**Lesson 3 - 1 Timothy 5-6**

**5:3. Honor widows who are truly widows**. It is estimated that forty percent of the women between forty and fifty in the ancient world were widows. The Christian community would not be immune to the causes of those statistics, and the large number of widows would present a significant pastoral concern.

The question here, however, is how to translate the Greek verb *timaō*, which many translators render as ‘honor’. Certainly this translation is possible. But the sense of giving financial support is also expressed by this Greek word and fits the context better here. Remember that the commandment to “honor your father and your mother” bore with it the obligation of financial support in their need, as Jesus argues with his opponents in Mark 7:9–13. And in 1 Tim 5:17 the statement that elders who serve well are due “double honor” is intended in a financial sense, as is made clear by the maxim quoted in the following verse: “A worker deserves his pay.” The meaning “give financial support” in 5:3 throws a meaningful light on the whole passage.

Going Deeper – A non-governmental Welfare System.

In the Jewish synagogue there was a ministry to the needy: the distribution of food to those in immediate need and a kind of “community chest” of funds for those in long-term need. This practice was continued in the early Christian community, if we are to believe the importance attached to it in James 1:27, where it is part of James’s definition of “religion that is pure and undefiled,” and the picture in Acts 2:41–47 and 4:32–37, where no one was in need because those in the community with resources shared what they had. Widows unsupported by other means would fall into the category of long-term indigents, and the proper handling of their needs occasioned the tension we hear about in Acts 6:1–6, where the Greek-speaking disciples complained that “their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.” Obviously there could be a strain between the needs of the widows and the resources of the community, and Paul is sensitive to that here**[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**5:5. She who is a real widow and is left all alone.** The real widow has no relatives to look after her, but instead depends on God. This reliance on God is expected of all in the community, beginning with Paul and mediated through Timothy (4:10). This is consistent with the attitude of widows in the Old Testament (Deut 10:18, and see Luke 4:25–26). Anna (Luke 2:36–37) is the prototype of these real widows. [[2]](#footnote-2)

**5:8. If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith**. Did Paul mean this literally? Understood correctly, yes. In a world without Social Security, in both Roman and Greek law children were obliged to support their parents. For a Christian to refuse to do so would add scandal to civil disobedience. The believer is not simply one who recites a creed but one who has made a baptismal commitment to the whole of Christian life, an oath of fidelity, as it were, a vow to live the life of love. To refuse such an elemental duty of love as to care for one’s own would add a guilt to which the pagan, who never made such a pledge, would be immune. **(ibid**. Montague p. 110)

**Going Deeper – An Area Needing Service**

Today, when women can find employment outside the home and government programs care for the retired and the unemployed, the Church, at least in the developed world, no longer needs to formally enroll needy, unsupported widows. However, in every parish today you will find widows, widowers, and elderly persons who have never married given to prayer and to service of the Church. They are not withered branches on the vine, but preciously fruitful by their witness, prayer, and service.

Two very important issues for today’s families and parishes are raised by this reading**. First**, adult children have an obligation to care for their elderly parents, and not only in financial ways. In many cases, parents may have sufficient financial resources but need help, assistance, and companionship—and many of them do not receive it. There is a lot of neglect of elderly parents and other elderly relatives. **Second,** despite government programs and other charitable initiatives, in every parish there are poor, elderly people with unmet physical needs. A truly Christian community seeks out these people and organizes to provide assistance. People need help with their houses and housekeeping, with transportation to stores and doctors and church, with dealing with government bureaucracies, and so on. Paul’s words about the responsibility of families and of the whole Christian community to the elderly call for education and initiatives in regard to these issues. (**Ibid.** Montague p. 112)

**5:19. The evidence of two or three witnesses**. Fr Montague feels that this is another indication of a rather developed church. That Timothy should not act on **an accusation against a presbyter** without confirmation of **two or three witnesses,** might be just common sense and the application of Jewish principles of law (Deut 19:15), mentioned five times in the New Testament (see also Matt 18:16; John 8:17; 2 Cor 13:1; Heb 10:28). But the statement may also suggest that such accusations have indeed been made. Christians living in the Greek world might be prompted by the widespread example of frivolous accusations. Ceslas Spicq, the author of a theological lexicon, cites a Greek inscription concerning Alexandria where, “the city having become almost uninhabitable because of the number of accusers and each household being prey to the menace,” the Roman prefect Tiberius Julius Alexander was obliged to suppress any unfounded denunciation and require the accusers to supply solid proof of their case. Persons in authority are especially vulnerable, since their concern for the common good sometimes requires refusal of a subordinate’s unreasonable demands, and this could lead to retaliatory accusations. On the other hand, abuse of authority is the worst kind, and the Church needs a procedure to deal with it. (**Ibid.** p. 114)

**6:1. Let all who are under the yoke of slavery**. Here in 1 Timothy, only the slaves are discussed, not the masters. Their status is described with a **yoke**, a traditional symbol of servitude, indicating Paul’s awareness that this condition is not what most people would prefer. They are not merely to give their masters “servile” obedience but, more than that, they are to give **full respect**, because they deserve it—a strange thing for Paul to say in light of what he knows of occasional abusive masters. Paul does not specify why the masters deserve respect, though we may assume it is the principle of authority, which he upholds elsewhere, even if it abused those under it (Rom 13:1). But we can assume that, on the part of the slave, the foundation for respect would not be the virtue of their masters but the slaves’ consecration to Christ, who, though Lord and Master, became a slave and gave his life as a ransom for all (Mark 10:45; Col 3:24).

