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Strategic Virtue, Human Agency, and Eschatological Vision: Reassessing Paul's
Exhortations to Cretan Women in Titus 2:4-5 within Roman Social and Cultural
Realities

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Introduction

An interesting phenomenon is unfolding in the metaphysical world of TikTok and Instagram Reels. Countless Gen-Z women, skilled in trendy reel-making and interactive content, have taken to promoting the “tradwife” lifestyle. This movement emphasizes rejecting the so-called dangers of “left-wing” and “liberal” college education or careers, instead advocating for a life dedicated to serving one’s husband, tending to the home, and raising children.¹

More notably, the majority of these young tradwife influencers also identify as Christian content creators, frequently using hashtags such as #christianwife, #christiangirlaesthetic, and #biblicalfemininity. With so many influencers producing nearly identical reels and social media content, they collectively present what they consider to be the ideal Christian woman’s lifestyle. Their definition of “godly femininity” is comprised of notions such as being gentle – citing Proverbs 15:1 and labeling gentleness as “feminine power.”² They also desire women to be aware of the female “privilege” of one’s “beauty and charm” as a way to advocate for societal change, citing the story of Esther as evidence.³ Some reiterate that it is “God’s plan” to be fruitful and multiply, to submit to her husband and to be a homemaker, where the opposite is defined as “Satan’s plan.” They claim that this is how God “calls” women to fulfill their purpose, and in some cases, justify it as simply an aspect of their identity “under Christ.”⁴

¹ Kelsey Kramer McGinnis, “Tradwife Content Offers Fundamentalism Fit for Instagram,” Christianity Today, March 13, 2024. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/03/tradwife-influencer-movement-fundamentalism-christian/>

² Lorri (@lorri_luxxe), “Biblical femininity changed my life forever.” Instagram, November 7, 2024. <https://www.instagram.com/p/DCBbWzhsI8e/?igsh+MXJ4aTRuM3FqdGV2OA==>.

³ Lorri, “Biblical femininity.”

⁴An Instagram post by @madison.palica writes, “As a woman under Christ, you are a homemaker.” See Madison Palica (@madison.palica), “A May 2022 Bankrate study found that 46% of women reported money

The prevailing argument among these influencers is that Scripture explicitly mandates this lifestyle. But does this lifestyle – centered on homesteading, husband-serving, and child-rearing – truly define the "ideal Christian woman"? And is this the vision or mandate that Scripture permanently puts forth?

Titus 2:4-5 is often referenced to support this model of Christian womanhood.⁵ In his instructions to Titus, who was tasked with addressing the issues in the church of Crete, the apostle Paul desires that the older women of Titus' community "urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, [and] to be subject to their husbands..."⁶ However, a closer reading reveals complexities that challenge this interpretation. Even if one were to take Paul's instructions literally, it is crucial to acknowledge the grounds he provides. The young women of Crete are urged to be loving wives and mothers, pure, self-controlled, and "busy at home" *so that* "no one will malign the word of God." With "maligners" here referring to those outside the Christian community, the implication is that if Christian women failed to adhere to these ideals, they – and, by extension, the Christian community – would earn a negative reputation.

However, it is apparent that this reasoning does not necessarily hold today. Outside the Christian community, promotions of this type of lifestyle for women is typically viewed with

negatively affecting their mental health," Instagram, January 5, 2025. <https://www.instagram.com/p/DEc7G-aM2nG/?igsh=aHV6Mnh2eHNuM2Zn>.

⁵ See Emily (@vessels.of.mercy), "'If you love me, you will keep my commands.' John 14:15 ESV," Instagram, January 16, 2024. https://www.instagram.com/p/C2Kza5trLEg/?img_index

=3&igsh=MWlwZG10dj-Rramps. In this post, Emily indirectly quotes Titus 2:4-5, saying "We are told that we need to respect & submit to our husbands; we're told to love our children... We're to be self-controlled, pure, busy at home," indicating that Paul's words for the young women of Crete are explicitly mandated for today. Jeannie Remy (@heartofawife) also directly cites Titus 2:5 as for what God calls women to do today. See Jeannie Remy (@heartofawife), "Being a keeper at home fulfills our husband's desire to protect and provide for us," Instagram, October 25, 2024. <https://www.instagram.com/p/DBjZqLZu3ul/?igsh+OW5tejBzNGp3cX03>.

⁶ I will be referencing the 2011 edition of The New International Version Bible throughout this project.

skepticism or outright hostility. Rather than enhancing Christianity's appeal, it arguably "drives people away" as it seems to present the life of a woman of faith as requiring a rigid, controversial, and potentially risky lifestyle.⁷ This raises the following questions: How was this exhortation relevant before? Is it possible that Paul was located within a fundamentally different cultural and social reality?

Some argue that this model of Christian womanhood is still mandated today and that women maintaining this lifestyle continue to safeguard Christianity's reputation and the gospel's appeal. Even if the topic of wifely submission is reviled by outsiders, they maintain that in some divine, mysterious way, wifely submission still acts as a defence against the reviling of the word.⁸ Likewise, other prominent voices say that since "unbelievers" will judge the genuineness of one's faith and the gospel according to her character, Christians are supposed to display a life that is "honouring to God" to "attract the unsaved to our gracious Lord."⁹ But is this life truly honouring to God? Will outsiders, especially women, truly think that such rhetoric and behaviour is honourable, and be attracted to the gospel and person of Jesus Christ? This is decidedly not the case.

Instead, we should acknowledge that Paul was operating within the Roman Empire, where a woman's image and reputation were of paramount importance. In Paul's time, a certain image of the pious, virtuous woman was indeed considered honourable by the outside society at large and would most definitely safeguard the reputation of the church and by extent, the gospel.

⁷ Fully embracing the "trad-wife" lifestyle can leave women fully financially dependent on their husband's income. In cases where these marriages ended, they may be left without resources or employment history. See Fortesa Latifi, "How the Trad Wife Trend on TikTok Sells Biblical Gender Roles," Teen Vogue, April 29, 2024. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/how-the-trad-wife-trend-on-tiktok-sells-biblical-gender-roles>.

⁸ Abigail Dodd, "Submission Is a Wonderful Weapon," Desiring God, March 10, 2021. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/submission-is-a-wonderful-weapon>.

⁹ "Godly Women: 1 Timothy 2:15; Titus 2:4-5," Grace To You, 2015. <https://www.gty.org/library/Print/Blog/B150720>.

The image of the ideal, virtuous woman, as described by Paul's contemporaries – including Roman authors, philosophers, and the letters exchanged between Neopythagorean women – aligns almost identically with Paul's description of the young women of Crete. This ideal was not only aspirational but a pillar of the Roman Empire. Additionally, Crete's domestic architecture, the nature of church gatherings, and the cultural emphasis on honor and shame created countless opportunities for young women to be publicly observed and scrutinized.

As this study will also survey, for early Christian women, failing to conform to Roman ideals could have dire consequences – not only for their personal reputations but for the safety of the Cretan church community as well as the reception of the gospel. This study will also survey the writings of Paul at large, who was divinely commissioned with the task of preaching the gospel regarding Jesus Christ and salvation and who frequently encouraged believers to uphold socially respectable behavior to make Christianity more appealing to outsiders. It becomes evident that Paul's instructions were shaped by strategic, evangelistic concerns rather than an absolute, transhistorical mandate for women's roles.

Furthermore, for those concerned that the "grace of God" (Tit. 2:11) plays a transhistorical and direct role in shaping Christian women's behavior, I argue that divine grace allows for human agency in defining what it looks like to "respond" to grace and transform in character. This, in turn, permits nuanced understandings across different eras of what constitutes a "godly woman" transformed by the grace of God.

Additionally, where Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit transforming a community, I argue that not only is the Spirit not explicitly mentioned as the agent behind the specific behavioral exhortations to women in Titus 2:4-5, but that its primary function in the context of the epistle to Titus (3:7) relates to enabling people to inherit eternal life. Finally, the Cretan Christians'

anticipation of the Kingdom of God reinforces the idea that Paul's commands were temporary, designed for their immediate social and cultural circumstances (Titus 2:13). The community was anticipating something beyond conforming to Roman Imperial standards for the sake of protecting the church and the gospel. God's kingdom is far greater than these strategic exhortations in Titus.

These considerations are crucial, not only to challenge influencers who problematically define the "epitome" of Christian womanhood, but also to help the church recognize and prevent harmful interpretations of biblical texts. Particular interpretations of this passage can have real consequences: they can restrict women's agency and leadership, cause the exclusion of career-oriented women from female circles in church communities, and contribute to unhealthy dynamics in marriage.¹⁰ How the church interprets Paul's words matters because how those interpretations manifest matters.

To be sure, this study has its limits. Roman history is vast and complex, and we can never be certain of Paul's original thoughts or intentions. Additionally, I would like to clarify that this study is not meant to demonize women who choose to stay at home, raise children, and care for their partners. That is a noble vocation, and, in some ways, is also a resistance movement to the pressures of neoliberal "boss-babe" capitalism, which has proven to be an exhausting endeavor under current economic systems.

Ultimately, this study approaches Paul's letter as a document written in a real time and space, to real people living within a different historical reality. This approach stems from the

¹⁰ Paula R. Pietromonaco et al., "Is Low Power Associated with Submission During Marital Conflict? Moderating Roles of Gender and Traditional Gender Role Beliefs," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 12, no. 2 (2021): 166.

recognition that Paul grounds his exhortation in the phrase “*so that* no one may malign the word of God” (2:5). My goal is to explore this phrase with curiosity and historical awareness, keeping in mind both the apostle’s priorities and the world around him. As the church continues to engage with the real world in real time and space, it is my hope that it will remain attentive to the fruit borne by different interpretations of the biblical texts. This is of utmost importance for the church’s edification and care.

To begin this study, we will first explore what constituted the “virtuous woman” in the Roman Empire and examine how these descriptions align, often strikingly, with Paul’s own desired characteristics for the young women of Crete.

The Virtuous Roman Woman, Pauline Terminology, & a Pillar of Society

Paul's time abounded with writings from Roman philosophers and political figures. These writers provided their opinion on a vast array of subjects, including the matter of what constituted a virtuous woman. More importantly, however, is that these descriptions given by first-century philosophers – as well as regular letters writers, and funerary inscriptions – are remarkably similar to the characteristics that Paul desires for the young women of Crete in Titus 2:4-5. These qualities are as follows: husband-lovers and children-lovers (2:4), self-controlled and pure, busy at home, kind, and subject to their husbands (2:5). Because of the frequency of these qualities in other contemporary texts, these qualities are not necessarily distinctly Christian behaviors that “stand out” in a pagan world. This chapter will also argue that Paul's instructions for the women of Crete legitimately echo Roman ideology concerning the virtuous woman, as it is evident that not only was Paul's social world saturated with ideas about what constituted the virtuous, honorable woman. But, there was a lot at stake if these virtues were not maintained.

Roman Philosophers & The Virtuous Woman

A helpful entry point into the writings of Roman philosophers on the virtuous woman is stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus (c. 25-95 CE). Rufus wrote that “women, as well as men... have received from the gods the gift of reason...”¹ and after a lengthy exposition on humanity's

¹ Cora E. Lutz, “Musonius Rufus ‘The Roman Socrates,’ in *Yale Classical Studies* 10, (1947): 39.

inclination towards virtue, he states that “not men alone, but women too, have a natural inclination toward virtue *and* the capacity for acquiring it...”² Moreover, he argues that if it is appropriate for men to engage with philosophy to “consider how they may lead good lives” then it is also appropriate for women, who are as equally inclined to acquire virtue and live “good” lives, to receive an education.³ Rufus argued that young girls, as well as boys, have the capacity and need for a philosophical education in order to acquire virtue. However, the desired outcome and set of virtuous qualities differed between boys and girls. By teaching her courage, self-control, and providing her a “knowledge about life,” Rufus argues that a woman’s philosophical education would allow her to be the embodiment of a “virtuous woman:” to be a good housekeeper, a careful accountant who manages her household slaves;⁴ a chaste, self-controlled, and pure character, one who is able to control her temper and not become overwhelmed by grief; and lastly, “an untiring defender of husband and children... [who] would love her children more than life itself...”⁵ Her philosophical training would prepare her to “nourish her children at her own breast, and to *serve her husband* with her own hands...”⁶

Overall, according to Rufus, education could be the means by which a woman acquires an ideal set of behaviours and characteristics – those that relate primarily to the domestic sphere. In contrast, men’s education was preoccupied with rhetorical training. One popular exercise, known as the mock-forensic speech, was meant to instill virtues that would assist the young man

² Lutz, “Musonius Rufus,” 39-41. Emphasis mine.

³ Lutz, 41.

⁴ Here is where he argues that philosophy, which is the study of “nothing other than knowledge about life” is useful. See Lutz, 41.

⁵ Lutz, 41. Emphasis mine.

⁶ Lutz, 42.

in his future commercial and political endeavours, and also in his role as *paterfamilias*.⁷

Nonetheless, although Rufus desired both men and women to have understanding, self-control, justice, and the like,⁸ how these virtues were ideally manifested is where the main difference lies.⁹

Although many of Rufus' contemporaries did not promote that formal or self-taught education as the vehicle for women to become virtuous, the list of ideal qualities and characteristics are consistent. The writings and letters of lawyer and Roman magistrate Pliny the Younger (c. 61–113 CE) reveal much about what constituted the virtuous Roman woman.¹⁰ Instead of acquiring virtue through their education, however, Pliny maintained that virtuous wives are carefully molded by their husbands.¹¹ The outcome is a woman whose primary concern is *loving her husband* and enhancing his reputation.¹² Pliny's own bride, Calpurnia, was a young, sheltered virgin when she married him. In his *Epistulae*, Pliny thanks her aunt, Calpurnia Hispulla, for bringing him a bride of such "potential."¹³ Calpurnia is described as having a naturally sharp intellect and throughout their marriage she becomes an avid reader – but

⁷ Lauren Caldwell, *Roman Girlhood and the Fashioning of Femininity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 17. See also R. Kaster, "Controlling Reason: Declamation in Rhetorical Education at Rome," in *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 328-335.

⁸ Indeed, Rufus still stands out in his views about the purpose of a woman's education and pushes back against assumed gender roles. While he recognizes that men's constitution as physically stronger may look like they are less suited for tasks such as spinning or other housework, such tasks are not appointed exclusively, and sometimes circumstances warrant the switching of things. See Lutz, 47.

⁹ For similar assessments on Rufus' arguments, see Lauren Caldwell, "Formal Education and Socialization in Virtue," in *Roman Girlhood and the Fashioning of Femininity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), and Annette Bourland Huizenga, "Introduction," in *Moral Education for Women in the Pastoral and Pythagorean Letters: Philosophers of the Household*, (Boston: Brill, 2013).

¹⁰ Pliny is one of the figures that is seen as having a sort of authority on the matter of virtuous behavior. As Jacqueline Carlon puts it, his writings would establish him as "an exemplar of moral rectitude and proper comportment," so there is lots to learn from his writings. See Jacqueline M. Carlon, *Pliny's Women: Constructing Virtue and Creating Identity in The Roman World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.

¹¹ Carlon, *Pliny's Women*, 132.

¹² Carlon, 138. There is also mention of how a women's actions could bring glory or disgrace to the men in their lives, which Carlon claims is a long-standing theme of Roman oratory and history. See Carlon, 139.

¹³ Pliny, *Epistulae*, 4.1, as cited in Carlon, 157. The meaning of "potential" here conveys the idea that she was "ready to be refined according to his wishes," See Carlon, 159.

primarily of the works of her husband.¹⁴ She memorized nearly all of Pliny's works and was heavily invested in how his recitations were received by others. Sitting behind a curtain at Pliny's oratory performances, she would listen to his recitations and the praises that came forth.¹⁵ As Carlon states, it was love that "compelled Calpurnia to learn skills that both highlight and complement Pliny's," and her education was "limited to interests that bring *only* praise to her behavior – those that define her resemblance to and affection for Pliny."¹⁶ She is also described as possessing the quality of self-restraint, or *frugalitas*, another virtue deemed admirable and important, especially in regards to *managing a household*.¹⁷

Calpurnia is highlighted as the ideal, virtuous young wife because everything recorded as honorable revolves around Pliny's aspirations and honour. She is the epitome of the obedient, young, and infatuated partner whose devotion makes Pliny confident she will keep his *gloria* alive.¹⁸ This pleased Pliny, and her ultimate deference and devotion to her husband is what makes her a virtuous woman.¹⁹

In his *Panegyricus*, Pliny also discusses the empress Plotina, wife of Roman emperor Trajan (ruling c. 98-117 CE). She is described as having great impact on her husband's reputation, which allowed him to keep his position in office. This is because she alone could

¹⁴ Carlon, 160.

¹⁵ Carlon, 162.

¹⁶ Carlon, 163.

¹⁷ Cicero (106-43 CE) judged this type of self-restraint as part of the greatest of all virtues (self-control), and that it should be understood as a combination of discretion and self-control. See Cicero, *For King Deiotarius*, trans. C.D Yonge, (London: George Bell & Sons, 1891), 26.

¹⁸ The idea of *gloria* in imperial Rome is roughly correlated with honour and fame. This was no doubt an important quality that Roman men longed to acquire and maintain. Roman men could suffer "disgrace" or a diminishing of *gloria* in not controlling their wives – even being prevented from being considered *maximi* (roughly meaning, "great"). See Pliny, *Panegyrics*, 83.4, as cited in Carlon, 143.

¹⁹ The Romans also valued the concept of *concordia*, a type of mutual devotion and harmony in a marriage, but that is specifically characterized by the wife's boundless devotion to her husband and unwavering concern for his well-being and reputation. It had long been used to describe the ideal state of marriage in Latin literature. See Carlon, 163.

assure Trajan's *gloria* within the *domus*, their private residence. She did this by displaying herself as a virtuous wife: devoted to her husband, traveling modestly, and embodying self-control. Moreover, her own *gloria* would result from her willing subordination and devotion to her husband.²⁰

The image of the ideal, virtuous wife that Pliny constructs is invested in her husband's goals and honour, manages her household well, exhibits self-control, and, in Pliny's personal case, is heavily invested in his writing and orations.

