

## LET NO ONE DESPISE YOUR YOUTH: CHURCH AND THE WORLD IN THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The Pastoral Epistles have often been considered as presenting “the ideal of Christian citizenship” that is characterized by a “peaceful life” in the present existence, an ideal that loses “the dialectic of the eschatological existence” found in the earlier Pauline writings.<sup>1</sup> Many consider such an attempt to accommodate to the accepted norms of the wider society as a “canonical betrayal” of the Pauline understanding of the spirit of justice and equity.<sup>2</sup> The transformative power of the gospel that challenges the oppressive structures of society is replaced by the concern to maintain the survival of a community bound by the traditions of the apostles, and the early charismatic leadership is replaced by a rigid structure that regulates the life of this community.

To those who adopt this reading of the Pastoral Epistles, this “domestication” of both the gospel and the structure of this gospel community is best symbolized by the unique power attributed to the *paterfamilias* of the patriarchal household.<sup>3</sup> As the household of God, the church “has become stratified according to the age/gender divisions of the patriarchal household,” and “ministry and leadership are dependent upon age/gender qualifications, not primarily upon one’s spiritual or organizational resources of giftedness.”<sup>4</sup> This model of the Christian community is rooted neither in God’s plan for humanity nor in the gospel of the cross, but is “defined according to the patriarchal standards of Greco-Roman society.”<sup>5</sup>

In response to such a portrayal of the vision of the church embedded in the Pastoral Epistles, much attention has been paid to the issue of gender roles. Among those who accept the Pauline authorship of these epistles,<sup>6</sup> many “egalitarians”<sup>7</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Hermeneia; trans. Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972) 39, 41.

<sup>2</sup> Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994) 25–54.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Michel Gourgues, “La première lettre à Timothée, témoin d’une ‘domestication’ et d’une adaptation de la foi et de l’expérience ecclésiale,” *ScEs* 56 (2004) 5–18.

<sup>4</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 289.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 291.

<sup>6</sup> Pauline authorship will also be assumed in and reaffirmed by this study, though its argument does not depend on it.

“complementarians” alike agree in their dissatisfaction with this reading.<sup>8</sup> The issue of age has, however, largely been ignored. This brief study will attempt to begin to fill this lacuna by examining the most explicit reference to age in the Pastoral Epistles: “Let no one despise your youth, but set an example for the believers in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity” (Μηδεὶς σου τῆς νεότητος καταφρονεῖτω, ἀλλὰ τύπος γίνου τῶν πιστῶν ἐν λόγῳ, ἐν ἀναστροφῇ, ἐν ἀγάπῃ, ἐν πίστει, ἐν ἀγνείᾳ, 1 Tim 4:12). Even limiting our attention to this one verse, a comprehensive exegetical discussion will not be possible;<sup>9</sup> instead, our focus will be on the significance of this verse in the understanding of the Pastoral Epistles’ interaction with the accepted norms of the wider society.

Buried in an epistle that contains numerous difficult and controversial passages, the significance of 1 Tim 4:12 within the larger argument of this epistle has largely escaped the attention of commentators. Most would explain this verse in light of the historical circumstances of Timothy as he faces challenges in his ministry: “Since Timothy was meeting extreme opposition, being ignored because of his age, this epistle must carry the apostle’s full authority and transfer that authority to Timothy in the eyes of the Ephesians.”<sup>10</sup> This historical concern certainly cannot be dismissed, but it does not fully explain both the location of this verse within Paul’s wider argument and the way in which this verse itself is formulated.

This emphasis on the historical reality behind the text is also reflected in the commentators’ discussion of the first part of this verse, “Let no one despise your youth.” Frequently present are discussions on ancient definitions of “youth”<sup>11</sup> and the relevance of a similar statement by Paul concerning Timothy in 1 Cor 16:10–11—although the language used there is different and an explicit reference to Timothy’s age is absent.<sup>12</sup> The significance of the verb “despise” (καταφρονέω) is often left unnoticed, and the few who have commented on this verb do not move be-

<sup>7</sup> Egalitarians would often insist that gender equality is grounded in the gospel of grace as articulated in Gal 3:28; see, e.g., Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) 79–104.

<sup>8</sup> Complementarians would often insist that male headship is rooted in the creation and the wider redemptive plan of God (cf. 1 Cor 11:2–16; 1 Tim 2:11–15); see, e.g., Bruce A. Ware, “Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God,” in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (ed. Wayne Grudem; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002) 71–92.

