

"Dead While She Lives"

A Study of 1 Timothy 5:6 and Its Application to All Christians

1 Timothy 5:6

"But she that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives."

INTRODUCTION

1. Paul writes to Timothy concerning the proper care of widows in the church at Ephesus (**1 Timothy 5:3–16**),
 - a. In verse six he states a principle that reaches beyond the subject of widowhood.
 - b. With a single statement, the Holy Spirit through Paul exposes one of the most sobering realities in the world:
 - i. A person can be physically alive and yet be spiritually dead at the very same moment.
2. The world measures life by its most visible signs:
 - a. Physical health, social activity, financial prosperity, entertainment, and the relentless pursuit of pleasure.
3. God measures life by a single standard:
 - a. One's living relationship with Him.
 - b. This passage stands as a warning to every disciple who is tempted to drift from devotion to Christ into the comfortable feeling of self-centered living.

I. Understanding the Context (1 Timothy 5:3–16)

1. Paul Draws a Contrast Between Two Kinds of Widows

- a. The immediate occasion of verse six is Paul's instruction about which widows the church is obligated to support. The contrast he draws is between the widow who is genuinely "desolate" and trustworthy versus the widow who has surrendered herself to pleasure.
- b. **The Faithful Widow (v. 5)**
 - i. **1 Timothy 5:5** — *"Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusts in God, and continues in supplications and prayers night and day."*
 1. She is deprived of earthly support and knows it.
 2. Rather than turning to the world, she turns to God.
 3. Her life is characterized by persistent, faith-driven prayer.
 4. She is spiritually alive because her dependence is upon God rather than upon earthly comforts.

c. The Self-Indulgent Widow (v. 6)

- i. **1 Timothy 5:6** — *"But she that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives."*
 1. She has abandoned spiritual priorities.
 2. She lives for luxury, self-gratification, and personal ease.
 3. Though she breathes, moves, laughs, and is active in the world, she is spiritually dead.
 4. The contrast could not be more stark: one trusts God; the other trusts herself.

d. The Greek word translated "lives in pleasure" is *spataláō*,

- i. Carries the sense of indulgent luxury, wanton self-gratification, and living solely for one's own enjoyment.
- ii. This is not the enjoyment of God's blessings with a thankful heart.
- iii. This is making pleasure the very governing purpose of one's existence.

2. The Principle Reaches Every Believer

- a. Paul's specific subject is widows, but the Holy Spirit's principle is universal. The same warning is found throughout the New Testament, and told to all disciples:
 - i. **Romans 8:13** — *"For if you live after the flesh, you shall die: but if you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live."*
 - ii. **Galatians 6:8** — *"For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."*
 - iii. **James 5:5** — *"You have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton (self indulgent); you have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter."*
 1. James uses the same word group — pleasure-centered living — as a mark of those who have forgotten God and chosen the world. The warning applies to every disciple without exception.

II. What Does "Lives in Pleasure" Mean?

1. The Word Carries a Specific Meaning

- a. The Greek *spataláō* describes a lifestyle centered around the satisfaction of personal desire.
 - i. It is not a single act of sin but a settled orientation of the heart — a daily pattern of asking "What do I want?" before asking "What does God want?"
- b. This is not the same as enjoying God's legitimate blessings.
 - i. The Bible affirms that God gives good things for our enjoyment:
- c. **Ecclesiastes 3:13** — *"And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God."*
- d. **1 Timothy 6:17** — *"...God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy."*
- e. The danger is not in gratitude for God's gifts.
 - i. The danger arises when pleasure becomes the master — when a person no longer uses blessings to glorify God.
 - ii. Instead makes the pursuit of personal comfort the governing aim of daily life.

2. Pleasure Becomes Dangerous When It Becomes Our Master

- a. Many sincere people are not living for gross, obvious sins. They have simply organized their lives around:
 - i. Entertainment and recreation above worship and service
 - ii. Material acquisition above generosity and sacrifice
 - iii. Personal comfort above the inconvenience of discipleship
 - iv. Leisure and ease above prayer and study
- b. Paul soundly describes this condition:
 - i. **Philippians 3:18–19** — *"For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."*
- c. When personal desire replaces God as the governing principle of life, desire itself has become an idol.
 - i. This is the heart of worldliness — and the replacement of God with self.

III. What Does It Mean to Be "Dead While She Lives"?

1. Physical Life Does Not Equal Spiritual Life

- a. The Scripture draws a clear distinction between human existence and spiritually alive.
 - i. A person may go through every outward motion of life — work, travel, laughter, family, community — and yet be entirely separated from God.
- b. **Ephesians 2:1** — *"And you did he make alive, when you were dead through your trespasses and sins, "*
- c. The Ephesians had not ceased to breathe when they were dead in sins.
 - i. They were physically alive and spiritually dead simultaneously — and Paul says this is precisely the condition which Christ delivers us from.