Woman-To-Woman Letters & Remembering a Virtuous Woman

Constructions about the virtuous Roman woman were not limited to the writings of elite Roman men. In a letter addressed to a woman named Clearete, the author, Melissa, from the neo-Pythagorean school of philosophy, praises Clearete for her character.²¹ The letter indicates that Clearete was eager to subject herself to more teaching about a "wife's adornment" which, according to Melissa, means that Clearete intended to "perfect [herself] according to virtue."²² So after advising Clearete on how to become a chaste, self-controlled, and modest wife, Melissa concludes that "it is not in the expenditure on clothing and looks that the modest women should express her love of the good, but in the management and maintenance of her household, and

²⁰ Pliny, 83.7, as cited in Carlon, 144.

²¹ The Neopythagoreans refers to a school that revived Pythagorean teachings, based primarily in Alexandria and in Southern Italy. There are conjectures about the dating of the writings that arose out of these groups, but the dates range from the fourth century BCE to the second century CE. Literature circulated between the two settlements, and Melissa's letter is an example of that. It was not unusual for the original Pythagoreans to include women, and in the case of the Neopythagoreans, there is substantial writing contributed by women. However, a large portion of the writings attributed to female authors dealt with the topic of the proper conduct and virtues of women. See Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 64-68.

²² Again, it seems that virtue is heavily related to Clearete fulfilling her role as a wife. See *P. Haun*. II 13, (Third Century CE), a copy of this letter from an earlier period. As cited in Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 72.

pleasing her own husband, by fulfilling his wishes.”²³ She continues, writing that “the husband’s will ought to be engraved as law on a decent wife’s mind, and she must live by it.”²⁴

Although these Neopythagorean writings have roots in an old, Greek philosophical tradition, such schools did influence first-century Roman thinking.²⁵ There is another letter from the Neopythagorean school: Theano to Euboule. This letter more specifically discusses the raising of children and emphasizing the importance of their “training in moderation,” (τὸ σωφρον ἀγωγή). Winter and Pomeroy note that the verb σωφρονέω also connotes chastity and self-restraint and was a leading virtue of Greek women, being mentioned quite frequently on women’s tombstones.²⁶ The female Greek philosopher Phintys even called it the greatest female virtue because it enabled a woman *to love and honour her husband.*²⁷

The characteristics of a virtuous woman, as it appears in these letters, primarily involves the submission to and honouring of one’s husband, childrearing, as well as chastity and modesty. These qualities are also consistent with those highlighted in the writings of the Musonius and Pliny, and also – with Paul. Thus far, the pattern of the virtuous Roman woman is consistent.

Epitaphs

Epitaphs of Roman women also illuminate the characteristics that defined the virtuous Roman woman. These ancient tombstones testify to what mourning husbands wanted to honour about their wives. One inscription, which dates to the late first century CE/early second century CE, is written on two sides of a coffin cartonnage. The inscription records the name of a woman,

²³ P. Haun. II 13; Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 73. Emphasis mine.

²⁴ P. Haun. II 13; Winter, 73.

²⁵ Winter, 72; Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 199.

²⁶ Winter, 73; Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, 70.

²⁷ Winter, 73; Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 196.

Valeria, and her “free-born status from Caesarea in [Mauretania]”²⁸ (a Roman colony). It also notes that her husband, Lucius Dexios, was from Herculaneum (located in Rome). The epitaph describes her as “kind, affectionate, dignified, blameless” and that “she *loved her husband and her children*.”²⁹ Another epitaph, commonly referred to as the *Laudatio Turiae*, written sometime between 18-2 BCE, details a husband grieving the death of his long-married wife. He mentions her “obedience, courteousness, easy good-nature, [and her] assiduous wool-working...”³⁰ But what is most striking, as the husband describes it, is when they were met with issues of infertility that were presumed to be her fault, she had no hesitation in suggesting divorce, so that her husband would not “suffer” the misfortune of being childless.³¹ Overall, the memory of this deemed-honorable Roman woman is primarily characterized by qualities that relate to the domestic sphere and catering to the desire and well-being of her husband.

Through this brief survey of philosophers, letters, and epitaphs, it is evident that throughout and surrounding Paul’s time, there was plenty of discussion about what constituted a virtuous woman. Many other Imperial Roman authors discussed the same matter, including Ovid, Plutarch, and Seneca.³² More importantly, the qualities represented in these treatises, letters and

²⁸ G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, v. 3 (Sydney: Macquarie University, 1983), 40; AE 828; SEG 1536

²⁹ G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, 40; AE 828; SEG 1536. Emphasis mine.

³⁰ G.H. R. Horsley, 33.

³¹ Indeed, she is described as willing to “hand over our house freely to the fertility of another woman,” and even assisting in seeking out an appropriate partner, and then further- being willing to treat the expected child as her own “in-common.” As one can assume from the epitaph, Lucias did not divorce his wife, although this would have been seen as “anti-Augustan.” See G.H.R Horsely, *New Documents*, 34-35.

³² Ovid (43 BCE-17 CE) maintained specific gender exclusivity towards certain crafts, writing that the woman Perilla, who devoted herself to literary rather than marriage made her verge on the masculine. He also thought that her “sitting amid her books” meant that her virtuous traits were not being put to work (in the household) as they should be. See Ovid, *Tristia*, 3.7, as cited in Caldwell, 30. Plutarch praises an educated woman for remaining “pleasant and agreeable” and encourages women to subordinate themselves to their husbands in *Advice to the Bride and Groom*. See Caldwell, 35; Lynn Cohick, “Women’s Agency in Rome,” in *The Biblical World cf Gender: The Daily Lives cf Ancient Women and Men*, ed. Celina Durgin and Dru Johnson, (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2022), 28. Seneca liked the idea of his mother morally shaping and modeling good conduct for his daughter, Novatilla. See Caldwell, 36.

epitaphs – particularly that of submission to one’s husband, unwavering love and dedication to one’s husband and children, self-control, and being good housekeepers – are consistent with what Paul writes in Titus 2:4-5.

Paul’s References to *Husband/Child Loving, Self-control and Purity, Busyness at Home, Submission*

Loving One’s Husband & Willing Submission (2:4; 5)

The first quality that Paul desires for young women is to be husband-lovers (2:4). The word that Paul uses is φιλάνδρους. This is the only time this noun occurs in the New Testament. It is translated as one “having affection or love for a husband”³³ and also includes being “attentive to the interests of a husband.”³⁴ Φιλάνδρους is a term used in literature akin to that discussed above, such as Plutarch’s *Moralia*³⁵ and in *The Epistles of Crates*.³⁶ In Valeria’s epitaph, φιλάνδρον is used on side two of the cartonnage to describe her husband-loving behavior!³⁷

Paul aspires for the young women of Crete to cultivate loving behavior towards their husbands (Titus 2:4).³⁸ With φιλάνδρους also involving being “attentive to the interests of [her] husband,” φιλάνδρους is clearly exemplified by someone like Calpurnia, as well as the unnamed wife who was willing to divorce her husband on account of her infertility. Paul’s exhortation

³³ BDAG, “φιλάνδρος,” 1055.

³⁴ Particularly in a manner in that is observable to others. See Frederick William Danker and Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 372.

³⁵ See Plutarch, *Plutarch’s Moralia in Sixteen Volumes*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, vol. 2 (London: Heinemann, 1928), 142.

³⁶ Crates of Thebes, “The Epistles of Crates,” in *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition*, ed. Abraham J. Malherbe, trans. Ronald F. Hock, (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 81.

³⁷ Horsley, 40.

³⁸ J. Harold Greenlee, *An Exegetical Summary of Titus & Philemon*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2008), 52.

regarding husband-loving (2:4) aligns with the husband-loving promoted in other Greco-Roman writings. As McKnight notes, the virtue of husband-loving was highly esteemed in Greco-Roman culture.³⁹ In Titus, Paul mirrors his contemporaries by advocating for a quality already linked to the conception of the virtuous Roman woman.⁴⁰

Likewise, Paul also uses the participle ὑποτασσομένης (v. 5), which may be translated as “while submitting,” and is followed by the dative phrase, τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν, indicating that the submitting is done *to her own* husband. Being the participle form of ὑποτάσσω, the verb also conveys a sense of being in compliance with someone,⁴¹ and can also refer to recognition of a certain organized structure (such as the hierarchal gender norms).⁴² The same verb is used in other biblical texts and understood as conveying submission to the *will* of God or the Law (Rom. 8:7; 10:3) or an act of voluntary yielding in love (1 Cor. 16:16; Eph. 5:21).⁴³ In his *Advice to the Bride and Groom*, Plutarch encourages woman to subordinate themselves (ὑποτάττουσαι) to their husbands, and they will be commended.⁴⁴ Moreover, Christopher Hutson affirms that the biblical phrasing of “being submissive to one’s own husband” is analogous to what the Neo-Pythagorean letter writers encourage their recipients to be like.⁴⁵ As discussed above, Melissa writes that the virtuous wife fulfills her husband’s wishes, and that his will is like an unwritten

³⁹ See Scot McKnight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 202.

⁴⁰ Although, it is likely the case that Paul did not have such a one-sided, drastic kind of devotion in mind, that Roman authors such as Pliny boasted that their wives had. After all, Paul was unique in his ideas of mutuality that he introduced and celebrated in his other writings. As Cohick writes, what Paul says about a husband’s body and his wife’s conjugal rights in 1 Cor. 7:4, and about being self-sacrificial in Eph. 5:25-31, is a “type of marital love [that] was not advocated by any other group or philosopher.” See Cohick, “Women’s Agency in Rome,” 28-29.

⁴¹ Danker and Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 367.

⁴² BDAG, 1042; Cohick, 28.

⁴³ BDAG, 1042.

⁴⁴ Plutarch, *Plutarch’s Moralia*, 142.

⁴⁵ He refers to 1 Tim. 2:11 here, instead of Titus 2:5. See Christopher R. Huston, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 233. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=5928854>

law engraved on her mind.⁴⁶ Thus, again, it is arguable that Paul is exhorting similar if not identical qualities that appear in other writings about the virtuous Roman woman.

Child-loving (2:4)

The word that Paul uses that is often translated as “to love their... children” (v. 4) is φιλοτέκνους. Like Paul, Rufus ties together husbands and children as he describes those who a virtuous, educated woman is equipped to tirelessly defend and love. Φιλοτέκνον is also used in Valeria’s epitaph to describe her love for her children, and is also, like Paul, coupled with describing her love for her husband.

Self-Control & Purity (2:4)

It is important to acknowledge that the qualities of self-control (σώφρονας) and purity (ἀγνάς) are paired together in Paul’s letter to Titus. Arguably, these qualities help define each other. For example, while purity might be understood in a variety of senses, including holiness, innocence, or of having a clear conscience, it can also carry connotations of chastity, especially when being paired with self-control.⁴⁷ As seen above, self-control was considered one of if not the greatest virtue for women and is the most mentioned quality on ancient tombstones. This was because it had to do with a woman’s *purity* in sexuality before and during marriage. Winter maintains that σώφρων connotes chastity and self-restraint, and Rufus frequently mentions σώφρων in his writing – along with justice and courage – as qualities necessary for a woman to live in her ideal identity as a “virginal daughter, chaste wife, or protective mother.”⁴⁸ Courage

⁴⁶ For Hutson’s discussion, see Hutson, 233, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=5928854>.

⁴⁷ F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 11-12.

⁴⁸ Lutz, 43.

would keep her from submitting to anything shameful (such as an adulterous act), and she must be “chaste and self-controlled (σώφρονα)” which means she must be “pure in respect *cf* *unlawful love*”⁴⁹ (or, in other words, sexually pure).

It is possible that Paul’s reference to being pure (ἀγνάς) could be referring to a sense of holiness and cleanliness before God, as he does in other passages.⁵⁰ But the fact that it is paired with self-control, which is something that often occurs in other writings of his time – and can easily be translated as in regards to sexual purity – lends the idea that Paul is referencing something that is often referenced by other writers of his time when describing the ideal, virtuous Roman woman – namely, sexual purity.

Busy at Home

Finally, Paul also urges the younger women to be οἰκουργός, or “busy at home” (2:5) Οἰκουργός describes one who works at home; the verb form οἰκουργέω refers to keeping house or fulfilling one’s household duties.⁵¹ It appears in texts such as Cassius Dio’s *Roman History*, which acknowledges the value of a wife who is “chaste, domestic, a good *house-keeper*...”⁵² A Roman woman’s household duties could range from chores such as wool-working to directing household slaves – and depending on the size, overseeing the growth of crops and business.⁵³

⁴⁹ Lutz, 41.

⁵⁰ For example, 1 Tim. 5:22; 2 Cor. 7:11 (typically translated as “innocent”), 2 Cor. 11:2.

⁵¹ Gingrich and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 561.

⁵² Cassius Dio, *Roman History, Volume VII: Books 56-60*, trans. Earnest Cary and Herbert B. Foster. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924.

⁵³ The idea of the domestic space being more of a public space where women were evaluated as managers of the household (and the ‘risk’ of slander) will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. See Cohick, 29.

More discussion on the type of women's work in the domestic sphere that could be put under public scrutiny will commence in the next chapter.⁵⁴

While Paul's intentions for these qualities in Titus 2:4-5 are not exactly the same as that of the Roman philosophers, Neopythagorean women and the widowed husbands who described what constitutes a virtuous woman, it is evident that the same phrases and terminology were utilized by all. In other words, this does suggest that the qualities Paul desires for the young women of Crete to cultivate conform to Roman ideology about virtuous women. Now, it may be helpful to ask, why are these qualities valued? What was the significance of the virtuous woman in Imperial Roman society?

Why did being a virtuous woman *matter*?

Sheer criticism and concern could befall onto women if they did not exhibit their designated virtues. Rufus mentions how his opponents worry that if women study philosophy – the women would “take an interest in oration, [arguing] and [attacking] premises, when they *ought* to be at home spinning wool.”⁵⁵ Why is it that these women *ought* to be *οἰκουροῦς*? More explicit is Juvenal's (satirical) despise of those women who, by way of their education, disrupt the social order by monologuing about poetry and morality, and who are so learned in grammar that they continuously correct their less-educated friends, and even their husband's speech.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ It should be noted that Paul also desires for the younger women in Crete to be “good” (ἀγαθὰς), which is sometimes translated as “kind.” I have decided to leave this quality out of the discussion as looking at the others seems sufficient, and the others appear more explicitly in non-Pauline writings.

⁵⁵ Lutz, 43. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁶ Juvenal begs that they at least let husbands “be permitted to make slips in grammar”; he also condemns wealthy women, who often seem to neglect or run their household “as cruelly as a Sicilian Court.” It seems to be that Juvenal thinks women were more virtuous when they did not live lavishly. See Juvenal, “The Satires of Juvenal,” in *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. G.G Ramsay (London: Heinemann, 1920), 121, 123.

But what garnered this kind of criticism? Why are certain qualities and virtues expected for these women (and men)? Besides widely held notions about the capability of women and the types of roles that were then deemed appropriate,⁵⁷ women's virtuous behavior played a significant role in the well-being and identity of the empire.

The family unit was considered the “building block” of Imperial Roman society. The family was viewed as a microcosm of the empire and the empire as a macro-version of the household. If the household flourished, so did the empire. But the opposite was also true: if the household was disorderly and chaotic, this would shake the foundation of the empire.⁵⁸ One of the most significant aspects of the family unit was the role of the *paterfamilias*, who was often the eldest male of the household. Generally, the *paterfamilias* was the only one who could own property, manage financial affairs, permit marriage and in some extreme cases, hold the power of life and death over those in his household.⁵⁹ While the role of the *paterfamilias* encompassed a variety of duties and expressed itself in nuanced ways throughout the empire, the *paterfamilias* was generally responsible for his household's legal, moral, and religious propriety. For example, a significant aspect of Imperial Rome was *pax deorum*, or maintaining “peace with the gods.”⁶⁰ The idea was that the welfare of individuals, families, and the Roman Empire in general depended on the beneficence of the divine, which was cultivated by offering the gods sacrifices, prayers, and general devotion. Idols and statues of various Roman gods populated the city – and

⁵⁷ See John B. Kamp, “Patriarchy and Gender Law in Ancient Rome and Colonial America,” *Iowa Historical Review*, 8, no. 1, (2020): 43.

⁵⁸ Nijay K. Gupta, *Strange Religion: How the First Christians Were Weird, Dangerous, and Compelling*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2024), 122. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=30611408>.

⁵⁹ Emma Johnson, “Patriarchal Power in the Roman Republic: Ideologies and Realities of the *Paterfamilias*,” *Hirundo: The McGill Journal of Classical Studies* 5, (2006): 99.

⁶⁰ Gupta, *Strange Religion*, 24. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=30611408>.

households. A newly wedded Roman wife was required to worship and revere any new gods introduced to her by her husband. United reverence to the same gods was understood to result in divine sanction of the marriage and prosperity of the household.⁶¹ The stoic Hierocles expressed how beautiful and smooth-functioning households consist in the unity of a husband and wife who are “consecrated to the gods...”⁶² Achieving the beneficence of the gods was an important part of maintaining well-being and prosperity in Imperial Roman society. This involved keeping various practices, including sacrifices, oath swearing, gift giving, and respect.⁶³ Since the overseeing of this was the responsibility of the *paterfamilias*, a wife’s unwillingness to submit (ὑποτάσσω) would be problematic.

The *paterfamilias* also had a moral responsibility. For one, he was considered responsible for ensuring his wife was not an adulterer. One thing to note is that the period surrounding the founding of the Roman Empire was marked by a disintegration of older Roman morality, which is said to have involved woman experiencing greater sexual freedoms, but also resulted in a decrease in the legitimate number of marriages and a large decrease in the fertility rate (which was essential to keeping Rome populated and numerous). Augustus responded by enacting laws that pertained to the family. The legislation *Lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis* (passed in 18 BCE) maintained that if a wife was caught in an act of adultery, husbands were obligated to obtain a divorce and charge her of adultery within 60 days.⁶⁴ This added the moral responsibility of having to control his wife’s sexuality, and a large sense of embarrassment if he was required to

⁶¹ Caroline Johnson Hodge, “Married to an Unbeliever: Households, Hierarchies, and Holiness in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16,” *The Harvard Theologica Review* 103, no. 1 (2010): 11.

