

“A Little Wine”: 1 Timothy 5:23 and Greco-Roman Youth

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The exhortation, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine on account of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Tim 5:23) is commonly seen as a rejection of extreme asceticism (as if it were an after-thought to the instructions regarding marriage and diet in 1 Tim 4:3), and treated with some perfunctory observations on the medicinal use of wine in antiquity. In this study, after discussing (a) the problems with the common reading of 5:23 as anti-ascetic polemic, I shall discuss (b) the literary context of instructions regarding how a youthful Timothy is to interact with older men, (c) the medicinal use of wine in terms of ancient humoral theory, (d) the application of humoral theory to youth and wine, and (e) abstinence from wine within a philosophical training regimen. I hope to show that in its context this verse makes sense as advice for a young minister.¹

a. Corrective of Asceticism?

Many interpret 1 Timothy 5:23 as a reaction against an extreme asceticism² and sometimes as polemic against some form of early Gnosticism.³ But this oft-repeated assumption is questionable. First, our verse appears not in a polemical context like 4:1-5 but in a didactic context of instructions pertaining to elders.

Second, to the extent that Gnostic sects practiced asceticism, they were concerned primarily with renouncing sex.⁴ Gnostic views on diet were not uniform, but they did not place any particular emphasis on abstinence from wine.⁵ Despite their insistence that 5:23 is an “anti-Gnostic motif,” Dibelius-Conzelmann cannot identify the Pastoral Epistles (PE) with any known Gnostic sect.⁶

Third, early Christian groups did not quarrel over abstinence from wine. The closest we come to that is a few criticisms of the Encratites, an ascetic movement that arose among followers of Tatian in the mid second century.⁷ Irenaeus criticizes them for abstaining from marriage and from meat but says nothing about abstinence from wine.⁸

Clement of Alexandria, after citing examples of Jesus drinking wine, says, “Let this be adduced by us against the so-called Encratites.”⁹ And yet this polemical side note comes near the end of a

lengthy discourse on the dangers of excessive indulgence in wine and the importance of moderation, in which Clement says, “I admire, therefore, those who take up an austere life and who crave the drug of temperance (σωφροσύνη [*sōphrosynē*]), namely water.”¹⁰ Hippolytus says the Encratites were “water drinkers,” though they were orthodox in matters of ecclesiology and Christology, and he is more concerned with their repudiation of marriage and meat than of wine. Against them he cites 1 Timothy 4:1-5 but not 5:23.¹¹

Tertullian lumps Tatian with Marcion and “Jupiter, the Pythagorean heretic of to-day,”¹² for their perpetual abstinence from meat and wine, even as he defends the Montanist tradition of occasional periods of abstinence from the same. In short, though various early Christian groups argued about appropriate degrees of ascetic discipline, there is no plausible evidence that they criticized each other for not drinking wine.¹³

Fourth, if 1 Timothy 5:23 were a criticism of some opponents’ ascetic practices regarding wine, that would represent a development away from the earlier Pauline attitude of tolerance regarding dietary scruples. Paul applies the principle of freedom to dietary scruples (1 Cor 8-10), though even one’s own freedom of conscience is no basis for imposing one’s practices on another believer (1 Cor 10:29).

Elsewhere, Paul advocates tolerance of dietary scruples and commends abstinence from wine, if drinking it causes a brother to stumble (Rom 14:21). Granted that the PE seem to reflect developments away from the Paul of the undisputed letters on several points, we might nevertheless ask whether it is plausible that a post-Pauline author writing in the name of Paul would move from Paul’s tolerance of wine and approval of abstinence to a position intolerant of abstinence (and, as some read it, insistent upon drinking wine).

Fifth, a major concern in the PE is outsider criticism of the Christian community for flouting social mores. In antiquity, Pythagoreans, Cynics and Jews were known for dietary restrictions regarding meat and sometimes wine.¹⁴ McGowan has called attention to the possible social implications of rejecting meat and wine, which were “the cuisine of sacrifice.”¹⁵ In particular, although they would drink wine in moderation, the Cynics preferred water as the most “natural” beverage.¹⁶ But abstinence from wine would hardly draw criticism. On the contrary, both Jews and pagans would more likely commend such self-discipline, which would be compatible with the call in the PE for church leaders to maintain impeccable reputations.

Furthermore, wine and sex do not receive equal consideration as manifestations of ascetic extremism in the PE. Dennis MacDonald has shown how an extreme celibacy could disrupt social norms

regarding marriage and evoke condemnation from outsiders (e.g., *Acts of John* 63-64; *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 7-15).¹⁷ So, beside the problem of overindulgence, there was a problem derived from an extremist celibacy, just the sort of doctrine that would “disrupt households” (Titus 1:11). By contrast, the PE adopt a moderate position, advocating sexual purity on the one hand, while on the other hand endorsing marriage and procreation (1 Tim 5:14; Titus 2:4-5). But when it comes to wine, the only issue is overindulgence. Church leaders are to be “sober” (νηφάλιος [*nēphalios*], 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2) and “not a drunkard” (μὴ πάροινος [*mē paroinos*], 3:3). In favor of moderation and against excess are instructions that church leaders not use or be enslaved to “much wine” (μὴ οἴνω πολλῷ προσέχοντες [*mē oinō pollō prosechontes*], 3:8; ...δεδουλωμένεις [*dedoulōmeneis*], Titus 2:4).

