty ‘hammer’ to crush the self-righteousness of human beings.<sup>[34]</sup> For ‘it shows them their sin, so that by the recognition of sin they may be humbled, frightened, and worn down, and so may long for grace and for the Blessed Offspring [*sc.* Christ]’.<sup>[35]</sup> It is in this sense that ‘the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ’.<sup>[36]</sup> Elsewhere Luther indicates that the law has a third use; we have ‘to teach the law diligently and to impress it on the people’, although he does not emphasize this.<sup>[37]</sup>

The Formula of Concord (1577), however, which settled Lutheran doctrine in disputed areas after Luther’s death, clearly specified in its sixth article a threefold use of the law. It is a means to the preservation of human society,<sup>[38]</sup> a summons to repentance and faith,<sup>[39]</sup> and a direction for the church.<sup>[40]</sup> These came to be called the *usus politicus* (to restrain evil), the *usus pedagogus* (to lead to Christ) and the *usus normativus* (to determine the conduct of believers).

Calvin agreed with these three functions of the law, but changed the order of the first two, and laid his emphasis on the third. Book II, chapter 7, of the *Institutes* is devoted to a consideration of why the law was given. First, it has a ‘punitive’ purpose, for it ‘renders us inexcusable’ and so drives us to despair. Then, ‘naked and empty-handed’, we ‘flee to his [*sc.* God’s] mercy, repose entirely in it, hide deep within it, and seize upon it alone for righteousness and merit’.<sup>[41]</sup>

Secondly, the law restrains evildoers, especially ‘by fright and shame’, from daring to do what they want to do, and so protects the community. In this sense the law acts as an external deterrent, while leaving the heart unchanged.<sup>[42]</sup>

‘The third and principal use’ of the law, indeed its ‘proper purpose’, according to Calvin, is the one which Luther somewhat neglected, namely ‘its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns’. The law is ‘the best instrument’ both to teach us the Lord’s will and to exhort us to do it. For ‘by frequent meditation upon it’ believers will ‘be aroused to obedience, be strengthened in it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression’.<sup>[43]</sup> Indeed it is in this ‘joyous obedience’ that authentic ‘Christian freedom’ is to be found.<sup>[44]</sup>

Thus the law’s three functions according to Calvin are punitive (to condemn sinners and drive them to Christ), deterrent (to restrain evildoers) and specially educative (to teach and exhort believers).

To which of these three purposes was Paul referring in his first letter to Timothy? Of which of them could it be said that ‘the lawful use of the law is for the lawless’? Certainly the second, relating to the restraint of evildoers. Calvin wrote: ‘The apostle seems specially to have alluded to this function of the law when he teaches “that the law is not laid down for the just but for the unjust and disobedient” ... (1 Tim. 1:9, 10)’.<sup>[45]</sup> But Paul’s words seem to apply to the first and third purposes of the law as well, since the law exposes and condemns the lawless,<sup>[46]</sup> and then, after they have fled to Christ for forgiveness, it directs them into a law-abiding life. In other words, all three functions of the law relate to lawless people, unmasking and judging them, restraining them, and correcting and directing them.

It is only because as fallen human beings we have a natural tendency to lawlessness (for ‘sin is lawlessness’)<sup>[47]</sup> that we need the law at all. The key antithesis, that the law is *not for the righteous but for lawbreakers* (9), cannot refer to those

who are righteous in the sense of ‘justified’, since Paul insists elsewhere that the justified do still need the law for their sanctification.<sup>48</sup> Nor can it be taken to mean that some people exist who are so righteous that they do not need the law to guide them, but only that some people think they are. Similarly, when Jesus said, ‘I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance’,<sup>49</sup> he did not mean that there are some righteous people who do not need to be called to repentance, but only that some think they are. In a word, ‘the righteous’ in these contexts means ‘the self-righteous’.

The fundamental principle that the law is for the lawless applies to every kind of law. For example, the reason we need speed limits is that there are so many reckless drivers on the roads. The reason we need boundaries and fences is that it is the only way to prevent unlawful trespass. And the reason we need civil rights and race relations legislation is in order to protect citizens from insult, discrimination and exploitation. If everybody could be trusted to respect everybody else’s rights, laws to safeguard them would not be necessary.

The same is true of God’s law. Its prohibitions and sanctions relate to the lawless. And Paul proceeds at once to illustrate the principle of ‘law for the lawless’ with eleven examples of law-breaking. The first six words, which he sets in pairs, appear to be more general than specific. The *law is made*, he writes, ... *for lawbreakers and rebels* (JBP ‘who have neither principles nor self-control’), *the ungodly and sinful* (who dishonour God and depart from righteousness), and *the unholy and irreligious* (who are devoid of all piety and reverence). These clearly refer to our duty to God, at least in general. But because the next five words are extremely specific in relation to our duty to our neighbour, it is natural to ask whether the first six may be meant to be specific in relation to our duty to God. George W. Knight suggests that they are.<sup>50</sup> Working backwards from the allusion to our father and mother, he proposes that *irreligious* (*bebēlos*) means profane in the sense of sabbath-breaking (the fourth commandment), that *unholy* (*anosios*) designates those who take God’s name in vain (the third commandment), that *sinful* (*hamartōlos*) alludes to idolaters (the second commandment), and that *ungodly* (*asebēs*) denotes those who flout the first commandment to love God exclusively. This leaves the words *lawbreakers* (*anomos*) and *rebels* (*anyptotaktos*), which seem to be introductory and to describe those who reject all law and discipline. This reconstruction is certainly ingenious, and may be correct, although it has to be declared unproved.

The next five words, however, do evidently allude to commandments five to nine. *Those who kill their fathers and mothers* of course break the fifth commandment to honour our parents; the expression is so extreme that Simpson is probably correct in understanding the reference to ‘smiters of fathers or mothers, adjudged a capital crime in Ex.

21:15’.<sup>51</sup> *Murderers* break the sixth commandment, ‘You shall not kill’, while *adulterers and perverts* (heterosexual and homosexual offenders) break the seventh. At least the former certainly do (‘You shall not commit adultery’), and the latter may be said to do so also if we understand the prohibition as intended to restrict sexual intercourse to the context of heterosexual marriage. ‘Perverts’ (NIV, REB) is not the best translation, nor is ‘sodomites’ (NRSV), for both terms nowadays carry assumptions and overtones which could express the kind of ‘homophobia’ which Christians should avoid. The Greek word *arsenokoitēs*, which occurs only here and in 1 Corinthians 6:9, is a combination of *arsēn* (male) and either *koiitē* (bed) or *keimai* (to lie). It probably refers back to the Leviticus texts which prohibit ‘lying with a man as one lies with a woman’.<sup>52</sup> It denotes practising male homosexuals.<sup>53</sup> *Slave traders* (NIV) or ‘kidnappers’ (RSV) are guilty of the most heinous kind of stealing, and both *liars* and *perjurers* break the ninth commandment not to bear false witness against our neighbour. The tenth commandment prohibiting covetousness is not included in Paul’s catalogue, perhaps because it is a sin of thought and desire, not of word or deed. But in order to make his list comprehensive he concludes that the law is also made for *whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine* (10). What is this? It is doctrine which conforms to the glorious gospel (literally, ‘the gospel of the sound’) of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me (11).

