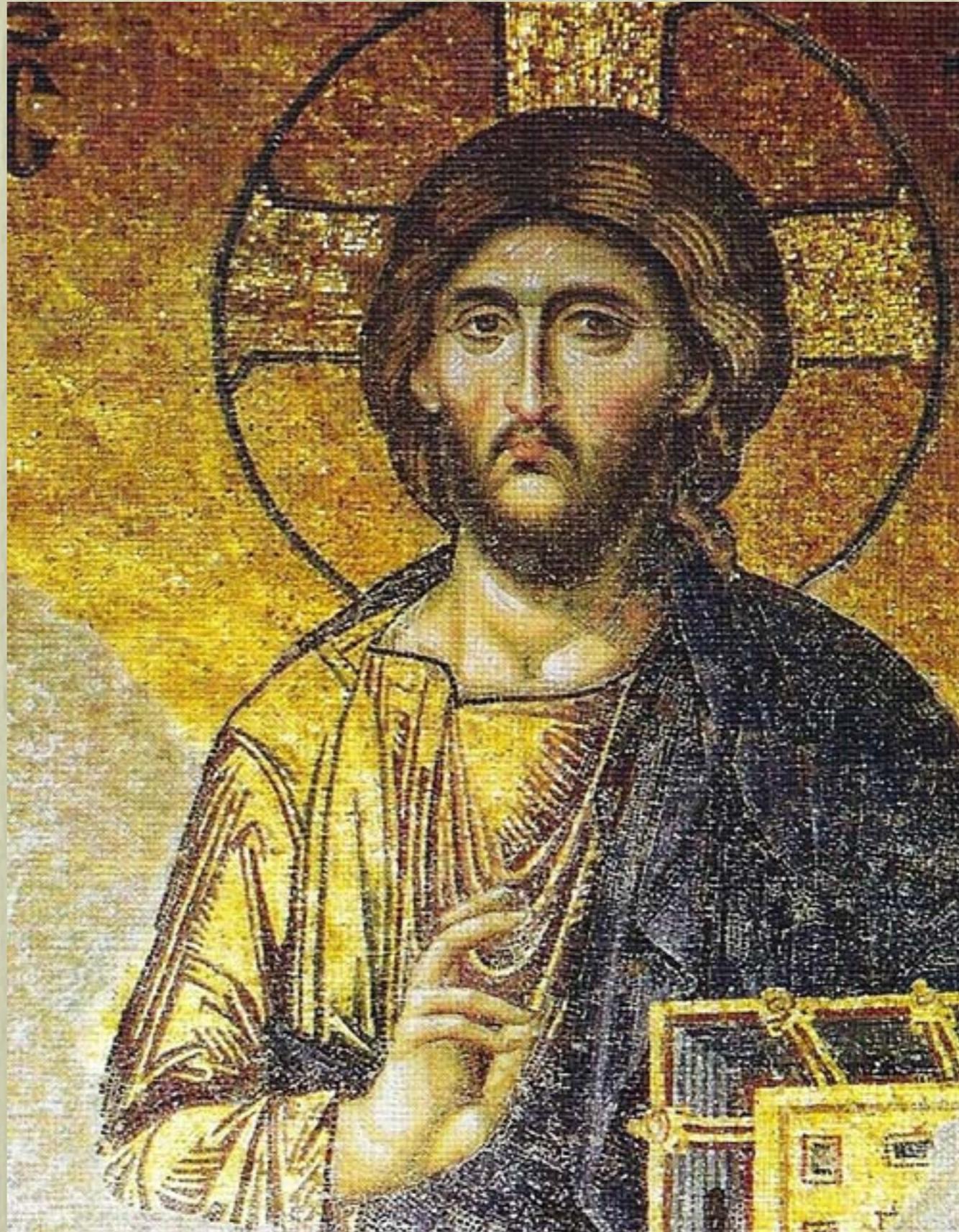


07. 1 Timothy 5_6



1 Timothy 5:1-2

Do not speak harshly to an older man, but exhort him as to a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters – with absolute purity.

Timothy's position requires that he exercise authority over the older men in matters concerning church organisation and life. His youth (see 4:12) could make this difficult at times since it goes against normal cultural expectations. Paul reminds him that he is to exhort (παρακαλέω) them: that is to say, mediate Christ's appeal to them.