<sup>9</sup> A more detailed examination of the entire verse will be provided in my forthcoming work: David W. Pao, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Brill Exegetical Commentary; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Nelson, 2000) 258. Similarly, Ceslas Spicq, *Saint Paul: Les Épîtres Pastorales* (4th ed.; Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1969) 1.512. Those who do not accept Pauline authorship of this epistle often suggest instead that this verse aims at legitimizing an office that claims to rest on Paul’s apostolic authority; see, e.g., Lorenz Oberlinner, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (HTKNT 11; Freiburg: Herder, 1994) 1.203–4.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., George W. Knight III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 205; Heinz-Werner Neudorfer, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an Timotheus* (Historisch-Theologische Auslegung; Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2004) 180, who includes a discussion of Timothy’s age in light of Acts 16:1.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002) 129; and Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 35A; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 251.

yond the discussions found in standard theological lexicons.<sup>13</sup> Even those who focus on the social background of this epistle fail to provide any discussion of this verb,<sup>14</sup> one that is significant in ancient honor-shame discourse.

There are some who do make passing comments on how this verse challenges the presumed inferiority of the youth as it “calls into question and reevaluates the distinctions and divisions that are ‘natural’ to human society.”<sup>15</sup> Even so, this verse is consistently considered merely as an isolated statement that carries limited rhetorical force in Paul’s argument in this epistle. Some would further suggest that this verse that appears to be at odds with the accommodating stance of the rest of the epistle simply reflects an attempt by the author to provide an “exception” for selected individuals to participate in the leadership circle of early Christian communities.<sup>16</sup>

In this study, we will first situate this verse within the honor-shame discourse in 1 Timothy and suggest that the call not to let anyone “despise” Timothy’s youth is a challenge to the dominant ethos of the time. Second, we will ground this subversive note within the wider theological landscape of this epistle. Third, the rhetorical force of this verse on the youth will be further evaluated by noting its parallel with Paul’s subsequent teachings concerning widows, another marginalized group in ancient society. In our conclusion, we will return to the issue of accommodation in the Pastoral Epistles.

## II. HONORING AND DESPISING

1. *Honor and shame language in 1 Timothy.* Recent studies on the cultural framework of the ancient Mediterranean world have emphasized the importance of honor and shame as pivotal values in the structuring of both social networks within individual political units as well as perceived ideological values that provide coherence to a group.<sup>17</sup> The recognition of the importance of these values has made an

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 314 n. 4, who refers to Ceslas Spicq’s discussion in *TLNT* 2.280–84 and C. Schneider’s discussion in *TDNT* 3.631–32.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Deutero-Pauline Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013) 129.

<sup>15</sup> Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 389; see also Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984) 107.

<sup>16</sup> Thus Sandra Hack Polaski, “‘Let No One Despite Your Youth’: The Deconstruction of Traditional Authority in the Pastoral Epistles,” *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 40 (2005) 260: “by creating an exception in the fictive context for the recognized heirs of Paul, the text leaves room for those who are not, literally, the recognized heirs of Paul to function in roles that are not theirs by their place in the household.” Despite its title, this article focuses not on 1 Tim 4:12 but on the wider power dynamics of early Christian community.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., John G. Peristiany, ed., *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965); David D. Gilmore, ed., *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1987); and J. E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

impact in the study of the NT world in general<sup>18</sup> and the interpretation of specific corpora in particular.<sup>19</sup>

With the surge in interest in this area of studies, there is also an increased awareness that honor-shame is not the only or even the primary framework within which the socio-cultural codes of the NT should be examined.<sup>20</sup> Several specific qualifications have been made in reference to conclusions reached in earlier generations of studies. First, many now recognize that a single society cannot simply be categorized as either a guilt society or a shame society. This false dichotomy fails to recognize the coexistence of both within one group, since individuals in various cultures often ground their identities in both individualistic and collectivistic terms.<sup>21</sup> Second, honor and shame discussions often reflect an ideal situation that may not reflect the actual practices of the time. In other words, social and anthropological models can create a construct that does not always reflect historical reality.<sup>22</sup> Third, a single pan-Mediterranean code of honor (and shame) does not exist in the ancient and present Mediterranean world.<sup>23</sup> Finally, it is doubtful whether honor-shame is a uniquely Mediterranean value system.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, within the biblical canon, honor-shame is likewise not a uniquely NT value system.<sup>25</sup>

Recognizing that honor and shame is but one window through which the text can be analyzed, our objective in this section is merely to highlight the presence of honor and shame language in the text of 1 Timothy and the one function such language carries in the arguments of this text. This discussion will then pave the way for our understanding of the use of the verb “despise” (καταφρονέω) in 1 Tim 4:12.