It is particularly noteworthy that sins which contravene the law (as breaches of the Ten Commandments) are also contrary to the sound doctrine of the gospel. So the moral standards of the gospel do not differ from the moral standards of the law. We must not therefore imagine that, because we have embraced the gospel, we may now repudiate the law! To be sure, the law is impotent to save us,<sup>54</sup> and we have been released from the law’s condemnation, so that we are no longer ‘under’ it in that sense.<sup>55</sup> But God sent his Son to die for us, and now puts his Spirit within us, in order that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us.<sup>56</sup> There is no antithesis between law and gospel in the moral standards which they teach; the antithesis is in the way of salvation, since the law condemns, while the gospel justifies.

## 2. The apostle Paul and the gospel (1:12–17)

Turning away from the false teachers and their misuse of the law, Paul now writes about himself and the gospel which has been entrusted to him. He makes an extremely personal statement. He retells the story of his conversion and commissioning, sandwiching it between two paeans of praise. ‘I thank Christ Jesus’, he begins (12), and ends: ‘Now to the King of the ages be glory and honour’ (17). His whole life is permeated with thanksgiving, not only for his salvation but also for the privilege of having been made an apostle.

In particular Paul mentions three related blessings. First, *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength ...* (12a). It is striking that he refers to the inner strength Christ has given him, even before he specifies the ministry for which he needed to be strengthened. The appointment would have been inconceivable without the equipment. Secondly, *I thank Christ ... that he considered me faithful* (12b). This cannot mean that Jesus Christ trusted him because he perceived him to be inherently trustworthy; his fitness or faithfulness was due rather to the inner strength he had been promised. Thirdly, *I thank Christ ... for appointing me to his service* (12c). *Diakonia* is a generic word, and there are many forms which Christian service or ministry takes. But Paul is clearly referring to his commissioning as apostle to the Gentiles.

He now gives further substance to his thanksgiving by reminding Timothy what he had been, how he received mercy,

and why God had had mercy on him.

First, he uses three words to describe what he had been: *I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man* (13a). His ‘blasphemy’ was that he spoke evil of Jesus Christ; he also ‘tried to force them [*sc.* his disciples] to blaspheme’.<sup>57</sup> His persecution of the church was pursued ‘intensely’, for he ‘tried to destroy it’<sup>58</sup> and in persecuting it he did not realize that he was persecuting Christ.<sup>59</sup> Then behind both the blasphemy and the persecution there was a *violent man* (*hybristēs*), *hybris* being a mixture of arrogance and insolence, which finds satisfaction in insulting and humiliating other people.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the apostle was intending to portray an ascending scale of evil from words (of blasphemy) through deeds (of persecution) to thoughts (of deep-seated hostility).

Secondly, Paul describes how he received mercy. Humanly speaking, there was no hope for someone as malicious and aggressive as he was. But he was not beyond the mercy of God. Twice he uses the same verb *I was shown mercy* (13b, 16a), or literally, as Thomas Goodwin the Puritan put it, ‘I was bemercied’.<sup>61</sup> To ‘mercy’ Paul now adds ‘grace’, having already bracketed them in his opening greeting (1:2). *The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus* (14). That is, grace ‘overflowed’ (NRSV) like a river in spate, which cannot be contained, but bursts its banks and carries everything before it, sweeping irresistibly on. What the river of grace brought with it, however, was not devastation but blessing, in particular the ‘faith’ and the ‘love’ to which Paul has already assigned a primacy (4, 5). ‘The Nile overflows; the crops abound. Grace overflowed, and faith and love sprang up.’<sup>62</sup> Grace flooded with faith a heart previously filled with unbelief, and flooded with love a heart previously polluted with hatred. It was, in the words of Bunyan’s autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*; he borrowed both parts of his title from verses 14 and 15.

No wonder Paul goes on to quote the first of the five ‘trustworthy sayings’ which occur in the Pastorals.<sup>63</sup> On each occasion the saying is pithy, almost proverbial, is perhaps a familiar quotation from an early hymn or creed, and is given by Paul his own apostolic endorsement. Indeed, since he constantly uses *pistos* (‘trustworthy’) of God, he is declaring that the aphorism is ‘a faithful presentation of God’s message’.<sup>64</sup>

This first ‘faithful saying’ is a concise summary of the gospel. *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst* (15). First, the content of the gospel is true and trustworthy, in distinction to the speculative nonsense of the false teachers and (we might add today) the lies of secular propaganda. Secondly, the offer of the gospel is universal. To be sure, NIV, REB and NRSV all put that it deserves ‘full’ acceptance, meaning ‘complete’ in the sense of ‘unreserved’. But JBP renders it ‘this statement is completely reliable and should be universally accepted’. This fits the context, since Paul argues in chapter 2 that the gospel must be made known to the nations. Thirdly, the essence of the gospel is that Christ came to save sinners. The law is meant for the *condemnation* of sinners; the gospel for their *salvation*. That Christ ‘came to save’ sounds like one of his own statements.<sup>65</sup> It alludes to both his incarnation and his atonement, and clearly implies his pre-existence. Indeed, after a careful examination of all the salvation passages in the Pastoral Letters Dr Philip Towner concludes that salvation as a present reality, though yet to be consummated, is ‘the centre point of the message’ and so of ‘the sound teaching’ of the apostles.<sup>66</sup>

Fourthly, the application of the gospel is personal. The universal offer is one thing (‘worthy of all acceptance’, AV); its individual acceptance is another (‘of whom I am the worst’). He has already called himself ‘the least of the apostles’<sup>67</sup> and ‘less than the least of all God’s people’;<sup>68</sup> he now humbles himself further as the ‘chief’ (AV), the ‘foremost’ (NRSV), ‘the greatest’ (JB) or ‘the worst’ (NIV) of sinners. Indeed, that is what *I am*, he writes, not simply what ‘I was’.

But can he mean it? Are we to understand him literally? This is an interesting hermeneutical question. Common sense tells us not to take his statement as a precise, scientific fact. For he had not investigated the sinful and criminal records of all the inhabitants of the world, carefully compared himself with them, and concluded that he was worse than them all. The truth is rather that when we are convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit, an immediate result is that we give up all such comparisons. Paul was so vividly aware of his own sins that he could not conceive that anybody could be worse. It is the language of every sinner whose conscience has been awakened and disturbed by the Holy Spirit. We may begin like the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men’, but we end like the tax collector who beat his breast and said (literally), ‘God have mercy on me, *the sinner*.’<sup>69</sup> The Pharisee indulged in odious comparisons; as far as the tax collector was concerned, however, there were no other sinners with whom to compare himself; he was the one and only.

We may now summarize what this first and pregnant ‘trustworthy saying’ tells us about the gospel. It is true and trustworthy. It is intended for everybody. It concerns Jesus Christ and his work of salvation. And it must be received by each of us individually.

