

**“As for those who in the present  
age are rich” (1 Tim 6:17):  
A reflection on mutual care within God’s  
household in the light of recent  
environmental disasters**

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On January 12, 2010, a massive earthquake, 7.0 on the Richter scale, hit the capital city of Haiti. The result was horrifying devastation. By conservative estimates, 188,000 buildings collapsed, 230,000 people died, and many more were injured. A year on, World Vision worker Ian McInnes reports, “Today rubble fills Port-au-Prince, children bathe in open sewers, cholera is out of control and 1.3 million people who lost their homes a year ago still live in camps run by aid agencies.” McInnes goes on to offer a stark contrast:

Only four months ago New Zealand faced a similar-sized earthquake. In fact, the Canterbury earthquake was even stronger - registering 7.1 as opposed to 7.0 in Haiti - yet if you live in Auckland you could be forgiven for thinking that everything is back to normal in Canterbury. Only 2737 homes were deemed uninhabitable two weeks after the Canterbury quake and despite the massive shake-up no one died and only two people were seriously injured.<sup>1</sup>

The difference between the two experiences exposes the stark disparity that exists in terms of materials, infrastructure, and resources between Haiti, considered one of the world’s poorest countries, and New Zealand, rated among the relatively prosperous.

Yet subsequent events have shown that such wealth is not a safeguard against disaster. On February 22, 2011, another earthquake hit Christchurch, and this time the effects were much more severe, with

1. Ian McInnes, “Haiti One Year On: Neglect Turns Disaster to Tragedy,” *New Zealand Herald*, January 12, 2011, 11. For an online version, see : [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=2&objectid=10698910](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=10698910) (accessed June 15, 2011).

180 people losing their lives, thousands having to abandon their homes, and parts of the city centre damaged beyond repair. If after the earlier earthquake, many New Zealanders had felt shaken but relieved to have absorbed an event of significant force with relatively little damage. The second calamity left us as a nation humbled and with a new awareness of our vulnerability to forces beyond our control. Then on March 11, as the search for bodies continued in Christchurch, the world watched in horror as Japan, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, experienced tragedy of terrible proportions; an earthquake and consequent tsunami engulfed parts of the country's northeast coast killing many thousands of people, sweeping away buildings and whole districts, and leaving a nation traumatized. Furthermore, while the whole world sympathised with those who were suffering on such a scale, many in nations apparently rich and well resourced also felt a new level of fear, with this startling demonstration that material prosperity and technological achievement are insufficient grounds for hope of escaping disaster.

From the perspective of the Christian community in relatively wealthy New Zealand, these recent events provoke reflection in at two directions. New Zealand is well resourced by comparison with many countries. Yet, we are compelled to ask how wealthier countries should respond to other parts of the world in need. In addition, the heightened awareness of our vulnerability to natural events, despite all our material and technological advantages, causes us to look for guidance to others within the body of Christ especially those who have long experience of living faithfully in challenging circumstances. How might we, then, as brothers and sisters in Christ, across geographical boundaries, realize together the life of people of God in an uncertain world?

Paul's first letter to Timothy provides significant help in pursuing such questions.<sup>2</sup> The epistle of 1 Timothy, along with 2 Timothy and

2. I take 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus to be genuine correspondence from the Apostle Paul to co-workers who were assuming growing responsibility in a late, post-Roman imprisonment phase of Paul's ministry. Issues of provenance and authorship cannot be dealt with here, but for recent treatments that support Pauline authorship see, e.g. W.D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 46 of *World Biblical Commentary*, gen. ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), xlvi-cxxix; P.H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 9-26; A.J. Köstenberger, "Hermeneutical and Exegetical Challenges in Interpreting the Pastoral Epistles," in *Entrusted With the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, ed. A.J. Köstenberger and T.L. Wilder (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2010), 1-8. I argue for the plausibility of a Cretan destination for the letter to Titus in George M. Wieland, "Romans Crete and the Letter to Titus," *New Testament Studies* 55 (2009): 338-354.