The rich set of vocabulary that expresses the cultural value of honor and shame is not limited to the “honor” (τιμή/δόξα/κράτος) and “shame” (αἰσχύνη/καταφρονητής) word groups. It also includes the “worthy” (ἄξιος), “good” (ἀγαθός/καλός), “dignified” (σεμνός), and “above reproach” (ἀνεπίλημπος/

<sup>18</sup> See, in particular, Bruce J. Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986); and Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, eds., *Honor and Shame in the World of the Bible* (Semeia 68; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Jerome H. Neyrey, *Paul in Other Words: A Cultural Reading of His Letters* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990); idem, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998); Bruce J. Malina, “Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 97–124; and David A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (SBLDS 152; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> Thus G. Gerald Downing, “‘Honor’ among Exegetes,” *CBQ* 61 (1999) 53–73.

<sup>21</sup> See Seger M. Breugelmans, “The Relationship between Individual and Culture,” in *Fundamental Questions in Cross-Cultural Psychology* (ed. F. J. R. van de Vijver, A. Chasiotis, and S. M. Breugelmans; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 150.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Zeba Crook, “Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited,” *JBL* 128 (2009) 609.

<sup>23</sup> Thus, Louise Joy Lawrence, *An Ethnography of the Gospel of Matthew: A Critical Assessment of the Use of the Honour and Shame Model in NT Studies* (WUNT 2.165; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 7–37. Though most cultural anthropologists do recognize this point, this is still a point relevant for NT exegetes.

<sup>24</sup> See the discussion in Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 501–23.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Saul M. Olyan, “Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and its Environment,” *JBL* 115 (1996) 201–18.

ἀνέγκλητος) word groups that depict acts/persons that are accepted according to the social norms of the time. Contrasting with these are the “blasphemous” (βλάσφημος), “evil” (κακός), and “sinful” (ἀμαρτωλός) word groups.<sup>26</sup> In religious and philosophical writings, “piety” (εὐσέβεια/θεοσέβεια) and “self-control” (σωφροσύνη) in particular also exemplify honorable behavior.<sup>27</sup>

In 1 Timothy, Paul begins by affirming that God alone is the eternal king who deserves “honor” (τιμὴ) and “glory” (δόξα, 1:17). Under this eternal king, Christians are called to pray for all who are in authority and live a life in all “piety” (εὐσεβεία) and “dignity” (σεμνότητι, 2:2). Women are called to act with “self-control” (σωφροσύνης, 2:9) while demonstrating their “piety” (θεοσεβειαν) through “good works” (ἔργων ἀγαθῶν, 2:10). Likewise, (male) overseers must be “above reproach” (ἀνεπίληπτον) and “self-controlled” (σώφρονα, 3:2). They must manage their households with all “dignity” (σεμνότητος, 3:4) and must have a “good reputation” (μαρτυρίαν καλὴν, 3:7) with outsiders. Deacons must also be “dignified” (σεμνοῦς, 3:8) and “blameless” (ἀνέγκλητοι, 3:10).

In the midst of this discussion, one finds Paul urging Timothy not to let anyone “despise” (καταφρονεῖτω) his youth (4:12). Similarly, the audience is called to “honor” (τίμα) widows who are in need (5:3),<sup>28</sup> and these widows are in turn called to be “beyond reproach” (ἀνεπίληπτοι, 5:7).

Elders who lead well are “worthy of double honor” (διπλῆς τιμῆς ἀξιούσθωσαν, 5:17), but “those who sin” (τοὺς ἀμαρτάνοντας, 5:20) are to receive public rebuke (5:20). Slaves must regard their masters as “worthy of full honor” (πάσης τιμῆς ἀξίους) so that the name of God “will not be blasphemed” (μὴ ... βλασφημῆται, 6:1). Finally, Timothy is to pursue “piety” (εὐσέβειαν, 6:11) and to be “blameless” (ἀνεπίληπτον, 6:14) until the final appearance of the King of kings and Lord of lords who alone deserves “eternal honor and power” (τιμὴ καὶ κράτος αἰώνιον, 6:16).

This brief survey demonstrates the prevalence of honor and shame vocabulary in 1 Timothy. One function of this language is to provide structure to a community through the postulation of a center of authority that (re)defines the interrelationship among its members.<sup>29</sup> This postulation and definition will in turn project a coherent sense of identity for members of this community as they interact with outsiders.

Paul begins and ends this epistle with a reference to the one who alone deserves honor, glory, and power: God, the King of kings (1:17; 6:16). The concern

<sup>26</sup> For a more comprehensive list, see Lendon, *Empire of Honour* 276–78.

<sup>27</sup> For these and other terms in the Pastoral Epistles, see Korinna Zamfir, *Men and Women in the Household of God: A Contextual Approach to Roles and Ministries in the Pastoral Epistles* (NTOA 103; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013) 98–99.