**6:2. Those who have believing masters**. Paul points to two other motives. **(1)** The honor of **the name of God**: Paul’s Jewish heritage emerges here, for the honor of the Lord’s name was at stake in the Israelites’ relation with the Gentiles (Ezek 36:17–20). And even more so does the New Testament insist on the message that Christian behavior sends to outsiders, for edification or for scandal (Matt 5:16; 1 Tim 3:7; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 4:4). The way the slave behaves either honors or dishonors the name of God. **(2)** Christian **teaching**: the masters who know nothing of the Christian faith would come to know it first by the behavior of their Christian slaves, for praise or blame. The reputation would then fall back on the Christian formation the slave received, hence on the gospel. (**Ibid.** pp.120-121)

**Going Deeper –Slavery**

In our passage Paul discusses only the attitude and behavior of slaves. He balances this in Col 4:1 by saying, “Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, realizing that you too have a Master in heaven.” The teaching of the Church today is very clear. The Catechism states (2414): “The seventh commandment forbids acts or enterprises that for any reason—selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian—lead to the *enslavement of human beings*, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave ‘no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, … both in the flesh and in the Lord’ [Philemon 16]” (emphasis original).

Unfortunately in the history of Christianity, masters were not always benefactors of their slaves, as Paul himself was well aware (Col 4:1). Often passages like these were appealed to in order to maintain a system that in the secular order did not reflect the equality and brotherhood called for in the Christian community. But the point applicable today to all civic and social relationships, especially the employer-employee relationship, is this: the bond of justice, the covenant by which persons are bound with rights and duties, is crowned with another kind of bond—that of love, a love born of Jesus Christ, who showed that love by becoming a servant, by washing the feet of his disciples. Around the Eucharistic table in the earliest Christian communities all were equal, all were brothers and sisters, no matter what their social rank or economic ties. And that community of love could not help but spill over into the world outside, not to be blind to justice but to enable and ennoble it with love. (**Ibid**. p. 122)

**6:3b. The sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ**. What he has to say about unmasking false teachers shows he is writing from long experience. He twice describes them as knowing nothing. Their intentions are wrong, because they seek only personal gain (v. 5); the reason why they cause controversy and are forever arguing is to distract attention from their defects and lack of true wisdom (v. 4).

Sound words would be those words which bring spiritual health, words of salvation. “The sacred words [words of salvation] of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3): this phrase, and the quotation from Luke 10:7 in 1 Timothy 5:18, give grounds for thinking that at the time this letter was written there was in circulation among the Christians of Ephesus, a written Gospel, specifically that of St Luke. However, there is no other evidence to support this theory. The Apostle could be referring to words of our Lord accurately passed on in oral teaching.

**6:3c. Teaching which accords with godliness**. The Greek word *eusebeia*, is translated variously as godliness/religion/piety. Its only appearance in the New Testament is in the Second Letter of St Peter and in the Pastoral Letters, and has a broad meaning. Sometimes it refers to Christian doctrine, not in the sense of abstract truths but as a revelation of God to man. Sometimes it means “religion” (cf. 1 Tim 6:5–6, where it is translated as “godliness”). In this passage (v. 3) it is the same as “revealed truth” insofar as revealed truth is our link with God; if one does not accept the truth, one breaks that link; if one makes use of it for financial gain one perverts its inner meaning.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**6:10.** **The love of money is the root of all evils** is probably a proverb accepted even by pagans of the time, particularly the more educated ones. Christians were well aware of the harmful effects of greed (cf. 1 Jn 2:17 and note). St Paul uses this memorable phrase to get at the false teachers: the root cause of all their errors is their greed for possessions. It is clearly a perverted thing to do to turn godliness, religion, into a way of making money (v. 5). Those who try to satisfy this ambition will end up unhappy and wretched. (**Ibid**.)