The obvious difficulties that can arise when a young man is dealing with younger women call forth from Paul a special insistence on the necessity of absolute 'purity' (ἀγνεία, 4:12) – a word used for respecting (not intruding on) sacred space.

1 Timothy 5:3-4

Honour widows who are really widows. If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some repayment to their parents; for this is pleasing in God's sight.

The resources of the community are being drained because some families are failing to carry out their responsibility and are leaving it to the community. Paul reminds such families that it is 'pleasing in God's sight' when they acknowledge their debt to the widows and care properly for them. The community's support is to be kept for 'real widows', that is, for those who are 'left alone', with no family to supply their needs.

1 Timothy 5:5-7

The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day; but the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. Give these commands as well so that they may be above reproach.

Paul takes the occasion to offer advice to these widows. They have no one on whom they can rely. Let them set their hopes on God (who will care for them through the community). After the busyness of life, they have the opportunity now to concentrate on prayer. They must not fritter away this precious time in living for pleasure. That is to be ‘dead even while she lives’.

1 Timothy 5:8

Whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

1 Timothy 5:9-10

Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old and has been married only once; she must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints' feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way.

Paul now describes the widows who should be officially inscribed on the list of those to be supported. They are to be ‘**not less than sixty**’. He will explain his reasons for excluding younger widows shortly. As with the bishops (see 3:2), they are to be examples to the community of the special fidelity that is to be between Jesus and the church. They are also to be people who are known to have lived exemplary Christian lives in the way described in verse ten. Of course, Paul is not saying that other needy widows are to be neglected. We are dealing here with what seems to have been a public institution in the community.

1 Timothy 5:11-12

But refuse to put younger widows on the list; for when their sensual desires alienate them from the Messiah, they want to marry, and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge.

In keeping with what Paul has already said about widows being ‘married only once’ (5:9), it seems that a pledge of chastity was made on the occasion of being placed on the list of widows approved for support. Younger widows were in a position to be tempted to break this pledge.

1 Timothy 5:13-16

Besides that, they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us. For some have already turned away to follow Satan. If any believing woman has relatives who are really widows, let her assist them; let the church not be burdened, so that it can assist those who are real widows.

There was also the problem that some of them were enjoying their subsidised leisure and were abusing it. Some may have been influenced by the false teachers (see 2:15; 4:3) and were refusing marriage on principle. Paul does not want the church to be subsidising their irresponsible behaviour. They should not be accepted among the approved widows, but should remarry, live responsible lives, and stop giving the Christian community a bad name.

1 Timothy 5:17-18

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and, “The labourer deserves to be paid.”

Paul turns his attention here to the ‘elders’ (πρεσβύτερος). Following the Jewish model of community organisation, they seem to have formed a council (see 4:14) which was responsible for the direction of the local community. The community should give special recognition to those who ‘rule well’. In keeping with the main theme of this letter which concerns the necessity of ‘sound teaching’ (1:10), Paul is especially interested in those elders who ‘labour in preaching and teaching’. The community should show its appreciation in some tangible form, according to the instructions of the sacred Scripture. Having quoted from Deuteronomy 25:4 10:8, Paul adds a saying of Jesus that is included in his Gospel by Luke.

1 Timothy 5:19-21

Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest also may stand in fear. In the presence of God and of the Messiah Jesus and of the elect **angels**, I warn you to keep these instructions without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality.

The council of elders was probably responsible for settling disputes that arose within the community. This would give special importance to Paul's instruction that they needed to be protected against false accusations. At the same time if they are guilty of public sin, and, in spite of correction, persist in it, they should be publicly disciplined for the good of the whole community. There are echoes here of the process outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 (see also 1 Corinthians 5:4-5). **'Angels'** were associated with divine judgment (2 Thessalonians 1:7).

1 Timothy 5:22-23

Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, and do not participate in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. No longer drink only water, but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.

Paul spoke earlier of the time when the elders laid hands on Timothy (see 4:14). He now instructs Timothy to discern well before he gives authoritative approval to those being presented for public ministry in the church. If through sinning they prove unsuitable, Timothy must bear some of the responsibility.

He is to keep himself ‘pure’ (ἄγνός, see 5:2).

We should understand that the water in many cities at the time was often unsafe for drinking and was known to cause ‘**ailments**’.

I Timothy 5:24-25

The sins of some people are conspicuous and precede them to judgment, while the sins of others follow them there. So also good works are conspicuous; and even when they are not, they cannot remain hidden.

