

The Role of 'Eusebeia' in the Inscriptions of Ephesus and the Letters to Timothy and Titus

Gary G. Hoag, Ph.D.

Few terms in the Greco-Roman world of the first century CE carried as much social significance, economic obligation, and religious expectation as *eusebeia*, often translated as “piety,” “godliness,” or “devotion.” In the metropolis of Ephesus, the semantic range of the *euseb-* root linked the people to the celestial hierarchy of the gods and the terrestrial powers of the Roman Empire. In epigraphic evidence, it appears widely, chiseled in monuments, public decrees, and sacred boundary stones.¹

New Testament scholars have wrestled with the frequency of *eusebeia* in the letters to Timothy and Titus—10 of 15 NT occurrences—largely due to its conspicuous absence in the undisputed Pauline epistles. Critics like Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann argued that the language signaled a “bourgeois” accommodation to Greco-Roman ethical standards, and that the early Christian movement had lost its radical eschatological edge and had settled comfortably into society.²

However, recent advancements in historical analysis, local epigraphy, and contextual theology—spearheaded by scholars such as Philip H. Towner, Luke Timothy Johnson, James R. Harrison, Paul Trebilco, and Michael Immendörfer—have overturned this view.³ Rather than a passive assimilation to cultural norms, might the use of *eusebeia* in the letters to Timothy and Titus represent a tactical reimagining of the social and contextual fixture? This represents the focus of this paper.

The fresh research follows in three sections: (1) the use of *eusebeia* in the inscriptions of Ephesus in the first century CE, (2) a review of the 10 texts in which the term appears in the letters to Timothy and Titus alongside the epigraphic evidence, and (3) a summary of findings for biblical reading and interpretation related to missionary training in this context and for contemporary application.

Section 1: The Epigraphic Profile of *Eusebeia* in Ephesus in the First Century CE

An examination of the first century CE inscriptions of Ephesus reveals the *euseb-* root in four areas: (1) imperial edicts correcting administrative and priestly abuses, (2) rosters of the sacred college of *Kouretes*, (3) international diplomatic monuments celebrating imperial favor, and (4) monumental private financial foundations designed to merge religious devotion with everlasting personal honor.

¹ For the noun, εὐσεβεία, see: I.Eph 21, 24, 26, 27, 233, 236, 237, 666a, 683a, 702, 853, 886, 1024, 1380, 1480, 1538, 3041, 3419. For the verb, εὐσεβέω, see: I.Eph 26, 27, 1391. For the adjective, εὐσεβής, see: I.Eph 11, 17, 21, 27, 203, 217, 296/9, 300, 302-4a, 314/5, 666a, 680, 690, 824, 892, 941/2, 957, 989a, 1001-6, 1008-10, 1012-24, 1028-30, 1032-8, 1040-4, 1047-51/3, 1065-7/8, 1084, 1352, 1565, 1578b, 1579, 1588, 1590a, 1598, 1859, 2090, 2426, 3059, 3118, 3263, 3408, 3418a, 4336.

² They put forth a *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* reading of the letters to Timothy and Titus and a deuterio-Pauline view of authorship. Cf. Martin Dibelius, *Urchristentum und Kultur: Rektoratsrede gehalten bei der Stiftungsfeier der Universität am 22. November 1927* (Heidelberg: Universitätsreden 2; Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1928) and Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*. Translated by Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro. Edited by Helmut Koester (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972). Others built on this framework, including David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles*. (SBL Dissertation Series 71; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-Historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), and Reggie M. Kidd, *Wealth and Beneficence in the Pastoral Epistles: A “Bourgeois” Form of Early Christianity?* (SBL Dissertation Series 122; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

³ See: Philip H. Towner, *The Goal of Our Instruction: The Structure of Theology and Ethics in the Pastoral Epistles* (JSNT Supplement Series 34; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation and Introduction* (Anchor Bible 35; New York: Doubleday, 2001); James R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn, eds. *The First Urban Churches 3: Ephesus* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018); James R. Harrison and Bradley J. Bitner, eds. *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity 11A: Texts from Ephesus* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2024); James R. Harrison, ed. *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity 11B: Essays on Ephesus* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2024); Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). Michael Immendörfer, *Ephesians and Artemis: The Cult of the Great Goddess of Ephesus as the Epistle's Context* (WUNT 2. Reihe 436. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

This section highlights a sample inscription from each of the four areas with Greek text, translation, and comments. This step maps an epigraphic profile of *eusebeia* in Ephesus in the first century CE, a setting rich with commercial and religious history, home to the magnificent Temple of Artemis, the administrative hub for the provincial Imperial Cult, and *neokoros* (temple warden) of the Emperor.