Total abstinence from wine was a self-discipline commendable to the religious and philosophical sensibilities of both Jews and pagans. The most one could say against abstinence would be that, like drunkenness, it represented an extreme position and that moderation was preferable to either extreme.¹⁸ But nothing in the PE suggests that the Christian communities drew criticism from outsiders for their abstinence from wine. In sum, it has generally been assumed but not demonstrated that 1 Tim 5:23 has in view some sect that practiced abstinence from wine.

On the whole, then, it seems best to take 5:23 as a comment on a practical aspect of purity in 5:22 and not to use it as the basis for a mirror-reading inference of some sectarian practice.¹⁹ Timothy is to be a model of purity (ἀγνεΐα [*hagneia*], 4:12), so a young minister, whether grounded in Jewish Scriptures or trained in a philosophical regimen of self-discipline, might well abstain from wine without coming under the influence of some heretical sect. Taking a cue from the text, then, I shall first consider how both the medicinal uses of wine and philosophical exhortations about abstinence from wine might fit into the present context.

b. Literary Context.

The block of instruction in 5:1-6:2 begins with general instructions about how Timothy should relate to older and younger men and women in the community (5:1-2), among whom Timothy’s peer group is the younger men, to whom he relates as “brothers” (cf. “your youth,” 4:12).²⁰ After this, there are specific instructions regarding older widows (5:3-10), younger widows (5:13-16), older men (5:17-25), and slaves (6:1-2).

An interpretive issue in 5:17-25 is whether πρεσβύτεροι [*presbyteroi*] is a generic term for older men or a technical term for

those who hold the office of “elders.” In favor of the former,²¹ πρεσβύτεροι [*presbyteroi*] in 5:1 is clearly a generic “older men.” Also, if πρεσβύτεροι [*presbyteroi*] here were officers, then we would need to account for the odd structure of the letter, as this passage is far removed from the discussions of bishop and deacons in chapter 3. In favor of the latter,²² “laying on hands” in 5:22 suggests some sort of ordination or commissioning, as in 1 Tim 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:6 (cf. Acts 6:6; 13:3). Also, 5:17 refers to the presiding (προεστῶτες [*proestōtes*]) and teaching (κοπιῶντες ἐν λόγῳ καὶ διδασκαλία [*kopiōntes en logo kai didaskalia*]) functions of the πρεσβύτεροι [*presbyteroi*], and some would also add that πρεσβύτεροι [*presbyteroi*] and ἐπίσκοπος [*episkopos*] are used interchangeably in Titus 1:5-9.

But these two positions may present a false choice. Alistair Campbell has argued that there was no “office” of elders in the first century. From his detailed examination of ancient Israel and Early Judaism he concludes, “The elders are the senior men of the community, heads of the leading families within it, who as such exercise an authority that is informal, representative and collective... It neither denotes particular office-holders, nor excludes them, but can easily associate with more precise official titles... ‘the elders’ does not so much denote an office as connote prestige.”²³ Similarly, in Greco-Roman society the word πρεσβύτεροι [*presbyteroi*] connoted “a class of person to whom respect was instinctively felt to be due, not so much the leaders of the state or town, but *one’s own elders* within family, clan or acquaintance.”²⁴ Campbell sees πρεσβύτεροι [*presbyteroi*] as the natural heads of families who led house-churches (κατ’ οἶκον [*kat’ oikon*]), from among whom a bishop was chosen to serve “at the city level” (κατὰ πόλιν [*kata polin*], Tit 1:5).²⁵ He then posits that 1 Tim 5:17-18 reflects a similar situation in which some elders of house-churches are appointed to the new post of ἐπίσκοπος κατὰ πόλιν [*episkopos kata polin*].²⁶

We need not agree with Campbell that “double honor” implies elevation to moniscopacy, as the context says nothing about a bishop. Nevertheless, Campbell’s understanding of elders is helpful. Chapter 5 is about how Timothy should treat older men and women, some of whom received honoraria for their service, and some were commissioned—blessed with the laying on of hands—to the function of teachers. This would be consistent with the exhortation in this letter for Timothy to “guard the deposit” (6:20) and with the directive elsewhere for Timothy to commit what he learned from Paul to “faithful people who will be capable to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2). The PE do not reflect all the trappings of formal ordinations that later

emerge in Early Christianity, but the “laying on of hands” is moving in that direction.

A second issue is the structure of the passage and the degree to which it is logically coherent.²⁷ The passage unfolds as a series of instructions, mostly imperative verbs, alternating between administrative directives about older men and exhortations about Timothy’s personal conduct. A cluster of such exhortations appears in 5:21-23, namely that Timothy should be impartial (21), not be hasty in laying on hands (22ab), and keep himself “holy” (ἅγιός [hagnos], 22c). The exhortation to drink “a little wine” is a comment on the preceding exhortation to be “holy.” Beside sexual abstinence, one aspect of religious purity is separation from sinners (5:22), a point apparently resumed in 5:24-25.²⁸ Another aspect is abstinence from wine.²⁹

At issue in 5:21-23 is how Timothy, a youth (4:12; 5:1), can maintain personal credibility as he administers his duties toward older men, whether to commission some as teachers or to adjudicate charges against others. His behavior with regard to wine contributes to his credibility.

c. Wine as Medicine.