Paul returns to the subject of Timothy's authorising of church ministers. He does not want him to be over-scrupulous. It is inevitable that he make some mistakes. Some people's sins are not conspicuous. He is not to blame if he fails to pick this up and the sins are revealed only later. It is the same with people's good points. Some of these will emerge only later. Timothy's duty is to make the best discernment he can on the evidence available to him.

1 Timothy 6:1-2

Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful to them on the ground that they are members of the church; rather they must serve them all the more, since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved.

Domestic slavery was part of social life in the Roman, Greek and Jewish world. Two considerations underlie Paul's remarks here. The first is that while it is true that Christian slaves, like other slaves, are 'under the yoke of slavery', they are also under another 'yoke', that of him who said: 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Matthew 11:28-30).

The second consideration is that all those who share in Jesus' communion of love with the Father are living a life that transcends the social inequalities that are part of our existence in the world: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28; see Colossians 3:11).

Both these considerations must radically transform all our social relationships, including slavery, but there was no possibility of a small Christian community altering such a fundamental institution in society generally. Furthermore, the institution was so much taken for granted that it persisted even in Christian households. Change would come about only by changing people's attitudes and perceptions. The behaviour of Christian slaves has a role to play in bringing about this change, and it is this that is Paul's concern here.

The freedom given to them in the Christian church should make their behaviour all the more attractive to their masters. Otherwise, since they claim to be Christians, they will cause their masters to think ill of Jesus and so **'blaspheme'**. We are reminded of Paul's quoting of Isaiah in his Letter to the Romans: 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you' (Romans 2:24; Isaiah 52:5). Though he does not explicitly say it here, Paul is obviously hoping that they will attract their masters to the faith. If their masters are Christians, this is all the more reason for the household slaves to fulfil their duties in a Christian manner. Since they are serving those who are loved by God and by Christ, they, too, should serve in love.

1 Timothy 6:2-3

Teach and urge these duties. Whoever teaches otherwise does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus the Messiah and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness.

Paul's main concern in writing this letter is to strengthen the church against those who are undermining it by 'teaching different doctrine' (1:3). He spoke of them as turning aside from 'a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith' (1:5), and so from 'love'. They fail to understand 'the things about which they make assertions' (1:7). He referred to them as being under demonic influence, and as being hypocrites and liars (see 4:1-2). He continues his critique here. The key problem is that their teaching is not in accord with the healing, life-giving words of Jesus: the words spoken by Jesus, before his death as well as through his Spirit, and the proclamation of the gospel which speaks about Jesus as well as being inspired by him. Only teaching that focuses on Jesus leads to communion with the living God.

1 Timothy 6:4

They are conceited, understanding nothing, and have a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words.

These teachers are described by Paul as ‘conceited’ (τύφω), in the sense of being unable to think clearly because they are blown about and deafened by their own impulsive ideas. Paul has already instructed Timothy to make sure that such people are not given authority in the community (see 3:6). He echoes what he said earlier about their lack of understanding. Their ‘**craving for controversy and for disputes about words**’ is ‘**morbid**’ (νόσος, ‘sick craving’). Paul goes on to describe what happens when such teachers influence a community. These are some of the problems that have motivated Paul to write. They are vices that cut at the heart of community love.

1 Timothy 6:4-5

From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

Paul begins the list with ‘**envy**’. This also features in the list of vices in Galatians 5:21 and Romans 1:29. Envy leads to ‘**dissension**’ (also in Romans 1:29 and Galatians 5:20). Where there is dissension there is ‘**slander, base suspicions, and wrangling**’. Their thinking has been corrupted. They have fallen for a fraud and are ‘**bereft of the truth**’. The tragedy of this is heightened by what Paul has already said about God willing everyone to be saved and to come to ‘**the knowledge of the truth**’ (2:4). His critique comes to a climax with a topic that will engage him for much of the rest of the letter, for he sees it as being central to the problem. The false teachers are playing on people’s religious sensibilities and are using religion as a way of making money.