A. Imperial Edict Correcting Administrative and Priestly Abuses (44 CE) – I.Eph 18

One of the most illuminating legal texts of the early Roman Empire among the inscriptions discovered at Ephesus is the Edict of Paullus Fabius Persicus, the Roman proconsul of Asia during the reign of Emperor Claudius. This extensive document etched in multiple locations (I.Eph 17-19) addressed the systemic financial corruption that had plagued the Temple of Artemis.⁴

The text of I.Eph 18 reveals that local civic leaders, priests, and administrative elites were using the temple for personal gain—selling off sacred offices, misallocating funds meant for public sacrifices, and exploiting tax exemptions for personal enrichment. In correcting these financial abuses, the proconsul explicitly frames the restoration of fiscal integrity as an act of cosmic piety:

Greek text excerpt (I.Eph 18, lines 12–16):
...διὰ τὴν πρὸς τὴν θεὸν εὐσέβειαν καὶ τὴν
πρὸς τὸν οἶκον τῶν Σεβαστῶν εὐνοίαν...
ὅπως τὰ δίκαια τῇ θεῷ μετὰ πάσης ἀγνείας
καὶ εὐσεβείας ἀποδοθῇ...

English translation:
"...on account of our piety (*eusebeia*) toward the
goddess and our goodwill toward the house of
the Augusti... so that the proper dues may be
restored to the goddess with all purity and
piety (*eusebeia*)..."

The official Roman administrative framework directly equates *eusebeia* with corporate structural health and proper economic bookkeeping. For an Ephesian, to be "pious" meant maintaining an undisturbed, financially stable relationship between the Roman state and the temple infrastructure. True piety ensured that the sacrificial fires remained lit, which in turn guaranteed that divine blessings and commercial wealth would continue to flow into the province.

E.A. Judge and James R. Harrison note that the edict's vocabulary—specifically its denunciation of the "unjust desire" for shameful gain and the "corrupt management" of the temple priesthood—may provide a cultural context for Pauline warnings regarding greed and leadership.⁵ As a detailed edict placed in many locations, it undoubtedly shaped the culture in Ephesus in the first century CE.

B. The Sacred Rosters of the *Kouretes* (92-93 CE) – I.Eph 1012

Throughout the first century CE, the *Prytaneion* or City Hall in Ephesus housed the sacred hearth containing the eternal flame of the city. This space was managed by an elite college of sacred officials known as the *Kouretes*. According to the local foundation myth, the *Kouretes* clashed their weapons to hide the infant Artemis (and her twin brother Apollo) from Hera.⁶

By the Roman era, the *Kouretes* represented an 6-member board of elite, wealthy citizens tasked with reenacting foundational mysteries, performing daily public sacrifices, and protecting the sacred identity of the city. The rosters chiseled onto the structural pillars of the *Prytaneion* record

⁴ I.Eph 17 contains Latin text fragments on monumental blocks in the Upper Agora and *Prytaneion* area. It outlines the governor's religious credentials and administrative mandate. I.Eph 18 features the best preserved copy of the edict. It appears in the Lower Agora and along the public avenues. I.Eph 19 provides supplementary fragments found inside the Great Theatre of Ephesus.

⁵ E.A. Judge and James R. Harrison. "Ethical Terms in St. Paul and the Inscriptions of Ephesus." In *The First Christians in the Roman World: Augustan and New Testament Essays*, by E. A. Judge (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 368–377.

⁶ Strabo, *Geography*, 14.1.20.

the names of the *Kouretes* in a consistent and formulaic manner. I.Eph 1001-1005 date from 27 BCE –37 CE, I.Eph 1006-1015 date from 40 CE–96 CE, and this sample dates to 92–93 CE:

Greek text excerpt (I.Eph 1012, lines 1–4):
[ἐπὶ πρυτάν]νεως Κλαυδίας Κρατείας
Βερειάνης... οἱ ἱεροὶ κουρήτες εὐσεβεῖς...