⁶² Hodge, “Married to an Unbeliever,” 11.

⁶³ See Gupta, 24. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=30611408>; Robert Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome: Religion in Everyday Life from Archaic to Imperial Times*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 5.

⁶⁴ Mary Alana Deminion, “Staging Morality: Studies in the *lex Julia de Adulteriis* of 18 BCE,” *Masters Thes.*, (University of Victoria, 2007), 16.

charge her in a public setting.⁶⁵ Infidelity could also be related to neglecting one's duties towards bearing legitimate offspring and being faithful in bringing up the children of the household. But the duty of a *paterfamilias* would be made easier if it were emphasized for women to cultivate the virtues of self-control and chastity (purity), hence its emphasis and celebration following the founding of the Empire and Augustus' rule.

Finally, another example that demonstrates the importance of the virtuous woman is their economic contribution to society from within the household. Being "busy at home" encompasses much. While it is evident that many women were active in the marketplace as shopkeepers and business owners who bought and sold items outside of the home, the Roman household functioned as the "hub of business" which overall contributed to the economy of the state.⁶⁶ For example, wives living in large estates in rural areas with a high number of slaves had important supervisory duties, especially overseeing the domestic work of female slaves; baking bread, serving in the kitchen as *focariae*, spinning wool, and cooking gruel.⁶⁷ For those in more urban areas and existing within the urban artisanal class, as can be deduced from funerary inscriptions, free, freed and slave women practiced a craft and sold goods and services; manufactured clothing (wool-working and looming), jewelry, and perfume, to selling fruits and vegetables.⁶⁸ Also, being "busy at home" is likely to involve more than economic contributions. As evidenced in one of the Neo-Pythagorean letters above, from Theano to Euboule, there is an emphasis on the loving and raising of children.

⁶⁵ Deminion, "Staging Morality," 4.

⁶⁶ Cohick, 29.

⁶⁷ Saller, "Household and Gender," 104.

⁶⁸ Saller, 105.

Overall, the Roman woman's productivity and contribution to the economy is extremely nuanced, especially regarding the variety of rural and urban areas and women's social class. After all, as Cohick suggests, "women navigated a social world wherein the category 'women' included rich and poor, slave and free, Jew and gentile, urban and rural, Roman and barbarian, and lots of realities in between."⁶⁹ Within this dynamic world, the exact roles of women in the household ranged widely. Although this description provides only a brief overview of the Roman woman's role in the household, there is nevertheless a gendered divide of productivity, which further served to keep the building block of Roman society – the household – running. Likewise, it was important for a Roman woman to submit (as exemplified by the importance of *pax deorum*) and to remain pure, so as not to tarnish the reputation of the *paterfamilias* – and make things disharmonious for her family. A Roman woman's virtues – in this case submission, self-control and purity, and domestic productivity – were understood as an essential part of Imperial Roman society. It is no wonder that so much attention has been given to discussing the ideal Roman woman in writings, epitaphs, and letters, and the type of criticism that could arise if a woman was not doing what she "ought" to be doing, or subverting her husband by say, correcting his grammar.

Conclusion

There are a vast number of reasons why it was important for Roman women to acquire and maintain ideal feminine virtues. But a woman's behavior and qualities were extremely important and integral to Imperial Roman society – the society that the apostle Paul was living in, and, more importantly, planting churches in. In this context, Paul uses terminology in Titus

⁶⁹ Cohick, 28.

2:4-5 that mirrored his contemporaries and was familiar to his letter recipients. It is therefore arguable that Paul's words to the young women of Crete echo first-century Roman ideology about what constitutes the virtuous woman. How Paul utilizes this "echo" is where the main difference lies. Because of the importance and value of the virtuous Roman woman, displaying a subversive character towards Roman Imperial ideology could be means for slander. Thus, we will now turn to the very real risk of slander (or as Paul puts it, "βλασφημῆται) that existed for the church at Crete and could prove potentially damaging to Paul's message.

Public Observation & the Real Risk of Slander

Thus far, it has been observed how significant the ideal, virtuous woman was to Roman imperial society. Therefore, because of her significance, the qualities that Paul desires the young women of Crete to exhibit, including that of loving one's husband and children, being self-controlled and chaste, being busy at home, and subject to one's husband (2:4-5), played an important role in evading slander and protecting the church. Indeed, as we shall see in the examination of domestic architecture, in the nature of early church meetings, and in women's simple go-about, public observation and scrutiny – particularly for women – was a real and constant reality in first-century Crete. Public observation of behaviour or actions could lead to slandering, including slander about the community to which she belonged. Excessive slander or criticism from outsiders, especially that which claims a group or person is subverting integral Roman ideologies (including that which constituted the virtuous woman), could have real consequences, as will be observed in the Roman suppression of the cults of Dionysius and Isis as well as of diviners such as astrologers and magicians. Considering all this, Paul's instructions to the young women of Crete seem primarily strategic and cautionary. Avoiding anything that might generate slander or excessive criticism of the early Christian church and its message was essential for ensuring its security in first-century Crete.

Paul's Intentions Behind the Qualities

Unlike his Roman contemporaries, Paul’s main goal is not simply glorifying the virtuous Roman woman. Paul reveals his intentions clearly as he writes “ἵνα μὴ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ βλασφημηῆται” (2:5). He exhorts the older woman to urge the younger women to be husband-lovers, child-lovers, self-controlled and pure, busy at home, to be good and to be subject to their own husbands *in order that* (ἵνα) no one will malign or blaspheme (βλασφημηῆται) the word of God (v. 5c).¹ The word of God (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) refers to the message of the Gospel or the message entrusted to Paul.² It does not refer to the written word of God, the Scriptures.³ Paul uses this phrase several times in the New Testament to refer to his verbal message of the gospel in general (1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Cor. 2:17; Col. 1:25; 2 Tim. 2:9). Thus, in his use of βλασφημηῆται, Paul desires that this word of God is not slandered, or defamed.⁴ Paul does not want the message about Christ (and ultimately, the underlying foundation of this newly formed community) to be ill-spoken of or discredited by non-Christians.⁵

Titus 2:5 is paralleled by two other exhortations in the letter to Titus. Paul instructs Titus to urge the men to exhibit certain qualities including self-control, teaching with integrity, seriousness, and soundness *so that* (ἵνα) his “opponents” (2:8) in Crete may not have *anything bad to say about them* (2:8).⁶ Likewise, Titus is also instructed to urge slaves to be subject to their masters and to try to please them *so that* (ἵνα) the teaching about God (which Paul has

¹ βλασφημηῆται is in the passive, so it moreso should be translated as “so the word of God may not be blasphemed.” Being written in the passive implies that the action is being committed *by* someone onto the word of God; Paul is trying to prevent an active agent from blaspheming or slandering the word of God

² Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on First and Second Timothy, Titus*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 66. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=5247259&ppg=65>. Gundry also references Titus 1:3 as synonymous.

³ Jerome D. Quinn, *The Letters to Titus*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 122.

⁴ Gundry, *Commentary on First and Second Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 66. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=5247259&ppg=65>.

⁵ J. Harold Greenlee, *An Exegetical Summary of Titus & Philemon*, 2nd ed., (Dallas: SIL International, 2008), 54.

⁶ Some manuscripts read ὑμῶν (you, plural) instead of ἡμῶν (us). See Greenlee, *An Exegetical Summary*, 59. Either way, it still refers to the opponents of Titus and, likely the elders appointed by Titus (1:5).

brought to Crete) may be made “attractive” – or embellished, adorned, honored (κοσμῶσιν) – in “every way.” (3:10c). Paul has in mind the reputation of the Church and the gospel. But whose opinion is he concerned with?

Who Poses as a Risk For Slander?

As for these opponents (2:8), although there is mention of a group causing contention within the Cretan church (1:10-11), it is more likely that the potentially slanderous opponents Paul is concerned about following his exhortations in 2:5d, 8c, 10c are those *outside* of the church community. The initial “opponents” mentioned in 1:10 who were disrupting Cretan Christian households belonged to the “circumcision group” were likely Jewish Christians with gnostic tendencies⁷ (hence Paul’s mention of Jewish myths in 1:13).⁸ They were aware and knowledgeable of the teaching Paul brought to Crete and were the primary group leading people astray from the doctrines he recently established.⁹ After all, there was a significant Jewish population on Crete in the first century. Josephus writes of a young man who “deceived” the Jews at Crete,¹⁰ and Philo writes about the numerous Jews who settled on Euboea, Cyprus and Crete.¹¹ They were the reason that Paul desires (hence his usage of γὰρ at the start of v. 10) for Titus to select overseers of the community that will hold firmly to the message Paul has taught in Crete (1:9).

⁷ Greenlee, 37;

⁸ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 498.

⁹ Yarbrough makes a good point. Paul writes, “*especially* those of the circumcision group” regarding those full of meaningless talk and deception. So, it is implied that they are not the only group in Crete that may cause some diversions in the doctrine Paul has brought to Crete. Nonetheless they were the primary group causing disruption in the establishment of Paul’s teaching. See Yarbrough, *The Letters*, 492.

¹⁰ Yarbrough, 493; Josephus, *The Jewish War*; trans. G.A Williamson, (London: Penguin Classics, 1984), 130.

¹¹ Philo, “On the Embassy to Gaius,” in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C.D Yonge, (Peabody: Hendrickson), 1026.

Additionally, the only real “threat” from these internal Jewish individuals was alteration of doctrine, and Paul combats this threat by exhorting Titus to appoint leaders who can refute incorrect teaching and to divert attention from “Jewish myths” (1:14). Thus, Paul is combatting a different opponent and a different type of threat when he exhorts older women, younger women, and younger men, to obtain certain qualities in order to evade slander – especially when those qualities, virtues, and behaviours are not only celebrated but deemed integral to Imperial Roman society. Overall, it is unlikely that Paul was concerned about the Judaizing group discrediting, having anything bad to say, or viewing the message about Christ as attractive. It is evident that there was another threat at hand that needed to be combatted by encouraging specific groups within the Cretan church, such as young women, to exhibit ideal Roman virtues.

The Very Real Risk of Slander, Discredit & Criticism in First-Century Crete

In the first century, the island of Crete was part of the Roman province of Crete and Cyrenaica. The principal Jewish population was located in Gortyn, the administrative capital for Crete and Cyrenaica.¹² Gortyn was likely the primary location for the Cretan church.¹³ First-century Crete was also marked by ethnic, cultural, and social diversity. Amongst this diverse population, early Christian communities gradually became more visible, and as MacDonald puts it, women had a particular role to play “in the increasing visibility of early Christianity and the growing dialogue between early Christianity and Greco-Roman society.”¹⁴ Visibility and opportunities for scrutiny manifested in a variety of ways in Roman Crete. Within the limits of this chapter, these opportunities, particularly for women, may be considered in threefold: in

¹² George Wieland, “Roman Crete and the Letter to Titus,” *New Testament Studies* 55, (2009), 352.

¹³ Wieland, “Roman Crete,” 353.

¹⁴ Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of Hysterical Women*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9.

Cretan domestic architecture, the public dimension of early Christian meetings, and, simply, women's existence in an honour-shame society.

Early Christian Visibility in Cretan Society

Cretan and Roman Households Affording Visibility

Before discussing Cretan household architecture, it is important to keep in mind that the Romanization of Hellenistic cities or countries was not homogenous. Despite many scholars accepting a significant cultural and architectural change across the island due to Roman colonization, domestic archaeological data from various excavated sites in Crete suggest otherwise. Crete did not undergo a homogenous or relatively quick process of Romanization.¹⁵ This means that, generally, life (and architecture) in the private, domestic sphere continued without significant alteration. This assertion will be considered while examining the design of first-century Cretan households. Nevertheless, it will also be considered alongside the evidence for the construction of Roman-style houses in first-century Crete. Overall, whether more Hellenistic or Roman in style, the spaces typically inhabited by early Cretan Christians had an inherently public aspect about them. This would afford visibility for early Christian communities and families, particularly early Christian women, and subsequently, cause opportunities for slander.

Architecture in two Cretan cities indicate a culture that cared less about privacy and testify to the reality of public observation of domestic activities. Ruth Westgate, in her study of domestic architecture in Lato and Trypetos from the late Hellenistic period, argues that the design of Cretan houses were distinct in that they were characterized by public exposure and

¹⁵ Rebecca J. Sweetman, "Domus, Villa, and Farmstead: The Globalization of Crete," *ΣΤΕΙΑ: The Archaeology of Houses and Households in Ancient Crete* 44 (2011): 443.

observance. By contrast, the most common Hellenistic housing style was the courtyard house. Variations of this style have been found across the Greek world, including Athens, Eretria, Olynthos, and Priene.¹⁶ This design is marked by a central courtyard which functioned as the singular point by which other rooms were accessible. Because of the centralized access, this tree-like pattern of housing has also been associated with the ideal of female seclusion.¹⁷ Exposure to the outside world was limited because the corresponding entrance (which had a longer, twisted vestibule) and the internal courtyard, provided a secluded space where women could carry out domestic tasks unobserved from the outside.¹⁸

However, Westgate's findings show that many of the houses in several Cretan cities were designed in a linear fashion. This means that instead of a more circular, radial pattern, the houses were smaller and consisted of one room following the other with doorway and hallway designs that revealed more of the rooms from the outside than the more circular, tree-like houses. What was also typical of many of these linear houses was the proximity of the hearth room to the front entrance, where many domestic activities took place; cooking and food preparation, textile and craft production, perfuming and various communal activities including family dining. Because of the proximity of this main room to the front entrance, there was frequent opportunity for the observation of domestic tasks and living from the street. Some houses also showed evidence of having semi-public or completely open forecourts where some domestic tasks were completed, such as collecting water from a cistern or using stone mortars.¹⁹ Evidence for houses that have a linear design, that lack inner courtyards, that have large rooms in close proximity to the front via

¹⁶ Ruth Westgate, "House and Society in Classical and Hellenistic Crete: A Case Study in Regional Variations," *American Journal of Archaeology* 111, no. 3 (2007): 426.

¹⁷ Westgate, "House and Society in Classical and Hellenistic Crete," 427.

¹⁸ Westgate, 427.

¹⁹ Westgate, 431.

shallow vestibules, and have semi-public forecourts also appear in Xerocambos in southeast Crete, and in more western parts, such as Kolonna, Eleutherna, and Kerames.²⁰

Admittedly, the actual time of occupation of the housing sites examined in Westgate's article range from the late fifth century BCE to the first century BCE, depending on the city. Those built in Eleutherna, for example, were built in the third or second century and were occupied until the first;²¹ the settlement at Xerocambos was occupied from the fifth to the early first century BCE; the latest evidence for occupation for a house in Lato dates from the second century BCE; and the small settlement in Trypetos shows evidence for occupation from the mid-third century to mid-second century BCE. So, the sites that were excavated were not exactly dated for the time Paul was writing to Crete, but there are a few things to keep in mind. First, it is arguable that culture determines the types of houses that are built, not vice-versa (however it is arguable that living in those houses maintains the culture), and Westgate notes herself how the island of Crete was distinct in that the houses indicated the Cretans' minimal concern for privacy.²² Moreover, Cretan women were granted relatively high autonomy, a relatively high standard of education, and, via the Gortyn Law, were allowed greater rights in comparison to women elsewhere in Greece.²³ These sorts of attitudes may have something to do with the minimal concern for female seclusion, as demonstrated by these linear houses. Second, there was less emphasis on the central role of the "private" family in late Hellenistic Crete, given the observation that private inscriptions, including funerary inscriptions, are much less common than

²⁰ Westgate, 435-439.

²¹ Westgate, 436.

²² Westgate, 427.

²³ Michael Gagarin, "Women's Property at Gortyn," *Dike: Rivista Di Storia Del Diritto Greco Ed Ellenistico*, 15, (2013): 73. <https://doi.org/10.13130/1128-8221/3492>

public ones in Crete.²⁴ In all, there was significantly less emphasis on the household being a self-sufficient unit, or on primary autonomy granted to the main male figure to utilize his authority within the household with private activities and particular domains for women. There was a communal aspect central to life at Crete. So, even if the houses described in Westgate's article were not necessarily inhabited right up through the first century CE, it is likely that, given Crete's heritage as incorporating a more communal, public lifestyle, as well as the not immediately all-encompassing homogenization of Roman culture, that the lifestyle associated with domestic infrastructure would have remained.²⁵

So, the reality of opportunities for observation, particularly of women, is demonstrated by the distinct housing patterns of Crete. Being more linear oriented, there was minimal concern for privacy and seclusion, and consequently, women could be *seen*. They would have been frequently observed by passers-by on the street, conducting their domestic tasks. This is one of the opportunities for observation that existed in Crete, close to the time Paul was writing his letter.

But, of course, the Romans did settle in Crete, gradually resulting in the presence of more distinctly Roman structures. Indeed, an examination of three major cities, Gortyn, Knossos, and Kissamos, provides an understanding of what Roman domestic housing looked like. The city of Gortyn, having been made the capital of Crete and Cyrenaica in 27 BCE, is described having

²⁴ Westgate, 451; A. Chaniotis, "From Communal Spirit to Individuality: The Epigraphic Habit in Hellenistic and Roman Crete," in *Creta romana e protobizantina: Atti del Congresso Internazionale*, ed. M. Livadiotti and I. Simiakaki, (Padua: Bottega d'Erasmus, 2004) 76, 83-84.