<sup>28</sup> The translation of the word τίμα here and the relationship between 4:12 and 5:3 will be further discussed below.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Oprisko, *Honor: A Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2012), for example, argues that “honor is a multiphenomenal category of concepts that, as a system, hierarchically structures society when an Other inscribes value onto an individual. ... Honouring is, therefore, a process of altering social reality through the medium of value” (3, 5).

for the reputation of this group of believers is therefore not that the believers might conform to outsiders' accepted norms, but that like Paul they can serve "as an example for those who would believe in him for eternal life" (1:16).

In light of this clear definition of the center of authority, members are to honor those who lead with "double honor" (5:17), recognizing that these leaders are themselves under the authority of God himself (5:20). It is in this (re)definition of the structure of the community that Paul urges Timothy not to let anyone "despise" his youth (4:12). This use of honor-shame language to restructure the power dynamic of this community continues when Paul urges his audience to "honor" the widows (5:3), another group that falls outside of the apex of the traditional pyramid of power structure. First Timothy 4:12 should therefore not be considered merely as an isolated piece of advice Paul gives for Timothy; instead, it plays an integral part in Paul's portrayal of the Christian community.

2. *Not despising your youth.* Returning to 1 Tim 4:12, we need to first highlight the significance of the verb "despise" (καταφρονέω) in ancient honor and shame discourse. In both Greek and Hellenistic Jewish authors, "to despise" (καταφρονέω) is often contrasted with "to honor" (τιμάω; cf. Diodorus, *Hist.* 1.89.5; Plutarch, *Lys.* 17.5; Appian, *Bell. civ.* 3.1.3; Dio Chrysostom, *Orat.* 18.2; 77/78.41; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 1.28; *Sententia* 127–30; Diogenes Laertius, *Vit.* 2.140) or even "to praise" (ἐπαινέω; cf. Plutarch, *Rect. rat. aud.* 44B). In reference to King Saul, for example, Josephus writes: "If there were some who before despised (κατεφρόνου) him, they were now brought round to honour (τιμᾶν) him and to deem him the noblest of all men" (*Ant.* 6.80.4 [LCL, Thackeray and Marcus]). For Aelius Aristides, when one "had been despised" (καταπεφρονημένης), one "had been stripped of its honors" (ἀνηρημένων δὲ τῶν ἐπ' αὐτῇ τιμῶν; *Rhet. Rex.* 20). Not unlike what we find in 1 Timothy, this contrast can also be applied in discourses on "piety" (εὐσέβεια) when as members of a moral community "we honor" (τιμῶμεν) one's piety while "we despise" (καταφρονοῦμεν) another's depravity (Philodemus, *Piet.* 41.60–65). These examples show how the language of despising is frequently understood within the honor and shame framework, and therefore "let no one despise" a person should be considered a call to attribute honor to that individual within the structure of a particular community.

Closer to the language and conceptual framework of 1 Tim 4:12 is perhaps 4 Macc 6:18–22 where one finds Eleazer's speech before his martyrdom:

For it would be irrational if having lived in accordance with truth up to old age (γῆρωσ) and having maintained in accordance with law the reputation (δόξαν) of such a life, we should now change our course and ourselves become a pattern (τύπος) of impiety (ἀσεβείας) to the young (τοῖς νέοις) by setting them an example (παράδειγμα) in the eating of defiling food. It would be shameful (αἰσχρὸν) if we should survive for a little while and during that time be a laughingstock to all for our cowardice, and be despised (καταφρονηθῶμεν) by the tyrant as unmanly by not contending even to death for our divine law. Therefore, O children of Abraham, die nobly (εὐσεβείας) for your religion (εὐσεβείας)! [NRSV]

Here one finds the discussion of examples of piety and impiety of the old for the youth within the framework of honor and shame. To be shamed is to be despised,

and thus to become a model of impiety. Instead, the respected elder is supposed to serve as an example for the youth as they act honorably.

Against this framework crafted by the social norms of the time, 1 Tim 4:12 may surprise its audience by calling one who is young to be honored as he serves as an example for those around him: “Let no one despise your youth, but set an example” (Μηδεὶς σου τῆς νεότητος καταφρονεῖτω, ἀλλὰ τύπος γίνου). Many commentators have included discussions on the ancient definitions of youth,<sup>30</sup> and most would agree that in the ancient Greco-Roman times those who are under their mid-forties could be considered “young.”<sup>31</sup> Some, however, would argue that this label should apply only to those in their twenties.<sup>32</sup> For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that in 1 Timothy it is the binary nature of the young-old pair that is in view. The exact age of the youth is less important than the fact that they were not old. Unlike our modern contexts, “old” does not carry the connotation of inferiority because it is not contrasted with the middle-aged adults who are still in the prime of their lives. John Barclay rightly notes:

In the simple polarity of “younger” and “older,” an older man can never be classed as “too old”; if there is no final category of “senile” into which to decline, the “old” can continue to compare themselves advantageously with the “young” for as long as it suits them to do so. The right of the older to rule is vigorously asserted: that is the reward (γέρας) that goes with old age (γῆρας, Plutarch, *Mor.* 789f).<sup>33</sup>

In 1 Timothy, only these two age categories exist, and these youths are contrasted with the respected “elders” (πρεσβύτεροι) of the community. To be young is therefore to lack the honor and respect ascribed to these “elders.”