English translation:
"[In the year of the prytanis] Claudia Krateia
Veriane... the sacred *Kouretes*, the pious ones
(*eusebeis*)..."

Here, *eusebeis* functions as an elite administrative title of civic prestige. It was a hereditary or financially acquired badge of honor of the top tier of Ephesian aristocracy. To be numbered among the *eusebeis* required vast financial capital, as *Kouretes* were expected to cover event expenses and fund lavish banquets for the people. Piety was thus structurally blocked off from the lower classes; it was the exclusive domain of those who possessed the wealth to buy systemic social leverage.

Guy MacLean Rogers reports the extensiveness of this pattern: "In all of the early lists of *Kouretes*, Artemis's youths are described as *eusebeis*."⁷ Steven J. Friesen's work on these lists unpacks *eusebeia* into three key dimensions within the epigraphic landscape of Roman Ephesus: (1) shift from inner dispositions to costly outward performance, (2) adherence to "ancestral customs" as a tool for civic identity, and (3) the merging of traditional religion and the Imperial Cult.⁸

C. International Diplomatic Monument Celebrating Imperial Favor (89–90 CE) – I.Eph 233

As the first century CE progressed, *eusebeia* became increasingly linked with loyalty to the Roman Emperor. During the reign of Domitian, the neighboring city of Aphrodisias erected the monument Aphrodisias in the heart of Ephesus to celebrate its first *neokoria*—the provincial privilege of building an official imperial temple dedicated to the Flavian ruling family. This example showcases how *eusebeia* was used as an international currency of political alignment and alliance:

Greek text excerpt (I.Eph 233, lines 6–10):
...τῆς πρὸς τοὺς Σεβαστοὺς εὐσεβείας
ἔνεκεν καὶ τῆς πρὸς τὴν λαμπροτάτην
Ἐφεσίων πόλιν φιλίας...

English translation:
"...on account of their piety (*eusebeia*) toward
the Augusti and their friendship toward the
most illustrious city of the Ephesians..."

For a first century CE resident, this inscription sent a clear message: to dissent from the Imperial Cult or to refuse participation in the civic veneration of the Emperor was not a matter of personal theological preference; it was an act of treasonous impiety (*asebeia*) that threatened the stability and safety of the entire city. Bruce Winter adds that divine honors and public declarations of *eusebeia* toward the Emperor functioned as a non-negotiable metric of political loyalty to Rome.⁹

Helmut Engelmann and Dieter Knibbe describe the pairing of *eusebeia* (religious devotion) and *eunoia* (civic goodwill) in I.Eph 233 as a boilerplate linguistic formula for international relations for the cities of Asia Minor under Roman rule.¹⁰

D. Monumental Private Financial Foundations (104 CE) – I.Eph 27

⁷ Guy MacLean Rogers. *The Mysteries of Artemis of Ephesus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 122. Cf. Jan N. Bremmer, "Priestly Personnel of the Ephesian Artemision: Anatolian, Persian, Greek, and Roman Aspects." In *Practitioners of the Divine: Greek Priests and Religious Officials from Homer to Heliodorus*, ed. by Beate Dignas and Kai Trampedach (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 37-53; and, Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 22-28.

⁸ Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family*. (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 116; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 146-168.

⁹ Bruce W. Winter, *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians' Responses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 28-45.

¹⁰ Christoph Börker and Reinhold Merkelbach, eds. *Die Inschriften von Ephesos: Teil II* (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt GMBH, 1979).

Although carved into the walls of the Great Theatre at the very beginning of the second century, 104 CE, I.Eph 27 exists as a massive epigraphic record with more than 500 lines aimed at solidifying the civic ritual system that functioned in Ephesus throughout the first century CE. The contributor, Gaius Vibius Salutaris appears as an extraordinarily wealthy Roman equestrian who sought to secure his immortal social legacy within Ephesus.