Titus, has often been characterised as lacking in theological interest, concerned only with practical matters relating to the life and ministry of the church. This characterisation fails to recognize the extent to which the letter's practical and ethical instructions are woven into a richly textured theological framework.<sup>3</sup> The letter addresses the church, from God's understanding, the challenges of maintaining the health and integrity of the church in the face of self-seeking leaders and their destructive teaching. Our approach will be to sketch that theological framework first, then turn to specific instructions for "those who in the present age are rich."

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up or themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. (1 Tim 6:17-19)

### The Theology of 1 Timothy

#### *God (Theology)*

Three times in 1 Timothy, from the opening verse onwards, God is described as Saviour (1:1; 2:3; 4:10).<sup>4</sup> Given the importance of the idea of God's saving in the Old Testament and in Christian faith, it is perhaps surprising to note that "Saviour" (*sōtēr*) is not a common designation for God in the New Testament. Apart from in this letter and in Titus (1:3; 2:10; 3:4), God is called Saviour only in the Song of Mary in Luke 1:47

3. For general surveys of scholarship on these letters see I.H. Marshall, "The Pastoral Epistles in Recent Study," in *Entrusted With the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, ed. A.J. Köstenberger and T.L. Wilder (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2010), 268-324. M. Harding, *What are They Saying About the Pastoral Epistles?* (New York: Paulist, 2001). Philip H. Towner builds a strong case for the integration of the ethics of the pastoral epistles with their theology in, *The Goal of Our Instruction: The Structure of Theology and Ethics in the Pastoral Epistles*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989).

4. This feature of 1 Timothy is explored by, e.g., F.F. Bruce, "'Our God and Saviour': A Recurring Biblical Pattern," in *The Saviour God: Comparative Studies in the Concept of Salvation Presented to Edwin Oliver James*, ed. S.G.F. Brandon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1963), 51-66. For a discussion of "God as Savior" and "Salvation" in see F. Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters*, *New Testament Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); J. Sumney, "'God Our Savior': The Theology of 1 Timothy," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 33 (1998): 151-61.

and the doxology in Jude 25. This apparent restraint in the New Testament may partly be explained by the fact that the term *sōtēr* was already widely used in the Greco-Roman world, claimed by emperors as bringers of peace and good order. They were also ascribed to a range of deities whose help was sought in the face of various threats and problems.<sup>5</sup> In response to the particular challenges addressed in 1 Timothy, however, it is God's function as Saviour that comes to the fore, both "our Saviour" (1:1; 2:3) and in some sense, "the Saviour of all people" (4:10).<sup>6</sup>

God is also Father (1:2), eternal Ruler (1:17; 6:15-16), the only God (1:17; 2:5), and the living God (3:16; 4:10). He is the creator (4:4-5), giver of life to all (6:13), and provider of good things (6:17).<sup>7</sup> This God, both transcendent (1:17; 6:15-16) and immanent (5:21; 6:13), is the object of worship (1:17; 6:15-16), prayer (2:1-2, 8), trust (5:5; 6:17), and service (5:21). God's existence is not contingent upon or limited to that of the world, for he "dwells in unapproachable light, which no one has ever seen or can see" (6:16). He is nonetheless not only present to those who acknowledge him (5:21; 6:13) but also concerned for "everyone." He is able to express his benevolent care through the world's structures of power (2:1-4).

### *The World (Cosmology)*

The world's existence is contingent upon God, and it receives its significance through its relation to God. It is created essentially well. It has the potential to be sanctified for God and enjoyed with gratitude by people who acknowledge God as the source (4:3-5). All life is given by God and lived in the presence of God (6:13). Marriage and childbearing (2:15; 4:3-5; 5:14), food (4:3-4), physical well-being (4:8), and medical provision (5:23) are all within the scope of God's intention and provision.

### *Present and Future (Eschatology)*

God is involved in the world as it presently is. The present world continues as God's good creation and the object of God's care. 1 Tim-

5. For fuller discussion see George M. Wieland, *The Significance of Salvation: A Study of Salvation Language in the Pastoral Epistles*, Biblical and Theological Monograph Series (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 21-28.