One cannot reflect on this faithful saying without remembering the story of Thomas Bilney, who was converted through it. Elected in 1520 a Fellow of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, ‘little Bilney’ (as he was called on account of his shortness of stature) was searching for peace but could not find it.

‘But at last’, he wrote, ‘I heard speak of Jesus, even then when the New Testament was first set forth by Erasmus ... And at the first reading (as I well remember) I chanced upon this sentence of St. Paul (O most sweet and comfortable sentence to my soul!) in 1 Timothy 1. “It is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be embraced, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am the chief and principal.” This one sentence, through God’s instruction and inward working, which I did not then perceive, did so exhilarate my heart, being before



wounded with the guilt of my sins, and being almost in despair, that even immediately I seemed unto myself inwardly to feel a marvellous comfort and quietness, insomuch that “my bruised bones leaped for joy” (Psalm 51). After this, the Scripture began to be more pleasant unto me than the honey or the honey-comb ...’ [70]

Perhaps Bilney’s most notable convert was Hugh Latimer, who later became the popular preacher of the English Reformation. Latimer greatly admired the courage with which Bilney went to the stake for his evangelical faith; he referred to him in his sermons as ‘St Bilney’.

Having considered Paul’s descriptions of what he had been before his conversion and how he received mercy, we are ready in the third place to ask why God had mercy on him. The only possible answer is ‘because God is a merciful God’. Ultimately, there is no other explanation. His merciful forgiveness originates not within us, as if we had any merit which inclined (let alone obliged) God to show mercy, but within his own merciful character, ‘whose property is always to have mercy’, as the Prayer Book says. Nevertheless, Paul mentions two factors which in his case might be said to have ‘predisposed’ God to be merciful.

The first concerned his past ignorant unbelief: *I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief* (13b). As he put it elsewhere, ‘I ... was ... zealous for God’ and ‘convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth’ [71]. Mind you, his conviction and zeal, his ignorance and unbelief were still culpable. He is not saying that his ignorance established a claim on God’s mercy (or mercy would no longer be mercy, nor would grace be grace), but only that his opposition was not open-eyed and wilful, or it would have been the sin against the Holy Spirit and would have disqualified him from receiving mercy. It is similar to the familiar Old Testament distinction between ‘unintentional’ and ‘defiant’ disobedience. [72] We may still pray for others what Jesus prayed from the cross, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’, [73] providing we remember that we all still need to ‘repent’, even of sins committed ‘in ignorance’ [74]

If Paul’s ignorant unbelief in the past was one reason why God had mercy on him, a second related to the faith of others in the future: *But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited* (“inexhaustible”, REB, JB) *patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life* (16). Although Paul’s conversion had a number of unique features (the heavenly light, the audible voice, the Hebrew language, Paul’s fall and blindness), it was also a ‘prototype’ (*hypotypōsis*, BAGD) of all subsequent conversions, because it was an exhibition of Christ’s infinite patience. In fact the conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road has proved to be just that. It remains a standing source of hope to otherwise hopeless cases. Paul seems to speak to us across the centuries: ‘Don’t despair! Christ had mercy even on *me*, the worst of sinners; he can also have mercy on *you*!’

To sum up, although Paul had been a blasphemer and a violent persecutor, the grace of Christ had overwhelmed him. He received mercy partly because of his ignorant unbelief and partly in order to display for the benefit of future generations the limitless patience of Christ. It was this experience of Christ’s grace, mercy and patience which underlay Paul’s evangelistic enthusiasm. Just so, nobody can share the gospel with passion and power today who has not had a comparably personal experience of Christ.

No wonder Paul broke out into a spontaneous doxology, in which, however (as in the similar verse, 6:15), he made use of some phrases from an early liturgical form, which seems to indicate that liberty and liturgy are not necessarily incompatible. He addressed God as *the King*, the sovereign ruler of all things, who not only reigns over the natural order and the historical process, but has also established his special kingdom through Christ and by the Spirit over his redeemed people. The divine King is now characterized by four epithets. First, he is *eternal*, literally ‘king of the ages’ (as in Rev. 15:3), beyond the fluctuations of time. Secondly, he is *immortal*, beyond the ravages of decay and death. Hence the folly of idolaters who have ‘exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles’ [75]. Thirdly, he is *invisible*, beyond the limits of every horizon. For ‘nobody has ever seen God’ [76] and indeed nobody ‘can see’ him (6:16); all that human beings have ever glimpsed is his ‘glory’, which has been defined as ‘the outward shining of his inward being’. His glory is displayed in the creation, [77] in both the heavens and the earth, [78] and reached its zenith in the incarnate Son, who is ‘the image of the invisible God’. [79] Fourthly, the King is *the only God*. The addition of the adjective ‘wise’ in the Textus Receptus used in the AV is ‘no doubt a scribal gloss derived from Romans 16:27’ [80]. What Paul is affirming is not the uniqueness of God’s wisdom, but the uniqueness of his being. He has no rivals. ‘I am the LORD’, he declares, ‘and there is no other.’ [81] To this great *King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God*, Paul now ascribes (as is most justly due) all *honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen* (17).

### 3. Timothy and the good fight (1:18–20)

So far Paul has referred both to the teachers of the law (and their false gospel) and to himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ (and the true gospel). Now Timothy has to choose which of the two he is going to follow. On the one hand, the apostle is urging him to silence the false teachers; on the other he must feel the insidious influence of their speculations. He cannot remain neutral, and sit on the fence, even though he is young, inexperienced, impressionable and retiring. Now as then the truth demands a verdict.

Paul begins by describing the context in which he is writing. He reminds Timothy both of the special father-son relationship which bound them together and of the circumstances of his ordination: *Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight*

(18). We are not told the substance of these prophecies. Nor is it clear whether they were directed to the church or to Timothy (declaring him called by God to his task, cf. Acts 13:1ff.) or to Paul (declaring Timothy a suitable addition to his mission team). What seems at least probable is that the occasion was his 'ordination'. For it was then that a 'gift' was given to Timothy, 'a prophetic message' was spoken, and 'the body of elders laid their hands' on him (4:14). Together these solemnly set him apart for his ministry, gifting and authorizing him to exercise it. It was by following these prophecies (RSV 'inspired by them') that Timothy would and could *fight the good fight*. Such at least was Paul's *instruction* to him. The word is again *parangelia*, 'command', as in verses 3 and 5. 'As often in military contexts ... it conveys a sense of urgent obligation.'<sup>82</sup>

What this 'good fight' is Paul does not specify. But since in 6:12 he urges Timothy to 'fight the good fight of the faith', it is reasonable to conclude that he means the same thing here. Certainly to defend the revealed truth of God against those who deny or distort it, and to 'demolish strongholds' of error,<sup>83</sup> is to engage in a dangerous and difficult fight, which demands spiritual weapons, especially 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God'.<sup>84</sup>

In particular, Timothy must keep *holding on to faith and a good conscience* (19a). Although here 'faith' does not have the definite article in the original, it does at the end of the verse (literally, 'suffered shipwreck concerning the faith'). So surely we must assume it at the beginning of the verse as well. Timothy possesses two valuable things which he must carefully guard, an objective treasure called 'the faith', meaning the apostolic faith, and a subjective one called 'a good conscience'. Moreover, they need to be preserved together (as in 1:5 and 3:9), which is exactly what Hymenaeus and Alexander have failed to do. This Hymenaeus is presumably the same heretic who taught that the resurrection had already taken place.<sup>85</sup> But Alexander was a common name, and there is no reason to identify this one with 'the metalworker' who did Paul 'a great deal of harm',<sup>86</sup> and who does not seem to have been a Christian at all.