Of interest to this study, “the *eusebeia* of Gaius Vibius Salutaris, a rich Ephesian, is honored nine times in I.Eph 27 for establishing annual lotteries, distributions, and a procession of statues in honor of the birth of Artemis.”¹¹ In the official letters embedded within the inscription, the Roman proconsul C. Aquillius Proculus enthusiastically commends Salutaris for this grand spectacle:

Greek text excerpt (I.Eph 27, lines 312–317):
 ...Γάιος Ούίβιος Σαλουτάριος, ἀνὴρ ἱππικῆς
 τάξεως... ἐκτενέστατα εἰσφέρει τὴν πρὸς
 τὴν θεὸν εὐσεβειαν καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸν οἶκον
 τῶν Σεβαστῶν...

English translation:
 "...Gaius Vibius Salutaris, a man of the
 equestrian order... has most extensively
 demonstrated his piety (*eusebeia*) toward the
 goddess and toward the house of the
 Augusti..."

The Salutaris foundation represents the ultimate intersection of material wealth, visual display, and civic piety in Ephesus. *Eusebeia* funds an elite-driven parade and activities designed to reinforce the prominence of Rome and the cosmic dominance of Artemis over the city and the people.

Section 2: The Radical Reconfiguration of *Eusebeia* in the Letters to Timothy and Titus

To the social and religious landscape of Ephesus, the letters to Timothy and Titus present a radical reconfiguration of *eusebeia*. The *euseb-* root appears a combined 10 times. Below is an analysis of these 10 texts, examined as they occur through the framework of the letters and supported by contemporary New Testament epigraphic and literary scholarship. Far from an absorption of cultural vocabulary, these texts represent a coordinated theological campaign to rescue *eusebeia* from the clutches of Artemis and the Imperial Cult, and connect it exclusively to the historical incarnation and ethical demands of Jesus Christ. This would make *eusebeia* accessible to everyone.

Text #1: 1 Timothy 2:1–2 – The Political Demotion of Imperial Piety

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness [ἐν πάσῃ εὐσεβείᾳ] and dignity."¹²

In this opening ethical instruction, the author of 1 Timothy commands the Ephesian house churches to pray for the ruling Roman authorities, including the “kings and all who are in high positions.” However, the underlying purpose of this prayer marks a stark departure from the civic ideology chiseled in inscriptions like I.Eph 233. The Aphrodisias monument directed *eusebeia* toward the Augusti as divine figures. In 1 Timothy 2:2, the direction of piety is radically repositioned. Believers pray for the political rulers, but they do not direct their *eusebeia* toward them.

¹¹ Gary G. Hoag, *Wealth in Ancient Ephesus and the First Letter to Timothy: Fresh Insights from Ephesiaca by Xenophon of Ephesus* (BBRS 11, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 33. Cf. Guy MacLean Rogers, *The Sacred Identity of Ephesos: Foundation Myths of a Roman City* (London: Routledge, 1991), Appendix 1.

¹² All biblical texts appear in NRSVUE unless otherwise noted.

Instead, prayer for the emperor emerges as a tactical request for political stability so that Christians can manifest their own multi-faceted godliness (*en paze eusebeia*). Philip H. Towner notes that the author here effectively de-sacralizes the Roman state: the emperor gets demoted from an object of divine devotion to a mere recipient of human intercession, and true piety is relocated away from public imperial temples into the quiet, everyday moral life of the Christian assembly.¹³

Text #2: 1 Timothy 3:16 – The True Cosmic Manifestation

"Without any doubt, the mystery of godliness is great [τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον]: He was revealed [ἐφανερώθη, also translated as "manifested"] in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory."

This passage stands as the theological center of 1 Timothy. The phrase "mystery of godliness" would likely bring to mind the ancestral rituals performed by the *Kouretes* in the *Prytaneion* (I.Eph 1012). Michael Immendörfer reports that the term "manifest" (*epiphanes*) was a specific title reserved for Artemis, who was hailed as the "most manifest goddess" (*epiphanestate theos*) and whose presence was made visible through the silver and gold statues of the *Salutaris* procession.¹⁴

In this light, 1 Timothy 3:16 executes a brilliant, poetic hijack of this "manifest" vocabulary. The text declares that the ultimate "mystery of piety" is not discovered by repeating a pagan ritual or located in a shiny metal statue. Rather, true godliness is a cosmic, historical reality concentrated entirely in the incarnation, vindication, and global proclamation of Jesus Christ.