2. Spiritual Death Is Separation from God

- a. The biblical definition of spiritual death is not annihilation but separation from God:
 - i. **Isaiah 59:1–2** — *"Behold, Jehovah's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear."*
 - ii. **Colossians 2:13** — *"And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, I say, did he make alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses;"*
- b. A person can maintain every appearance of life while the relationship with God has withered and gone cold.

3. One Can Be Religious and Still Be Spiritually Dead

- a. The most sobering illustration of this truth is the church at Sardis.

- i. A congregation that bore every outward mark of Christian life yet Christ condemned them for this reason:
- ii. **Revelation 3:1** — *"...I know your works, that you have a name (character or reputation) that you live, and are dead."*
 1. Notice the elements of their visible life that could have deceived any observer:
 - a. They had a name — a reputation in the community as a living church.
 - b. They had works — outward religious activity was present.
 - c. Yet Christ declared them dead.
- b. The widow in our text was among the people of God. The church at Sardis was a congregation bearing the name of Christ.
 - i. Neither standing in the community nor membership in the church automatically equals spiritual life.
 - ii. God examines **the inward reality, not the outward appearance**.

IV. Signs That a Christian Is Becoming "Dead While Living"

Spiritual death seldom arrives without warning. It advances through a series of recognizable symptoms, each one a step further from God and deeper into self-centered living.

1. Loss of Desire for God's Word

- a. **Psalm 119:97** — *"O how love I Your law! it is my meditation all the day."*
- b. **1 Peter 2:2** — *"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."*
 - i. A spiritually healthy Christian is hungry for Scripture.
 - ii. Bible study is not a burden but a feast.
 - iii. Spiritual decline is evident:
 1. When God's Word begins to feel like an obligation rather than a delight.
 2. When services regularly pass without personal application.
 3. When daily reading has quietly disappeared.

2. Prayer Becomes Neglected or Mechanical

- a. The faithful widow of verse five is characterized above all by her perseverance in prayer.
 - i. Prayer is the breath of the spiritual life. When it ceases, spiritual life fades.
 - ii. **Luke 18:1** — *"And he spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."*
 - iii. **1 Thessalonians 5:17** — *"Pray without ceasing."*
- b. The absence of prayer is one of the earliest and most reliable symptoms of spiritual death.
 - i. The self-centered Christian has little need for prayer.
 1. They are managing their own life and solving their own problems.
 - a. For these people, prayer assumes dependence; dependence requires humility; and humility is incompatible with the pleasure-centered life.

3. Worship Becomes Routine Rather Than Genuine

- a. **John 4:24** — *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*
- b. The spiritual path of the dying Christian moves from engaged worship to mere attendance.
 - i. The body is present; the heart is elsewhere.
 - ii. They go through the forms of worship — singing, prayer, communion, giving, the sermon — but with diminishing engagement.
 - iii. Christ's rebuke of Israel's empty worship applies with equal force:
 1. **Matthew 15:8** — *"This people draws near unto me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."*

4. Service Becomes Inconvenient

- a. Living Christians serve. Dead Christians consume. The shift is from asking "How can I contribute?" to asking "What am I getting out of this?"
 - i. **Galatians 5:13** — *"...by love serve one another."*
 - ii. **Mark 10:45** — *"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."*
- b. When opportunities to serve are consistently passed by.
 - i. When the Christian is present for the blessing but absent for the burden-bearing, a dangerous pattern of self-centeredness has taken hold.

5. Sin Becomes Tolerated

- a. **Hebrews 3:13** — *"But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."*
- b. Spiritual death seldom arrives as a single catastrophic event.
 - i. It creeps in through tolerated compromise.
 - ii. What once grieved the conscience gradually becomes acceptable.
 - iii. What was once unthinkable slowly becomes habitual.
 - iv. The heart hardens little by little.
 - v. The Christian who would have been horrified at a certain sin five years ago now practices it without a troubled conscience.
- c. This is what Paul means when he says in **Romans 1:28** that God gave some "over to a reprobate mind"
 - i. Not a sudden act of divine judgment but the end result of a long process of chosen hardening.

V. Why Pleasure-Centered Living Produces Spiritual Death

1. Pleasure Shifts the Focus from God to Self

- a. Christianity begins with a call to self-denial. It is the entry point:
 - i. **Luke 9:23** — *"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."*

- b. Self-denial and self-indulgence move in opposite directions.
 - i. You cannot simultaneously follow Christ and follow your own desires as your governing principle.
 - ii. Every step taken toward "what I want" is a step taken away from "what God wants."
 - iii. **1 John 2:15–16** — *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."*

2. Pleasure Dulls Spiritual Sensitivity

- a. **Hebrews 11:25** — *...choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.*
- b. Moses' choice reveals a spiritual reality:
 - i. The pleasures of sin are real, but they are temporary and destructive.
 - ii. Sin does not immediately destroy its victim. It first dulls and gradually weakens the conscience.
 - iii. It softens the sense of spiritual danger, and makes the soul comfortable.
 - iv. Instead it should set off an alarm.
- c. The Christian who becomes mentally numbed by pleasure-seeking finds that the convicting power of the Word seems less sharp.
 - i. Warnings in a sermon do not seem to apply to him.
 - ii. That the voice of the Holy Spirit through Scripture begins to fall on a deafening ear.