Commentators often cite references to wine as a medicine in antiquity. Irrelevant here would be the external use of wine to cleanse a wound (e.g., Luke 10:34), as the present passage deals with internal use of wine as a medicine, of which numerous examples exist from the first and second centuries.³⁰ Among medical writers, for example, Dioscorides recommended wine mixed with honey for a weak stomach,³¹ and Celsus advised aerobic exercise and hot wine instead of water for stomach ills.³² Such advice was generally reflected in such writers as Pliny the Elder, who recommended “a little wine” for vigor and for the stomach,³³ and Seneca, who took for granted “propping the feeble pulse with wine.”³⁴ But for our purposes, the most salient consideration of wine stems from humoral theory, which associated the effects of wine on bodily fluids, known as “humors” (χύμαι [chymai]), because it so thoroughly integrated medical theory with philosophical understanding of human nature.

Humoral theory originated in the Hippocratic Corpus and continued to be influential into the 19th century CE.³⁵ The Hippocratic Corpus is a collection of some 60 treatises on medical theory, of which a core is dated to the time of Hippocrates of Cos in the late fifth century BCE, though others added to it over the years.³⁶ While treatises in the corpus offer varying theories on the number of humors and how they related to health and illness, *On the Nature of Man* contains the version

of the theory that came to represent the foundation of Hippocratic medicine.³⁷

On the Nature of Man describes four basic humors in the human body: blood (αἷμα [*haima*]), yellow bile (χολή ξανθή [*cholē xanthē*]), black bile (χολή μέλαινα [*cholē melaina*]), and phlegm (φλέγμα), and argues that good health results from maintaining the proper balance among these humors.³⁸ This way of thinking about the body was consistent with Greek philosophical interest in harmony, balance, and order.³⁹ Although the Hellenistic and early Roman periods saw the rise of several new schools of medical thought,⁴⁰ humoral theory remained influential.⁴¹ In the second century, Galen systematized and reinvigorated some common ideas, but we should not think he invented all of what follows.

Galen accepted the Hippocratic theory of four humors but made it more complex it by correlating it with the four qualities of wet/dry and hot/cold.⁴² Hippocrates also appealed to Galen's philosophical interest in correlating physiology with the four basic elements of the cosmos (earth, air, fire, water)⁴³ and with the four seasons.⁴⁴ Blood, for example, was hot and wet and increased in spring, while yellow bile was hot and dry and increased in summer, the hottest and driest season, when phlegm was weak. In autumn, blood decreased and black bile increased.⁴⁵ Phlegm was cold and wet and increased in winter.

The qualities assigned to the humors and the seasons were also associated with specific ages of life. Thus, children were thought to be warm and moist, but the bodies of adults cooled with age.⁴⁶ Youths (νέοι [*neoi*]) were hot and dry, while adults were cool and dry, and older people (πρεσβύτεροι [*presbyteroi*]) were moist and cold.⁴⁷ Youth was the "summer" of life, associated with an excess of yellow bile, so that a youthful constitution was identified as hot and dry.

The following table represents a synopsis of humoral theory described in *On the Nature of Man* 7 and developed more fully by Galen:⁴⁸

Humor χύμα (<i>chyma</i>)	Age ἡλικία (<i>ēlikia</i>)	Season ῥα (<i>hōra</i>)	Temperament κράσις (<i>krasis</i>)
Blood αἷμα (<i>haima</i>)	Child παῖς (<i>pais</i>)	Spring Hot & Wet	Sanguine
Yellow Bile χολή ζανθή (<i>cholē zantha</i>)	Youth μειράκιον (<i>meirakion</i>)	Summer Hot & Dry	Choleric
Black Bile χολή μέλαινα (<i>cholē melaina</i>)	Adult ἀνήρ (<i>anēr</i>)	Autumn Cool & Dry	Melancholic
Phlegm φλέγμα (<i>phlegma</i>)	Old Man πρεσβύτες (<i>presbytēs</i>)	Winter Cold & Wet	Phlegmatic

On this theory, natural shifts in the balance of humors that occurred with changes in age and season caused certain diseases to be prevalent at different times.⁴⁹ Thus, in order to restore and maintain the balance of humors, physicians considered such external factors as climate, diet, and exercise.⁵⁰ Here we shall focus on one specific dietary factor, namely, wine.

The Hippocratic tractate *Acute Diseases* discusses the effects of various wines and vinegars, whether dry or sweet, diluted with water or mixed with honey or some other additive, and applies each to specific humoral imbalances.⁵¹ Along the same line, Galen discusses how wine affects the stomach and digestion and therefore temperament:

“Thus also in the words of Theognis: ‘The drinking of much wine is an evil—yet if it be drunk with understanding (ἐπισταμένως [*epistamenōs*]), it is a good thing and no evil.’ In fact, if it is drunk in moderation (συμμέτρως [*symmetrōs*]) it helps the coction (πέψις [*pepsis*]) of food and its absorption and distribution, also blood-formation and nutrition generally; it likewise makes our souls at once milder and bolder—acting, of course, through the bodily temperament (κράσις [*krasis*]), which again is produced by means of the *humors*.⁵²

For Galen the medicinal value of wine depended on using it knowledgeably and in moderation. “Knowledgeably” entailed

following the Hippocratic tradition of a healthy regimen for the different seasons of the year as different humors predominate in the body:

The layman ought to order his regimen in the following way. In winter eat as much as possible and drink as little as possible; drink should be wine as undiluted as possible, and food should be bread, with all meats roasted; during this season take as few vegetables as possible, for so will the body be most dry and hot. When spring comes, increase drink and make it very diluted, taking a little at a time; use softer foods and less in quantity; substitute for bread barley-cake; on the same principle diminish meats, taking them all boiled instead of roasted, and eating when spring comes a few vegetables, in order that a man may be prepared for summer by taking all foods soft, meats boiled, and vegetables copious as possible, the change to be slight, gradual and not sudden. In summer the barley-cake to be soft, the drink diluted and copious, and the meats in all cases boiled. For one must use these, when it is summer, that the body may become cold and soft. For the season (*ἥρη* [*hōris*]) is hot and dry, and makes bodies burning and parched. Accordingly these conditions must be counteracted by way of living. On the same principle the change from spring to summer will be prepared for in like manner to that from winter to spring, by lessening food and increasing drink. Similarly, by opposing opposites prepare for the change from summer to winter. In autumn make food more abundant and drier, and meats too similar, while drinks should be smaller and less diluted, so that the winter may be healthy and a man may take his drink neat and scanty and his food as abundant and as dry as possible. For in this way he will be most healthy and least chilly, as the season is cold and wet.⁵³

Here the appropriate drink for winter is undiluted wine, which offers warmth when the body is naturally cold; whereas in the summer diluted wine provides a cooling and softening effect when the body is naturally hot and dry. In theory, then, wine (and diet in general) was effective not only to help restore the humoral balance of bodies suffering from acute diseases but also to maintain the normal health of bodies through the cycles of the seasons with their regular fluctuations in bodily humors. This consideration of how wine could affect the body differently in different seasons of the year also calls to mind the theory of humoral balance in different seasons of life.

d. Wine and Youth.

Greco-Roman medical writers applied humoral theory to explain changes in the life cycle. Since they associated the four stages of life (childhood, youth, adulthood, old age) with the four seasons, it is not surprising that their advice about wine varied according to one’s age in the same way that it varied according to season. In each case, the main factor was the predominant humor in the body. In the following passage, Galen quotes from and comments on Plato’s *Laws*:

But I shall remind them [the Platonists] once again, even if they do not wish me to, that Plato himself, after whom they name themselves, wrote about these things, not merely once or twice, but many times. So it is sufficient for me to set forth certain passages in accordance with the present argument, of which there are two concerning wine drinking from the second book of the *Laws*, and another concerning diet from the *Timaeus*. The first passage from the second book of the *Laws* [666A-B] is as follows:

809 “Therefore, shouldn’t we establish a law maintaining that children (παῖδες [*paides*]) up to age 18 not drink any wine at all, teaching that one ought not to pour fire upon fire in body and soul before one advances to engage life’s troubles, and keeping in mind the manic constitution of young people (τῶν νέων [*tōn neōn*]); and after that age, allowing them to drink wine in moderation until 30 years of age, but maintaining that the youth (νέος [*neos*]) should abstain from strong drink (μέθη [*methē*]) and excessive wine (πολυoinία [*polyoinia*]); but allowing the one who is near 40 years in age and who dines in the common mess to call upon the other gods and especially to invoke Dionysus into that mystic rite and amusement of older men (τῶν πρεσβυτῶν [*tōn presbytōn*]), namely, wine, which was given to humankind as an aid, a remedy against the harshness of old age (τοῦ γήρωος [*tou gērōs*]), so that the character of the soul might become forgetful of grief and despair, softened from its increasing hardness, just as iron plunged into fire becomes likewise more malleable?”

From this passage, I [Galen] exhort the genuine Platonists to remember not only what is said here about wine drinking, but also what is said about the differences between ages. 810 For he says that the nature of adolescents (τῶν μεираκίων [*tōn meirakiōn*]) is manic, and that of old men (τῶν γερόντων [*tōn gerontōn*]) is harsh, dispirited and hard,

doubtless not on account of the number of years they lived, but in accordance with the temperament (κρᾶσις [*krasis*]) of body which is peculiar to each period of life. For the temperament of adolescents is hot and full-blooded (ἡ μὲν γὰρ τῶν μαιρακίων θερμὴ καὶ πολυαῖμος [*hē de tōn meirakiōn thermē kai polyaimos*]), but that of old men is low in blood and cold (ἡ δὲ τῶν γερόντων ὀλιγαῖμός τε καὶ ψυχρά [*hē de tōn gerontōn oligaimos te kai psychra*]); and for this reason a drink of wine is beneficial to old men since it elevates the coldness which is typical of their age to a warm balance (συμμετρία θερμασία [*symmetria thermasia*]); but for those who are still growing it has the opposite effect. For wine overheats their natural constitution (φύσις [*physis*]), which boils and moves excessively, and having moved it, the wine drives it to overindulgences and excesses. Plato says these and many other things in the second book of the *Laws* about wine drinking which would be beneficial to those who wish to read them.⁵⁴

Plato recognized a four-stage life cycle, corresponding to the four seasons, and here Galen follows Plato's recommendation that "children up to age eighteen" drink no wine.⁵⁵ This corresponds to the Hippocratic rule that in springtime adults should drink wine "very diluted." Plato's recommendation for drinking "in moderation" was aimed at those in the second stage of life, which he counted up to age 30.⁵⁶ Galen taught that young men are "hot" by nature, so that wine easily "overheats" them.⁵⁷

Of course, young men everywhere disregarded Plato's advice, and youth were notorious for their drunken revelries and all manner of carousing, impetuosity and passion.⁵⁸ Humoral theory explained why young men in particular were liable to the captivation of the cup. A young man in the summer of life, so the theory went, had a naturally hot temperament, and wine "added fire to fire." So it was important that a young man drink in moderation and that his wine be properly mixed with water. Access to wine was a mark of entrance into the world of adult men, including the right to recline at a common table and have strong drink (μέθη [*methē*]).⁵⁹