Marc Kleijwegt points to three factors that contribute to the subordinate position of youth in preindustrial society: (1) the dominant role of the father in the patriarchal household; (2) the gerontocratic nature of ancient political systems; (3) the lack of alternative possibilities to form and ground one’s self-identifies.<sup>34</sup> Within an honor and shame framework, this subordinate position is often articulated through the language of despising. In discussing shame and shamelessness, Aristotle states that human beings esteem only those “whose opinion they do not despise” (ὄν μὴ καταφρονεῖ τῆς δόξης) and therefore “they are not ashamed . . . before those whose opinion in regard to the truth they greatly despise—for instance, no one feels shame before children or animals” (οὐκ αἰσχύνονται . . . ὄν πολὺ

<sup>30</sup> See n. 11 above.

<sup>31</sup> See Emiel Eyben, *Restless Youth in Ancient Rome* (trans. Patrick Daly; London: Routledge, 1993) 6–9.

<sup>32</sup> R. Larry Overstreet, “The Greek Concept of the ‘Seven Stages of Life’ and Its NT Significance,” *BBR* 19 (2009) 537–63.

<sup>33</sup> John M. G. Barclay, “There Is Neither Old Nor Young? Early Christianity and Ancient Ideologies of Age,” *NTS* 53 (2007) 234. Since those who are “senile” were limited in number in ancient societies, they did not constitute a “socially significant age class” (228).

<sup>34</sup> Marc Kleijwegt, *Ancient Youth: The Ambiguity of Youth and the Absence of Adolescence in Greco-Roman Society* (Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology 8; Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1991)

καταφρονουσι τῆς δόξης τοῦ ἀληθεύειν—οὐδεὶς γὰρ παιδία καὶ θηρία αἰσχύνεται; *Rhet.* 2.16.15, 23 [LCL, Freese]).

In historical accounts one finds those who despise the youth, underestimating their power. The Persian King Darius, for example, is said to have “despised the youth of Alexander” (καταφρονήσας τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου νεότητος; Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.* 17.7.1–2). Jeroboam, the king of Israel, also fought against Abijah, the King of Judah, “for he despised him because of his age” (κατεφρόνει γὰρ αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν; Josephus, *Ant.* 8.274.4). These examples do prove the rule: in general, it is the older who is expected to receive honor and respect. For the Roman author Aulus Gellius, this is among the foundational values of Roman society:

Among the earliest Romans, as a rule, neither birth nor wealth was more highly honoured (*honus tribui*) than age, but older men were revered by their juniors almost like gods and like their own parents, and everywhere and in every kind of honour (*honoris*) they were regarded as first and of prior right. From a dinner-party, too, older men were escorted home by younger men, as we read in the records of the past, a custom which, as tradition has it, the Romans took over from the Lacedaemonians, by whom, in accordance with the laws of Lycurgus, greater honour (*maior honos*) on all occasions was paid to greater age. (*Noct. att.* 2.15.1–2 [LCL, Rolfe])

Though not necessarily always observed,<sup>35</sup> this honor code remains the dominant paradigm that governs social interaction and the distribution of power within a community. Paul’s call in 1 Tim 4:12, “let no one despise your youth,” therefore provides a significant qualification to this code. Without denying the need to respect the elders, Paul denies that the youthful should be ignored as being insignificant and irrelevant in the gospel ministry simply because of their age.

With the old being the ones being honored, they also serve as examples for the young. To emulate the old is considered the primary duty of the young (Cicero, *Off.* 2.13.46). Following one’s example fits naturally within honor and shame discourses because to honor is to emulate: “It is fitting that the older should be solicitous about the younger and should lead and admonish him, and that the younger should honour and emulate and follow the older” (τιμᾶν καὶ ζηλοῦν καὶ ἀκολουθεῖν; Plutarch, *Frat. amor.* 487A [LCL, Helmbold]). Moreover, that which gains the praise of the one whose opinion one values would naturally become the major force that shapes the behavior of a person (cf. Plutarch, *Cat. Maj.* 8.4). After all, “the values of honour and shame are instilled in the young through constant example and exhortation.”<sup>36</sup> It is therefore not surprising that immediately after the call to “let no one despise your youth” (μηδεὶς σου τῆς νεότητος καταφρονεῖτω) one finds Paul calling Timothy to “set an example for believers” (τύπος γίνου τῶν πιστῶν). What is sur-

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.3.28: “The Epeians despised Neleus because of his old age and because he was alone.” As in this case, often when the dishonoring of the older is mentioned in ancient documents, the author would provide an additional descriptor explaining the condition of such older persons (in this case “because he was alone”).