Luke Timothy Johnson emphasizes this reality, noting that by framing Christ's life as the true "mystery of *eusebeia*," the text strips the local Ephesian cults of their claims to cosmic monopoly, providing early believers with an alternative narrative that shifts their gaze away from the material luxury of the temple toward the historical, crucified, and vindicated Messiah.¹⁵

Text #3: 1 Timothy 4:7–8 – The Accessibility of an Alternative Form of Godliness

"Have nothing to do with profane and foolish tales. Train yourself in godliness [πρὸς εὐσέβειαν], for, while physical training is of some value, godliness [ἡ εὐσέβεια] is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

In Ephesus, the preservation of "myths" (*mythoi*) paid people well. The *Kouretes* made money guarding and retelling the local mythic tales of birth of Artemis. 1 Timothy 4:7 commands a total break from this cultural industry, labeling these ancestral narratives as "profane and foolish tales." Gordon Fee writes, "Timothy is to put aside the 'silly myths' of the heretics and give himself to rigorous training—not physical training, which has some limited value, but training in *eusebeia*."¹⁶

In place of these mythic tales, the author introduces an athletic metaphor: "train yourself for godliness" (*gymnaze de seauton pros eusebeian*). In Ephesus, *eusebeia* was viewed as an inherited status or a political prize achieved via financial endowment (I.Eph 27, 1012). By reframing godliness as athletic training (*gymnasia*), the author makes the virtue widely available. True piety is no longer restricted to the wealthy elite who can afford to buy a priesthood; it is a discipline open to all men and women, from upper class citizens to lower-class laborers and slaves.

¹³ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 179-180.

¹⁴ Michael Immendörfer, *Ephesians and Artemis*, 90, 100-101.

¹⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 155.

¹⁶ Fee, Gordon D. *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*. (NIBC 13. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 102.

Text #4: 1 Timothy 6:3 – The Doctrine at the Heart of True Devotion

“Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness [τῇ κατ’ εὐσέβειαν διδασκαλίᾳ]...”

Here, the author ties *eusebeia* to orthodox, Christological instruction (*didaskalia*). For I. Howard Marshall, the phrase reveals that true Christian piety is impossible without an orthodox, Christ-centered doctrinal root.¹⁷ In the Greco-Roman world, piety linked to an orthopraxic system—it did not matter what you believed about the gods, as long as you performed the public sacrifices, joined in the civic parades, and paid your temple dues according to the ancestral laws (I.Eph 18).

1 Timothy 6:3 subverts this pragmatic approach. The author insists that true godliness is inseparable from internal cognitive assent to "sound words" and specific theological content centered on the Lord Jesus Christ. Piety shifts from an outward performance of civic ritual to an inward, intellectually robust commitment to Christian truth, creating a boundary marker between the household of God and the surrounding syncretistic religious culture of Ephesus.

Text #5: 1 Timothy 6:5–6 – The Decoupling of Piety and Profit

“...and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain [πορισμὸν εἶναι τὴν εὐσέβειαν]. Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment [ἔστιν δὲ πορισμὸς μέγας ἡ εὐσέβεια μετὰ αὐταρκείας].”

This passage mirrors and refutes the prevailing economic mindset chiseled in multiple places in Ephesus. As documented in the edict of Paullus Fabius Persicus (I.Eph 18), the religious infrastructure of the city was viewed by the elite class as a primary "means of gain" where religious prestige led directly to political power, tax immunities, and financial enrichment.

The author of 1 Timothy targets false teachers who may attempt to import this Ephesian mindset into the household of God, viewing Christian ministry as an avenue for acquiring social capital and financial leverage. James R. Harrison highlights that 1 Timothy 6:5–6 acts as a direct strike against this elite-driven, transactional model of religion.¹⁸ By introducing the concept of contentment (*autarkeia*), the text decouples piety from profit. True *eusebeia* is found not in accumulating wealth through sacred office, but in a radical satisfaction with Christ and basic food and clothing.

Text #6: 1 Timothy 6:11 – The Virtuous Pursuit of God’s Servants

“But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness [εὐσέβειαν], faith, love, endurance, gentleness.”