Whoever these two men were, what we are told about them is that 'by rejecting conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in the faith; among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander' (19b–20a, NRSV). The NIV rendering *some have rejected these* is unwarranted. What the heretics had rejected is clearly singular, not plural. The word used for their rejection of conscience (*apōtheō*) means to push something or someone away, to repudiate. It implies 'a violent and deliberate rejection'.<sup>87</sup> Having done this to their conscience, they have *shipwrecked their faith*. Conversely, it is precisely by preserving a good conscience that Timothy will be able to keep the faith. Thus belief and behaviour, conviction and conscience, the intellectual and the moral, are closely linked. This is because God's truth contains ethical demands. As Jesus said, 'if anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out [or "know"] whether my teaching comes from God ...'<sup>88</sup>

In other words, doing is the key to discovering, obedience the key to assurance. By contrast, it is when people are determined to live in unrighteousness that they suppress the truth.<sup>89</sup> So if we disregard the voice of conscience, allowing sin to remain unconfessed and unforsaken, our faith will not long survive. Anybody whose conscience has been so manipulated as to be rendered insensitive is in a very dangerous condition, wide open to the deceptions of the devil (4:1–2). 'A bad conscience is the mother of all heresies,' Calvin wrote.<sup>90</sup> This may not be an invariable rule, but it is often true. I have myself known Christian leaders who once were faithful teachers, but who, as a result of some stubborn disobedience in their lives, turned aside from the truth and so ruined their ministry.

So serious was the apostasy of Hymenaeus and Alexander that Paul wrote of them: *whom I have handed over to Satan* (20). This is almost certainly an allusion to excommunication, because Paul used the identical expression in relation to the incestuous offender at Corinth. 'Hand this man over to Satan', he wrote,<sup>91</sup> and then explained his meaning: 'Expel the wicked man from among you.'<sup>92</sup> Since the church is the dwelling-place of God, it follows that to be ejected from it is to be sent back into the world, the habitat of Satan. Radical though this punishment is, it is not permanent or irrevocable. Its purpose is remedial, 'in the hope that through this discipline' (REB) the offenders may *be taught not to blaspheme* (20). The implication is that, once the lesson has been learned, the excommunicated persons may be restored to the fellowship.

In this first chapter, which concerns the place of doctrine in the local church, Paul gives valuable instruction about false teaching. Its essential nature is that it is *heterodidaskalia*, a deviation (*heteros*) from revealed truth. Its damaging results are that it replaces faith with speculation and love with dissension. Its fundamental cause is the rejection of a good conscience before God.

What then should Timothy do in such a situation? Paul does not tell him to secede from the church, which would have been one extreme reaction. But neither may he remain silent in the face of heresy, let alone compromise with it, which would have been the opposite extreme. Instead, he was to stay at his post, and to fight the good fight of the faith, both demolishing error and contending earnestly for the truth.

## 2. Public worship (1 Timothy 2:1–15)

In this pastoral letter Paul is looking beyond Timothy, to whom it is addressed, to the local churches he has been called to supervise. The apostle is concerned through Timothy to regulate the life of the church. He began with doctrine (chapter 1), urging Timothy to counter false teaching and to remain himself loyal to the apostolic faith. He continues now with the conduct of public worship (chapter 2).

As he had 'urged' Timothy (*parakaleō*) to remain in Ephesus to combat error (1:3), so now he exhorts him to give priority to public worship: *I urge (parakaleō again), then, first of all, that ... prayers ... be made for everyone*. 'First of all'

refers 'not to primacy of time but primacy of importance'.<sup>1</sup> For the church is essentially a worshipping, praying community. It is often said that the church's priority task is evangelism. But this is really not so. Worship takes precedence over evangelism, partly because love for God is the first commandment and love for neighbour the second, partly because, long after the church's evangelistic task has been completed, God's people will continue to worship him eternally, and partly because evangelism is itself an aspect of worship, a 'priestly service' in which converts 'become an offering acceptable to God'.<sup>2</sup>

This emphasis on the priority of worship has particular importance for us who are called 'evangelical' people. For whenever we fail to take public worship seriously, we are less than the fully biblical Christians we claim to be. We go to church for the preaching, some of us say, not for the praise. Evangelism is our speciality, not worship. In consequence either our worship services are slovenly, perfunctory, mechanical and dull or, in an attempt to remedy this, we go to the opposite extreme and become repetitive, unreflective and even flippant.

Paul alludes to two main aspects of the local church's worship, which divide the chapter in half. First he considers its scope, and emphasizes the need for a global concern in public worship (1-7), and secondly he considers its conduct, and addresses the question of the respective roles of men and women in public worship (8-15).

## 1. Global concern in public worship (2:1-7)

What stands out in this paragraph is the universal range of the church's responsibility. In contrast to the elitist notion of the Gnostic heretics, that salvation was restricted to those who had been initiated into it, Paul stresses that God's plan and therefore our duty concern everybody. Four times the same truth is emphasized. First, prayers are to be offered *for everyone* (1). Secondly, God our Saviour *wants all men* (NRSV 'desires everyone') *to be saved* (3-4). Thirdly, Christ Jesus *gave himself as a ransom for all men* (6, NRSV 'for all'). Fourthly, Paul was *a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles* (7), that is, to all the nations or to everyone. There can be no doubt that this repetition is deliberate. These four truths belong together in Paul's mind. It is because God's desire and Christ's death concern everybody that the church's prayers and proclamation must concern everybody too.

### a. The church's prayers should concern all people (2:1-2)

Paul mentions four different kinds of worship (*requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving*), three of which he has already brought together in an earlier letter.<sup>3</sup> Most commentators suggest that the first three are almost synonymous and cannot be neatly distinguished from one another. 'I admit', wrote Calvin with humility, 'that I do not completely understand the difference' between them. Then, after mentioning one attempt to do so, he continued: 'But I myself do not go in for subtle distinctions of that kind.'<sup>4</sup> Indeed, he is content with the broad distinction between 'genus and species', *prayers (proseuchē)* being a generic word for every kind of prayer, while *requests (deēsis)*, and *intercession (enteuxis)* are specific. Some modern commentators are prepared to go a bit further, suggesting that *deēsis* expresses profound personal need, while *enteuxis* came to mean 'to enter into a king's presence and to submit a petition to him'.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps G. W. Knight offers the most succinct statement to the effect that all four terms should delineate our prayers: '*deēseis*, making requests for specific needs; *proseuchas*, bringing those in view before God; *enteuxeis*, appealing boldly on their behalf; and *eucharistias*, thankfulness for them'.<sup>6</sup>

Although Paul uses this cluster of four words, they all focus on a single theme, namely that they should *be made for everyone* (1). This immediately rebukes the narrow parochialism of many churches' prayers. Some years ago I attended public worship in a certain church. The pastor was absent on holiday, and a lay elder led the pastoral prayer. He prayed that the pastor might enjoy a good vacation (which was fine), and that two lady members of the congregation might be healed (which was also fine; we should pray for the sick). But that was all. The intercession can hardly have lasted thirty seconds. I came away saddened, sensing that this church worshipped a little village god of their own devising. There was no recognition of the needs of the world, and no attempt to embrace the world in prayer.