²⁵ Regarding Roman influence and rule, Sweetman contends that although Crete came to be under standard Roman administration, there was no great, cultural colonization in places all over; different parts of the island could choose whether to adopt or ignore certain Roman elements. This means that there was opportunity for long-held Cretan cultural aspects to have remained. However, Gortyn is said to have "become an identifiably Roman city very quickly," albeit this is in reference to pottery, mosaics and *public* architecture, not necessarily domestic architecture. See Sweetman, "Domus, Villa, and Farmstead," 445-446.

undergone rapid Roman “engulfment.”²⁶ Archaeological findings suggest that the city was one of the earliest to show signs of Romanization. The earliest imperial statues found on Crete (of Tiberius) were found in Gortyn.²⁷ Roman Odeions were found dating to the first centuries BCE and CE.²⁸ The earliest Mosaics at Gortyn are Roman in style, and several likely date close to when Gortyn was made the capital. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that this also extended into housing infrastructure. While it is difficult to find sources that discuss housing design in the city of Gortyn specifically, it is still helpful to explore what has been found of general Roman household architecture. Typical Roman household architecture may be categorized into three types: the *domus*; the large apartments found within *insulae*; and small apartments located in upper apartments of *insulae* within the city, shops, and singular-room living spaces.²⁹

The Roman *domus* was an atrium-peristyle house (similar to the Hellenistic courtyard house), typically belonging to the wealthy elite.³⁰ Despite the vast array and exceptions in atrium house architecture, typically one would always find two types of rooms: the *atrium* and the *tablinum*. The atrium was the room the house was centered on; it was a large courtyard area that served as the main spot for gathering. This was also the space where the most expensive and elaborate furnishings could be found.³¹ Cianca notes that, in general, the areas of a Roman house most frequently visited by guests would be the most elaborately decorated. She writes that “in

²⁶ Anna Kouremenos, “Cultural Identity and the Process of Emulative Acculturation: The View from the Domestic Realm in Roman Crete,” *Research Gate*, 2019: 13.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333602818_Cultural_identity_and_the_process_of_emulative_acculturation_the_view_from_the_domestic_realm_in_Roman_Crete.

²⁷ Rebecca J. Sweetman, “Roman Knossos: The Nature of a Globalized City,” *American Journal of Archaeology*, 111, no. 1 (2007): 77. See also I.F Sanders, *Roman Crete: An Archaeological Survey and Gazetteer of Late Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Crete* (Warminster: Aris and Philips, 1982), 37, 40.

²⁸ Sweetman, “Roman Knossos,” 77.

²⁹ I subscribe to Jenn Cianca’s general categorization of typical Roman house design here. See Jenn Cianca, *Sacred Ritual, Profane Space: The Roman House as Early Christians Meeting Place*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018), 36.

³⁰ Cianca, *Sacred Ritual, Profane Space*, 36.

³¹ Cianca, 38.

Pompeii, many examples are available that indicate the importance of this room for presenting the image of the *paterfamilias* whose status would be underscored by his selection of rich colours in wall painting, marble revetments or columns supporting the atrium's roof, and elaborate *lararia*, or domestic shrines....³² Another often guest-filled place was the tablinum, typically placed right next to the atrium, and that which was the focal point of the atrium's extended area. Here, the *paterfamilias* would conduct his *salutatio*, the primary time set aside where he would receive his clients, guests, slaves, business relations, any other guests.³³ Typically there was also a large window behind where the *paterfamilias* would sit, from which "would gleam in the bright sun,"³⁴ offering an intimidating picture of the *paterfamilias*. It is apparent that there was concern about public image, particularly on the part of the *paterfamilias*, as demonstrated by the presence of these very public and elaborately decorated spaces that existed in the *domuses* of the Roman elite. Therefore, although many aspects of a Roman domus were definitely more private than what was observed about the late Hellenistic linear houses, there were still opportunities for public exposure within domestic living.³⁵

Furthermore, the *materfamilias* often had the freedom to move throughout the house during the steady stream of visitors throughout the day.³⁶ The *materfamilias* and any other women of the household may have avoided the atrium and tablinum during the *salutatio*, but there is no strong indication otherwise.³⁷ The atrium was also a common place for domestic

³² Cianca, 38.

³³ Cianca, 38.

³⁴ Cianca, 39.

³⁵ For example, in these wealthy homes, the entrance was narrow and typically guarded by a slave. The entrance was not as visible to the public as those described in Westgate's article were. Also, these wealthy Roman houses had *cubicula*, many bedrooms without windows that visitors did not have free or easy access to. See Cianca, 38-39.

³⁶ Cianca, 42.

³⁷ Cianca, 42.

activities, either performed by slaves or the *materfamilias* managing those slaves. Therefore, because of the constant stream of visitors, it is plausible that the performance and image of the women (or women) of the household was also under public observance. But instead of her image being adorned by the greatness of the household and elaborate decoration, it was in the management of the slaves, the discipline of children and the overseeing of their education, and in their duty as occasionally acting as hostess of banquets in her home.³⁸ Because wealthy Roman houses functioned as “bustling centres of activity”³⁹ due to the duties of the *paterfamilias*, these houses afforded visibility and opportunities for scrutiny of the performance of women in Roman Crete.

Similar aspects may be identified in other Roman-type households. Generally, the dwellings of non-elites in cities included apartments and shops. Apartment buildings often had communal spaces such as a central courtyard, a latrine, or niches honouring particular Roman gods. Many rooms of the large apartment units had similar functions to that seen within the *domus* such as entertaining guests and greeting business partners and clients.⁴⁰ Smaller apartments, however, which were typically on the upper floors, had smaller layouts – some even having a just a single room.⁴¹ Still, there would be a central space shared with the other rooms or *cubicula*.⁴² Occasionally, instead of a singular family occupying all of the rooms, low-income tenants would inhabit only a singular room or *cubiculum* and use the shared central space when

³⁸ Cianca, 42.

³⁹ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “Domus and Insulae in Rome: Families and Housefuls,” in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. D.L Balch and C. Osiek, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 3-18. Cited in Cianca, 40.

⁴⁰ Cianca, 44.

⁴¹ Cianca, 44.

⁴² Gustav Hermansen, *Ostia: Aspects of Roman City Life* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1981), 44. Cited in Cianca, 45.

they could.⁴³ When it comes to shops, they were typically rented out by tradespeople, and often attached to a large *domus* or connected to the ground floor of an apartment building. Shops as a domestic space varied; some had an upstairs floor that provided the dwelling place for the family. For some lower-income shopkeepers, the space functioned simultaneously as a work space and a one-room house.⁴⁴ But these three types of dwelling spaces (*domus*, large *insulae*, small *insulae*) are primarily found in urban areas.

Rural dwellings, including those which were situated on farms on inland Crete, are characterized as *villas*; they are not dissimilar to the atrium-style *domus*, but larger land allowed for multiple dining areas, multiple courtyards, and gardens. They also had houses for workers, whether slaves or freepersons. But again, this refers to the housing of the elite and not necessarily the majority. Overall, these Roman-style houses, including the *domus*, and even the variety of apartments and shops which were located within apartment buildings or functioned simultaneously as private dwellings, all had very public characteristics. In larger *domae*, visitors would be entering in and out for business meetings or for being entertained, and many apartments were communal, with poorer families sharing spaces. Shopworkers would have had a stream of people entering and exiting to purchase their services or goods, perhaps observing their work effort or the domestic tasks taking place at hand if the particularly lower-income workers had only one space. All these elements associated with the vast majority of domestic living in Imperial Roman cities afforded opportunities of public observation. Moreover, it was just culturally perpetuated. Public observation was the way of life; and this is why representation, particularly through house design, mattered. The domestic space, especially for the elite, acted as

⁴³ Cianca, 45.

⁴⁴ Cianca, 45.

“a canvas for the self-representation of the owner,”⁴⁵ and there was an importance to demonstrating their identity as a Roman and loyalty to the empire, and “this demonstration of Roman identity was effected through architectural design, decoration, and *proper behaviour*.”⁴⁶ Domestic dwellings functioned as an integral space to showcase one’s identity and in order for one to be recognized as an esteemed citizen of Rome. In all, observation was a significant aspect of Roman Imperial culture and every-day life, as demonstrated by an analysis of the design and function of domestic architecture.

The Nature of Church Meetings and Opportunities for Public Observation

Another way in which the early Cretan Christians were subject to public observation was through their meetings. Early church communities met in a variety of contexts, but households are the most referred place for early church meetings in the New Testament. Prisca and Aquilla are listed as hosts for a church community in Rome (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19). Paul praised Gaius for his hospitality espoused towards him and the entire church that meets in his home (Rom. 16:23). A church community met in the home of Apphia and Archippus (Phm. 1:2), and a church meeting that occurs in Troas in an upper room where Paul is preaching is mentioned in Acts (Acts 20:7-11). The nature of the design of domestic architecture may very well have afforded opportunities for public observation. Indeed, Stark argues that, based on the archaeological evidence, house churches were clearly identifiable, and that their neighbours were very much aware that these were Christian gathering places.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Cianca, 47.

⁴⁶ Cianca, 47.

⁴⁷ See Michael L. White, *Building God’s House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), cited in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 192. Indeed, Christianity grew because of person-to-person influence; they had to be open. See also Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 208.

Indeed, it is evident early Christian gatherings were observed and scrutinized by outsiders. Pliny the Younger (c. 61-113 CE) offers the earliest material regarding observation and critique from outsiders. He writes to Emperor Trajan (c. 53-117) about his investigation of those identified to him as Christians.⁴⁸ Although he is unsure if they truly committed any offenses against the empire, he sees the movement as a “contagion” that spread “not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms.”⁴⁹ A couple of early Christian apologists bring up the rumoured cannibalistic practice of the Eucharist. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 CE) alludes to accusations regarding the Eucharist in his First and Second Apology (1 Ap. 26; 2 Apo. 12).

In a later era, Minucius Felix (d. 250 CE) lays out a fictional conversation between a pagan and a Christian that reveals some of the observations and rumours generated during the time of the early church. The pagan remarks how the Christians have “gathered together from the lowest dregs the more unskilled, and women... [who are] leagued together by nightly meetings... they know one another by secret marks and insignia, and they love one another almost before they know one another.”⁵⁰ So, through Pliny’s observation of the networking and establishment of the church, Justin Martyr’s defense of rumours regarding the Eucharist, and Minucius documenting of rumours regarding Christian communal meetings and interpersonal behaviour, Christian meetings were under significant observation and scrutiny.

Christians also met in outdoor spaces. There is evidence for gardens, watersides, urban open spaces and burial sites as Christian meeting places. For instance, watersides are a recurring

⁴⁸ Also See Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 22-23.

⁴⁹ Pliny, *Letters*, 10. 96-97. Georgetown University, <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/texts/pliny.html>. Accessed November 2024.

⁵⁰ Minucius Felix, *The Octavius of Minucius Felix*, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis (New York: Christian Literature, 1885), 332.

setting for Jesus' own teaching in the Gospels, especially in Mark (Mk. 2:13; 3:9; 4:1). In the book of Acts, Paul's farewell meeting with the Ephesian leaders in Miletus is located at the harbour (Acts 20: 36-38). In other early writings, such as the *Epitome of the Acts of Andrew*, Andrew is described as walking along the shore with Lesbius at Patras where they sit down with others and Andrew begins to teach them.⁵¹ Watersides in general were a popular spot for other associations or philosophical schools and were suitable for prayer, teaching, and feasting.⁵² Ultimately, they would have been in public view,⁵³ and Crete, with many of its cities situated near water, would not have been short of waterside gatherings.

Thirdly, the early church became visible through its acts of charity. One of the first examples of mass early Christian charity was providing sustenance for the starving in Antioch, Greece, and Macedonia.⁵⁴ In Aristides's (d. 134 CE) apology, he writes of the Christians' acceptance and hospitality towards a stranger as they "they bring him to their dwellings, and rejoice over him as over a true brother."⁵⁵ He also writes that if "there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food...."⁵⁶ Lucian of Samosata (c. 120-180) describes how a group of Christians were eager to receive Peregrinus, a cynic philosopher who later converted to Christianity, describes the care of the Christians towards an imprisoned man named Proteus.⁵⁷ It

⁵¹ Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* (London: A&C Black, 2013), 187.

⁵² Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places*, 189.

⁵³ Adams, 189.

⁵⁴ A.A Bykov, "The Origin of Christian Charity," *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences* 166 (2015): 613.

⁵⁵ Aristides, *The Apology of Aristides*, trans. J. Rendel Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1893), 49.

⁵⁶ Aristides, *The Apology*, 49.

⁵⁷ Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, trans. A.M. Harmon (London: Heinemann, 1936), 13.

is evident that the early Christians attended to the needy, and that their generosity and charity was well-known to outsiders, either by hearsay or public observation.

From Cretan linear-house designs to more Imperial Roman-Style homes, from observations and hearsay about Christian traditions, meetings, and practices, the early Cretan Christians were frequently subject to public observation. Furthermore, women were present in all these contexts, from going about domestic tasks within or partially outside the home, to attending and hosting communal meetings to contributing to charitable cases.⁵⁸ Consequently, women's behaviour – from their interactions with their husbands to how they portrayed themselves – was under observation. Moreover, outside of Christian gatherings, it was almost always possible to “identify and distinguish adherents of the Jesus-movement in the general populace.”⁵⁹ So, we will turn to Margaret McDonald's argument about the reality of early Christian women specifically being under public observation and having to navigate the public dimensions of early Christianity within honour-shame culture, and then finally, a discussion on the real consequences that could occur due to excessive criticism and slander about the early church.

Women's Observation & Avoiding Shame

MacDonald argues that a system of honour and shame system was present in Mediterranean society.⁶⁰ She builds on the work of Gilmore, who identifies a link between the dichotomy of honour and shame with gender expectations.⁶¹ There also existed a strong sense of what the public and private sphere was (although MacDonald admits those terms are slippery),

⁵⁸ Istvan Czachesz, “Women, Charity, and mobility in Early Christianity: Weak Links and the Historical Transformation of Religions”, in *Changing Minds: Religion and Cognition Through the Ages* (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 2011), 149. He talks about Christianity's investment in charity and women's active involvement in Christianity.

⁵⁹ Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods*, 21.

⁶⁰ MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, 27.

⁶¹ Gilmore, “The Shame of Dishonour,” 3.

with men being associated with the former and women with the latter.⁶² One can imagine, therefore, the issues that would arise when Christians conducted mixed meetings in households, essentially mixing the private and public together. To be sure, it was not uncommon for a Roman woman, especially an elite Roman woman, to be nearby while her husband was entertaining guests. Moreover, many women had various degrees of freedom in the public sphere, including attending public meals and functioning as benefactors. Nevertheless, women “remained subject to symbol systems,” and therefore needed to be cautious about their behaviour and the frequency of their venturing into public.⁶³ As a Mediterranean woman went about her household duties, participated within the church community, or embarked on any necessary public errand, she simultaneously “[represented] her household’s shame, embodying its possessive concern for reputation.”⁶⁴

Navigating this system was difficult because early Christian women participated in ministerial opportunities that required them to be mobile. Paul frequently mentions female co-workers and leaders within certain communities (Phil 4:2-3; Rom. 16:1, 3, 6, 7, 12, 15). St. Thecla was criticized for her ministerial travels and supposed neglect of her household.⁶⁵ So, although an unfortunate burden to bear, and despite there also being a concern for early Christian men to maintain honour, early Christian women played a significant, mediatorial role between the Church and world.⁶⁶ It is this norm of observance and scrutiny of specifically women in

⁶² Philo expresses the public sphere being “male” and the private sphere of household management as “female.” He writes, “the women are best suited to indoor life which never strays from the house,” See Philo, “The Special Laws, III,” in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C. D Yonge, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1969), 803; MacDonald, 32.

⁶³ MacDonald, 34.

⁶⁴ MacDonald, 240.

⁶⁵ MacDonald, 253.

⁶⁶ For example, Paul’s concern for male leaders to be of good standing and reputation in 1 Tim. 3:7, “so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap,” which is a strong but effective way to describe the harmful effects slander has on the community.

particular, which testifies to the reality of public observation and *consequently* slander in first-century Crete. Although some of these findings may not directly testify to the island of Crete, they nevertheless testify to Mediterranean culture and society during the first century. Because women were observed and held a particular, unconscious role in protecting the reputation of their families and the Christian community at large, it was important for them to protect it by any means possible, such as embodying the role and traits of the virtuous, Graeco-Roman woman.

The Consequences of Slander

In Crete, public observation of early Christian communities and individuals was a reality. Opportunities for public observation and scrutiny were afforded by late Hellenistic and early Roman architecture, in the gatherings of Christian communities and in the pursuit of charity, and in a woman's simple existence – either during her day-to-day tasks or participating in her church community. With so many opportunities for observation and scrutiny of the early Christian community, it was important to evade any means for slander. Indeed, there could be real consequences for the early Christian community if the slander or rumours were deemed as too offensive, as explicitly undermining the Roman constitution, or hinting at any revolutionary tendencies. This can be observed in Roman hostility towards the minority cults of Dionysus and Isis as well towards first-century astrologers and magicians.

The cult of Dionysus (or the Roman equivalent, *Bacchus*) was subject to slander regarding its mysterious, nightly meetings. It was rumoured that their customary nightly celebrations not only consisted of mingling of males and females, but also included a murder rite.⁶⁷ There was also supposedly a priest who performed “secret rites” and an excessive amount

⁶⁷ David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter*. Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, Vol. 26. (1981), 66; Titus Livius (Livy), *The History of Rome*, XXXIX.8.4, trans.

of wine and feasting.⁶⁸ It was also more women-centered with the initiation rites having initially been for women only. It changed when the Priestess Paculla Annia started initiating men.⁶⁹ When this happened, their number grew into what was almost classified as a “second state,” and it was rumoured that their objective was to eventually control the state.⁷⁰ This panicked the Roman senate, resulting in an issuing of a decree against the assembling of the Dionysus cult, and suppression of all forms of rites and worship (unless permission was granted by the city praetor). With over seven thousand men and women involved in the cult, many were thrown into prison or executed.⁷¹ Because of the slander regarding murder, mysterious meetings, and potential political uprising, the Romans reacted in hostile oppression of this cult.