In contrast to elite benefactors like Salutaris, who bought public honor (*philotimia*) and civic fame (I.Eph 27), the Christian servant gets instructed to take an entirely different path. Philip H. Towner points out that this list of virtues is deliberately designed to form a counter-cultural service profile.¹⁹ While the secular leaders of Ephesus chased after status markers that separated them from the lower-class populace, Timothy must shun all that and pursue inward virtues instead.

¹⁷ I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 639.

¹⁸ James R. Harrison, "An Epigraphic Portrait of Ephesus and Its Villages," in *The First Urban Churches 3: Ephesus*, ed. James R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 45–49.

¹⁹ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 412.

Text #7: 2 Timothy 3:5 – Unmasking the Theatrical Performance of Religion

“...holding to the outward form of godliness [εὐσεβείας] but denying its power. Avoid them!”

In this prophetic warning concerning the difficulties of the last days, the author targets individuals within the community who exhibit a superficial, outward "shape" or "form" of godliness (*morphosin eusebeias*). When read against the background of the Ephesian Great Theatre, where the Salutaris foundation chiseled its decrees (I.Eph 27), this phrase carries immense rhetorical power. Ephesian religion was, by definition, all about the outward choreographed public activities.²⁰

2 Timothy 3:5 unmasks this entire system, declaring that a piety built merely on public display, social conformity, and external performance is fundamentally dead, lacking any power (*dynamis*). William D. Mounce notes, "They have the shape of godliness but not the substance... Their religion is a performance; they wear the mask of piety, but they have actively repudiated the very power that makes true godliness possible."²¹ The missionary instruction here is clear and direct: avoid those who treat the Christian faith as a stage for social advancement or political safety, and focus instead on a deep, hidden spiritual reality that transforms actual ethical behavior.

Text #8: 2 Timothy 3:12 – Persecution is the Cost of True Piety

“Indeed, all who want to live a godly life [εὐσεβῶς ζῆν] in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

This short sentence shakes the foundations of Greco-Roman civic religion. In Ephesus, the main reason an individual or a city performed *eusebeia* toward Artemis or the Roman Emperors was to secure safety, peace, and gain. Piety was an insurance policy against disaster. If the city honored the gods, the gods would honor the city with economic success and imperial protection (I.Eph 18, 233).

2 Timothy 3:12 reverses this formula with shocking force. The author declares that living a godly life "in Christ Jesus" rather than in the service of Artemis or the Augusti results not in material gain or civic honor but in social marginalization and persecution. Craig S. Keener confirms this. "In the Roman world, piety (*eusebeia*) was meant to secure the favor of the gods for civic stability. To claim that true devotion to God would bring immediate persecution completely subverted the foundational promises of the imperial and regional cults."²²

Text #9: Titus 1:1 – The Ultimate Aim of Apostolic Ministry

“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness [τῆς κατ’ εὐσέβειαν]...”

Moving beyond the geographic confines of Ephesus to the island of Crete, the opening greeting of the letter to Titus shows that this reconfigured model of *eusebeia* was a universal feature of early Christian missionary theology. Robert W. Yarbrough affirms this. "Knowledge of the truth is not an end in itself; its proper destination is a behavior pattern defined by godliness (*eusebeia*). In the Cretan context, notorious in the ancient world for moral instability, this linked sequence of truth-to-piety was Paul's primary blueprint for alternative community building."²³

²⁰ For a vivid depiction of the annual choreographed procession, see: *Anthia and Habrocomes* in Jeffrey Henderson, *Daphnis and Chloe by Longus; Anthia and Habrocomes by Xenophon of Ephesus* (LCL 69; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²¹ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Word Biblical Commentary 46; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 546.

²² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 621. Cf. Scot McKnight, "Eusebeia in the Pastoral Epistles," *The Jesus Creed*, Substack, November 19, 2023, <https://scotmcknight.substack.com/p/eusebeia-in-the-pastoral-epistles>.

²³ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 462.

Apostolic ministry does not merely aim to impart abstract intellectual dogmas; its goal is to produce a structurally transformed way of living in the real world. John Stott echoes this. "The truth of the gospel is intended to have a practical and moral effect. It is 'the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.' Authentic Christian doctrine does not minister to a speculative curiosity; its purpose is the transformation of character."²⁴ The proof of Christianity is the example of the transformed life.

Text #10: Titus 2:11–12 — The School of Grace and Ethical Renunciation

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly [εὐσεβῶς]..."