The Grand Rapids Report (1982), by contrast, which summarized the findings of the Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility, included this commitment:

We resolve ourselves, and call upon our churches, to take much more seriously the period of intercession in public worship; to think in terms of ten or fifteen minutes rather than five; to invite lay people to share in leading, since they often have deep insight into the world's needs; and to focus our prayers both on the evangelization of the world (closed lands, resistant peoples, missionaries, national churches etc.) and on the quest for peace and justice in the world (places of tension and conflict, deliverance from the nuclear horror, rulers and governments, the poor and needy etc.). We long to see every Christian congregation bowing down in humble and expectant faith before our sovereign Lord.<sup>7</sup>

I sometimes wonder whether the comparatively slow progress towards peace and justice in the world, and towards world evangelization, is due more than anything else to the prayerlessness of the people of God. When President Marcos was toppled in 1986, Filipino Christians attributed his downfall 'not to people power but to prayer power'. What might not happen if God's people throughout the world learned to wait upon him in believing, persevering prayer?

In particular, Paul directed the churches to *pray for kings and all those in authority* (2a). This was a remarkable instruction, since at that time no Christian ruler existed anywhere in the world. *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662) is wrong therefore in its Communion Service to limit its intercession to Christian leaders, asking God 'to save and defend all Christian kings, princes and governors'. By contrast, when Paul told Timothy to pray for kings, the reigning emperor was



Nero, whose vanity, cruelty and hostility to the Christian faith were widely known. The persecution of the church, spasmodic at first, was soon to become systematic, and Christians were understandably apprehensive. Yet they had recourse to prayer. Indeed, prayer for pagan countries and their leaders already had a precedent in the Old Testament.

For Jeremiah told the exiles to pray for Babylon's peace and prosperity,<sup>8</sup> and the edict of Cyrus, which ordered the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, included a request to the Jews to 'pray for the well-being of the king and his sons'.<sup>9</sup>

It is hardly surprising to find the early church following this warrant from both Old and New Testaments. Thus Clement of Rome, towards the end of the first century, included a prayer in his first letter to the Corinthian church for rulers and governors: 'Grant them, Lord, health, peace, harmony and stability, so that they may give no offence in administering the government you have given them.'<sup>10</sup>

Tertullian too in his *Apology*, which is usually dated about AD 200, wrote: 'We pray also for the emperors, for their ministers and those in power, that their reign may continue, that the state may be at peace, and that the end of the world may be postponed.'<sup>11</sup>

Paul is quite specific in directing why the church should pray for national leaders. It is first and foremost *that we may live peaceful and quiet lives*. For the basic benefit of good government is peace, meaning freedom both from war and from civil strife. Paul had had many experiences of this blessing, when Roman officials had intervened on his behalf, not least in Ephesus itself when 'a great disturbance about the Way' had arisen, and the city clerk had succeeded in quelling it.<sup>12</sup>

Prayer for peace is not to be dismissed as selfish. Its motivation can be altruistic, namely that only within an ordered society is the church free to fulfil its God-given responsibilities without hindrance. Two are mentioned, and a third is implied. Those mentioned are *godliness and holiness* (2b). 'Godliness' (*eusebeia*) is a favourite word in the Pastorals,<sup>13</sup> where it is used as a synonym for *theosebeia* (2:10) meaning the worship of God or religious devotion. 'Holiness' (*semnotēs*) seems in the context to mean 'moral earnestness'.<sup>14</sup> The NEB portrays these two blessings of peace as the 'full observance of religion and high standards of morality'.

The third positive benefit of peace is implied in verse 3. *This is good* (namely prayer that those in authority will maintain peace), *and pleases God our Saviour* (3), *who wants all men to be saved* ... The logic of this seems to be that peaceful conditions facilitate the propagation of the gospel. Certainly the *pax romana* was a major factor in its early rapid spread. The ultimate object of our prayers for national leaders, then, is that in the context of the peace they preserve, religion and morality can flourish, and evangelism go forward without interruption.

Here is important apostolic teaching about church and state, and about the proper relations between them, even when the state is not Christian. It is the duty of the state to keep the peace, to protect its citizens from whatever would disturb it, to preserve law and order (using this expression without the oppressive overtones it often has today, referring to a clampdown on dissidents), and to punish evil and promote good (as Paul teaches in Rom. 13:4), so that within such a stable society the church may be free to worship God, obey his laws and spread his gospel. Conversely, it is the duty of the church to pray for the state, so that its leaders may administer justice and pursue peace, and to add to its intercession thanksgiving, especially for the blessings of good government as a gift of God's common grace. Thus church and state have reciprocal duties, the church to pray for the state (and be its conscience), the state to protect the church (so that it may be free to perform its duties). Each should acknowledge that the other also has a divine origin and purpose. Each should help the other to fulfil its God-given role.

### **b. God's desire concerns all people (2:3-4)**

The reason the church should reach out and embrace all people in its prayers is that this is the compass of God's desire. True, he is accurately named *God our Saviour* (3b), but we must not attempt to monopolize him, since he *wants* not only us but *all men to be saved* (4a). In affirming this, Paul may have had in mind those nationalistic Jews who believed themselves to be God's privileged favourites and forgot God's original promise to bless all earth's families through

Abraham.<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, Paul may have been thinking of élitist Gnostics who reserved initiation into *gnosis* (knowledge) for a select few. In our day there are other versions of the monopoly spirit of which we need to repent, e.g. racism, nationalism, tribalism, classism and parochialism, together with the pride and prejudice which are the cause of these narrow horizons. The truth is that God loves the whole world, desires all people to be saved, and so commands us to preach the gospel to all the nations and to pray for their conversion.

Does this emphasis on 'all people' lead us out of élitism (only *some* will be saved) into its opposite extreme of universalism (*everybody* will be saved)? No. That Paul was not a universalist is evident, not only from his other letters but from this one too. If he was shown mercy because of his ignorant unbelief, presumably others who are defiant in their unbelief will not receive mercy (1:13). Some will 'fall under the same judgment as the devil' (3:6), and sooner or later all sin will be judged (5:24), while the covetous will fall into harmful desires 'that plunge men into ruin and destruction' (6:9).