When seen in light of the stereotype of youth, the admonition "no longer drink water only, but use a little wine..." might suggest an image of a young man on the threshold of adult privileges and responsibilities. This is, indeed, how Erasmus understood this verse, which he paraphrased:

I think that you have been abstemious enough up to this time.
From now on do not drink only water, but instead use a

moderate measure of wine. Let the fact that you have abstained from wine up to the present be attributed to the heat of early youth. Now it is time for you to give thought to your health so that you can be equal to performing all the duties of a bishop. The stomach is bolstered by a moderate measure of wine; drinking only water can be very harmful to it...⁶⁰

Erasmus thus combined ancient humoral theory of human development with the medicinal use of wine to make sense of this exhortation to a young church leader. Since Timothy is a young disciple learning to carry on the tradition he learned from his teacher, we should consider more fully how abstinence from wine functioned in the training of young philosophers.

e. Abstinence and the Philosophers.

Apart from considerations of religious purity, some philosophers advised drinking in moderation as a matter of self-discipline,⁶¹ while others advised complete abstinence for the same purpose.⁶² The Cynics especially urged their followers to drink water, which is readily supplied by nature.⁶³ By contrast with that extreme position, the Stoics urged moderation,⁶⁴ but even they could appreciate the value of drinking only water. A passage from Epictetus is instructive:

Great power is always dangerous for the beginner (ἀρχόμενος [*archomenos*]). We ought, therefore, to bear such things according to our power—nay in accordance with nature [*lacuna* ...] but not for the consumptive. 21 Practice (μελέτησον [*meletēson*]) at some one time a style of living as one who is ill, that at some other time you may live as one who is healthy. Take no food; drink only water (ὕδροπότησον [*hydropotēson*]); refrain at some one time altogether from desire (ὀρέξεως [*odexeōs*]), that at some other time you may exercise desire, and then in a rational manner (εὐλογῶς [*eulogōs*]). And if you do so in a rational manner (εὐλογῶς [*eulogōs*]) whenever you have some good in you, you will desire well. 22 “No, but we wish to live as sages (σοφοί [*sophoi*]) and to benefit people immediately.” What sort of benefit? Indeed, have you benefited yourself? But you wish to convert them. Indeed, have you converted yourself? Do you wish to benefit them? 23 Show them in yourself what sort of people philosophy makes, and stop talking nonsense. As you eat, you benefit those who eat with you; as you drink, you benefit those who drink with you; as you yield to everybody,

as you give place, as you carry yourself, in this way you benefit them and don't spray them with your own spittle.⁶⁵

This passage brings together several ideas that are important for understanding 1 Timothy 5:23 within the context of a paraenesis for young teachers. First, the addressee is a beginner (ἀρχόμενος [*archomenos*], 20). So also, in the PE, Timothy is characterized as a "youth" (1 Tim 4:12; cf. 2 Tim 2:22), and his peer group is among the "younger men" (1 Tim 5:1; cf. Tit 2:6-8). He relates to older men (πρεσβύτεροι [*presbyteroi*]) as to fathers (1 Tim 5:1), presumably even when he is "laying on hands" (5:17-25).

Second, the beginner is eager to benefit others immediately (22), but Epictetus says he will influence people more effectively by his example of living rationally than by any arguments he could offer at this early stage. His conduct in all areas of life demonstrates "what sort of person philosophy makes" (23). The beginner does not yet know enough to benefit his hearers by words, and he "talks nonsense" and "sprays them with spittle" (23). So also, Timothy's effectiveness will depend upon how he sets "an example (τύπος [*typos*]) for the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (4:12), so that his "progress will become evident" (φανερὰ [*phanera*], 4:15).

Third, abstinence from wine functions along with fasting and abstinence from other desires as part of the philosopher's regimen. Such abstention is for practice (μελέτης [*meletēs*]) in the good habits of the philosophical lifestyle. According to Epictetus, a beginner must build up gradually through discipline and practice.⁶⁶ So also, "Timothy" is exhorted, "Exercise (γύμναζε [*gymnaze*]) yourself for piety" (4:7). "Paul" exhorts him, "Do not fail to practice (ἀμέλει [*amelei*]) the gift that is in you...practice (μελέτα [*meleta*]) these things" (4:14-15).

Fourth, by abstaining from various desires, the philosopher learns how to engage those desires "in a rational manner" (εὐλόγως [*eulogōs*], 21). To drink "rationally" as a Stoic is to drink in moderation, just as drinking "knowledgeably" for medicinal purposes means drinking in moderation,⁶⁷ and just as the only appropriate way for adults to drink is in moderation.

In the instruction to "drink a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments," therefore, we see an intersection of philosophical moral exhortation with common theories of physiology and human development. The philosophers advocated temperance (σωφροσύνη [*sōphrosynē*]) and self-control (ἐγκράτεια [*egkrateia*]) as antidotes to fleshly desires, including wine. They did not limit their admonitions to youth; yet to the extent that philosophy students were typically young men and to the extent that young men

were understood to be especially susceptible to fleshly desires, the admonitions of the philosophers can be seen to have had a more pointed application to youth.

