

Concern for Social Respectability in the Pastoral Letters

The Pastoral Letters exhibit special concern for the social respectability of Christians:

- A bishop is to be someone “well thought of by outsiders” (1 Tim. 3:7).
- Slaves are to accept their lot so that “the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed” (1 Tim. 6:1).
- Young women are to be submissive to their husbands “so that the word of God may not be discredited” (Titus 2:5).
- Young widows should remarry “so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us” (1 Tim. 5:14; cf. Titus 2:8).

In general, Christians are to be productive and obedient, good citizens whose lives are free of anything offensive or scandalous (1 Tim. 2:1–3, 9–10; 3:2–13; 2 Tim. 2:22–25; Titus 1:5–8; 2:3–10; 3:1–2, 14). The virtue of “self-control” receives particular emphasis (2 Tim. 1:7; Titus 1:8; 2:5–6, 12). Thus these letters make clear that Christianity is not socially subversive and that the gospel has a certain “civilizing function”: it trains those who would otherwise be “vicious brutes” (Titus 1:12; cf. 3:3) to live in ways that are “self-controlled, upright, and godly” (Titus 2:11–12).