How then can we avoid both opposite extremes of élitism and universalism? Besides, is not the doctrine of election itself a form of élitism? And is it not incompatible with Paul's statement here that God wants all people to be saved? We begin our response by stating that Scripture indubitably teaches divine election both in the Old Testament (e.g. 'he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them'),<sup>16</sup> and in the New Testament (e.g. 'you did not choose me, but I chose you').<sup>17</sup> although different churches formulate the doctrine differently. Yet this truth must never be expressed in such a way as to deny the complementary truth that God wants all people to be saved. Election is usually introduced in Scripture to humble us (reminding us that the credit for our salvation belongs to God alone), or to reassure us (promising us that God's love will never let us go), or to stir us to mission (recalling that God chose Abraham and his family in order

through him to bless all the families of the earth). Election is never introduced in order to contradict the universal offer of the gospel or to provide us with an excuse for opting out of world evangelization. If some are excluded, it is because they exclude themselves by rejecting the gospel offer. As for God, he *wants all men to be saved*.

How then can we affirm simultaneously God's desire that all people be saved and God's election of some to salvation? Christians have struggled with this question in every generation, and have tried to reinterpret the three words which form the backbone of the sentence in verse 4 (namely 'wants', 'all' and 'saved') in such a way as to affirm election and avoid both élitism and universalism. Some have translated 'wants' (*thelei*) as either 'desires' (NRSV) or 'wishes', and have emphasized the distinction between a desire and a purpose, between wishing and willing. This seems consistent with the similar scriptural statements that God takes 'no pleasure in the death of the wicked' [18] and that he is patient, 'not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance'. [19] These three texts all declare that God's 'desire' or 'pleasure' for everybody is salvation, not judgment. The linguistic experts tell us, however, that there is no difference between the two verbs *thelō* and *boulomai*, since both can mean either to 'wish' or to 'will'. So all we can say is that the statement 'God wants all people to be saved' cannot be pressed into meaning that it is his fixed purpose and intention that everybody will be. For alas! it is possible to resist his will. [20]

Secondly, others suggest that the verb to 'be saved' means here to 'be preserved physically' rather than 'rescued spiritually and morally', since some think it has this meaning elsewhere (e.g. 2:11 and 4:10), and since the immediate context is that of governments protecting and preserving their citizens. This proposal has not found wide acceptance, however, since Paul goes on to write about the death of Christ for our sins, and since the vocabulary of salvation in the Pastors usually refers to a deliverance from sin. [21]

Thirdly, a number of commentators insist that 'all men' cannot be taken in an absolute sense as signifying every single individual. Instead, 'the apostle's meaning here', writes Calvin, following Augustine, 'is simply that no nation of the earth and no rank of society is excluded from salvation, since God wills to offer the gospel to all without exception'. Paul is speaking rather of classes and not of individuals. [22] Henriksen argues similarly that the 'all' means 'all men regardless of social, national and racial distinctions' and not 'one by one every member of the entire human race, past, present and future, including Judas and the antichrist'. [23] G. W. Knight points out in addition that this is the natural interpretation of verse 1, for it is possible to pray for 'all kinds of people' (e.g. the rulers as well as the ruled), but not possible to pray for absolutely everybody. [24] And in many other passages of Scripture 'all' is not absolute, but limited by the context. For example, when Jesus commissioned Paul to be his witness 'to all men', he meant not 'absolutely everybody in the world' but 'Gentiles as well as Jews'. [25]

This is an important insight which needs to be affirmed. Nevertheless, it does not altogether solve the problem. However we interpret the words 'want', 'saved' and 'all' in verse 4, we are still left with an antinomy [26] between the universal offer of the gospel and God's purpose of election, between the 'all' and the 'some'. Moreover, it is not a purely Pauline problem; we find it clearly within the teaching of Jesus himself. On the one hand he invited all to come to him. [27] On the other he said that his ministry was limited to those whom the Father had given him out of the world. [28] Again, on one occasion he said, 'You refuse to come to me', on another 'No-one can come to me unless the Father ... draws him'. [29] So why is it that some people do not come to Christ? Is it that they will not or that they cannot? Jesus taught both.

Wherever we look in Scripture we see this antinomy: divine sovereignty and human responsibility, universal offer and electing purpose, the all and the some, the cannot and the will not. The right response to this phenomenon is neither to seek a superficial harmonization (by manipulating some part of the evidence), nor to declare that Jesus and Paul contradicted themselves, but to affirm both parts of the antinomy as true, while humbly confessing that at present our little minds are unable to resolve it.

The universality of the gospel invitation rests on a double foundation, namely the two truths that there is only one God and only one mediator. Paul states these facts about God and Christ with such an economy of words that some have wondered if he is quoting from an early credal statement. If so, he still endorses it with his own apostolic authority.

He begins: *For there is one God* (5a). The fundamental contrast in verses 4 and 5 is between the *all men* God wants to be saved and the *one God* who desires that they should be. The reason he wants *all* to be saved is that he is the *one* God, and there is no other.

Supposing there were not one God, but many, and that the truth about God were not monotheism but polytheism. Supposing there were, as the Greeks believed, a pantheon of many gods, or even, as popular Hinduism holds, millions of deities. Then presumably these many gods would either share out the human race between them, by some amicable comity arrangement, or engage in a fierce, competitive struggle with each other for the allegiance of human beings, as was represented in the grotesque mythologies of ancient Greece and Rome. But if there were many gods, no single deity would presume to claim a monopoly of the world's worship—or not until he had defeated his rivals in some unseemly celestial battle!

Over against such ludicrous speculations Scripture insists on the unity of God. In the Old Testament the recited Shema began with the declaration, 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.' [30] It was the basis of his demand for his people's wholehearted and exclusive love. [31] This fundamental truth found further expression in Isaiah: 'I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.' [32] Hence the so-called 'jealousy' of God. Jealousy is the resentment of rivals. Whether it is good or evil depends on whether the rivals have any legitimacy. God's rivals have not,

because they are false gods, indeed ‘no-gods’. It is in the context of idolatry that he says, ‘I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God ...’ [33] He is intolerant of rivals; he refuses to share with any other the worship which is due to him alone. ‘I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.’ [34] Hence too his invitation to the nations to believe in him: ‘Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.’ [35] So it is already plain in the Old Testament that it is the uniqueness of Yahweh as the only God which justifies his ‘jealousy’ and so his universal mission, calling on every knee to bow to him and every tongue to swear by his name. [36]

Precisely the same reasoning is found in the New Testament. Indeed Paul keeps repeating it. ‘There is but one God, the Father,’ he writes, who is the creator and heir of all things. [37] Again, ‘there is ... one God and Father of all’ [38] And here in 1 Timothy, *there is one God* (2:5; cf. 1:17; 6:15). Further, it is because ‘there is only one God’ that he is not the God of Jews only but the God of Gentiles too. [39] Thus both Old and New Testaments affirm first that God is one and then that this monotheism is the fundamental basis of world mission. Our *exclusive* faith (*there is one God*, and no other) leads necessarily to our *inclusive* mission (the one God *wants all men to be saved*).