<sup>36</sup> Horden and Purchell, *Corrupting Sea* 491.

prising is that despite his youth Timothy should be honored and therefore serve as an example for the others to emulate.<sup>37</sup>

### III. HONORING AND DESPISING WITHIN GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN

With his call to Timothy not to let anyone despise his youth, Paul challenges the accepted norms of the time. This subversive stance is not rooted, however, in the natural ability of the youth or the unique gifts Timothy possesses but in the wider redemptive plan of God. In this verse (4:12) and its immediate context, at least two grounds of this subversive stance can be identified: the example that points back to Paul (and the gospel he preaches) and the hope that points forward to a reality that remains to be fully revealed.

1. *Setting an example for believers.* While the older is expected to serve as an example for the younger, the young Timothy is now called to set an example for all believers. While some would argue that this right to set an example is dependent on whether Timothy is able to live an exemplary life “in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity” (4:12),<sup>38</sup> the wider context in which the statement is situated points to a more substantial basis upon which this right is to be grounded. It is also upon this basis that Timothy’s youth is not to be despised.

At the very beginning of this epistle, “God” is introduced as “our Savior” (σωτήρ ἡμῶν, 1:1), an appellation rarely applied to God the Father elsewhere in the NT.<sup>39</sup> Some see this as acculturation to the Hellenistic milieu,<sup>40</sup> but this is consistent with LXX usage (1 Sam 10:19; Pss 23:5; 24:5; 26:1, 9; 61:7; 78:9; 94:1; Hab 3:18; Isa 12:2) and takes on an important function in the Pastoral Epistles in underlining the continuation of God’s redemptive act.

After introducing God as “our Savior,” Christ Jesus is introduced as the one who “came into the world to save (σῶσαι) sinners,” and Paul counts himself among these sinners (“of whom I am the worst,” 1:15). Despite the difficulties surrounding this preformed saying, one of its functions is to point to how God’s redemptive plan is now realized through the life and ministry of Christ Jesus. Moreover, this saying extends God’s redemptive plan to the ministry of Paul.

In locating himself with God’s redemptive plan in Christ, Paul uses the language of example as he explains the purpose of his call to this ministry: “so that in me, the worst [of all sinners], Christ Jesus could demonstrate his immense patience as an example (ὑποτύπωσιν) for those who would believe in him for eternal life”

<sup>37</sup> In an ironic note, Juvenal does say that if parents fail to serve as examples for their children, then their babies are forced to serve as examples for their parents (*Sat.* 14.49). This text is meaningful only if the audience assumes that the old should serve as the role model for the youth. See the discussion of this text in Suzanne Dion, *The Roman Mother* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988) 118.

<sup>38</sup> Thus, for example, Neudorfer, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an Timotheus* 181.

<sup>39</sup> Outside of the Pastoral Epistles (cf. 1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Tit 1:3; 2:10; 3:4), this use can be found only in Luke 1:47 and Jude 25.

<sup>40</sup> See the recent detailed argument in Franz Jung, *ΣΩΤΗΡ: Studien zur Rezeption eines hellenistischen Ehrentitels im Neuen Testament* (NTAbh N.F. 39; Münster: Aschendorff, 2002) 321–32, who considers this usage in light of the Roman imperial background.

(1:16). Closely following this account of his own call to the gospel ministry, Paul extends this charge to Timothy who is now called to fight “the good fight” (1:18). In this first chapter, therefore, one finds the link between God the Savior and Christ Jesus who saves sinners, between Christ Jesus and Paul who is called into the gospel ministry, and between Paul and Timothy who is now charged to continue on with this ministry within the wider redemptive plan of God.

It is within this framework that 4:12 should be understood. As Paul was an “example” (ὑποτύπωσιν) for those who would believe in Christ, Timothy is now called to be an “example” (τύπος) for the believers. While it is not incorrect to identify Paul as “prototype” and Timothy as “type” in this set of relationship,<sup>41</sup> it is best to see both as extending what Christ Jesus did in making visible and realizing God’s redemptive plan.<sup>42</sup> That the young Timothy can serve as an example is because of the way he is committed to the gospel of Christ Jesus that Paul preaches, a gospel that ultimately is grounded in God the Savior himself. It is only in this sense that one can understand how Paul can say to Timothy in the verses that follows 4:12: “Persevere in these, for by doing so you will save (σώσεις) yourself and those who listen to you” (4:16). Timothy can “save” himself and those around him because in his ministry he ultimately represents “the living God,” who is identified in this context as “the Savior (σωτήρ) of all people” (4:10).