1 Timothy 6:6-8

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

Paul agrees that there is great value in godliness (see 4:8), but not the kind that the false teachers are seeking. As he wrote earlier, the goal of sound teaching is ‘love’ (1:5), and what more valuable than to experience the love of God that is Jesus’ gift to us! As against the acquisitiveness of those who are contradicting the gospel for their own material gain, Paul speaks of ‘contentment’ (αὐτάρχεια). Here we have yet another attempt by Paul to reach across to the best in his culture to attract his contemporaries to the fullness of the Gospel which he has been commissioned to proclaim. αὐτάρχεια (contentment) was highly recommended by the proponents of the major philosophical schools of the day, including the Stoics, the Epicureans and the Cynics.

They understood αὐτάρκεια as ‘self-sufficiency’, whereby people found contentment in themselves and did not need other people or anything outside themselves to be complete. Paul could say of himself: ‘I have learned to be content with whatever I have’ (Philippians 4:11), not, however, because he was sufficient in himself, but because he had all he needed in Jesus. His ‘contentment’ allows him to say, in a very unStoic way: I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me’ (2 Corinthians 12:9).

1 Timothy 6:9-10

But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

Paul's statement echoes Jesus' words: 'I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear ; your Father knows that you need them' (Luke 12:22,30). His words about the seductive nature of material wealth also echo the words of Jesus: 'None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions' (Luke 14:33). Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God' (Luke 18:25).

1 Timothy 6:11

But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.

Most of the instructions which Paul has given to Timothy in this letter have been aimed at the community, especially those in leadership positions. These final words are for Timothy. He is to pursue ‘**righteousness**’ (δικαιοσύνη), and ‘**godliness**’ (εὐσέβεια). They are necessarily connected. Through the gift of righteousness, we share in Jesus’ relationship to God. The result is a life in which we live in the presence of the living and true God, the God of the Exodus and the God of Jesus. We listen to God’s word and let God’s will be expressed in all our activity. ‘**Faith, love and endurance**’ are also listed together in Titus 2:2. The words translated ‘**gentleness**’ (πραῦπάθεια) here is found only here in the Greek Bible. It is related to πραῦτης (see Titus 3:2).

1 Timothy 6:12-14

Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of the Messiah Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame

The ‘fight’ metaphor (repeated from 1:18) comes either from the stadium (see 4:10) or the battlefield. The prize is ‘eternal life’ (1:16). The confession to which Paul refers may be the confession of faith which Timothy made when he was given his present commission (1:18; 4:14). Paul solemnly enjoins upon him that he is to be faithful with the **faithfulness of Jesus**. It is this commission, elements of which Paul has been stressing in this letter, which is the commandment which Timothy is to keep ‘**without spot or blame**’.

1 Timothy 6:14-16

until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus the Messiah, which he will bring about at the right time – he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen.

Paul invites Timothy to contemplate and look forward to the ‘manifestation’ (ἐπιφάνεια) of the Messiah, which God will bring about ‘**at the right time**’ (καιροῖς, see 2:6).

The concluding solemn doxology may be from synagogue worship.

1 Timothy 6:17

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Paul returns to the subject of wealth. He picks up from the points he was making in 6:3-10. We recall also his criticisms of the women who were displaying their wealth in the assembly (2:9), his concern that bishops (3:3) and deacons (3:8) not be lovers of, or greedy for, money. Also his criticism of widows who were 'living for pleasure' (5:6). Paul is anxious that those in the community who are wealthy are not seduced into pride or into finding their security in their material possessions.

Everything is passing except God. We must put our trust in 'God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment'. Paul is echoing the warning of the psalmist: 'He would not take refuge in God, but trusted in abundant riches, and sought refuge in wealth' (Psalm 52:7).

1 Timothy 6:18-19

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Wealth is something that gives us the opportunity ‘to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share’. We are not to be like those who ‘store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God’ (Luke 12:21). The wealthy must not let material possessions distract them from taking hold of ‘the life that really is life’. There are echoes in Paul’s words of the advice given by Jesus: ‘I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes’ (Luke 16:9).

1 Timothy 6:20-21

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge; by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith. Grace be with you (plural).

After once again urging Timothy to ‘guard what has been entrusted to you’ – the community entrusted to his care, and the gospel which he is commissioned to proclaim – Paul speaks again of the emptiness and the danger to the faith of the heterodox teaching that Timothy must do all he can to stamp out. He concludes this formal, apostolic letter with a prayer that God’s grace will be with the community. The plural ‘you’ is a further indication that this is not conceived as a personal letter to Timothy, but is meant for the church. Paul has assured them that Timothy is acting under Paul’s instructions, and he wants him to be obeyed.