### c. *Christ’s death concerns all people (2:5–6)*

The apostle moves on from the *one God*, who desires all people to be saved, to the *one mediator* between God and human beings, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This additional reference to the one mediator is indispensable to Paul’s argument; it would not have been watertight otherwise. It is as if he anticipates our possible response to what he has written about monotheism. We might say: ‘I grant that there is only one God. I am no idolatrous polytheist. But this does not prove the propriety, let alone the necessity, of the Christian mission. After all, Jews and Muslims are also fiercely monotheistic. Even some traditional religionists (or “animists”, as they were previously called) look beyond the spirits to a Supreme Being. The unity of God is not really in dispute. Instead, the question may be put thus: why should not the one God, who wants all people to be saved, save them in different ways, some through Hinduism or Buddhism, others through Judaism or Islam, and yet others through New Age and other contemporary cults? Why should he insist that all people be saved in the same way and *come to a knowledge of the (same) truth?*’

Paul’s answer is that there is not only one Saviour God, but also one mediator between him and us, and therefore only one way of salvation.

This question is being hotly debated in our day. The status of other religions, and the relationship of Jesus Christ to them, is a living issue. Three main positions are held.

First, the traditional view, held until recently by the great majority of Christians, is that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour and that salvation is by explicit faith in him. This is commonly called ‘exclusivism’, although it is an unfortunate term because it sounds negative and élitist, and because it says nothing about the inclusivism implicit in the universal offer of the gospel. The leading exponent of this view in this century has been Hendrik Kraemer in *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938).

The second view is usually named ‘inclusivism’. It also affirms that Jesus Christ is the Saviour, but adds that he saves different people in different ways, especially through their own religion. The best-known exponent of this position is probably Karl Rahner in his *Theological Investigations*, vol. V (1957).

The third view, which is gaining ground in our postmodern world of scepticism about truth, is called ‘pluralism’. It not only tolerates the different religions, but actively affirms their independent saving validity, and therefore denies uniqueness and finality to Jesus. The best known contemporary representative of this position is John Hick, especially in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (1987). A simple quotation expresses his view. It is acknowledged by pluralists, he writes, ‘that Jews are being saved within and through the Jewish stream of religious life, Muslims within and through the Islamic stream, Hindus within and through the Hindu stream ...’ *etc.* [40]

We may affirm, however, without fear of contradiction, that in this classification Paul would have declared himself an ‘exclusivist’. In his day there was an abundance of religions and ways of salvation, ‘many “gods” and many “lords”’. [41] For example, there were the popular mystery religions from the East. Also the Gnostics postulated a whole succession of angelic emanations spanning the gulf between God and the world, of which Jesus was the greatest but not the only one. Paul insisted, however, that there is only one mediator. We need to be clear, therefore, that Christians do not claim uniqueness for ‘Christianity’ as a system in any of its varied formulations, or for the church as an institution in any of its cultural expressions, but only for Christ himself as a historical person and uniquely qualified mediator.

A mediator is an intermediary, the person in the middle, who effects a reconciliation between two rival parties. *Mesitēs* was used in the papyri both for an arbiter in legal disputes and for a negotiator of business deals. And between God and the human race, Paul writes, there is only one, Jesus ‘the only go-between’. [42]

So wherein does his uniqueness lie, that we dare to say he has no competitors and no successors? His unique qualifications as mediator are to be found in his person and work, in who he is and what he has done.

First, the person of Jesus is unique. He is *the man Christ Jesus* (5b). Of course he is also God. In the previous chapter he was bracketed with the Father as the single source of grace, mercy and peace (1:2); he was three times designated ‘our Lord’ (1:2, 12, 14); and it was said that he ‘came into the world to save sinners’ (1:15), which assumes a pre-existent purpose and decision. What Paul now adds is that he became a human being. The juxtaposition of words in the Greek sentence is striking: ‘... one mediator between God and men, man Christ Jesus’. An intermediary must be able to represent both sides equally. This was Job’s longing: ‘If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both.’ [43] And in Jesus Christ ‘Job’s pathetic cry ... has been answered ...’ [44] For he is both God and man, and

therefore able to mediate between us. He is God from the beginning, deriving his divine being from his Father eternally, and he became human in the womb of his mother Mary, deriving his human being from her in time. Thus the New Testament bears witness to him as the unique God-man. There is no parallel anywhere else, even in the so-called 'avatars' ('descents') of Hinduism, whose historicity is extremely dubious, and whose plurality sets them apart from the incarnation of God in Jesus, which took place once and for all and for ever.

Secondly, the work of Jesus is unique, in particular what he did when he died on the cross. He *gave himself as a ransom for all men* (6a). We note the apostle's remarkable leap from the birth of Jesus (*the man Christ Jesus*) to his death (*who gave himself*). The one led to the other. He was born to die. Next, his death is portrayed as both a sacrifice and a ransom. He 'gave himself' means he 'sacrificed himself' (REB), offering himself deliberately and voluntarily as a sacrifice for sin. The phraseology goes back to Isaiah 53:12, where the suffering servant is said to have 'poured out his life unto death'. Jesus applied the concept to himself as the good shepherd, who would lay down his life for his sheep, freely of his own accord.<sup>[45]</sup>

Moreover, he gave himself *as a ransom*. This expression is a clear echo of Jesus' own statement that the Son of Man had come 'to give his life as a ransom for many'.<sup>[46]</sup> The implications are unambiguous. A ransom was the price paid for the release of slaves or captives. Still in our day hijackers hold people to ransom. The word implies that we were in bondage to sin and judgment, unable to save ourselves, and that the price paid for our deliverance was the death of Christ in our place. The Greek version of Jesus' statement was *lytron anti pollōn* ('a ransom instead of many'). Paul strengthened it by attaching the preposition to the noun as a prefix, and adding a second preposition: *antilytron hyper pantōn* ('a substitute-ransom on behalf of all'). The presence of both prepositions is significant. 'Christ is pictured as an "exchange-price" on behalf of and in the place of all, on the ground of which freedom may be granted.'<sup>[47]</sup>

Paul also changed *pollōn* ('many') into *pantōn* ('all'). It is doubtful, however, if he thereby changed the sense. Joachim Jeremias has argued that, although in Greek contexts *polloi* is 'exclusive', meaning 'many' as opposed to 'all', in Jewish contexts *polloi* is 'inclusive', meaning 'the many who cannot be counted', indeed 'all'.<sup>[48]</sup>

But did Christ die for all? There has been a long-standing debate in the church whether the atoning sacrifice of Jesus was 'limited' in its scope (he died for his own people) or 'universal' (he died for everybody). It is not difficult to quote texts supporting both positions. On the one hand, the good shepherd laid down his life for his sheep<sup>[49]</sup> and 'Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her'.<sup>[50]</sup> On the other, *he gave himself as a ransom for all* (6) and he is 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'.<sup>[51]</sup> Various attempts at harmonization have been made, and both sides have legitimate concerns. The concern of those who defend a 'limited' atonement is for the justice of God, that the penalty of sin should not be paid twice, first by Christ on the cross and then by those who reject him and are condemned. The concern of those who defend a 'universal' atonement is for the universality of the gospel offer.