Similarly, the Isis cult (originating in Egypt) was rumoured to be subverting principal tenets of the Roman constitution. Not only rumoured as a gathering place for prostitutes (which was untrue since they demanded a high standard of sexual morality from their devotees),⁷² the Isis cult was slandered as a vehicle for reversing the “proper relationship between man and woman.”⁷³ After all, it was endorsed by Cleopatra, and Augustus was offended that Marc Antony has become “enslaved” to Alexandra.⁷⁴ The Romans also observed that wives of Isis cult were supposedly “ruling” over their husbands, clearly subverting a founding tenet of Rome. The mythical founder of Rome, Romulus, had “constructed a constitution which regulated the temperance of women, which included obedience to husbands.” Moreover, the success of Rome,

William A. McDevitt, (London: John Child and Son, 1850). Perseus Digital Library.
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Liv.+39+8&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0149>.
 Accessed November 2024.

⁶⁸ Balch, “Let Wives Be Submissive,” 66; Livy, *The History of Rome*, XXXIX. 8.4-6.

⁶⁹ Balch, 68.

⁷⁰ Balch, 68. Livy, 16.3.

⁷¹ Balch, 68.

⁷² Balch, 69.

⁷³ Balch, 70.

⁷⁴ Balch, 70.

it was thought, resulted from the constitution.”⁷⁵ No wonder Antony was perceived as “[abandoning] his ancestors’ habits of life,’ emulating ‘alien and barbarian customs,’ one of which was enslavement to a woman.”⁷⁶ Overall, the Isis cult became perceived as a threat to the Roman constitution. Of course, it is unlikely that Antony was “enslaved” or that there was real threat to the Roman constitution. Nevertheless, the slander resulted in the Roman senate decreeing that the temples of Isis be destroyed (c. 50 BCE).⁷⁷ Later, members of the Isis cult were expelled from Rome (c. 19 BCE).⁷⁸

Likewise, astrologers and magicians were slandered as subversive to the “public order.”⁷⁹ Their claim to specialised skills and knowledge allowed them a degree of social power since “people turned to them for help that they could not obtain, at least not as effectively, elsewhere.”⁸⁰ It was this claim to special knowledge and ability that caused the socio-economic elite especially to revere them with suspicion and hostility since it made them a potential rival source of social power.⁸¹ Perhaps this is why such diviners were “liable to legal restrictions and even at times capital punishment.”⁸² Juvenal writes his own slander, writing that “no astrologer has credit unless he has been imprisoned...”⁸³ implying that astrologers were morally corrupt. Eventually, astrologers and magicians also had their own expulsions from Rome.⁸⁴ A diminished reputation caused by suspicion, hostility, and slander led to a hostile reaction by Roman elites

⁷⁵ Balch, 72.

⁷⁶ Balch, 72.

⁷⁷ Balch, 65.

⁷⁸ Leonard Victor Rutgers, “Roman Policy Towards the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome during the First Century C.E.,” *Classical Antiquity* 13, no. 1 (1994): 69.

⁷⁹ James B. Rives, “Magicians and Astrologers,” in Michael Peachin, *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 679.

⁸⁰ Rives, “Magicians and Astrologers,” 681.

⁸¹ Rives, 681.

⁸² Rives, 681.

⁸³ Juvenal, “The Satires of Juvenal,” in *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. G.A Williamson (London: Penguin Classics, 1984), 129.

⁸⁴ Rutgers, “Roman Policy” 69.

upon a certain group. Within the Roman Empire, foreign or non-Roman cults, having born an excessive amount of slander accusations – typically which consisted of being subversive, in defiance of Roman values, as potentially starting a revolution, or being immoral – could face real consequences that affected the safety and longevity of that group.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is truly a reason that Paul desires the young women of Crete to exhibit the traits of the ideal, virtuous Roman woman (Titus 2:4-5). The reality was that life in Crete during the Roman Empire afforded daily opportunities for public observation and scrutiny, which is evidenced by the designs of late Hellenistic and Imperial Roman houses that caused many opportunities for women to be observed and scrutinized within (and in front of) their households as they conducted their daily tasks or interacted with guests. Furthermore, the nature of early church meetings, which were clearly observed by outsiders and likely consisted of mixed-gender meetings, afforded even more opportunities for the observation of women. Lastly, simply being a woman – whether within the church meetings, or going about church business, or conducting one’s own errands – involved the responsibility of maintaining her family or community’s honour. This means that there were more than enough opportunities for slander to be generated if she failed to exhibit the ideal, virtuous woman that Paul (as well as his contemporaries) lays out in Titus 2:4-5. Moreover, this slander would likely extend to the church community the woman belonged to, and, consequently, the very thing that the church community was founded on: the preaching entrusted to Paul (1:3) which is *the word of God* (Tit. 2:5). If the Christian message – the principal tenet of this small, newly birthed, and foreign “cult” – was slandered due to the actions and behaviour of a woman failing to be virtuous (which, as we saw in the previous chapter, was integral to the Roman empire) there could be real consequences for

the success and existence of the Cretan church community as evidenced by the Roman suppression of the cult of Dionysus and Isis, and of magicians and astrologers. Of course, early Christians were severely persecuted by the Romans until Constantine's accession in the fourth century. Paul's instructions for women did not prevent that, but the reality of public observation and the typical response of the Romans to newly-formed cults that supposedly violate central values of the empire or generate too much slander greatly suggests that exhibiting ideal Roman virtues within the church community was a strategic, cautionary effort in order to protect the community and to secure the establishment of the church of Crete. MacDonald writes that "as women themselves were instructed to maintain ideal feminine roles and behaviours, they acted as mediators between the church and pagan society, *effectively diminishing the risks of slander and criticism* that would have *dire effects* for the growth of the church and the spread of Paul's teaching."⁸⁵ The next chapter will explore Paul's priorities as an apostle and the strategical exhortations present in his other letters.

⁸⁵ MacDonald, 13. Emphasis mine.

Paul's Concern for Social Respectability & an Apostle's Priorities

Paul demonstrates tremendous concern for social respectability throughout his letters, beyond his exhortations to the young women of Crete. In his letters to Timothy, the Thessalonians, Corinthians, and Colossians, Paul urges different groups to act in a respectable manner so that neither the gospel nor the church will gain a bad reputation. While the risk and consequences of slander has already been assessed as grounds for Paul's concern, another factor emerges: Paul's identity as an apostle, being divinely entrusted with preaching the gospel. Like his other letters, Paul begins his letter to Titus by identifying himself. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ *for the purpose of* furthering "the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness – in the hope of eternal life, which God... at his appointed season he has brought to light *through the preaching entrusted to me...*" (Titus 1:1-3) Similarly, in his first letter to Timothy, he asserts that God wants all people "to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people" (1 Tim. 2:2-6). Importantly, Paul claims that this message is the reason why he was appointed a herald and an apostle (2:6); his whole vocation is tied up with the message that Christ has offered himself as a ransom for all, and that God desires all to be saved (2:4, 6). Given Paul's vocation as an apostle concerned with spreading the message of salvation offered by Jesus Christ, it follows that he would be deeply concerned with its reception. He desires that it is appealing to outsiders (2:10).

It is also arguable that Paul's identity and vocation as a divinely appointed apostle not only explains his concern for the reputation of the church and the message being preached but perhaps also explains the presence of principles in his other writings that stand in contrast to the exhortations he gives to particular groups – particularly slaves and women. For example, as will be discussed more below, Paul seems to promote a picture of mutual submission between men and women in Ephesians 5 that stands in contrast to the hierarchy put forth not only in Ephesians 5 itself but also in Titus 2:5. Moreover, despite Paul's seeming toleration of slavery (2:10) he exhorts Philemon and Onesimus in a way that radically modifies master-slave relations. Finally, his prioritizing of eloquence and soundness of speech contradicts his reproach of others who prioritised more polished orators (1 Cor 2:1-5; 2 Cor 10:10). The point is this; Paul, an apostle, concerned with the establishment of the gospel of Jesus Christ offering salvation in the newly-founded church community of Crete, is concerned with its solid reception by any means possible – perhaps even by prioritizing conforming to Roman Imperial standards over pushing “redemptive” principles that are found throughout and within his other texts. Paul's identity as an apostle necessitates exhorting a strategical set of behaviours for societal groups within church communities, thereby supplementing the idea that his instructions to women in 2:4-5 are primarily strategic towards the end of securing a virtuous reputation and avoiding the ill-repute of the gospel message about Jesus Christ.

This chapter is therefore a twofold assessment. First, this chapter will identify Paul's concern for social respectability through a brief survey of other Pauline writings, demonstrating that it is a familiar habit and a concern of his. Second, this chapter will aim to identify other Pauline principles that conflict with his exhortations to the young women (and enslaved persons)

of Crete, which, alongside his identity as an apostle, supplement the idea that Paul's exhortations in Titus are of necessity in regards to the reception of the gospel.

Paul's Concern for Social Respectability

Titus 2:9-10

To begin, we look at the passage that occurs shortly after the exhortation to young women. Just as the young women of Crete were instructed to live virtuously to prevent the gospel from being blasphemed or spoken ill-of, Paul exhorts another societal group to embody "ideal" behaviour. In this case, the concern goes beyond prevention. Paul suggests that the conduct of enslaved person in Crete will "adorn" the teaching about God our Saviour (2:10). Paul uses the present subjunctive form of κοσμέω which refers to making something beautiful or to have an "attractive appearance" through decoration or adornment. It is also used to describe the bride being adorned for her husband in Revelation (Rev 21:2). But it can also carry the sense of something to be adorned in an inwardly, moral sense or to give someone or something credit.¹ Interestingly, Jerome Quinn argues that the closet parallel of using κοσμέω occurs in Septuagintal passages such as 3 Maccabees 3:5 and 6:1 which describe "lives adorned with good deeds and virtue."² Perhaps then, Paul's goal for the public image of the gospel is for it to be associated with good deeds and that which is considered virtuous behaviour, hence his commands for enslaved persons to be respectful towards their masters. Paul also adds that this sort of adornment of the gospel, performed by enslaved persons on account of their behaviour, would make it attractive in "every way" (ἐν πᾶσιν).³

¹ BDAG, "κοσμέω," 560. See also *Analytical Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, ed. Maurice Robinson and Mark A. House, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2012), 211.

² Jerome D. Quinn, *The Letter to Titus*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 128.

³ BDAG, "πᾶσιν," 560.

Paul's list of expected qualities for slaves in Titus 2:9-10 aligns with Imperial Roman expectations for slave behaviour. For example, in his treatises on agricultural affairs compiled as *De Re Rustica*, Columella (4-70 CE) describes how enslaved household overseers should deal with enslaved persons in a way that promotes obedience and quality of work.⁴ Likewise, Seneca (c. 4 BCE- 65 CE), in an excerpt on a master's treatment of slaves, puts forth that treating one's slaves with respect would result in impressive loyalty, respect, obedience, and skillful work.⁵ Both of these texts contain parallel principles and qualities that Paul exhorts believing enslaved persons to cultivate. Therefore, Paul promotes what is already understood to be virtuous behaviour for enslaved persons. Given the importance of the roles of enslaved persons in Imperial society in a way similar to how the role of the virtuous women was integral to the functioning and order of society, these instructions would ensure that early Christian enslaved persons were functioning in a way that shared no hints of being disruptive, disorderly, or subversive. Indeed, as Paul mentions, via their virtuous behaviour, the gospel which they believed would be "adorned" or "given credit," making it ultimately "attractive" to outsiders (2:10).

Enslaved persons had no inherent reason to reject respecting or submitting to their masters due to newfound Christian beliefs, contrary to some claims.⁶ However, first-century

⁴ For example, Columella writes that an overseer should be one that "has been hardened from farm work from his infancy," and that he should not be a gadabout, and should only go out of bounds to learn something new, and generally should be skilled in husbandry, and strictly enforce labour to keep watch over the other slaves. See Columella, *De Re Rustica*, Book I. VIII, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library, 1941. https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/e/roman/texts/columella/de_re_rustica/1*.html.

⁵ "Have some of them dine with you because they deserve it, others in order to make them so deserving." Seneca maintains that to truly gain respect is to be loved, and that masters should not assume the character of tyrants. See Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic: Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, trans. Robin Alexander Campbell (London, England: Penguin Books, 1969), 95.

⁶ For example, some claim that since some slaves found personal liberation in the gospel, it "engendered a desire and an expectation of greater freedom and equality in the world, and therefore the Apostle's words could be heard as designed to hold back any rebellion of Christian slaves in non-Christian households." See Scot McKnight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 109.

slaveowners were nevertheless wary of slave uprising; Seneca addresses those who worry that if masters demand respect instead of fear, slaves will be “invited to proclaim their freedom and bring about their employers’ overthrow.”⁷ Therefore, Paul’s promotion of virtuous behaviour among slaves would help dispel suspicions toward both them and their Christian community, allowing the gospel to be associated with virtue and gain social respectability.

1 Timothy 6:1

In his first epistle to Timothy, Paul provides behavioural exhortations with the reputation of the gospel in mind. Again, Paul writes that enslaved persons should respect and honour their masters by pleasing them, not talking back to them, and submitting to them *so that* (ὅνα) God’s name and the apostle’s teaching may not be slandered, ill-spoken of, or discredited (βλασφημηῆται, 6:1). Robert Yarbrough offers an interesting suggestion on what the name of God (ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ) here refers to. He contends that it is an expression of God’s “personal rule and activity,” and refers to “his full being, authority, and majesty”⁸ which he further suggests as manifesting as Christ. In other words, slaves in the early church who portrayed disrespectful or unvirtuous behaviour would also discredit the Son of God, who, also, is the core figure of Paul’s message. Again, Paul encourages conventionally virtuous behaviour amongst Christian enslaved persons to thwart any suspicion or slander concerning the gospel.

1 Timothy 3:7

⁷ Seneca, *Letters from A Stoic*, 95. <https://archive.org/details/letters-from-a-stoic-1/page/3/mode/1up>. There are also plenty of narratives that describe slaves suddenly turning on their masters; in a letter to his Acilius, Pliny the Younger tells of how the slaves attacked Larcus Macedo, although he is described as having been particularly an “arrogant and savage master.” See Niall McKeown, “The Sound of John Henderson Laughing: Pliny 3.14 and Roman Slaveowners’ Fear of their Slaves,” *Actes du Groupe de Recherches sur l’Esclavage depuis l’Antiquité* 29 (2007): 266.

⁸ Robert Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 255. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=6454404&ppg=255#>.

Again, in Paul's first letter to Timothy, after a lengthy exposition on the ideal qualities of church "overseers" (3:2-7), Paul concludes with an over-arching desire: an overseer – a role that involves watching over the church and has been essential to Paul's ministry and the establishment of churches (Acts 20:28)⁹ – must have a "good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap" (3:7). Now, the grammatical construction of this sentence indicates that falling into "the devil's trap" is contingent upon whether the overseer has a reputable image. Of course, a reputable image is marked by being faithful to one's wife, being temperate, self-controlled, able to teach effectively, not being a drunk or quarrelsome or violent, and "managing [one's] family well," (3:2-4). Perhaps avoiding disgrace and "the devil's trap" refers to refraining from the consequences that result from not having these qualities; violence can lead to harmful acts, lack of self-control to chaos, unnecessary quarreling to disunity. The "devil's trap" could simply be referring to the natural consequences of unvirtuous behaviour.

However, many also argue that this passage (3:7) acts as a summarizing statement of all the qualities listed before it; having a good reputation with outsiders happens as one exhibits all the qualities listed in 3:2-6, a list that "apart from being a neophyte (3:6), contains qualities that one would expect to find in *anyone* who is an upright, responsible, and respectable."¹⁰ If an overseer exhibits qualities understood to be virtuous in society, *then* he will *not be held in public reproach* or have a bad reputation, and, most importantly, he will also avoid "the devil's trap."

⁹ Raymond E. Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 79.

¹⁰ Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus*, 78. Emphasis mine. See also Ben Witherington III, "A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John," in *Letters and Homilies for Hellenised Christians*, Vol. 1 (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 236.

Overall, falling into the “devil’s trap” happens *because* this overseer of the church does not have a good reputation and is held in public reproach and disdain. Is it also possible, then, that the “devil’s trap” refers to the effects of slander and the loss of respectability for the church and the gospel as a whole? It is indeed possible. And as previously observed, slander, at worst, could have violent and oppressive consequences for a small, newly-established foreign cult community. At best, a damaged reputation to one of the church’s leaders would lead to outsiders “speaking evil” of the message or the gospel (slandering) that the church upholds.¹¹ One may also consider that the Devil is identified as “the accuser of our brothers and sisters” (Rev 12:10), and thus, his “trap” in 1 Timothy 3:7 may be defined by accusation, except that this accusation manifests in a church’s overseer being held in ill-repute by society.

Ultimately, Paul’s lists of qualities for the overseer, are not only already considered admirable and virtuous qualities in Greco-Roman society, but are rightly identified as “missionary in character”¹² because they are promoted with the intent of protecting the reputation of the church and the reputation of the gospel which aids in its reception by outsiders. Paul’s instructions to overseers, which follow the pattern of promoting virtuous behaviour¹³ and avoiding slander (either explicitly or metaphorically) again parallel his instructions to enslaved persons and more importantly the young women of Crete in Titus 2:3-5.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 1 Corinthians 6:6; Colossians 4:5-6

¹¹ Osvaldo Padilla, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2022), 105.

¹² Quinn, *The Letter to Titus*, 150.

¹³ Which again, conformed to the qualities that Graeco-Roman society already celebrated. See Paul R. Trebilco, Simon Rae, and Deolito V. Vistar Jr., *1 Timothy: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary*, Asia Bible Commentary Series, (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2023), 36.