When we read 1 Timothy 5:23 in light of philosophical directives for youth, speculation about hypothetical ascetic Gnostic teetotalers becomes pointless. This is not polemic against some supposed water-drinking sect, as if to demonstrate how wrong they were. Abstinence from wine was commendable among pagans, Jews and Christians, so that this command to “drink a little wine” would hardly constitute an effective polemic. Nor is it a weak-kneed compromise with the dominant culture. Rather, inasmuch as medicine and philosophy were closely related in antiquity, we should not be surprised to see a bit of medical advice tossed into a section of moral exhortation. If we understand Timothy’s abstinence as an exercise in purity, then we can see that his drinking “a little wine,” including drinking for medicinal purposes, could also function as part of his own exemplary behavior, in this case demonstrating appropriate use of wine. By his exemplary behavior, the youthful Timothy gains credibility in his administration of his duties toward older men.

End Notes

¹An earlier version of this paper was presented in the Disputed Paulines Section of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2004. My thanks to Trevor Thompson for comments and suggestions.

²So John Chrysostom, *Hom. 1 Tim.* 10.2 (PG 62, 550); 16.1 (PG 62, 587). As a variation, Hanson, *Pastoral Epistles*, 104, takes it as polemic against the “pseudo-ascetic purity of the false teachers.” Cf. Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians I: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 277. Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 375-376, is more cautious about assuming the ascetic influences of false teachers but does not offer an alternative explanation for 5:23.

³Martin Dibelius & Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, trans. P. Buttolph & A. Yarbro (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 65-67, 80-81, which many cite without question.

⁴Alastair H. B. Logan, *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 82-85, cites *Apocryphon of John* 25.16-26.7 and *Testimony of Truth* 69.7-24, to show that, “this

rigorous ascetic strain runs right through the very varied contents of the Nag Hammadi Library, as one of the few connecting links” (p. 84). He finds no support for the heresiologists’ charges of Gnostic libertinism (p. 85).

⁵Some sects taught a spiritual “fasting” (*Gos. Thom.* 14; Ptolemy, *Flora* 33.5.10-15). Self-contradictory Critics accused them of both rejecting meat (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.24.2) and gluttony (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.6.4.; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 26.5.8); as well as misrepresenting their ascetic practices (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 40.1.4). On varieties of Gnostic asceticism, see David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 62-72, 90-111; K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 2nd ed., trans. R. McL. Wilson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983), 257-262.

⁶Dibelius-Conzelmann, *Pastoral Epistles*, 65-67.

⁷On the Encratites, see Henry Chadwick, “Enkrateia,” *RAC* 5, 343-365; H. F. Stander, “Encratites,” *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. E. Ferguson (2nd ed.; New York: Garland, 1990), 298-299; Wm. L. Petersen, “Tatian the Assyrian,” in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian ‘Heretics,’* ed. A. Marjanen & P. Luomanen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 125-158; W. M. Calder, “The Epigraphy of the Anatolian Heresies,” in *Anatolian Studies: Presented to W. M. Ramsay*, ed. W. H. Buckler & W. M. Calder (Manchester: University Press, 1923), 59-91, esp. pp. 67-74, 84-87.

⁸Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.28.1.

⁹Clement, *Paedagogue* 2.2.33.1.

¹⁰Clement, *Paedagogue* 2.2.20.2.

¹¹Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 8.20 (=8.13 ANF).

¹²Tertullian, *On Fasting* 15 (trans., S. Thelwall, ANF 4, 112).

¹³Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 231-233, suggests that 5:23 speaks against unorthodox Christians who used bread and water only for the Eucharist, on which see Epiphanius, *Haer.* 46.392; 47.400, and comments in Calder, “Epigraphy,” 73. Even if some such groups existed in the second and third centuries, nothing in our context suggests that Eucharistic practice was an issue for the PE.

¹⁴Peter Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 82-99.

¹⁵McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 67-88. Cf. Stanley K. Stowers, “Greeks Who Sacrifice and Those Who Do Not,” in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A.*

Meeks, ed., L. M. White and O. L. Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 293-333; Garnsey, *Food and Society*, 86.

¹⁶Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives* 6.90, 104; ps-Crates, *Ep.* 18 (A. J. Malherbe, *The Cynic Epistles* [SBL SBS 12; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1977], 68).

¹⁷D. R. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983).

¹⁸E. F. Scott, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936), xxxiv, 69, argues that drinking only water represented an excess of virtue that would violate the Greek ideal of a Golden Mean.

¹⁹On the pitfalls of mirror-reading, see John M. G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *JSNT* 31 (1987), 73-93; Trevor Thompson, "As if Genuine: Interpreting the Pseudepigraphic Second Thessalonians," in *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen*, ed., J. Frey, J. Herzer, M. Jenßen & C. K. Rothschild (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 471-488. For a nuanced analysis of the opponents in 1 Timothy, see Jerry L. Sumney, "Servants of Satan", "False Brothers" and Other Opponents of Paul (JSNTSup 188; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 254-278, who finds "no evidence in 1 Timothy that these opponents are Gnostics or proto-gnostics" (278), and he does not list 5:25 among references to opponents.

²⁰For elaboration, Christopher R. Hutson, *My True Child: The Rhetoric of Youth in the Pastoral Epistles* (PhD diss., Yale University, 1998).

²¹Abraham J. Malherbe, "How to Treat Old Women and Old Men: The Use of Philosophical Traditions and Scripture in 1 Timothy 5," in *Scripture and Traditions: Essays on Early Judaism and Christianity in Honor of Carl R. Holladay*, ed., P. Gray and G. R. O'Day (NovTSup 129; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 263-290.