Titus 2:11–12 functions as a summary of the missional ethics taught in the letters to Timothy and Titus. The author leverages the language of the Imperial Cult—using the term "appeared" (*epiphane*), which was standard epigraphic shorthand for the ascension or arrival of the Roman Emperor—but links it to the historical breakthrough of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

This divine grace operates as an alternate school, actively "training us" (*paideuouosa*) to execute a decisive moral break from the surrounding culture. To live godly (*eusebos*) in the present age requires a dual action: the active "renunciation of ungodliness" (*asebeia*, which included participation in the civic imperial cults and temple networks) and the simultaneous adoption of an ethical lifestyle defined by self-control, justice, and quiet, daily righteousness.

Section 3: Summary of Findings for Biblical Reading and Missionary Training

After examining *eusebeia* in the epigraphic evidence and the 10 biblical texts, the letters to Timothy and Titus come into view as containing radical instructions that redefine *eusebeia*. They also appear as sophisticated missionary training manuals. This final section includes a summary framework for biblical reading and four strategic pillars for missionary training, each with an application point.

When we read the letters to Timothy and Titus against the backdrop of the Ephesian inscriptions, we see the piety shifts from Artemis and Augusti to the Lord Jesus Christ. Related practices shift from transactions aimed at gain to transformational activities targeting contentment. The posture of piety changes from public honor-seeking parades to humble quiet people doing good works. And access to the priesthood has gone from the elite to everyone. This chart illustrates these findings.

The Piety Paradigm Shift			
Ephesian Civic <i>Eusebeia</i> (Ephesian Inscriptions)			Christ-centered <i>Eusebeia</i> (The Letters to Timothy and Titus)
Artemis and the Augusti	—>	Piety	—> The Lord Jesus Christ
Transaction and Gain	—>	Practices	—> Transformation and Contentment
Public Loud Spectacle	—>	Posture	—> Domestic Good Works
Elite Class Privilege	—>	Priesthood	—> Priesthood of All Believers

Lastly, four pillars emerge for missionary training: (1) the strategy of subversive contextualization, (2) the separation of piety from profit, (3) the social access to the priesthood for all believers, and (4) the shift from theatrical performance to domestic integrity. They follow with applications.

²⁴ John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus: Guard the Truth* (TBST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 168.

Pillar 1: The Strategy of Subversive Contextualization

One of the greatest debates in modern missiology centers on how the church should engage local cultural vernacular. Should missionaries create an entirely new vocabulary? Should they follow cultural patterns? Or should they practice subversive contextualization? The author of the letters to Timothy and Titus does not abandon the word *eusebeia* because it was deeply compromised by the Temple of Artemis and the Imperial Cult. Instead, the author enters the lexical battlefield, captures the culture's most prized term, and radically fills it with new Christological content.

Missionary Training Application: Cross-cultural Christian workers do well to identify the core “prestige words” and ultimate values of their host culture. Rather than merely condemning these concepts from a distance, effective missional engagement requires hijacking local vocabulary—whether it be concepts of honor, peace, justice, or blessing—and re-anchoring the language and pursuit of the divine in the historical person and work of Jesus Christ, thereby demonstrating that the deepest longings of the culture find fulfillment only in the gospel.

Pillar 2: The Separation of Piety from Profit

In Ephesus in the first century CE and the Greco-Roman world, religion was seamlessly woven into the fabric of economic advancement and social networking. To climb the social ladder, one had to perform civic piety by funding games, serving in cultic capacities, and maintaining active political and religious alliances. The letters to Timothy and Titus shatter this paradigm by fiercely declaring that “godliness is not a means of financial gain” (1 Tim 6:5).

Missionary Training Application: In many contemporary mission fields, particularly in the Global South or areas dominated by prosperity theology, religion remains transactional. People approach the Christian faith as a vehicle for securing material prosperity, social status, or political leverage. Missionary training programs benefit by having 1 Timothy 6 as a key text to combat this syncretism. And training workers to build communities where godliness is coupled with *autarkeia* (contentment) can protect them from becoming an elite playground for social advancement or fiscal exploitation.