3. Pleasure Competes with Devotion to God

- a. **Mark 4:18–19** — *"And others are they that are sown among the thorns; these are they that have heard the word, and the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."*
- b. In the Parable of the Sower, the seed among thorns does not die immediately.
 - i. It germinates; it begins to grow.
 - ii. But the competing growth of worldly care and pleasure gradually crowds out the word until it becomes unfruitful.
 - iii. Many Christians are not destroyed by outright persecution or growing apostasy.
 - 1. They are destroyed by distractions.
 - a. By the slow, steady accumulation of things that are not sinful in themselves
 - b. These do, however, crowd out their devotion to Christ.

VI. Christ Came to Give True Life

1. Jesus Offers Abundant Life — Not Mere Existence

- a. **John 10:10** — *"The thief comes not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."*
- b. The world offers excitement, stimulation, entertainment, and comfort.
- c. Christ offers life — real, deep, enduring, eternally satisfying life.

- d. These two are not the same thing.
 - i. Many Christians have settled for the world's false sense of contentment because it is immediate and sensory.
 - ii. The life that Christ gives requires faith, patience, and self-denial to fully experience.

2. Spiritual Life Is Found Only in Union with Christ

- a. **John 14:6** — *"Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me."*
- b. **Galatians 2:20** — *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*
- c. True life is not found in accumulating pleasures, achieving comfort, or building a reputation.
- d. True life is found in a living, active, surrendered union with Jesus Christ.
- e. Paul's remarkable statement is that his own individual life has been so transformed that Christ now lives it through him.
- f. This is the life that pleasure-seeking destroys — the Christ-life, the only life worth living.

3. Christians Must Daily Choose Life

- a. **Romans 6:11–13** — *"Likewise reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield you your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."*
- b. The Christian life is not a one-time decision followed by passive maintenance.
- c. It is a daily reckoning, a daily choosing.
 - i. Every morning a disciple wakes up and faces the same fundamental question: Will I live today for the flesh or for the Spirit? Will I yield my time, my energy, my desires, my decisions to Christ — or to myself?
 - ii. There is no neutral ground. To drift toward self-indulgence is to drift away from life.

VII. Practical Applications for Every Christian

In light of **1 Timothy 5:6** each of us must honestly examine our own hearts. The following questions are not meant to condemn but to awaken:

1. What controls my daily decisions — God's glory or personal comfort?

- a. *When I make choices about how to spend my time, my money, my energy, and my attention, what is the operating principle? Am I asking, "What does God want from me today?" or "What do I want today?"*

2. What genuinely excites me most?

- a. *Take an honest inventory. What do I look forward to with eagerness? What fires my imagination and fills my conversation? Is it worship? Is it God's Word? Is it opportunities to serve? Or is it sports, entertainment, recreation, accumulation, and leisure?*

3. Is my spiritual life growing or declining?

- a. Compare where you are today with where you were one year ago, five years ago. Are you praying more or less? Is Scripture more precious or less precious? Are you more eager to serve or more inclined to sit? Growth and decay are both processes — and at any given moment, every Christian is moving in one direction or the other.

4. Am I merely existing spiritually — or am I truly alive in Christ?

- a. There is a vast difference between spiritual existence and spiritual vitality. Many Christians exist — they attend, they comply with certain outward expectations, they have not formally abandoned the faith. But they are not alive. The fire of devotion has gone out. The question is not whether your name is on a church roll but whether Christ lives in you (*Galatians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 13:5*).

5. Would God describe me as spiritually alive?

- a. Remember the church at Sardis. They had a name among men as a living church — but Christ said they were dead (*Revelation 3:1*). The opinion of others is irrelevant. The opinion of God is everything. What would He say of your spiritual condition today?

CONCLUSION

1. Paul's warning is both brief and devastating:

- a. "But she that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives."
- b. A person may possess every outward sign of a successful life — health, comfort, social standing, material abundance, even religious respectability — and yet be utterly dead in the sight of God.

2. God does not call His people merely to exist.

- a. He calls us to an active, fruitful, discipleship through faith, prayer, service, holiness, and wholehearted devotion to Jesus Christ.
- b. The pleasure-centered life is not simply one lifestyle option among many.
 - i. It is the path of spiritual death.

3. The good news is:

- a. That the One who said "I am the resurrection, and the life" (*John 11:25*) is able to restore what has been lost.
- b. The spiritually declining Christian is not beyond hope.
- c. But restoration requires honesty, repentance, and a deliberate turning from self back to Christ.

Invitation Thought

The greatest tragedy is not physical death. The greatest tragedy is to be physically alive and spiritually dead — to stand one day before God as one who had life within reach and chose pleasure instead.

Therefore:

1. Examine your heart honestly before God.
2. Renew your devotion to His Word and prayer.

3. Reject self-indulgent living as the enemy of spiritual life.
4. Draw near to Christ — for only in Him is true life found.

John 10:10 — *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."*

Galatians 2:20 — *"...Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*