6. See Wieland, *The Significance of Salvation*, 85-97.

7. Cf. Greg Couser, "The Sovereign Savior of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus," in *Entrusted With the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, ed. A.J. Köstenberger and T.L. Wilder (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2010), 105-136. Couser analyses the evidence in 1 Timothy under the heading, "1 Timothy: The Sovereign God and His Creation," 107-24.

othy also anticipates a further, future existence, described as “eternal life” (1:16; 6:12). “Life now” is explicitly contrasted with “life to come” (4:8), and “the present age” with “that which is to come” (6:17-19). That which may be possessed and enjoyed in “the world” is necessarily limited to the span of human earthly existence (6:7), and it is therefore to that which is coming that the letter looks to “the life that is really life” (6:19).

### *Christ Jesus (Christology)*

1 Timothy is able to hold together strong monotheistic affirmations (1:17; 2:5; 6:15-16) with a notable equating of Jesus with God at significant points. The letter opens, in what may be an echo of Psalm 65:4, where the “God of our salvation” is declared to be “the hope of all the ends of the earth,” with an ascription of Paul’s apostleship to both “God our Saviour” and “Christ Jesus our hope” (1:1).<sup>8</sup> There is “one God”, but also “one mediator between God and humankind” (2:5). The church functions, and ministry is performed “in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus” (5:21; 6:13). God is “Lord of lords” (6:15), and Jesus is also “lord” (1:1, 12-13; 6:3, 14).

The activity of God in Christ is focussed in particular events-in-time. In the past, Christ Jesus “came into the world” (1:15) where he “was revealed in flesh” (3:16); he “made the good confession” before Pontius Pilate (6:14) and “gave himself a ransom” (2:5-6); he was “taken up in glory” (3:16). In the future, “at the right time” (or “in his own time”), God will bring about “the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:14-15). In the period of time between his past and future appearances, Christ Jesus is active in and through people who hear his call to service (1:1, 12-13), receive his empowering (1:12), experience his mercy, grace, and patience (1:13-14), and know themselves to be in his presence even now (5:21; 6:13). God and Christ Jesus must be spoken of jointly in relation to the divine saving dispositions of grace and mercy, the saving acts of revelation and redemption, and salvation’s future goal.

### *Salvation (Soteriology)*

References of salvation run through 1 Timothy.<sup>9</sup> In the first mention of God in the letter, he is designated “our Saviour”; it is from “the

8. See Wieland, *The Significance of Salvation*, 28-33.

9. For a brief survey of those references and others in 2 Timothy and Titus see George M. Wieland, “The Function of Salvation in the Letters to Timothy and Titus”, pp. 153-72 in *Entrusted With the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, ed. A.J. Köstenberger and T.L. Wilder (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2010), 153-172.

command of God our Saviour" that Paul's apostleship derives its authority, purpose, and soteriological significance (1:1). Rather surprisingly, Paul's ministry is itself an outcome of the ministry of Christ Jesus, who "came into the world to save sinners" (1:15). This saving that experience comprises the familiar elements of Christian salvation; despite his sinful past Paul, received mercy, grace, faith, and love. He was accepted by God and given the opportunity to serve him. Through the example of Paul, others would come to believe in Jesus Christ and enter eternal life (1:12-16).

Another dimension to the concept of God as Saviour is suggested when the letter appeals for prayer "for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" (2:1-2). The basis for this appeal is that "This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2:3-4). What is the relation of this "quiet and peaceable life" that is to be prayed for? In one sense it might be preparatory, creating conditions within which the gospel could be heard, and "the knowledge of the truth" concerning Christ the mediator extended. In the Greco-Roman context, however, there is also the implication that God is the supreme Saviour and benefactor whose care is for all people. Those human authorities who claim to be able to save people from trouble and distress can only do so as the Saviour God enables them.<sup>10</sup>

God's saving therefore includes that general help and provision for all and the particular saving that is exemplified by Paul's experience of mercy and faith and extends to eternal life. Both dimensions are glimpsed again in the statement that "we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe" (4:10). There is only one living God, and he is the source of all good, and the one from whom all may seek help. It is, however, those who receive, believe, and live according to the teaching about Christ Jesus. Saving goes beyond temporal help and provision, to effect transformation of lives spoiled by sin and bring new life that will be fully realized in the coming