²²E.g., Towner, *Letters*, 361-363, 373-365.

²³R. Alistair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 1994), 20-66, quotation from 65.

²⁴Campbell, *Elders*, 67-96, quotation from 95.

²⁵Campbell, *Elders*, 197.

²⁶Campbell, *Elders*, 201-202, refers to the "new post of ἐπίσκοπος κατὰ πόλιν," placing these letters on a trajectory toward the monepiscopacy that Ignatius takes for granted. James W. Aageson, *Paul, the Pastoral Epistles, and the Early Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 123-140, who concludes that, on a trajectory

between Paul and Ignatius, the theological and structural patterns of ecclesiology in the PE are “closer to Ignatius than to Paul” (138).

²⁷On how 5:17-25 coheres, see William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 304-306; Ray Van Neste, *Cohesion and Structure in the Pastoral Epistles* (JSNTS 280; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 60-66, though the chiasmic analysis seems artificial. The place of 5:23 within 5:17-25 and the structure of the argument as a whole are debated. Ceslas Spicq, *Les épîtres pastorales* (4th ed.; Paris: Lecoffre, 1969), 549, declares, “this chapter is particularly poorly composed.” Dibelius-Conzelmann, *Pastoral Epistles*, 80-81, take 5:21-22 as a separate section. Norbert Brox, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (4th ed.; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1969), 203, and Lorenz Oberlinner, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (3 vols.; Freiburg: Herder, 1994-96, see a new section at 5:23-25. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles in the New English Bible with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 82-83, includes 6:1-2 within the discussion of elders, some of whom, in his view, were slaves. The majority read 5:17-25 as one section pertaining to elders, though usually treating 5:23 as a digression.

²⁸Cf. 2 Tim 2:21, where a “vessel of honor” is “sanctified” (ἡγιασμένον [*hēiasmenon*]), if he “purifies himself from these” (ἐκκαθάθη ἑαυτὸν ἀπὸ τούτων [*ekkarathē heauton apo toutōn*]), the antecedent of “these” being the false teachers of 2:16-18.

²⁹Dan 1 (LXX) does not use the word “purity,” but Daniel determined not to defile himself (ἀλισγηθῆ [*aligēthē*], 1:8), and the four young men drank only water (ὕδροποτεῖν [*hydropotein*] 1:12) and abstained from wine and dainty food. On abstinence from wine as a religious scruple, consider priestly abstinence (Lev 10:8-11); the Nazirite vow (Num 6:2-4); the Rechabites (Jer 35); Philo on the Passover (Philo, *Special Laws* 2.148); the Therapeutae (Philo, *Contemplative Life* 4.37); the life of Torah (*m. ’Aboth* 6.4, alluding to Ezek 4:11); and vows before a god (Plutarch, *On Control of Anger*, Mor. 464B). On the relation between sex and diet in ancient asceticism, see G. P. Corrington, “The Defense of the Body and the Discourse of Appetite: Continence and Control in the Greco-Roman World,” *Semeia* 57 (1992), 65-74.

³⁰R. Jackson, *Doctors and Diseases in the Roman Empire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 82, discusses evidence from ancient amphorae used to transport medicinal wines.

³¹Dioscorides, *De Materia Medica* 5.7.1, which goes on to recommend it for “women who drink water only (γυναιξίν

ὑδροποτούσαις [gynaixin hydropotousais], cf. Aelian, *Varia Historia* 2.38).

³²“But if anyone suffers from his stomach, he should read out loud, and after the reading take a walk, then exercise himself at handball and at drill or at anything else which brings the upper part of the body into play; on an empty stomach he should not drink water but hot wine; if he digests readily he should take two meals a day; drink light and dry wine, and after a meal drinks should preferably be cold...” (Celsus, *On Medicine* 1.8.1-2, trans., Spencer, LCL).

³³Pliny, *Natural History* 23.38.

³⁴*Moral Epistles* 95.22.

³⁵Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine* (2nd ed.; New York: Routledge, 2013), 53-86; Jacque Jouanna, *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen: Selected Papers*, ed. P. van der Eijk; trans. Neil Allies (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 335-359.

³⁶Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 60-61.

³⁷Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 59, 74, 81.

³⁸Hippocrates, *Nature of Man* 4-5; Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 78-86, describes variations on this theory within the Hippocratic Corpus.

³⁹Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 80.

⁴⁰On Dogmatic, Empiricist, Methodist, and Pneumatic schools of medicine, see Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 116-253; John Scarborough, *Roman Medicine* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969), 38-51.

⁴¹Scarborough, *Roman Medicine* 182, n. 17, lists inscriptional evidence that physicians from Cos were in demand around the Mediterranean. While all the schools honored Hippocrates, the Pneumatists, who flourished in the early Empire, made most use of Hippocratic humoral theory (*ibid.*, 42, 47-48; Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 207-213).

⁴²Galen, *On Hippocrates' Nature of Man*, argues that *Nature of Man* 1-8 on the doctrine of humors was genuine, and he saw this as foundational for Hippocrates' thought. On Galen's reading of Hippocrates, see Jouanna, *Greek Medicine*, 313-333, who thinks the treatise was written entirely by Hippocrates' student Polybus.

⁴³Galen, *On Hippocrates' Nature of Man* 1.29-32; Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 81-82; Jouanna, *Greek Medicine*, 339.