Similar language occurs throughout Pauline literature. In 1 Thessalonians, after encouraging the community to grow in their unity and love for another, he urges them to “lead a quiet life,” characterized by minding their own business and working diligently *so that* (ἵνα) their “daily life *may win the respect of outsiders*” (1 Thess 4:12)¹⁴ and also so that they will not be always financially dependent on one another. Again, here Paul urges behaviour where the primary incentive is gaining the respect of those outside the Christian community.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is repeatedly embarrassed about the incidents and behaviours of the Corinthian community, specifically regarding the perception of outsiders. He notes in horror¹⁵ the case about sexual immorality in the church (a man sleeping with his father’s wife), writing that it is a kind of sexual indulgence “that even pagans do not tolerate” (5:1). Various forms of sexual immorality were present in the city of Corinth, including temple prostitution (1 Cor 7:2),¹⁶ but the case within the Corinthian church was not respectable even among the pagan public. Later, Paul discusses how the Corinthians should handle disputes; he criticizes their lack of ability to settle disputes with each other, especially when Paul expects them to eventually become “mature, spiritual, grace-gifted Christian believers” who should have “the necessary understanding to handle such dissensions,” especially trivial ones (6:2).¹⁷ Rather, these believers cannot trust or work with each other to sort out minor cases.¹⁸ Paul says all this to shame them (6:5) and remarks in disdain at how these trivial cases have to be brought in front of unbelievers

¹⁴ Emphasis mine.

¹⁵ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 218.

¹⁶ Strabo (64 BCE- 21 CE) writes of the history of Old Corinth, that, “it owned more than a thousand temple slaves, and courtesans...” and it was “on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich, and the merchants and soldiers who were there squandered all their money...” See Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (London: Heinemann, n.d), 8.6.20.

¹⁷ Paul Gardner, *I Corinthians*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 249.

¹⁸ Gardner, *I Corinthians*, 250.

or outsiders in the form of legal proceedings (6:6). Not only is it embarrassing for the community that they cannot solve trivial cases between them, especially with the wisdom provided to them “in Christ” (1:30), it is shameful at a human level that seemingly none of them are wise enough to do so. The church was “airing its dirty linen in public forum.”¹⁹ According to Paul, this embarrassment need not have occurred in the first place and he was especially upset at the risk it poses for the reputation of the church community (6:6). Here, Paul again shows concern for the church’s social respectability.

Colossians 4:5-6 highlights Paul’s concern for eloquently and clearly communicating the gospel to outsiders. After requesting prayer for clear proclamation of the message about “the mystery of Christ” (4:5), he discusses proclamation tactics for the Colossian community, saying that they should be “wise” in their interactions with outsiders, ensuring that their end of the conversation is “full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that they may know how to answer everyone” (Col. 4:6). There are several ways to interpret this passage, but it is clearly characterized by a concern for spreading the gospel and expanding the church, as well as “a plea for appropriate behaviour in relation to nonbelievers.”²⁰ Having dialogue that is “full of grace” or “communicating graciously” connotes gentleness and respect.²¹ Being “seasoned with salt” suggests that Paul wants one’s speech not to be “insipid,” but rather to be clear, winsome, and witty.²² Salt makes things taste pleasant, so the message that is communicated by Christians

¹⁹ Fee, *The Epistle to the 1 Corinthians*, 261.

²⁰ Margaret Y. MacDonald, “Citizens of Heaven and Earth: Asceticism and Social Integration in Colossians and Ephesians,” in *Asceticism and the New Testament*, ed. Leif E. Vaage & Vincent L. Wimbush, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 272.

²¹ Jonathan M. Watt, *Colossians, Philemon*, Brill Exegetical Commentary Series, (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2024), 174. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=31340123>. Although Watt argues that this grace is the result of the “moderating influence of the Holy Spirit, rather than implying social dignity,” he admits that it could at least be a side-effect of “Spirit-filled behaviour.” Either way, the Apostle is encouraging believers to communicate with outsiders, especially when discussing the gospel, in a way that is gentle and respectful.

²² Watt, *Colossians, Philemon*, 174.

should be done in a way that adorns the gospel by the very method of their speech. Salt is also used as a preservative so perhaps Paul is inferring that he desires a sort of communication that protects individual dignity, and ultimately, the dignity and reputation of the church.²³ This exhortation to have the eloquence of speech is similar to Paul's urging of Titus to show integrity, seriousness, and soundness in his speech which cannot be criticized and is irreprehensible (ἀκατάγνωστος) *so that* his outsider "opponents" may have nothing bad, evil, or vile (φᾶλος) to say about him (Titus 2:7-8).

In light of all these passages where Paul provides exhortations that have the social respectability and the reputation of the early Christian community and the gospel in mind, Shogren rightly claims that "it was always Paul's desire that Christians make a sincere and positive impression on non-Christians."²⁴ Therefore, the idea that Paul's exhortations to the young women of Crete in Titus 2:4-5 which echo the characteristics of the virtuous Roman woman and which are followed by a purpose clause – *so that* (ἵνα) the gospel and message they ascribe to and represent is not slandered, spoken ill-of, or discredited – is primarily strategical and grounded in his overarching concern for the church and the gospel's social respectability and is supported by numerous other Pauline writings. Paul desires that all the early church communities display respectful and virtuous behaviour for the purpose that the community, and ultimately the message he has been entrusted with spreading (Titus 1:3) does not acquire a bad, untrustworthy, or suspicious reputation.

Paul's Priorities as an Apostle

²³ Watt, 174.

²⁴ Gary Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 172.

The discussion now turns to another factor that emerges as grounds for Paul's exhortations to the young women of Crete (2:4-5) as well as enslaved persons and other groups: Paul's identity and vocation as an apostle.

As argued, the word of God that Paul does not want to be maligned or slandered (Titus 2:5) refers to the message the Paul was preaching. Paul's message primarily concerned Jesus as the Messiah and the offer of salvation to all people (2:11; 2 Tim 6:10-11; Acts 5:42). Additionally, Paul identifies himself as one commissioned as an apostle to further the faith of God's elect and "their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness – in the hope of eternal life... which now at his appointed season has brought to light *through the preaching entrusted to me*," (Tit. 1:1-2, emphasis mine). There are many other occasions where Paul indicates that he has been entrusted with the gospel or with the task of preaching it (1 Thess 2:4; 1 Tim 1:11, 2 Tim 1:11). Of course, Paul is not the only one tasked with preaching this gospel, but it is nonetheless his primary vocation and his uttermost concern. Therefore, it is plausible that Paul's vocation as a herald and an apostle of the gospel message, which has been "entrusted" to him by the command of the Saviour God himself (Titus 1:3), has something to do with the presence of these exhortations in Titus 2:4-5. A prioritization seems to be taking place in these exhortations. Paul, an apostle commissioned with ensuring the reception of the gospel of salvation afforded by Jesus Christ, prioritizes tactics that appear to conflict with what he presents in other writings.

First, while the epistle to Titus emphasizes unilateral submission of a wife to a husband, Ephesians 5:21 emphasizes relatively revolutionary mutual submission between a husband and wife before elaborating on the roles of partners, which end up also emphasizing the husband's duty to love their wives as their own body (5:28). Not to mention Paul's leveling remark concerning marital relations to the Corinthians, where he writes, "in the same way, the husband

does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife” (1 Cor 7:4).²⁵ Moreover, Paul commends women for being co-workers in the gospel and “workers in the Lord” (Rom. 16:3-4, 6, 12; Phil. 4:3) positions that arguably included a lessening of the focus on being “busy at home.” These writings convey and promote a comparatively nuanced role and lifestyle for Christian women in the backdrop of the ancient world, and more importantly, ultimately, they contrast what Paul is explicitly promoting in Titus 2:4-5.

Similarly, there are principles found within Paul’s writings that contrast Paul’s instructions to slaves in Titus (2:9-10). While Paul’s letter to Philemon has indeed unfortunately been used in many contexts to justify the practice of slavery, it has also inspired the opposite. It is significant when Paul encourages Philemon to receive and to treat Onesimus “no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother” (Phlm 16). Although Paul could not simply request emancipation, his exhortation to Philemon is at least an “ethical, social, and cultural stretch”²⁶ and is based on the spiritual reality that Onesimus is “adopted child of God through baptism” (Gal 4:5; Rom 8:15) and a “new creature” (2 Cor 5:17).²⁷ Paul also recognizes the burden that slavery is for those under it (1 Tim 6:1).²⁸ Wilkerson writes that “the unflinching grip that slavery has on the heart and soul of the master as well as the slave and all who support and participate in the system forces Paul to carefully and assertively frame his request of Philemon.

²⁵ Preston Sprinkle notes how this statement is indeed unique, compared to the writings of his contemporaries, also saying that it is “a revolutionary statement in its own right.” See Preston Sprinkle, *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality is Not Just an Issue*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 95.

²⁶ Demetrius K. Williams, “‘No Longer as a Slave’: Reading the Interpretation History of Paul’s Epistle to Philemon,” *Onesimus Our Brother: Reading Religion, Race, and Culture in Philemon*, ed. Matthew V. Johnson, James A. Noel, and Demetrius K. Williams (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 25.

²⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Letter to Philemon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 114.

²⁸ Paul’s usage of “yoke” signifies his understanding that slavery is a less-than ideal societal condition, meaning that he is not merely indifferent towards it. However, Paul is not at liberty to overturn or promote anything reminiscent of a social overturn. Considering this, Paul focuses on his mission as an apostle in spreading the gospel, as will be elaborated below. For the significance of the “yoke” terminology, see Osvaldo Padilla, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 93, and Scot McKnight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 108-110.

He calls [Philemon] to *reject a belief system* utterly *at odds* with his Christian faith, a way of life that has benefited him, and whose cruelty he has rationalized.”²⁹ Ultimately, for someone who exhorts church communities to act and conform to Roman ideologies concerning virtuous behaviour, in this letter Paul seems rather subversive to these systems at play, and more importantly, appears to contradict what he says in Titus.

Even Paul’s exhortation for Titus to show “integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech” so that no one will have anything bad to say about him or Paul (2:8) stands in contrast to Paul’s disdain for the Corinthians favouring certain apostles over others, including Paul, on account of Paul’s less eloquent speaking skills (1 Cor. 1:12; 2:1-5;). After all, as Paul writes, the things that he teaches are “words taught by the Spirit” and those without the Spirit of God cannot accept the things that come from God anyway (2:14). So, why does it matter if a teaching is without reproach? Why must it be characterized by eloquence and seriousness?

The Point

Paul held a particular role that manifests very prominently in Titus. Paul was an apostle, entrusted with the gospel and the task of preaching it and ensuring its reception within Greco-Roman communities. This was his main priority. As Yarbrough writes, “Paul’s immediate goal in ministry was not revolutionary change of the social order: it was preaching and teaching the gospel for the sake of establishing enclaves of Christian believers and thereby ultimately redeeming the world.”³⁰ Despite there being principles in Paul’s other writings that pose a trajectory towards a new or different social order than the one in the early Roman Imperial

²⁹ Margaret B. Wilkerson, “‘Ain’t Your Marster?’ Interrogating Slavery and Gender in Philemon,” in *Onesimus Our Brother: Reading Religion, Race, and Culture in Philemon* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 108.

³⁰ Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 254. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=6454404&ppg=254#>.

world, it is evident that Paul has different priorities in Titus, especially when the topic of salvation comes into play. Paul, a servant and an apostle of Christ (1:1) having the task of preaching entrusted to him by the command of God our *Saviour* (1:3), who promised eternal life before the beginning of time (1:2) and whose grace has appeared that offers salvation to *all* people (2:11), is focused on the gospel having a solid reputation and being well-received in Crete. Hence, despite there being principles found throughout Scripture that counter or lessen the exhortations in Titus (and other passages that encourage certain behaviours to diminish slander and promote the reception of the gospel) one might recognize – in light of the significance of the virtuous Roman woman for the empire, the consequences of slander for a small, newly-formed foreign cult, and ultimately, Paul’s concern as an apostle for the gospel to be well-received in Greco-Roman society, since salvation has also come (Titus 2:11; 1 Tim 2:4; 1:15) – that these exhortations were largely strategic.

Conclusion

It is significant that the Apostle repeatedly expresses concern for how the church is perceived by the public. In many instances, Paul instructs either individuals or churches to seek social respectability, most often so that the gospel or the church itself is not slandered. Concern for the church and the gospel’s reputation permeates Paul’s letters, and thus it is reasonable to suggest that likewise his exhortation to the young women of Crete in Titus 2:4-5 is founded primarily by that concern. This is further supported by Paul’s commitment to his role as an apostle who seeks that the gospel is received by many, which, as seen in his letters, involves encouraging early Christians who are in unideal conditions (such as enslaved persons, and likely also young women) to “adorn” the gospel with their virtuous behaviour for the time being, rather than promoting other, almost subversive values one gets a glimpse of in his other writings. The

apostle prioritized the spread, reputation, and reception of the message he has been entrusted with. Alongside the significance of the role of the virtuous Roman woman and the consequences to slander, it is very plausible that all these ideas bear into the presence of Paul's exhortations to women in Titus 2:4-5.

The Grace of God, Piety, the Kingdom of God, and the Purpose of the Holy Spirit

Since the epistle to Titus is indeed, a letter, it is appropriate to consider the immediate literary context surrounding Titus 2:4-5. For example, one can observe that Paul grounds his behavioural exhortations to specific groups (2:1-10) in the appearance of the grace of God (2:11) which “teaches” the people to live lives characterized by self-control, uprightness, and godliness (2:12). However, does this mean that Paul’s behavioural exhortations – including those directed towards the young Cretan women – are to be understood as instituted by the grace of God? Especially if that grace results in something defined as “godly” living? Are they not qualities that Christian women of all eras should strive to imitate? Not necessarily. First, it is evident that the “teaching” or “training” that occurs by the grace of God is more about the human response to the overwhelming revelation of that grace – a response that involves living a “good” life as already established by pagan principles (even “godliness,” a significant part of Imperial Roman society!). Second, Paul’s acknowledgement of the people’s anticipation of Jesus ushering in the Kingdom of God (2:13) demonstrates an anxiousness for a better reality where Paul’s commands and what is considered “virtuous” may no longer be valued or relevant. Finally, although Paul mentions the Holy Spirit’s “washing of rebirth and renewal” (3:5) and his community’s subsequent behavioural transformation (3:3), it is not necessarily the case that the Holy Spirit’s character renewal is involved in the behavioural exhortations that Paul gives to specific groups, not only because those specific behaviours are first explained by coming about by human agency in

response to the grace of God, but because the primary purpose of the Holy Spirit's rebirth and renewal, at least as it is described in Titus, is enabling the people to become heirs of eternal life (3:7).

The main point of this chapter is to address concerns about the specific behaviours laid out in Titus 2:4-5 being divinely facilitated or encouraged, given the subsequent mention of grace of God in "teaching," and the Holy Spirit in "washing." Moreover, although there is mention of those specific group exhortations as being "godly" behaviour, the quality itself (later to be addressed as *pietas*) is not distinctly Christian. As one shall see, "godly" behaviour, in Paul's time, was already established as an integral part of Imperial Roman society. If there are any contentions that Paul's exhortations to young women in Titus 2:4-5 (as well as those laid out in 2:1-10), are in any way "distinctly Christian" or "divinely facilitated or encouraged" qualities, the Apostle's writing proves otherwise.

“The Grace of God,” and an Assessment on Whether Living “Self-Controlled, Upright, and Godly Lives” is More Virtuous than “Christian” (2:11-12)

In addition to exhorting the people to behave in a certain way *so that* the word of God is not slandered and so that is more appealing (Tit. 2:5; 2:10) Paul does offer another reason for these behaviours.¹ Marked by the conjunction “γὰρ” (for), Paul explains that “the grace of God has appeared (Ἐπεφάνη) that offers salvation to all people” (2:11), and that “it teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright lives in this present age” (2:12).

¹ Greenlee recognizes that one of the options for understanding the usage γὰρ does involve Paul turning to the grounds for his exhortations to women, men, and slaves. See Harold J. Greenlee, *An Exegetical Summary of Titus and Philemon*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2008) 64.

This grace of God (ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ) is the subject of the participle παιδεύουσα, and therefore is the one active in the “teaching” of the people so that (ἵνα) they might live in their current age (ζήσωμεν ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰῶνι) having denied (ἀρνησάμενοι) ungodliness (τὴν ἀσεβειαν) and earthly desires (τὰς κοσμικὰς ἐπιθυμίας) in a manner of *self-control* (σωφρόνως) acting *rightly* (δικαίως), and *piously* (εὐσεβῶς). In other words, the qualities of self-control, uprightness, and piousness are what the people embody as a result of the instruction of the grace of God, and they are also the driving reason for the behaviours expressed in the exhortations throughout 2:1-10. But how does the grace of God “instruct” or “educate?” Like most divine mysteries, it is difficult to determine exactly how grace instructs behaviour, and the language here is indeed seen as unusual,² but there are multiple propositions. Yarbrough argues that as God’s grace is extended, the human response should be to pursue it (as opposed to “receiving” God’s grace in vain, 2 Cor 6:1). Here, Paul promotes an understanding of God’s grace (which offers the gift of salvation) that “does not promote passivity but *rather stirs to zeal* even ‘in the present age,’ which in so many ways seems to be given over to evil” (note Gal 1:4).³ In other words, zeal in the *form* of self-control, uprightness and godliness (2:12) is the result of the “instruction” or “teaching” of God’s grace (2:12).

On a similar note, McKnight suggests that where Paul writes that God is the “saviour of all people,” which is followed by “especially for those who believe,” (in 1 Tim 4:10) this means that that access to salvation does not have to do with God’s grace but with humans choosing to

² Raymond Collins, *I & II Timothy & Titus: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library, (Louisville, John Knox, 2002) 349.

³ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 470. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=6454404&ppg=470>

embrace and respond to it via belief.⁴ But McKnight also perceives this transformation as one that involves turning away from sin – which he defines as “uncivilized piety” – but really refers to socially disrespectful behaviour.⁵ In other words, these authors convey the idea that a person’s willing response to the grace of God results in a transformation of behaviour happens to conform to what is generally respectable, or that which is defined as “civilized piety.”⁶ One’s choice to embrace grace and thereby salvation is outwardly expressed in “civilized,” or respectable, virtuous behaviour.