10. Dibelius and Conzelmann understood the goal of salvation to be that peaceable life in the present age, in agreement with their influential *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* interpretation according to which Paul's eschatological horizon had faded from view leaving only the present. See M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, trans. Philip Bottolph and Adela Yarbro, *Hermeia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 9-10. This however fails to take adequate account of the future dimension of the hope of salvation in 1 Timothy. See discussion in Wieland, *The Significance of Salvation*, pp. 249-50.

age. As a minister of that teaching, Timothy is also an agent of God's salvation (4:16).

### *The Church (Ecclesiology)*

The Church is described in three ways in this letter: "the household of God," "the church of the living God," and "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (3:15). The first of these expressions (*oikos theou*) is a social image, referring to the Greco-Roman household, a social organism bound together by ties of family relationship and allegiance. Most of the first Christian churches around the Greco-Roman world probably grew up in the setting of a hospitable household, whose leader took the role of supporter or patron of the Christian mission (e.g. the household of Lydia in Philippi, Acts 16:14-15, 40; cf. Prisca and Aquila and "the church in their house", Rom 16:3, 5a).<sup>11</sup> The implication is that believers are related to one another as members of the family unit that has God himself as its head. Within the church as family, there is an obligation of mutual love and respect, service and care (5:1-16).

"The church of the living God" (*ekklēsia theou zōntos*) recalls the setting of the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, where the people, as pilgrims in the wilderness, gather in a great assembly (*ekklēsia*) to meet with and listen to "the living God" (see e.g. Deut 4:10, 33; 5:26; 9:10; 18:16). The emphasis is on God's calling out to a people who belong to him and for them to hear his voice; it is in gathering to him that they are constituted as a people invited to worship him, to shape their life together according to his instruction, and to live among the nations as a distinctive people who belong to God. The church, as the assembled people of God, engages the world for and through God, in its ministry of intercession (2:1-2). The church practices the discipline of attentiveness to God through the scriptures (4:13).

The pillar and bulwark of the truth (*stylos kai hedraiōma tēs alētheias*) is a structural metaphor. A pillar could be either a support feature of a building (suggesting that the church maintains or holds up the truth),

11. For accounts of Greco-Roman households and discussion of their significance in early Christianity see e.g. P.H. Towner, "Households and Household Codes," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 417-419; for an extensive bibliography, see C.S. Keener, "Family and Household," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. C.A. Evans and S.E. Porter (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 353-368; Robert Jewett, "The Social Structure of House and Tenement Churches in Rome," in *Romans*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 64-69; and for consideration of households in Paul's mission, see E.J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 300-304.

or something set up as a sign (the church is the witness to the truth).<sup>12</sup> The term *hedraiōma* is difficult to translate, but it is linked to *hedraios* which has the meaning “firm, steadfast” (as in Col 1:23: “steadfast in the faith”). The “truth” in this context is summarized in the Christological confession that follows:

He was revealed in flesh,  
vindicated in spirit,  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among the Gentiles,  
believed on in the world,  
taken up in glory. (3:16)

The church, as a pillar of truth, holds to its confession of faith in Christ Jesus (3:16) and to its practice of the godly life that accords with that which has been revealed in Christ (6:3-5). The church resists any corruption of faith and life that sullies its faithful witness.

### *Summary: 1 Timothy's Theological Framework*

This brief survey has by no means exhausted the theological content of 1 Timothy, but it serves to illustrate the richness and coherence of the framework within which the letter's practical instructions are to be understood. The dominant accent is soteriological, reflecting the concerns addressed about unhealthy teaching that threatens to distort the church's faith and curtail its witness in and to the world. Against a religious exclusivism, Paul declares that God cares for all; against a fascination with esoteric doctrines, he insists that the “mystery” is Christ revealed and proclaimed; against a misdirected asceticism, he urges a proper appreciation of the created world; and all of this with the awareness that salvation will ultimately be completed and fully realized in the coming age.