**6:11. But as for you, man of God**. The term “man of God” man of God” is an Old Testament title reserved for Moses, David, and the prophets. As the man of God, Moses receives the revelation of the Lord (Josh 14:6), legislates in God’s name (Ezra 3:2), and blesses the people (Deut 33:1). David is called man of God in the context of giving laws concerning worship (2 Chron 8:14; Neh 12:24). But it is in reference to the prophets that the title “man of God” appears most frequently (Judges 13:8; 1 Sam 2:27; 9:6; etc.). It was the role of the prophet to communicate the Lord’s fresh word to his people and also to communicate the people’s need to the Lord by interceding for them (Jer 15:11). Hence “man of God” connotes a prophetic authority, which means being a channel of God’s will for his people and of the people’s needs to God. From this and what follows we can glimpse something of the situation Timothy is in. Confronted with difficulties, especially the pseudo-teachers, he may be tempted to become discouraged and indecisive, and Paul wants to reaffirm his divine call and hearten him to act courageously upon it

**6:11-12**. **Avoid/shun all of this; pursue/aim at righteousness…Fight/compete the good fight of the faith; take/lay hold of the eternal life.** He is not only to avoid the greed of the false teachers, but also Paul directs him to actively combat their influence in verse 12; that he is to **aim at/pursue**, **fight/compete**, and **lay/take hold**—three commands ticked off like a coach giving a disheartened player a pep talk and sending him or her back on the field. The reference to **Godliness**/**Righteousness** refers to right relationships with God and with the people Timothy is pastoring. **Piety**/**Devotion** (*eusebeia*) is frequently mentioned in the Pastorals. That characteristic refers not only to personal piety but applies also to the worship taking place in communities as well.

**Going Deeper – Fight the Good Fight**

In 1 Tim 4:7, Paul told Timothy to *train* himself for godliness. Here he must go into the arena and *fight* for it. Combat imagery would appeal to the Hellenistic mind, shaped as it was by love of competitive sports, so it is not surprising that Paul would use it frequently (1 Cor 9:25; Col 1:29; 1 Tim 4:10; 2 Tim 4:7). In Eph 6:10–17, Paul develops a long metaphor detailing the weapons to be used in spiritual combat. In Christian tradition there are many images for the growth of the Christian life: a journey, ascending a mountain, following Jesus, purification, illumination, a deepening union. The combat image is less popular today, perhaps because it suggests violence. Yet Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force” (Matt 11:12); and he demands of his followers a certain violence to self if one is to experience the new life of grace (Mark 8:34–38). NAB’s **compete well for the faith** loses something of the power of the Greek, which literally says, “Fight the fight of the faith.” The combat of the faith is very different from the kind of disruptive quarreling that Paul described in 1 Tim 6:4–5. Seeking the truth in love (Eph 4:15), its aim is ultimately unity in love. But there are times when the price is costly, when hard decisions have to be made, when one’s personal preferences must be sacrificed, when evil must be confronted, when one’s fears must be overcome. It is much harder to work for truth and unity, for human and spiritual solidarity, than it is to respond with violence. (**Ibid.** Montague pp.126-128)

**6:20-21. Guard what has been entrusted to you.**  What Timothy has received from Paul is a sacred trust. The word “deposit,” given in some translations for **what has been entrusted to you**, was used when describing entrusting money or words or secrets or even a person to a third party (Lev 5:21, 13; Tob 10:13). In any case, the stress is on the trustworthiness of the receiver. For that reason, deposits were often consecrated by placing them in a temple, which served as a bank. According to the books of Maccabees, the temple of Jerusalem served as such a bank (2 Macc 3:10–11; 4 Macc 4:3–7). Pagans had similar practices. The temple of Artemis in Ephesus, where Timothy lived, similarly received such funds. Like such a deposit, what Timothy has received is a sacred trust. It comprises the whole gospel message, which Paul has described in various ways throughout the letter. Paul’s delegate is not to add or subtract, and, in the context of the major concern of this letter, he is to keep the message in its purity against the godless **prattle/babbling** of the false teachers.

**6:20. Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions/absurdities.** The Contradictions/absurdities may be the teachings that deny the truths of the faith or simply the methods of discourse employed by these so-called rhetoricians, who delight in arguing (the Greek word is *antitheses*) but do not arrive at real “knowledge.” The false *gnōsis* (“knowledge”) may be an early form of Gnosticism, but more likely it is the kind of titillation with “knowledge [that] inflates with pride,” in contrast to divine “love [that] builds up” (1 Cor 8:1).

**6:21. Some have missed the mark/strayed from the fold.** Some who began as Christians in Ephesus ended up committing themselves to heresy (**professing it**). They have, like lost sheep, strayed from the fold and **from the faith** it professes. (**Ibid**. pp. 133-134)

1. Montague, G. T. (2008). [*First and Second Timothy, Titus*](https://ref.ly/logosres/cathcomm75ti?ref=BibleNAB.1Ti5.3&off=866&ctx=le+(John+19%3a25%E2%80%9327).%0a~It+is+estimated+that) (P. S. Williamson & M. Healy, Eds.; p. 108). Baker Academic. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Fiore, B. (2007). [*The Pastoral Epistles: First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus*](https://ref.ly/logosres/sp12pastepis?ref=Bible.1Ti5.5&off=60&ctx=ations+and+prayers%3a+~The+real+widow+has+n) (D. J. Harrington, Ed.; Vol. 12, p. 103). Liturgical Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [*Saint Paul’s Letters to the Thessalonians, and Pastoral Letters*](https://ref.ly/logosres/navarrentstandard73th?ref=Bible.1Ti6.3-10&off=33&ctx=s+described%0a6%3a3%E2%80%9310.+~What+he+has+to+say+a) (p. 98). (2005). Navarre; Scepter Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)