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THE FIRST EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY: An Expanded Paraphrase

III CHURCH ORDER (Chs. 2: 1-5: 25), *continued*

(d) *Warning against false teachers* (Ch. 4: 1-5)

Now the Spirit tells us quite explicitly that in the latter times some will apostatize from the faith. They will turn their minds to deceiving spirits and doctrines inspired by demons; they will teach falsehood with dissembling words, for their consciences will be as insensitive as though they were cauterized. They will tell people not to marry and to abstain from various kinds of food. But all kinds of food have been created by God, and believers who have come to know the truth may partake of them all and give thanks for them. Everything created by God is good; nothing need be refused if we give thanks for it when we take it, for then it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer.

(e) *True religion* (Ch. 4: 6-16)

If you point this out to your brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, well trained in the language of faith and of the sound doctrine which you have made your own. Have nothing to do with old wives' fables that have nothing to do with true religion. True religion is what you must be exercised in. Bodily exercise has its own limited usefulness, but true religion is universally useful; it holds good promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Here is a trustworthy saying; it deserves to be accepted by all: "This is why we toil and struggle, because we have set our hope on the living God, the Preserver of all mankind, especially of believers".

These are the things you must urge on them in your teaching. Do not let anyone despise your youthfulness. Set an example to the believers in speech and behaviour, in faith and love and purity. Till I come devote yourself to the reading of Scripture, with exhortation and instruction. Do not neglect the spiritual gift with which you have been entrusted—the gift that you received through a prophetic utterance when the elders' hands were laid upon you. Practise these things; be constantly engaged in them, so that all may see your progress. Pay attention to yourself as well as to your

teaching ; persevere in these things ; for if you do so you will deliver your own soul and your hearers' souls too.

(f) *Proper behaviour towards members of the church* (Ch. 5: 1-2)

Do not administer a rebuke to an elder, but appeal to him as you would to your father. Treat the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women, with all propriety, as sisters.

(g) *Instruction about widows* (Ch. 5: 3-16)

As for widows, give honour to those who are widows in deed as well as in name. What I mean is this: if a widow has children or grandchildren, they should learn first of all to practise true religion at home and repay their parents or grandparents for the care they have bestowed on them, for this is pleasing in God's sight. But a woman who is a widow indeed, one who is truly destitute, has set her hope on God and continues in supplication and prayer night and day ; whereas one who trifles her time away is as good as dead even while she lives. Lay this charge on them, and see that they are irreproachable in this respect. A man who makes no provision for his own people, especially the members of his household, has denied the faith ; he is worse than an unbeliever.

A widow should not be enrolled unless she is over 60 years of age. She should have been one man's wife, and must have her good works attested. Let her be enrolled if she has brought up children, shown hospitality to strangers, attended to the needs of her fellow-Christians, helped those in trouble, and devoted herself to all sorts of good works.

Younger widows should not be enrolled, for when they succumb to wayward impulses that take their minds off Christ, they want to marry, and incur condemnation for breaking their original pledge.¹ Besides, they learn idle habits, gadding about from house to house ; and not only do they learn idle habits but they become tattlers and busybodies, talking about things that are none of their business.

My advice regarding younger widows, then, is that they should get married, have children and keep house ; then they will give no occasion to any ill-disposed party to speak evil of them. By neglecting this some of them have already strayed from the path and gone to the devil.

If a woman who is a believer has widows among her relatives, let her supply their needs ; then the church will not be burdened

¹Enrolment in the order of widows evidently involved an undertaking not to remarry.

with their support but can concentrate on the relief of those who are widows indeed.

(h) *Remuneration of elders* (Ch. 5: 17-20)

Elders who direct the affairs of the church well should be counted worthy of double honour — especially those who work hard in preaching and teaching. The scripture says: "Do not muzzle an ox when it is threshing out the grain".¹ And again: "The workman deserves his pay".² Do not take up an accusation against an elder unless it is confirmed by "two or three witnesses".³ Open sinners must be publicly exposed, so as to deter the others.

(i) *Personal counsel* (Ch. 5: 21-23)

I charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels: observe these injunctions without discrimination; whatever you do, avoid favouritism. Do not lay hands on anyone too quickly, and avoid being implicated in other people's sins: keep yourself pure. Stop drinking only water; take a little wine for your stomach since you are subject to such frequent attacks of sickness.

(j) *Evil works and good* (Ch. 5: 24-25)

Some men's sins are committed in full view of all and lead the way to the impending judgment; other men's sins catch up with them later and find them out unawares. Similarly, good works are known to all, and those that are not good cannot be concealed.

IV. VARIOUS INJUNCTIONS (Ch. 6: 1-19)

(a) *Advice to slaves* (Ch. 6: 1-2)

Those who are under the yoke of slavery should hold their masters worthy of all honour; then the name of God and our Christian teaching will not fall into disrepute. Those whose masters are themselves believers must not disregard them because they are fellow-Christians; they should serve them all the more diligently, because those who devote themselves to service are trusted and loved.

(b) *The grace of contentment* (Ch. 6: 3-10)

This, then is the instruction and exhortation that you must give. Anyone who teaches otherwise, and does not adhere to the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with true religion, is deluded and knows nothing. Such a

¹ Deut. 25: 4; cf. 1 Cor. 9: 9.

² Luke 10: 7.

³ Deut. 19: 15; cf. Matt. 18: 16; 2 Cor. 13: 1.

man is morbidly taken up with disputes and debates which give rise to envy and strife, slander and evil suspicions, constant friction between men whose minds are corrupt, who are devoid of truth, and who regard religion as a means of material profit. But true religion, coupled with contentment, is great profit in itself. We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of it; so, if we have food to eat and clothes to wear, we shall be content. Those who covet riches will fall into many a temptation and snare, into senseless and harmful desires, which drown men in destruction and perdition. Love of money is the root of all evils; its pursuit has led some away from the faith and pierced them to the heart with many a pang.

(c) *The Christian warfare and witness* (Ch. 6: 11-16)

As you are a man of God, avoid these things! Pursue righteousness, true religion, faith, love, patience, and a gentle spirit. Wage the noble warfare of faith; lay hold of eternal life. It was for this that you were called; this is the noble confession which you bore in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God who gives life to all, and in the presence of Christ Jesus who bore witness by His noble confession before Pontius Pilate: keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ. That manifestation will be granted us in due season by Him who is the blessed and sole Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords; He alone has immortality and dwells in light inaccessible; no man has ever seen Him or can see Him. To Him be honour and power eternal! Amen.

(d) *Advice to the rich* (Ch. 6: 17-19)

As for those who are rich in this world's goods, tell them not to be haughty; bid them rest their hope, not on uncertain wealth, but on God, for it is He who in rich abundance gives us everything for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good works and be rich in *them*, to share their wealth liberally and show generosity. Thus they will store up for themselves a good foundation for the coming day, and take hold of the life that is life indeed.

V. FINAL CHARGE, WARNING, AND BLESSING (Ch. 6: 20-21)

Guard the treasure deposited with you, Timothy! Keep clear of those empty babblings that have nothing to do with true religion, and the contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge". Some have professed this so-called "knowledge" and gone astray from the faith.

Grace be with you all.