### **Hearing 1 Timothy's Word to the Rich**

A feature of Timothy is the chain of terms such as “command,” “instruct,” “urge,” etc. Paul's apostolic ministry is performed at the com-

12. The latter is preferred by, e.g., B. Witherington III, who writes, “The point is that believers hold up and represent the truth to the world, and therefore their behavior is all the more crucial. It is of course also correct to say that the truth is the church's foundation, but that is not the focus here; rather, the focus is on the relationship of the Christian assembly to the world.” Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, vol. 1 of *A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 245.



mand of God (1:1). Paul, in turn, exhorts Timothy, who accordingly instructs others about what they, in their turn, are to teach (1:3-4). The letter's many instructions may, therefore, be tracked back along this chain of command to their ultimate source in God. It is significant that it is specifically "God our Saviour" who gives the initial command to Paul (1:1), for the practical instructions are thus related not only to God but to God's saving purpose.

### *The Church and God's Saving Activity*

As we have seen, the church is considered to be God's household, a social organism. Within the household are old and young, male and female, and people at different stages of life with varying degrees of need. One aspect of the functioning of the household is illustrated in the letter's very practical discussion of the care of women who have been widowed (5:3-16).<sup>13</sup> It is expected that within a person's immediate household provision should be made for those who are in need - and of this God approves (5:3). So crucial is this practical expression of the interconnectedness that God intends to exist within household units that individuals who fail to take on such responsibilities are declared to have denied the faith (5:8). Where, however, such provision is not available, the women concerned are to be recognized and helped as members of God's household, the church. In the context addressed in 1 Timothy, the Christian community includes women who are bereft of family and of essential provision, and who are utterly dependent on God (5:5). It is indeed God our Saviour who meets their need, but he does so through the operation of relationships within his household as God's people learn generosity and care from him. Furthermore, the particular case of the widows illustrates that within the household, some of those who are in the most extreme material need deserve to be honoured for the quality of their faith and valued for the service and assistance they give to others (5:3, 5, 9-10). What is envisaged is not a charitable donation to "the beggar at the gate" but the activating of a functioning household within which mutual giving and receiving takes place with honour and love among its members.

As the "assembly of the living God," the church heeds God's call to a distinctive life among the nations. They gather as those who are given the privilege of access to God, and they are to make use of that access

13. On the situation of the widows envisaged in 1 Timothy see B.W. Winter, "Providentia for the Widows of 1 Timothy 5:3-16," *Tyndale Bulletin* 39 (1988): 83-99; and discussions in I.H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 574-581; Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 332-337; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 273-77.

in praying to God, our Saviour, for the world and its people. God's care extends to all. It is only as God works in and through them that human authorities will be able to bring about the longed for peace and well-being. The church gathers, like Israel at Sinai, to have their life oriented towards God's purpose and to learn to live in God's way.

To the extent that it is faithful in its life and teaching, the church stands as a pillar of witness, a sign in the world of the reality of Christ and his salvation. Through its care, prayer, and witness the church therefore participates with God, our Saviour, in his beneficent provision and ordering of the world, his generous response to the cry of the needy, and his call to transformation and hope in Christ.

In our very different world, the first letter of Paul to Timothy invites us, as the church, to realize our identity as God's household and find ways to function as a globally connected family. It calls us to rediscover our focus as a people gathered by and to the Living God. It calls us to live among the nations as a distinctive people, transformed by what we learn from him rather than conformed to the attitudes and behaviours of our age. It calls us to be oriented towards God's saving purpose not only for us but also for the world. It challenges us to hold up Christ Jesus, our hope, and the one who came into the world to save sinners. He, at the right time, will be manifested as Lord, and will cultivate lives that are consistent with that confession.

### *The Rich within the Church*

Having traced its theological framework centred on the saving purpose and activity of God, and considered the character and role of the church within that framework, it is time to note that, almost at the end, the letter turns to a particular group of people within the Christian community: "those who in the present age are rich" (6:17-19).