Pillar 3: The Social Access to the Priesthood for All Believers

As chiseled into the blocks of the Ephesian *Prytaneion* (I.Eph 10:12), *eusebeia* was essentially an aristocratic oligopoly. Only the wealthy elite, who could fund civic projects and buy expensive priesthoods, could legitimately wear the title of the “pious ones.” The letters to Timothy and Titus overturn this reality. By reframing piety as a *gymnasia* (exercise ground) open to all (1 Tim 4:7–8), and by commanding wealthy women to strip away their elite, priestly attire in favor of good works (1 Tim 2:9–10), the text flattens the deep socio-economic stratifications of the Roman Empire.²⁵

Missionary Training Application: When planting churches or ministries in stratified societies, Christian workers can accelerate the impact by leveling the playing field and giving social access to everyone. The local church cannot allow wealthy or socially powerful people to bring their secular leverage into God’s house. True spiritual service and maturity within the missional assembly must link to Christlike character rather than social status, financial backing, or family lineage.

Pillar 4: The Shift from Theatrical Performance to Domestic Integrity

Finally, reading the letters to Timothy and Titus against the backdrop of the Salutaris statue processions (I.Eph 27) highlights a radical shift from public, theatrical performance to hidden,

²⁵ For more exploration on 1 Timothy 2:9–10, see: Gary G. Hoag, *Wealth in Ancient Ephesus*, 61–98.

everyday moral integrity. In Ephesus in the first century CE, piety was measured by the scale of your public monument, the noise of your parade, and the visibility of your gold and pearls. The letters to Timothy and Titus redirect the entire expression of godliness inward to the heart and downward into the basic, unglamorous structures of domestic life—how one treats their spouse, manages their children, operates with honesty in the workplace, and quietly serves the poor.

Missionary Training Application: Modern missionary efforts often promote the pursuit of bold results over spiritual formation which often takes time. The letters to Timothy and Titus train contemporary missionaries to value the "quiet and peaceable life" (1 Timothy 2:2). Lasting missional impact comes not through fleeting, costly public campaigns, but through the unglamorous work of making disciples who live out counter-cultural holiness in the mundane spaces of daily life.

Conclusion: Chiseled in Stone or Written on the Heart

The inscriptions of Ephesus chisel a fascinating story of an empire obsessed with securing peace, wealth, and eternal memory through the material monumentalism of civic piety. Figures like Paullus Fabius Persicus and Gaius Vibius Salutaris used their immense wealth to etch their version of *eusebeia* into the public consciousness, ensuring that *eusebeia* would remain a tool for imperial submission, commercial profit, and aristocratic domination. Their testimony teaches this.

Yet, the letters to Timothy and Titus tell a vastly more enduring story. Writing directly into the shadow of the great Temple of Artemis, the author of these letters executed a brilliant and lasting lexical coup. By seizing *eusebeia*, a primary prestige word in Ephesus in the first century CE, and re-anchoring it in the historical, self-giving incarnation of Jesus Christ, the letters to Timothy and Titus emerge as a magnificent alternative framework for godliness. This new way of life need not be chiseled on stone. The author wants this written on the hearts of Timothy, Titus, and us.

For modern readers and missionaries, this historical comparison serves as a timeless and relevant model for missional engagement. It shows that the church does not need to retreat from a hostile culture, nor does it need to assimilate to its values. Instead, following the blueprint of the letters to Timothy and Titus, God's servants can step into the public square, capture its cherished terms, and reconfigure them under the lordship of the crucified, risen, and manifest King of Kings, Jesus Christ.

Abstract:

This paper explores the use of *eusebeia* in the inscriptions of Ephesus. This research provides a social and religious backdrop for reading 10 texts where *eusebeia* appears in the letters to Timothy and Titus. Readers discover a deliberate strategy of subversive contextualization. While Ephesian *eusebeia* was transactional, elite-driven, and bound to the economic engines of the Temple of Artemis and the Roman Imperial Cult, the letters to Timothy and Titus transform this sacred idea into a Christ-centered framework. The author of the letters departed from Greco-Roman patterns and reconfigured "godliness" with Christ, celebrating the priesthood of all believers, and calling them to do good works while living ordinary lives in pursuit of godliness with contentment.

Key words:

Ephesus, inscriptions, godliness, contentment, subversive contextualization, Timothy, and Titus.