

HOUSEHOLDS AND THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

1 Timothy 5:1-25

Across 1 Timothy 5, Paul develops his purpose statement in 1 Timothy 3:15. He provides instructions concerning how both Timothy and the church ought to behave in the household of God.

Relational manners (vv. 1-2)

As a young leader in the Ephesian house churches, how should Timothy relate to members of God's household? Refusing to eliminate age and gender distinctions in the church, Paul urges Timothy to relate to each member in a particular manner. These ways of relating are governed by affection, care, and purity. They inform sensitive pastoral ministry to members of God's household.

Honoring widows (vv. 3-16)

Against the backdrop of relational manners, Paul focuses on care for a specific kind of member in God's household: widows.

Care for widows pervades Scripture. God is the defender of widows (Deut 10:17-18; Ps 68:5). Jesus cares for his widowed mother on the cross (John 19:25-27). And the early Church was characterized by its practical provision for widows (Acts 6:1-6).

Paul has three different kinds of widows in view in verses 3-16.

1. "Widows who are truly widows," that is, older widows without a family support system, who are dependent on God and embody good works (1 Tim 5:1, 5, 9-10)
2. Widows with a family support system (1 Tim 5:4, 8, 16)
3. A young widow or young woman (1 Tim 5:11-15)

Paul advises Timothy and the church to care for these widows in different ways. As the household of God, the church is to honor widows who are truly widows by providing practical, financial support. The church does not replace the family household. This means that family households with widows or widowers are to care for their own. The family serves as the support system. The young widow or young woman, by contrast, is described in ways that are at odds with the structure of the household of God and the family household. Paul encourages these young widows or young women to embrace the household structures.

By honoring widows and, by implication, widowers, the household of God and the family household demonstrate what they believe through how they live (1 Tim 4:16).

Honoring elders (vv. 17-25)

Like those who are truly widows, honor and good works frame the discussion of elders (1 Tim 5:17, 25). Elders are worthy of double honor, that is, worthy of respect and financial payment. Those who rule well in the household of God ought to be honored in real, practical ways.

In the case where an elder's life does not reflect his doctrine, Paul gives Timothy guidance concerning accusations against elders, the discipline of a guilty elder, and discernment in the appointment of elders.

Key ideas: The Church is a household made up of family households, each of which have "household rules."

Application questions:

What are the "rules" in your household?

How do you relate to other members in your household? How do you relate to members of God's household?

How can you honor widows, widowers, elderly or aging members of your family?

Why does Paul take honoring elders and the discipline of elders so seriously?

How do Paul's instructions concerning widows and elders connect how we live with what we believe (4:16)?