This use of the “example” language that ties Timothy back to Paul, who represents Christ Jesus the son of the living God, provides the proper basis for Timothy’s youth not to be despised. He is to be honored not because of his youthful energy and accomplishment, but because he represents ultimately the living God who alone deserves all “honor,” “glory,” and “power” (1:17; 6:16).

2. *Setting our hope in the living God.* Ancient (and modern) youth are often perceived to be controlled by their youthful passions. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan says it best: “youth alone is weak in strength, feeble in counsels, ardent in sin, scornful of those who give counsel, and ready to be seduced by pleasures” (*Job* 7.21).<sup>43</sup> In view of these perceptions, the young Timothy is called to “set an example for the believers in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity” (4:12). This call connects this section with the previous one (4:6–10), a section that begins with a call to Timothy to train himself for “piety” (εὐσεβείαν, 4:7) and ends with a note that provides the basis and motivation for a pious life: “because we place our hope in the living God” (ὅτι ἠλπίζομεν ἐπὶ θεῷ ζῶντι, 4:10).

“Hope” is first introduced at the beginning of this epistle. In a verse that presents God as “our Savior” (σωτήρ ἡμῶν), Christ Jesus is presented as “our hope” (τῆς ἐλπίδος ἡμῶν, 1:1). Already in Ps 64:6 (LXX), God is identified as both “our

<sup>41</sup> So Lewis R. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles* (HUT 22; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986) 93, who also suggests that within this rhetorical paradigm Paul functions as the inductive paradigm (as self-sufficient proofs) while Timothy as illustrative paradigm (as witnesses).

<sup>42</sup> See Yann Redalié, “Sois un modèle pour les croyants’: Timothée, un portrait exhortatif, 1 Tim 4,” in *1 Timothy Reconsidered* (ed. Karl Paul Donfried; Colloquium Oecumenicum Paulinum 18; Leuven: Peeters, 2008) 87–108.

<sup>43</sup> Translation taken from Saint Ambrose, *Seven Exegetical Works* (trans. Michael P. McHugh; Fathers of the Church 65; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1972) 343.

Savior” (ὁ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν) and “the hope of all the ends of the earth” (ἡ ἐλπίς πάντων τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς). Both concepts reappear in 1:15–16 when Christ Jesus is the one who came “to save” (σωσαί) sinners, and among whom Paul who in turn became an example for those who will inherit “eternal life” (ζωὴν αἰώνιον). In this epistle, “hope” is therefore closely linked with “Savior/salvation.”<sup>44</sup> If so, when the honor and dignity of the young Timothy is to be grounded in God the Savior, one should not be surprised that this honor and the behavior that is to follow flow also from the hope in this living God.

If hope can be considered a subversive act that unmasks and challenges the validity and relevance of the present reality, it is expected that this hope would also challenge the accepted norms of the time. It should not come as a surprise then when this hope subverts the honor code of the particular community. “Let no one despise your youth” is therefore grounded in the past redemptive act of God in Christ as well as in the anticipation of the future fulfillment of his redemptive plan.

#### IV. THE YOUTH AND THE WIDOWS

Paul’s teachings on the youth (4:12–16) should be read together with a passage that deals with yet another marginalized group—the widows (5:3–16). Even a cursory examination of this complex and difficult passage would not be possible here, but highlighting a few parallel points will be sufficient for our purposes.

Paul begins his teachings on the widows with this call: “Honor (τίμα) widows who are in truth widows” (5:3).<sup>45</sup> The use of the verb “honor” is here noteworthy. Though “it should be taken broadly of respect which finds appropriate expression,”<sup>46</sup> it should not be reduced to the material sense of simply providing monetary support for these widows.<sup>47</sup> Those who see in this verse an allusion to the fifth commandment of the Decalogue (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16) recognize that to honor is not simply to offer financial support to those who are in need.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the use of “honor” language should be understood within the wider use of honor and shame language in 1 Timothy, as well as the use of such language in literary and non-literary documents in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>49</sup> After all, within an honor and

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. George M. Wieland, *The Significance of Salvation: A Study of Salvation Language in the Pastoral Epistles* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005) 21–33. Bernard Mutschler (*Glaube in den Pastoralbriefen: Pistis als Mitte christlicher Existenz* [WUNT 256; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010] 293) is probably correct in suggesting that the content of this “hope” is the full and final realization of God as the Savior of all.

<sup>45</sup> This verse has been variably translated, from “Honor widows who are really widows” (NRSV) to “Honor widows who are truly in need” (NET). Here, I am following Towner (*Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 337) in his literal translation of this verse.

<sup>46</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 1999) 582.