⁴⁴Galen, *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* 8.6.17-19. Diogenes Laertius 8.10, ascribes to Pythagoras the division of the life span into four 20-year periods corresponding to the four seasons, and Galen correlated these with four humors. However, Hippocrates and

Galen did not view the “seasons” of the life span as four equal periods. Hippocrates, *Nature of Man* 15, defines the period of cool and dry adulthood as age 25-42 (and Jones, LCL, notes textual variants as age 20-45 or age 30-45). In addition, Jouanna, *Greek Medicine* 340-359, shows that Galen did not fully correlate the four humors with four temperaments (sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic), an idea that would come in late antiquity. But aspects of this line of thought, especially melancholy, were widespread (e.g., Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.5; Plutarch, *Lysander* 2.3; ps-Aristotle, *Problems* 30.1), and Galen touched on them.

⁴⁵Hippocrates, *Nature of Man* 7; cf. Plato, *Symp.* 188AB.

⁴⁶Hippocrates, *Nature of Man* 12; *Aphorisms* 1.13-15, identifies heat with the growing bodies of children and youth.

⁴⁷Hippocrates, *Regimen in Health* 2.

⁴⁸Susan P. Mattern, *Galen & the Rhetoric of Healing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 102-105, points out that this theory is describing males. Galen associated females with the qualities cold and wet, whereas the ideal human was an adult male in the prime of life, hot and dry.

⁴⁹Hippocrates, *Nature of Man* 7-8; *Humors* 13-14.

⁵⁰E.g., Hippocrates, *Airs, Waters, Places*, discusses climate; *Regimen in Health* discusses diet and exercise appropriate to specific “age, season, habit, region, and personal constitution” (2); cf. *Regimen in Acute Diseases*.

⁵¹Hippocrates, *Ancient Medicine* 13; *Acute Diseases* 50-64, especially 50, 51, 53, 61, 62 on effects of wine for an excess of bile. This tractate discusses similar humoral effects of barley gruel (10-49) and baths (65-68).

⁵²Galen, *Habits of the Soul* 4.778 Kühn (trans. Brock, LCL).

⁵³*Regimen in Health* 1 (trans., Jones, LCL).

⁵⁴Galen, *Habits of the Soul* 4.808.15—810.15 Kühn.

⁵⁵The diet of small children should include much milk and “very little wine” (Aristotle, *Pol.* 7.15.1 [1336A]). Jerome, *Ep.* 107.8, reflects the common wisdom that small girls should not be given dainty food or wine but then confuses the issue by citing 1 Tim 5:23 as if it were medical advice pertaining to children.

⁵⁶It is necessary to protect the young (οἱ νέοι [*hoi neoi*]) in the pleasures of food and drink by teaching them to use it in moderation (μετρίως, Plutarch, *How Young Man Should Listen to Poetry*, Mor. 14F).

⁵⁷Galen, *On Good and Bad Humors* (Kühn 6.805, 809). Cf. “For just like those who drink wine, youth are very hot by nature”

(Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.12.8 [1389A]). Cf. ps.-Aristotle, *Problems* 3 (871-876) for numerous examples of the heating effects of wine on temperament, including:

"Why is it that children, who are hot, are not fond of wine, while Scythians and courageous men, who are hot, are fond of wine? Isn't it because the latter are hot and dry (for such is the constitution of men), while children are hot and moist? And fondness of drink is desire for something moist. Therefore, the moisture prevents children from being thirsty; for their desire is something internal" (ps-Aristotle, *Problems* 872A; cf. Plutarch, *Alexander* 4.3-4); and

"Why is it that those who drink heavily are prone to tears? Isn't it because they become hot and moist? They are, therefore, lacking self-control and so are moved by small things" (ps-Aristotle, *Problems* 874B).

⁵⁸Hutson, *My True Child*, chapter three; cf. Emiel Eyben, *Restless Youth in Ancient Rome*, trans., Patrick Daly (London: Routledge, 1993), 28-41.

⁵⁹Aristotle, *Politics* 7.15.9 (1336B). Giuseppe Cambiano, "Becoming an Adult," in *The Greeks*, ed., Jean-Pierre Vernant; trans., C. Lambert & T. L. Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 86-119, discusses children's access to wine at certain festivals as a "first step in the process of integration into the adult world" in classical Athens (100-101).

⁶⁰Erasmus, "Paraphrase on the First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Timothy," in *Collected Works of Erasmus* 44, trans. J. J. Bateman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 33 (=Leiden 7.1053).

⁶¹Ps-Crates, *Ep.* 10; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.12.11.

⁶²Pythagoras, according to Diogenes Laërtius 8.13; Plutarch, *On Keeping Well*, Mor. 123B.

⁶³Diogenes Laërtius 6.104; ps-Crates, *Epp.* 14, 18 (both addressed to youths); ps-Diogenes, *Ep.* 37.4-6; ps-Socrates, *Ep.* 9.2; ps-Lucian, *Cynicus* 5.

⁶⁴Regarding festivals, "do what the crowd does, but in a different way" (Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 18.4); on moderation instead of extreme (i.e., Cynic) asceticism, cf. *Moral Epistles* 5.2-6; 14.14; 19.2; 39.5-6. For a similar view among milder Cynics, cf. ps-Anacharsis, *Ep.* 3; ps-Crates, *Ep.* 10.1.

⁶⁵Epictetus, *Diatribes* 3.13.20-23 (trans. Oldfather, LCL, modified).

⁶⁶Cf. Epictetus, *Diatribes* 3.12.11; 3.14.1-13.

⁶⁷According to Theognis, cited in Galen, *Habits of the Soul* 778 Kühn (quoted above).