***Paideia*, and Paul’s Appropriation of Greco-Roman Virtues**

Indeed, Towner maintains that Paul’s usage of παιδεύουσα to indicate the type of training or instructing the grace of God does was “unmistakenly intended” to echo or co-opt the Hellenistic concept of “paideia.”⁷ Paideia refers to the training or teaching by which humans learn to be “civilized,” and for Plato and other Hellenistic thinkers this involved acquiring virtue as quantified by the four cardinal virtues.⁸ Moreover, three of the four cardinal virtues are expressed in Paul’s letter to Titus in his mention of self-control, uprightness, and godliness/piety (2:12).⁹ These three virtues, which act as a summarizing statement encompassing the specific types of behaviour exhorted for the groups in Titus 2:1-10, characterize the life that Paul urges Christians to live. But what is happening here is that “Paul has refashioned the Greek ideal[s]”¹⁰ in order to provide a framework for Christian behaviour.

⁴ Scot McKnight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 207.

⁵ McKnight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 207.

⁶ McKnight, 207.

⁷ Philip. H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 380.

⁸ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 38.

⁹ McKnight, 207.

¹⁰ Towner, 381.

“Godly” Behaviour Found in Secular Society?

There may be some concern over the seeming loss of distinctness that Christians have in exhibiting behaviour that is “in contrast” to the world. After all, the Christian identity is associated with metaphors revolving being “the light of the world” as they perform good deeds and glorify God (Matt 5:14-16), and there are other exhortations that include not being conformed to the pattern or ways of the world (Rom 12:2). So how could one claim that the instructions Paul gives in Titus are pagan in origin and not distinctly Christian or Christlike? Or, why would Paul give instructions that are in accordance with pagan understandings of virtue?

Despite their pagan origins, these virtues that are being encouraged for Christian communities can and do set Christians apart.¹¹ This is because where these virtues may have been desired or respected, they still proved absent in much of Greco-Roman society and particularly in Cretan culture.¹² Paul quotes from the Greek philosopher Epimenides that “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons” (1:12). He also affirms that the God he serves “does not lie” (1:2) which directly contrasts Zeus, who starred in many Cretan stories and who is described as having lied in order to have sexual relations with a female human (by disguising himself as her husband), but at the same time was held to be the epitome of virtue.¹³ In contrast, Paul encourages Cretan Christians to display vigorously virtuous character. As Towner suggests, it seems that Paul in his instructions to the Christian community is making a “higher claim to virtue,”¹⁴ and also as a result, it appears that the Christian God, who distributes

¹¹ I am mentioning this because there may be fear or concern that the response to God’s grace is simply behaviour that is already considered virtuous by society and is not distinctly “Christian behaviour.”

¹² Towner, 377.

¹³ Because of his supposed possession of all four of the cardinal virtues. See Towner, 376.

¹⁴ Towner, 376.

grace (Titus 2:11) *effectively* “teaches” virtuous living.¹⁵ In other words, Paul desired that what was understood to be virtuous behaviour should be exhibited *best* by Christian communities.

More On εὐσεβῶς & Its “Pagan” Origins: The Framework for “Godly”

Behaviour

There may also be concern specifically regarding Paul’s usage of the word “godly” or “piously” to describe the lives Christians must live (εὐσεβῶς, 2:12). Surely the idea of living in “a godly manner” sounds distinctly Christian, and therefore also are the commands that come before it. But Paul’s usage of εὐσεβῶς to convey what is usually translated in English as “godliness” or “piousness” is one of the key demonstrations of Paul’s appropriation of Roman virtue for Christian communities. Where Paul uses the Greek εὐσεβῶς, which tended to refer to both a reverent attitude and proper ritual conduct before the gods, its Latin equivalent *pietas* also encompassed reverence and dutifulness towards one’s parents, homeland, and emperor.¹⁶

Indeed, *pietas* referred to the fulfillment of one’s “filial, religious, civic, and imperial obligations that sustained reciprocal relationships between kin, neighbours, allies, and contracting parties as well as demonstrated reverent loyalty toward country, divinity, and ruler.”¹⁷ In *The Decalogue*, Philo describes “*piety* and holiness, [as] the *chiefs* of all virtues.”¹⁸ Similarly, Cicero describes *pietas* as “the feeling which renders kind offices and loving service to one’s kin and country.”¹⁹ This ultimate, cardinal virtue of *pietas* was sheer in scope and held great

¹⁵ Towner, 377.

¹⁶ Christopher T. Hoklotubbe, *Civilized Piety: The Rhetoric of Pietas in the Pastoral Epistles and The Roman Empire* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), 6.

¹⁷ See Georges Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, trans. Philip Krapp (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970), I. 133, referenced in Hoklotubbe, *Civilized Piety*, 6.

¹⁸ Philo, *The Decalogue*, 119-120. Early Jewish Writings.
<https://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book26.html>. Accessed December 2024. Emphasis mine.

¹⁹ Hoklotubbe, 5.

significance in imperial society, in the domains of family, emperor and land, and in worshipping the divine. As stated by Augustus, *pietas*, with its fulfillment of obligation towards the gods, the nation and emperor, and family, was destined to provide strength, peace, and prosperity for the empire.²⁰

***Pietas* in Society**

So how did *pietas* exactly manifest in Imperial Roman society? Regarding the emperor, *pietas* appeared in the publishing of honorary statutes, in cult images, architectural facades, and coin design.²¹ It also included demonstrations of benefaction by wealthy elites, including the emperor himself, in the construction and refurbishment of temples, shrines, and tombs.²² Emperor Augustus particularly led the way in Rome's recommitment to its gods, being a key figure in building and refurbishing temples including the awe-inspiring Mars Ultor, and portraying himself on coins and reliefs as sacrificing to the gods.²³

Pietas also extended to the domain of marriage and family. For the sake of *pietas*, laws were enacted that incentivised marriage between Roman citizens and intensified the punishment for adultery.²⁴ *Pietas* also involved the urging of child-rearing, giving mothers with three or more children special esteem in the form of a tax break. A wife exhibiting *pietas* meant upholding certain duties: exhibiting loyalty and submission to her husband, performing domestic tasks, and

²⁰ Hoklotubbe, 56. *Pietas* was also a quality that was used to argue Rome as exemplary and to justify its imperial sovereignty. See Hoklotubbe, 38.

²¹ Even from Emperor to Emperor. Coins minted at the beginning of Hadrian's reign display *pietas* towards Trajan. See Hoklotubbe, 18; 27.

²² With *Pietas* being an important theme of Augustus' ideological restoration of the Roman constitution, he reinstated the ancient priesthoods and rituals and advocated for the construction and reconstruction of temples. Overall, he wanted Rome to be a "paradigm of *pietas*." See Hoklotubbe, 25.

²³ Hoklotubbe, 26. See also Paul Zanker, *Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 102-35, for more on Augustus' architectural achievement in the name of *pietas* and portrayals of himself on altars, facades, and statues.

²⁴ Hoklotubbe, 29.

exhibiting any other qualities considered virtuous for the dutiful Roman matron.²⁵ A society that revolved around being *pietas* also meant married men were given preference for more esteemed positions in political offices than unmarried and childless men, again promoting marriage and childrearing.²⁶ Men had specific duties to uphold in the name of *pietas*, too; besides getting married, duty also concerned his role as *paterfamilias*. As explored in the first chapter on the virtuous Roman woman, the *paterfamilias* was generally responsible for his household's legal, moral, and religious propriety. Cicero, for example, praises a man named Appius Claudius the Blind as *pietas*; he was an old man who had four sons, five daughters, and a large household staff. Appius was able to maintain "absolute command over his household" and as a result, "the customs and disciplines of his forefathers flourished beneath his roof."²⁷ Managing his household well (an act of piety) also facilitated a lifestyle of piety for his family. Hospitality (typically also considered a Christian trait) was also linked with *pietas*, as demonstrated in Heliodorus' *An Ethiopian Story* and Xenophon of Ephesus's *An Ephesian Tale*.²⁸

Children, of course, displayed piety in revering and obeying their parents. An example of *impiety* was that of T. Manlius. As Livy tells it, Manlius disobeyed his father (who also happened to be his commander in military pursuit). Manlius was executed despite his contrary actions proving successful against the enemy.²⁹ *Pietas* can be seen in the young Octavian, however, who

²⁵ Hoklotubbe, 52. As also expressed in Chapter One, in the discussion of the virtuous Roman woman.

²⁶ Hoklotubbe, 29. In a recreated address, Dio Cassius, a third-century C.E. historian shows how Augustus charged bachelors of the noble class with "impiety" for abandoning the Roman Family and therefore the diminishment of Roman descendants, who would defend the state, maintain temples, and the rites of the gods. See *his. Rom.* 56.1-9; Hoklotubbe, 30; Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicerone to the time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993): 60-80.

²⁷ Emma Johnson, "Patriarchal Power in the Roman Republic: Ideologies and Realities of the *Paterfamilias*," *McGill Classical Studies* 5, (2006): 106.

²⁸ Something we tend to associate with Christian character, no doubt. See Travis W. Proctor, "Hospitality, not Honors: Portraits and Patronage in The Acts of John," *Harvard Theological Review* 117, no. 4 (2022): 84.

²⁹ Melanie Racette-Campbell, *The Crisis of Masculinity in the Age of Augustus*, (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2023), 70.

explains in his *Res Gestae* how he took vengeance for his father. He writes, “those who killed my father I drove into exile by way of the courts law, exacting retribution for their crime, and afterward I defeated them twice in battle while they were making war upon the state.”³⁰ In his act of vengeance and in seeking to honor his father, Octavian was seen as taking his filial *duties* seriously and thereby exhibiting piety.

Likewise, for enslaved persons, exhibiting *pietas* meant vigorously serving their masters. As also seen previously (chapter three), the virtuous, dutiful Roman slave displayed qualities of obedience, respect, and reliability, and producing quality work. This was a display of *pietas* to the household, and ultimately, the Imperial Roman social order. *Pietas* was the “essential element that [held] the family [and empire] together—that sense of social obligation and duty that maintains harmony and order in the house between wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters.”³¹

Overall, *pietas* was marked by fulfilling one’s duty towards the family, the empire, and the plethora of Roman gods. Each group had a set of specific duties that were according to their role and position in society. This piety towards the nation, family, and especially the gods – who were seen as benefactors of Rome – is what Cicero claimed the Romans have “excelled every race and every nation [in].”³²

***Pietas* In Paul’s Writings**

So, living “godly” lives – as it was defined in Paul’s time – was about exhibiting *pietas*. *Pietas* involved attending to one’s duties, and many of those duties depended on one’s identity

³⁰ Racette-Campbell, *The Crisis of Masculinity*, 11.

³¹ Hoklotubbe, 79.

³² Cicero, M. Tullius, “De Haruspicum Responso,” Attalus, trans. N.H Watts, 1928. Accessed February 28, 2025. <https://www.attalus.org/cicero/haruspices.html>.

and position (a man versus a woman, a slave versus children). In other words, duty meant performing specific behaviours that would mark one as virtuous and therefore pious. Of course, regardless of one's identity, everyone was required to display *pietas* in the worship and reverence of the gods, and this is where the early Christians differed. Paul, for instance, explains what a godly/pious (εὐσεβῶς) life with Jesus only revered as divine would look like (2 Tim 3:12). Timothy is also urged to live a life of godliness *in accordance* “the truths of [their] faith” (about Jesus) and of “the good teaching you have followed,” as opposed to any “myths and old wives’ tales” (1 Tim. 4:6-7). Paul also writes that the words of Jesus are the framework for “godly (εὐσεβείαν) teaching” (1 Tim 6:3). And in Titus Paul describes his commission as an apostle of Jesus Christ as one appointed to “to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth (about Jesus) that leads to *godliness* (εὐσεβείαν)” (Titus 1:1).

Therefore, the main distinction between pagan *pietas* and Christian *pietas* is the God(s) they worship and revere. However, every other aspect of *pietas*, including everyone’s respective duties, remains virtually the same. Living a “godly life” as mentioned in Titus (2:12) is characterized by women exhibiting the qualities of the ideal, virtuous Roman women, as are men, and enslaved persons (2:2-10).³³ Even Paul’s urging of the people to respect and yield to Roman authorities, and to pray for the emperor and other ruling authorities so that the community will live “peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness (εὐσεβεία) and [dignity]”³⁴ (1 Tim. 2:2) represents their commitment to Roman *pietas*. As Hoklotubbe summarizes, “the life of piety promoted by [Paul] especially resonates with conventional Roman values in the author’s

³³ As well as children, but the duties of children are mentioned only briefly in Titus. The charge here is also directed at their father, and not the children alone. See Titus 1:6.

³⁴ Although typically translated as “holiness,” the word here, σεμνότητι, can (and should) be translated as “dignity.”

exhortation to the entire [church] to pray on behalf of the emperor, and to women and slaves, specifically, to fulfill the duties befitting their stations in life.”³⁵

What is Appropriate to Sound Doctrine

Although the virtuous qualities that characterize a life of piety resonate with conventional Roman values, Paul does identify these behaviours as “appropriate to sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1) which refers to the doctrine about Jesus – which may lead one to think that these behaviours and qualities are indeed distinctly Christian to be modelled by believers in any era, as Paul also says they are brought about by the response to the grace of God and the salvation brought through Christ.

However, again, these behaviours and qualities encompass what Paul describes as a life of self-control, uprightness, and godliness/piety (2:12), which, as examined, are very Greco-Roman in origin and foundational characteristics to Imperial Roman society. So, when Paul writes that they are “appropriate to sound doctrine” (or in other words, appropriate for the Christian lifestyle) what Paul is really doing here (whether unconsciously or consciously), is appropriating Roman virtues and understandings of traits such as “godliness” to provide a framework for Christian behaviour. Yes, it seems that the grace of God “instructs” Christians in this manner, but as discussed above, the “instruction” of the grace of God really involves the grateful *response* of the new believer; in this case, the believer is the agent of his or her behaviour, and that behaviour is shaped by what is understood to be good and godly in the world around them.

³⁵ Hoklotubbe, 54.

This lends to further speculation about Paul’s use of the phrase “in this present age” (Titus 2:12). Although mentioned above that it is used in a context to discuss living a lifestyle that is contrast to the “evilness” of the culture of that age, perhaps the reference, especially based on what has recently been discussed, to living “self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in [the] present age” presents the idea that these qualities indeed conform to the standards of the “present age,” or conform to “the world of world system.”³⁶

A Different Ideal in the End: Waiting for the Appearing of Christ (2:12-13)

The present age – even though it is the age that salvation has appeared and offered to all people – *is not the ideal age*. This is especially true if the life that is to be lived in the present age is “qualified by the contrast made with the future consummation of hope that follows.”³⁷ After all, Paul tends to use the phrase “the present age” in the context of eschatological discussion (1 Tim 6:17; 2 Tim 4:10), contrasting the present age with “the age to come” (1 Tim. 4:8). Therefore, although the gift of salvation and responding to God’s grace is to be taken up now, there is yet a future age to look forward to. Moreover, this age will involve the completion of the already very real but unfinished experience of salvation.³⁸ So, while Christian communities are exhorted to live a life that is characterized by self-control, uprightness, and of course, godliness (piety), Paul also recognizes that the Cretan Christian community are nevertheless anxiously awaiting “the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

³⁶ Towner, 381.

³⁷ Towner, 381.

³⁸ Towner, 381.

Now, this anticipation is marked by hope, not only because it completes the gift of salvation, but also because it signals the “inauguration of God’s eternal kingdom...”³⁹ There are various things that are hoped for when it comes to the inauguration of God’s eternal kingdom including the end of all strife and sorrow, not having to live completely by faith rather than by sight,⁴⁰ and no longer struggling with sin and rather being presented as spotless in front of Christ (1 Jn. 3:2).⁴¹ However, the inauguration of God’s kingdom should also be understood as the inauguration of a completely new order. This is an order that, is characterized by i) no longer living subject to an oppressive and hostile government, and rather living as citizens of a society where Christ is King; ii) the removal of class privileges and the prioritizing of the sophisticated; iii) and the removal of hierarchy between humans in all types of social relationships.⁴² These characteristics are relevant because they suggest that many of the qualities that Paul puts forth in Titus will no longer be relevant or required in the age that the Cretan Christians long for (2:12).

For one, in the Kingdom of God, Christian communities will no longer have to worry about their reputation in society in order to prevent the malignment of the word of God or for the purpose of averting slander which, as discussed, could pose as a real threat to the community due to the presence of a hostile government and a particular social order. Therefore, it is arguable that Paul’s behavioural exhortations that have slander or reputation in mind – including those directed towards the young women of Crete (2:4-5) – are rendered irrelevant in the Kingdom of God.

³⁹ Daniel M. Doriani and Richard D. Phillips, *2 Timothy & Titus*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2020), 66. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=6470287&ppg=189>

⁴⁰ For which often we grow weary (2 Cor. 5:7).

⁴¹ Doriani and Philipps, 70.

⁴² Of course, the Kingdom of God is a vast topic. These are only a few qualities of the Kingdom of God, and they are relevant to the epistle to Titus.

Secondly, on that note about reputation, no longer will there be a prioritizing of the culturally and intellectually elite. Paul urges Titus to embody integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech so that those who oppose him and his teaching may essentially be “humbled” and have no means to criticize him or Paul and the Christian community at large (2:8). As mentioned previously, a characteristic of a virtuous Roman man included strong rhetorical skills and an extensive education. However, in the Kingdom of God there will no longer be a need to prevent slander of the Christian community and its teachings and nor will there be a culture that prioritizes the intellectually and verbally sophisticated. Instead, all will be rendered equally valuable. After all, much of Jesus’ teaching concerned the equal value of all people.⁴³ For one, he teaches his disciples to welcome and to also “become like little children” – or to model themselves after them, despite their “lowly position” in order to become part of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:4-5).