<sup>47</sup> Thus Dibelius and Conzelmann, *Pastoral Epistles* 73; Spicq, *Saint Paul* 1.525; Oberlinner, *Pastoralbriefe* 223–24; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* 279; Zamfir, *Men and Women in the Household of God* 111.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Bruce W. Winter, “Providentia for the Widows of 1 Timothy 5:3–16,” *TynBul* 39 (1988) 92.

<sup>49</sup> See, in particular, James R. Harrison, “Benefaction Ideology and Christian Responsibility for Widows,” *NewDocs* 8 (1988) 113–14.

shame culture, to honor a person is not simply a verbal or mental act. The concrete and material implication is always an integral part of any act of honoring a person.

The relationship between this use of “honor” language here and the call not to “despise” one’s youth in 4:12 should not be missed. As Paul challenges the dominant ethos of the time in his call not to “despise” one’s youth, here Paul also challenges the same ethos in his call to “honor” the widows. Both groups lie outside the center of the power structure in ancient societies, but both are not to be deprived of their proper honor and dignity.

As the young Timothy is called to set “an example” for the believers, these widows are also called to live a life that is “beyond reproach” (ἀνεπίλημπτοι, 5:7). Significantly, as the overseer who is the leader of the community is called to be “beyond reproach” (ἀνεπίλημπτον, 3:2), these widows are called to do likewise in setting the model of behavior for the rest to follow. Later in this same epistle the young Timothy is also called to be “beyond reproach (ἀνεπίλημπτον) until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:14). As those who are honored are expected to set the model for their community, both young Timothy and the widows are now called to join the ranks of the overseer in serving as examples for their community.

For the young Timothy, the example he is to set is built on the fact that “we place our hope (ἠλπικαμεν) in the living God” (4:10). When Timothy is called to be “beyond reproach” in 6:14, it is also in view of the future “appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In the same way, the true widow is described as one who “has set her hope (ἠλπικεν) in God” (5:5), a hope that empowers a life that is “beyond reproach” (5:7). The eschatological hope that allows the youth to live beyond the immediate concerns of this life also prevents the widow from being the one “who lives for pleasure” (5:6). Grounded in the anticipated fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan, this hope becomes a subversive hope that empowers both the youth and the widows to become examples for the believers.

The parallelism between the exhortations to the youth and the widows cannot be missed. Though marginalized, these two groups are to be honored as visible symbols of the powerful gospel. Grounded and empowered in their hope in the living God, they can then serve as examples for their community of believers. No longer despised, they represent the one and only Savior God.

## V. ACCOMMODATION, SUBVERSION, OR TRANSFORMATION?

Our study on one small section of 1 Timothy provides at least a qualification to the conclusion of some that Paul is simply presenting a set of teachings to appeal to existing social norms for the sake of survival. In challenging the social and political structure of his time, Paul grounds his teachings in the gospel that looks back to God’s redemptive work through Christ while anticipating the final fulfillment of such work in the future. This gospel challenges how one is to view oneself, one’s community, and one’s social and political location within the wider society.

It is naïve to assume, however, that this gospel necessarily rejects the totality of the existing social structures and ethical ideals. After all, the call to live an honorable life in the presence of others includes an appeal to a common code of be-

havior. Perhaps affirming the possibility of such an honorable life is already a subversive stance when faithfulness to such ideals is in itself a radical call.<sup>50</sup> In our case, although the youth are not to be despised, many of the responsibilities traditionally ascribed to them remain, including respecting the older men and women (5:1–2), avoiding youthful passions (5:2), taking care of the elderly and the needy (5:3–8), and being content in this world (6:6–10).

If so, Paul's stance in 1 Timothy should not be considered as simply either accommodation or subversion; instead he calls for a transformation that both transcends the accepted ideals that Christians could share with the dominant culture, and challenges practices and social norms that Christians should abandon.<sup>51</sup> Paul grounds both in God's redemptive plan in history since it is this redemptive plan that fundamentally alters one's existence. This redemptive work would in turn empower believers to lead a faithful life as witnesses to all.

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<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., Pieter de Villiers ("Heroes at Home: Identity, Ethos, and Ethics in 1 Timothy within the Context of the Pastoral Epistles," in *Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the NT* [ed. J. G. van der Watt and F. S. Malan; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006] 384) who claims that "there is something heroic when, in the context of a persistent and destructive culture of moral decay, someone opts for the difficult path of sobriety and faithfulness."

<sup>51</sup> This is akin to the sociological model of "accommodation and resistance" since a newly formed group necessarily has to negotiate its identity vis-à-vis the dominant culture; cf. Philip A. Harland, "Honouring the Emperor or Assailing the Beast: Participation in Civic Life among Associations (Jewish, Christian and Other) in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse of John," *JSNT* 77 (2000) 99–121; and Paul Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the NT* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).