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Who are the rich? What are riches? Paul gently teases his readers with four cognate terms (*plousios*, *ploutos*, *plousiōs*, *plouteō*):<sup>14</sup> those who are "rich" mustn't trust in "riches" but in God who provides "richly" and if they want to be "rich," they should be "rich" in good works. The play

14. See Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 1: 297.

on words poses a profound challenge: what do they really value, and in what or in whom do they truly trust?

It is in this regard that the “rich” have most need to receive from the “poor.” In the household of faith pictured in 1 Timothy 5, it is the one in the most severe material need, the real widow, left alone, who has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day (5:5). This is precisely what the “rich” must learn to do (6:17b)! For me, as a visitor from relatively rich New Zealand to economically poor parts of our region, one of the most profound enrichments has been to see and experience a deeper and more urgent life of dependence upon God.

One example might serve to illustrate this. I was in Kathmandu with the students of the Nepal Baptist Bible College. One afternoon a terrible scream rang out, and I ran to see what had happened. As I went two students met me and urged me to hurry. One of the young men had trapped his fingers in a heavy door; it had slammed shut, leaving his hand misshapen, and the young man was in extreme pain and great distress. “I have some medicine in my room!” I said, “I’ll fetch it as quickly as I can.” But as I turned to rush back to my room, I was topped by one of the students who had come to call me, an 18 year old girl. “Sir,” she said, “Thank you for the medicine, and we shall be glad to use it, but that’s not why we came for you. First would you please pray?” I was humbled and rebuked. This crisis, minor though it was, had exposed something about each of us. I, the “rich” Christian, had instinctively responded to the need by reaching for what my wealth could provide: the medicine in my suitcase. She, the “poor” believer, had instinctively responded by reaching out to God. I stopped, and prayed, joining my prayers with the faith of the poor. Then I fetched the medicine, but when I brought it back, the young man was calm and smiling. He assured me that he didn’t need it; the pain was gone.

Within the household of faith, each has something to give, and each has his or her needs met when they receive what others are able to give. In the case of the care of widows in 5:3-16, what obstructs the proper functioning of the household, in relation to the care of its members, is that some, who do have the means to meet the needs of others in the family, refuse to do so (5:8). When we consider our identity as God’s household, whose family relationships cross geographical, political, ethnic, and cultural boundaries, we are compelled to acknowledge that the spate of ecological disasters in recent years has left many in severe practical and material need, while others by comparison are more than amply supplied. Those members of the household of God, who enjoy relative prosperity, must listen to the stern words that declare that they, who fail to provide for family members, are actually denying the faith

that we profess. One practical step must be to strengthen relationships across the borders of material and economic disparity. The purpose is for “those who in the present age are rich” to become more aware of the suffering of members of their family in Christ. The “rich” must appreciate the gifts of faith and love that they themselves stand to receive within an authentically functioning trans-national household of faith.

The call to the church, as the assembly of pilgrims, is to reorientate their existence towards God, to learn from God to live distinctively in the world. As “those who in the present age are rich” pray for rulers to act in a way that extends God’s loving care to all, they must scrutinize their own use of economic, political, and social power. They must consider whether their choices, actions, and inactions are together a participation in God’s saving rule in the world or serve rather to obstruct the benefits of God’s rule from reaching others. As “rich” pilgrims, they must especially heed the call to value that to which God invites us more than that to which might be acquired along the way. Christians must cultivate the richness of generosity, which is learned from our most generous God and from Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all. The pillar of truth will be held high by those who live distinctively among people possessed by the things that they think they possess, point to enduring treasure, and invite to real life.

### **Conclusion**

With its world-affirming depiction of God, our Saviour, who is the creator, life-giver, and benefactor of all, 1 Timothy calls the Christian community to appreciate the gifts of creation and look to God for the needs of this life. The community of believers lives in the present age, not only as a recipient of God’s saving care, but also an active participant in its functioning among themselves and its extension to all. Within that community, there are special dangers for those who “in the present age are rich.” Paul found it necessary to recall them, and his word to the rich recalls us, to genuine trust, true values, generous and respectful sharing, and real life.