Finally, it is arguable that the Kingdom of God will omit hierarchical relationships between humans. For one, McCaulley finds that within God is a character of liberation: God is a God who acknowledges the suffering of enslaved people, and liberates them (Ex. 3:7-10).⁴⁴ Moreover, this is a characteristic that was also to be reflected by God’s people (Deut. 24:17).⁴⁵ Any form of bondage, including human slavery, is not a characteristic of God’s kingdom. Similarly, any other human relationship that requires a posture of subjection is not characteristic

⁴³ And as Everett Ferguson rightly notes, “God was supremely at work in Jesus Christ; where Christ is, there is the kingdom. The ministry of Jesus, especially the miracle, was a demonstration of the kingdom.” See Everett Ferguson, *The Everlasting Kingdom*, (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 1989), 43.

⁴⁴ Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 143.

⁴⁵ McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 143.

of the Kingdom of God. Overall, in the “ideal age,” subjection to any human figures, rulers or authorities simply does not exist.⁴⁶

In all, Paul acknowledges the Cretan Christians’ anticipation of the inauguration of the Kingdom of God (2:13). While they wait, the people are taught to live in a way that best exemplifies Roman virtue. However, it is possible that the very mention of their anticipation of a more perfect, ideal age – while they are instructed to live “godly lives” (lives that best exemplify Roman virtue) demonstrates that the lives they are instructed to live are not the “ideal” that God, or Paul has in mind. In the Kingdom of God, not only will there no need to worry about the risks of slander or the “attractiveness” of the gospel, but there are values and principles regarding human relationships that simply conflict with the behavioural exhortations that Paul gives. This includes his exhortation to women to exhibit the qualities of a virtuous, Roman woman so that “no will malign the word of God” (2:4-5). With all that has been observed, not only is this exhortation not necessarily grounded in something distinctly Christian, it will also be deemed irrelevant in the Kingdom of God – because not only will there no longer be the risk of slander, but hierarchal subjugation between humans will simply not be a reality in the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, before women of today seek to emulate Paul’s behavioural exhortations in Titus 2:4-5 with great sincerity or before it is commanded to Christian women, one must ponder their origins, purpose, and ultimately their relevancy in the Kingdom of God. These exhortations served as a temporary framework for respectable and even pious Christian behaviour in response to the grace of God (2:11), and were also strategic in terms of protecting the reputation and

⁴⁶ The Kingdom of God is a vast subject, and many debates lie therein, including these topics. However, I am holding onto these premises for the sake of my argument. Ultimately, this would mean that the subjection of women to their husbands, as laid out in Titus 2:5, would no longer be present.

reception of the gospel message and the early Church community. When Christ appears, and ushers in the Kingdom of God, these specific behavioural exhortations will no longer be relevant.

Priority of the Holy Spirit in Allotting Eternal Inheritance (3:5-7)

Thus far, it has been examined how the grace of God “instructs” behaviour as well as the type of behaviour that it provokes. It turns out that the behaviour of those who respond to or are instructed by the grace of God is profoundly Greco-Roman in origin, even “pious” or “godly” behaviour. In other words, in writing how the grace of God teaches Christians to live “self-controlled, upright, and godly lives,” Paul appropriates Roman virtue in order to provide a framework for their behaviour. However, these behaviours situated within their “present age” also stand in contrast to the age to come, the Kingdom of God, in which these behaviours will be deemed irrelevant due to how they are purposed, and also in terms of what characterizes the Kingdom of God.

Nevertheless, Paul not only discusses the grace of God in “instructing” behaviour, he also mentions the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul mentions the previous way that his community used to live, describing them as “foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures” and living in “malice and envy, being hated and hating one another” (3:3). But then, he writes that God saved them via the “washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,” implying that their past behaviours were changed when the Holy Spirit (whom was poured out upon them because of what Christ has done (3:6) did his work of regenerating and renewing (3:5).

This poses a few questions. If the Holy Spirit is involved in the behavioural changes from vice to virtue,⁴⁷ does this mean that the Holy Spirit is also involved in facilitating the behaviours for the specific groups that Paul mentions beforehand? If so, that may imply that Paul's previous behavioural exhortations are more divinely sanctioned or cultivated than primarily functioning as a framework that Paul exhorts and provides.

First, yes, the Holy Spirit technically facilitates a transformation from vice to virtue for the community Paul mentions (3:3). However, notice again that in the behavioral exhortations beforehand, the specific groups are *agents*. Yes, the "instructing" of the grace of God is involved, but the people have agency in their response to the grace of God. In other words, these behaviours that are exhorted for specific groups of people ultimately come about primarily by human agency; they respond to God's grace in a manner that is virtuous for their specific group. However, the qualities that are mentioned as being affected by the Holy Spirit in Titus are qualities that can apply to all people and are broad, objectively good, and beneficial for the community: not being foolish or disobedient, not living in malice and envy, not hating nor being hated, and being "peaceable and considerate" *people* (3:2). Although these qualities come as a result of the renewal of the Holy Spirit (3:5) the behaviours encouraged to *specific* groups beforehand are not necessarily part of the same category.

Furthermore, there is simply no mention of the Holy Spirit facilitating women to be subject to their husbands or for young men to show integrity and seriousness in their speech or for enslaved persons to try to please their masters. These are all simply commanded by Paul for

⁴⁷ It should be noted that many of the "bad" qualities that Paul mentions here are also pagan in origin and understanding, for one, "Paul shares with the philosophic moralists of his day the concern that Christians do not live a life of sensuality. For the Stoics, the ideal of the moral life was a life without passion... Influenced by this view, [Paul] describes the former life of the members of the community as one that was enslaved to passions and various pleasures..." See Collins, *I & II Timothy*, 359.

the purpose of protecting the reputation of the gospel and then defined as what was understood as the virtuous human response to God's grace, while the people wait in anticipation of a greater reality (2:11-13).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the explicitly stated purpose for the behavioural transformation of the community. The purpose of the specific behavioural commands given to young women, young men, and enslaved persons has to do with the reputation of the word of God (2:5, 8, 10) as well as the protection of the community. However, for the "rebirth and renewal" that follows the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, the reason is given as such: the Holy Spirit was poured out, made possible by the work of Jesus Christ (3:6) "*so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life*" (3:7). In this case, although the work of the Holy Spirit not only causes some sort of behavioural transformation on the community that Paul mentions (3:3) but its primary purpose of rebirth and renewal *was so that the people could inherit eternal life*. Thus, when it comes to the question of Holy Spirit's involvement in character transformation, his work may be evident not only for behaviour that is not group-specific, but that the *primary purpose* of the work of the Holy Spirit in the letter to Titus is enabling the people to receive eternal life.

Conclusion

This chapter has been an attempt to address the relevant passages that follow Paul's exhortations to specific groups in his letter to Titus. After all, Paul writes immediately after his instructions to women, men, and slaves that the grace of God that has appeared, not only offering salvation, but teaching the people to be "self-controlled, upright, and godly" (2:12). However, there is human agency necessarily involved in this "teaching;" those who acquire these virtues are those who have decided to "respond" to the grace of God in the manner they know how:

aspiring towards a virtuous life – even a “pious” life – which really has to do with attending to the duties that is expected of one’s identity, position, and status (either as a woman, an enslaved person, or a man). Therefore, it is not necessarily the case that the grace of God “teaches” people to be virtuous – including women who would be considered virtuous if they are busy at home, subject to their husbands, child-lovers, and chaste. What is more is that Paul mentions the people’s anticipation of another reality, the Kingdom of God, where not only are these commands made irrelevant, but many of the qualities therein conflict or at least do not belong in the Kingdom of God.

Yes, at some point, the Holy Spirit is directly involved in behavioural transformation (and there is lack of human agency), but not only is it described as producing general qualities that may be applied to everyone and does not limit or comply with the boundaries of their roles, but the behavioural transformation is a by-product of the *primary* purpose of the Holy Spirit’s regeneration and renewal as articulated in the letter to Titus: to enable the people to become heirs of eternal life (3:7).

Ultimately, the passages that follow Paul’s exhortations do not, as some might propose, suggest that the exhortations that Paul gives – including his exhortations to the young women of Crete in Titus 2:4-5 – are divinely mandated, orchestrated, or facilitated (i.e. the grace of God “teaching” or the Holy Spirit “regenerating and renewing”), or are distinctly “Christian” qualities that Christian women of all time are called to emulate. Rather, the texts suggest otherwise: human agency involved in the “instructing” of the grace of God suggests that the human response to the grace of God would indeed be self-control, upright, and godly living (which encompass the instructions to specific groups beforehand, marked by the “γὰρ”) if that what was indeed understood to be virtuous. Moreover, the anticipation of and longing for the Kingdom of

God, an alternative reality where such behaviours for specific groups are no longer relevant, speaks to the value and lasting relevancy of Paul's behavioural commands. Finally, Paul makes it evident that the work of Holy Spirit in washing, rebirth, and renewal – which does happen to result in his community's behavioural transformation – is *primarily* about affording the people eternal life (3:7). Therefore, it is not necessarily the case that Paul's exhortations throughout 2:1-10, including those directed at the young women of Crete (2:4-5) are eternally relevant simply due to the mention of the grace of God “instructing” or the Holy Spirit offering a “washing of rebirth and renewal” (3:7).

Conclusion

This project has been an attempt towards understanding the world Paul was situated in when he wrote the epistle to Titus. Various kinds of information have been brought forth for this goal. The virtuous Roman woman – as defined by first-century Roman philosophers and historians, as characterized by the letters exchanged between Neopythagorean women, and as remembered in the epitaphs written by mourning husbands – was a critical component of Imperial Roman society. By virtue of the same terminology being used, this is the type of woman that Paul urges the young women of Crete to be (2:4-5). But for what? Paul urges the young women to live in such a manner *so that* no one outside of the Christian community will malign, blaspheme, or speak ill of the word of God (2:5). After all, the early Cretan Christians, particularly women, were subject to much public observation and scrutiny – via the design and culture surrounding domestic architecture, the nature of Christian gatherings and activities, and the social pressures prescribed by the honour/shame dynamics of the Mediterranean. Slander regarding the gospel, or the Christian community at large could produce dire consequences for the church. Paul, an apostle seeking to establish Christian communities throughout the Imperial Roman world, was wary of these things. And not only was he wary of the safety and lasting reputation of the church of Crete, he was also deeply concerned with the gospel's effective reception in society. Paul, after all, was an *apostle*, commissioned with “[bringing] to light” the message about Jesus Christ and the hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2-3). Throughout his letters, Paul repeatedly expresses concern for the church's reputation for the sake of the gospel, and in doing

so prioritizes exhorting behaviours that garner social respectability over other principles and values that technically conflict with those exhortations. This is what Paul is doing in Titus, and Paul has these things in mind when he tells the young women to be husband-lovers, children-lovers, self-controlled, pure, busy at home, and subject to their husbands (2:4-5).

Furthermore, although Paul grounds his exhortations to the young women, young men, and enslaved persons in the “instruction” of the grace of God which results in qualities such as self-control, uprightness, and godliness, it must be noted that these behaviours are a *human* response to the grace of God; the people respond in a manner that corresponds with Greco-Roman understandings of virtue even when it comes to “godliness.” So, if there is any contention that it is God who facilitates such virtuous qualities, that is simply not the case. Importantly, Paul also notes that while the people are “taught” to live in such a way, they nevertheless anticipate a better reality. They anticipate the eschatological Kingdom of God, their “blessed hope” (2:13), where the social realities that necessitate Paul’s commands – concern for the church’s public witness, avoidance of slander, and the burdens of hierarchical subjugation – will no longer exist. Finally, yes, Paul identifies the work of the Holy Spirit in the transformation of a community (3:3-5). But not only is the work of the Holy Spirit not explicitly stated as grounds for Paul’s specific exhortations (as the grace of God is in 2:11), Paul states the primary purpose of the Holy Spirit’s rebirth and renewal in this way: it is poured out upon the people, coinciding with the justification afforded by Christ *so that* the people may become heirs “having the hope of eternal life” (3:7). In Titus, the Holy Spirit primarily functions to enable believers to be recipients of eternal life, and it is not stated as grounds for Paul’s behavioural exhortations throughout 2:1-10. Thus, any contention that the exhortations Paul puts forth in Titus are divinely facilitated is unfounded.

These arguments are meant to show that Paul's exhortations to the young women of Crete are not commands that hold perpetual applicability for Christian living. During the initial stages of research, Paul's stated rationale for the exhortations – "*so that* no one will malign the word of God" – was intriguing, given that from a contemporary viewpoint, this concern seems largely irrelevant. Today, when it is asserted that a Christian female lifestyle is characterized by submission to one's husband and attending primarily to the domestic sphere, this can provide the Christian community with an *unfavourable* reputation amongst outsiders. It was this observation that initially lent the idea that Paul was writing from a fundamentally different reality. Indeed, a reality that held great emphasis on what constituted the virtuous woman, that involved great consequences due to slander, and where Paul was commissioned with the spread and reception of the gospel above other things.

So what, then, are we to glean from these passages, if they are not as "eternally applicable" as some make them out to be? First of all, they offer a crucial reminder as to the categorization of Paul's writings. The Epistle to Titus is a letter written in real time and space, to an individual and community within a particular situation. Paul's exhortations were not given in a vacuum. For those who desire to be honest in their approach to interpreting Paul's writings, they must recognize that the composition is a product of a real individual, navigating real situations in light of a very new, life-altering commission, message, and movement. Paul sought to ensure that the Cretan Christian community was securely established, not only in sound doctrine (1:5, 9, 10-11) but also in their reputation before the surrounding society.

But what about this life-altering message and movement? This leads to our second rule of thumb when it comes to contemporary interpretation and application of these specific exhortations. What is Paul ultimately concerned about? Not only is he concerned about the

protection of the community, but with the reception of the message about Jesus. He is adamant that the peoples behaviour does not cause the message about God promising eternal life (1:2-3) to become of ill-repute. This is very much still a relevant concern today. It remains true that God desires “for all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth,” namely, that there is “one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people” (1 Tim 2:14-6). Therefore, the way we train, exhort and disciple church communities must always have the reputation and reception of the gospel in view.

Finally, any interpretation and consequential application of a text should be examined by the “fruit” it produces. What is the consequence of exhorting women to exactly emulate the commands laid out in Titus 2:4-5 today? As mentioned, such exhortation can generate significant criticism of Christianity from outsiders and understandably so. Historically, emphasis on submission of women to their husbands has rationalized domestic violence.¹ In other instances, it has diminished the sense of the female collective identity within the church and their bonds of friendship as their identity became increasingly subsumed within the family.² Practically, of course, interpreting “busy at home” as indicating a woman *must* make unpaid domestic-labour her priority coupled with depending solely on her husband for financial security can make her vulnerable in the case of divorce or widowhood.³ Furthermore, an interpretation of the importance of submitting to one’s husband also serves as a mechanism for the exclusion of

¹ Martin Luther interpreted Titus 2 as ordaining female subordination and permission to hit his wife for disciplinary reasons. See Nancy Eileen Nienhuis, “Theological reflections on violence and abuse,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 59 (2005): 117-118. See also Ruth Tucker, *Black and White Bible, Black and Blue Wife: My Story of Finding Hope After Domestic Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 14.

² Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021), 72-73. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tyndale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=6533799&ppg=72>.

³ Marika Lindholm, “The Tradwife Trend is a Risky Throwback,” *Psychology Today*, September 27, 2024. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/more-than-womens-work/202409/the-tradwife-trend-is-a-risky-throwback?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

women from church leadership.⁴ And what is the fruit of that? It is apparent that such restrictions do not always contribute well to the church community and negatively affects the lives of the women therein. Not only do many churches who restrict women from leadership lack the insight and representation the women can give, there is, interestingly, a correlation between the restrictions placed on women in church leadership and poorer health.⁵ When interpreting texts such as these, it is crucial to assess the “fruit” of an interpretation when it is into practice.

This study has not been without its limitations. The arguments put forth have been largely historical. While I have attempted to paint a picture of the world Paul was living in with great detail, there is nonetheless uncertainty as to the extent that that picture comes into play with the author’s text. Nevertheless, the context of first-century Crete must be taken into consideration when reading the text. Secondly, my approach has not taken a step-by-step, ordered exegesis of the texts appearing before and after the main text of focus (2:4-5). For example, considering how the phrase regarding Jesus Christ “who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own...” (2:14) may bear on the text, would be helpful in developing a more finely nuanced interpretation of the text of focus. Finally, since this project has been about depicting the world Paul lived in and was writing to, it would be helpful to find a more diverse array of voices regarding the nature and culture of early Imperial Crete.

⁴ For one, because Titus 2:3 mentions older women teaching younger women, and also the command to submit to one’s husband, this is used as ground for excluding women from teaching men (in other words, any mixed congregation) or holding authority in church. See Costi Hinn, “Is it Biblical for Women to be Pastors or Elders?,” For The Gospel, January 21, 2023. <https://www.forthegospel.org/read/is-it-biblical-for-women-to-be-pastors-or-elders>.

⁵ “Study Explores How Sexism Within Religious Congregations Shapes Women’s Health,” American Sociological Association, December 12, 2022. <https://www.asanet.org/for-press/press-releases/study-explores-how-sexism-within-religious-congregations-shapes-womens-health/?hilit=Religion+Hurts%3A+Structural+Sexism+and+Health+Religious+Congregations>.

Paul, an apostle, wrote a letter to a fellow co-worker, Titus. This letter, like many of Paul's other writings, has been used for the formation of doctrine and the ordering of the church community. When we approach and utilize Paul's writings, it is important to tread carefully and to understand that these texts were not written in a vacuum, but in real-time and space, by a human addressing real situations. Thankfully, God is not confined by time and space, and his promises regarding eternal life, which he established before the beginning of time (1:2), do not change. Neither does our hope regarding the appearance of Jesus Christ and the ushering in of the Kingdom of God (2:13). These are the teachings we are to prioritize. In contrast, Paul's specific exhortation for the women to Crete (2:4-5) is a culturally-marked, temporary commandment, meant for specific purposes such as the safety of the community and the reception of the gospel. For the sake of the church community today, and for women in particular, it is integral that we consider the conditions of the world Paul was living in, the conditions of the world we live in now, and ultimately, what the Kingdom of God will – and already does – care about and look like.

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