As with the statement that God desires all people to be saved, so with the statement that Christ gave himself for all people, it is possible to argue that 'all' means 'all kinds and classes' and not 'absolutely everybody'. Yet it is probably wiser to concede that Scripture appears to affirm both positions in an antinomy which we are at present unable to resolve. Whatever we may decide about the scope of the atonement, we are absolutely forbidden to limit the scope of world mission. The gospel must be preached to all, and salvation must be offered to all.

Here, then, is the double uniqueness of Jesus Christ, which qualifies him to be the only mediator. First there is the uniqueness of his divine-human person, and secondly the uniqueness of his substitutionary, redeeming death. The *one mediator is the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom*. We must keep these three nouns together, the man, the ransom and the mediator. Historically, they refer to the three major events in his saving career, his birth by which he became *man*, his death in which he gave himself as a *ransom*, and his exaltation (by resurrection and ascension) to the Father's right hand, where he acts as our *mediator* or advocate today. Theologically, they refer to the three great doctrines of salvation, namely the incarnation, the atonement and the heavenly mediation. And since in no other person but Jesus of Nazareth has God first become man (taking our humanity to himself) and then given himself as a ransom (taking our sin and guilt upon himself), therefore he is the only mediator. There is no other. No-one else possesses, or has ever possessed, the necessary qualifications to mediate between God and sinners.

What we do not know is exactly how much accurate and detailed information people need about the Man-Ransom-Mediator before they can call on God for salvation. What we do know is that all human beings are sinful, guilty and perishing; that no human being can save himself or herself by good works, religious observances, beliefs or sincerity; that Jesus Christ, being God, man and a ransom, is the only competent mediator through whom God saves; and that therefore it is urgent to proclaim the gospel in its fullness to as many people as possible.

#### ***d. The church's proclamation must concern all people (2:7)***

Paul's statement at the end of verse 6 is so compressed as to be enigmatic: *the testimony given in its proper time*. Some commentators think that it is the death of Christ which, at the proper time, when it took place, is itself the divine witness to God's loving desire to save sinners. But since Paul goes on at once in verse 7 to the contemporary proclamation of the gospel, it seems more probable that this is the testimony to which he is referring. The birth and death of Jesus took place in the first century; now *in its proper time* testimony to him has to be borne. *And for this purpose [sc. of witness] I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles* (7).

How are we to understand the three nouns 'herald', 'apostle' and 'teacher'? Paul was all three, but nobody is all three today. As we noted when considering the first verse of this letter, the designation 'apostle', when used of the 'apostles of Christ' in distinction to the 'apostles of the churches', alluded primarily to the Twelve, to whom Paul and James were later

added. They were eye-witnesses of the historic Jesus, especially of his resurrection, were promised the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and were given authority to teach in Christ's name. In addition, Paul was appointed the 'apostle to the Gentiles'. His strong ejaculation that he was telling the truth and not lying<sup>52</sup> was probably necessary because the false teachers were challenging his apostolic authority.

Although there are no 'apostles' of Christ today, who are comparable in inspiration and authority to the writers of the New Testament, there are certainly 'heralds' and 'teachers'. How shall we describe their responsibilities? It was the task of the apostles to formulate, defend and commend the gospel. It is the task of heralds to proclaim it, and of teachers to give systematic instruction in its doctrines and ethics.

What, then, do they proclaim and teach? Jesus Christ, the God-man, the ransom and the mediator, and all that is implied by those truths. To whom do they minister? *To the Gentiles*, all people of all nations. How do they do so? 'In faith and truth' (NRSV). The NIV and REB take these words as indicating the substance of the Christian message and so translate 'the true faith'. In the context it seems more likely that 'faith' and 'truth' describe the characteristics rather than the content of the teaching. That is, heralds preach and teachers instruct with conviction and sincerity. Or possibly 'truth' may be the objective truth of the gospel, while 'faith' is the subjective state of the teacher.<sup>53</sup> There is an urgent need for such heralds and teachers today. It is not enough that the Son of God was born, died and was raised, or that he is the uniquely qualified God-man, ransom and mediator; this great good news must be made known, both heralded and taught, throughout the world.

In summary, the first half of this chapter begins and ends with a reference to the church's world-wide responsibility. The local church has a global mission. According to verse 1 the church is to pray for all people; according to verse 7 it is to proclaim the gospel to all people, all nations. But how can the church be expected to include the whole world in the embrace of its intercession and its witness? Is not this perspective arrogant, presumptuous, even imperialistic? No! Chrysostom at the end of the fourth century gave us the reason: 'Imitate God!' he cried.<sup>54</sup> That is, the universal concern of the church arises from the universal concern of God. It is because there is one God and one mediator that all people must be included in the church's prayers and proclamation. It is the unity of God and the uniqueness of Christ which demand the universality of the gospel. God's desire and Christ's death concern all people; therefore the church's duty concerns all people too, reaching out to them both in earnest prayer and in urgent witness.

## 2. Sexual roles in public worship (2:8–15)

The topic of public worship, which Paul began to address in the first half of this chapter, he continues in the second. But now he turns from the priority and scope of the local church's prayers to the respective roles and appropriate behaviour of men and women whenever the church assembles for worship. He outlines the duties of the men in relation to prayer (8) and the duties of the women in relation first to dress, hairstyle and jewellery (9, 10), and then in relation to men (11–15).

*I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.*

<sup>9</sup> *I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes,* <sup>10</sup> *but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.* <sup>11</sup> *A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.* <sup>12</sup> *I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.* <sup>13</sup> *For Adam was formed first, then Eve.* <sup>14</sup> *And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.* <sup>15</sup> *But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

These are probably the most controversial verses (especially verses 11–15) in the Pastoral Letters. They have been much studied and discussed, not least in the recent church debates about the ordination and ministry of women. Moreover, the conclusions we draw from this text will depend largely on the hermeneutical principles we bring to it. Before we look at the details of these verses, therefore, it is necessary to consider the two principles which seem to be of paramount importance.

### a. Hermeneutical principles

The first may be called the *principle of harmony*. Those of us who believe the Bible to be the written Word of God also believe that when God spoke, he did not contradict himself. Therefore, although we gratefully acknowledge Scripture's rich diversity of both theological emphasis and literary style, we also expect it to possess an underlying consistency. This does not mean that we shall be guilty of artificial manipulation, but we shall seek a natural harmonization, interpreting each text within the total biblical context. So, as we approach these verses about the place of women in the church, we shall not isolate them from Scripture's fundamental assertion of the equal value and dignity of men and women by creation and redemption.<sup>55</sup> There is no difference between the sexes either in the divine image we bear or in our status as God's children through faith in Christ. Every idea of gender superiority or inferiority is ruled out from the start.

Secondly, we must seek to apply the *principle of history*. That is, God always spoke his word in particular historical and cultural settings, specially of the ancient Near East (the Old Testament), Palestinian Judaism (the Gospels) and the Graeco-Roman world (the rest of the New Testament). No word of God was spoken in a cultural vacuum; every word was spoken in a cultural context. It is, in fact, the glory of divine revelation that, in order to communicate with his people, God did not shout culture-free maxims at them from a distance. Instead, he stooped to their level, entered their history, assumed their culture and spoke their language. Yet this divine condescension also creates acute problems of