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Divergent, Insurgent or Allegiant? 1 Timothy 5:1–2 and the Nature of God’s Household

Gregory A. Couser

Cedarville University

This study asks how Paul’s household conception of the church in 1 Tim 5:1–2 compares to the social norms characteristic of the Greco-Roman household. First, 5:1–2 is set within the overall flow of the book’s argument to show how this passage rests on a carefully developed theological substructure. Second, the passage itself is closely examined to delineate the social norms that emerge in the manner of engagement urged upon Timothy with respect to the various strata of the household. This study argues that Paul is extending a pre-existing, theologically-shaped notion of God’s household as he guides Timothy. Drawing on the OT as mediated through Jesus and his own earlier apostolic reflection, Paul determines the character and manner of Timothy’s interaction within the family of God. It is this theologically-shaped conception of God’s household which drives the re-appropriation (or reclamation) of the social spaces in the secular household toward the fulfillment of God’s purposes in and through his family. Contacts with Greco-Roman social norms are incidental and not fundamental.

Throughout 1 Timothy the central metaphor Paul chooses to inform and drive Timothy’s mission at Ephesus is the church as God’s household (1:4; 3:15; cf. 3:5, 12).¹ The household owes its existence to God’s saving work in Christ by the Spirit (esp. 3:15–16). In addition, God’s household takes its shape (on the personal and corporate level) and its mission from God’s saving mission in Christ (2:1–7).² The problem that brings Timothy to Ephesus at the behest of Paul is that God’s “household rules,” his saving purposes for

¹ The following assumes that the apostle Paul is the author of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. However, space prohibits a defense of Pauline authorship as the most *historically* plausible and convincing explanation for the production, content, and canonical status of these letters. For a robust defense, see W. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), lxxxiii–cxxix. For an important recent treatment of pseudonymity and these letters, see T. Wilder, “Pseudonymity, the New Testament and the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (ed. A. Köstenberger and T. Wilder; Nashville: B&H, 2010), 28–51.

² For the relationship of 2:1–7 to the household material generally, see G. Couser, “‘Prayer’ and the Public Square: 1 Tim. 2:1–7 and Christian Political Engagement,” in *New Testament Theology in Light of the Church’s Mission* (ed. J. Laansma, G. Osborne, and R. Van Neste; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 278–81.

his people, are effectively being re-written.³ The over-realized eschatology of the erring elders has essentially distorted the way in which God saves in the present.⁴ Inept, speculative (yet confident) OT eisegesis abounds (1:7) as the false teachers have abandoned the “gospel” as the norming norm for their reading of the OT.⁵ Consequently, their affirmations are anything but “sound” or “healthy” (1:10). The already/not yet tension of Paul’s eschatology has been resolved decidedly in favor of the already.⁶ Hence, the theology that regulates the members of the household and the household as a whole—with respect to its creation, internal life, and mission in the world—has been gravely distorted. The family of God has been turned away from the life of love. Instead, it has been turned against itself and away from its mission through the influence of false teachers (1:3b–4).

Within this broader context of family dysfunction, in 5:1–2 Paul instructs Timothy on how to approach the various strata of the family. A harsh, stinging rebuke is prohibited. Rather, Paul wants him to “exhort” or “appeal” (he uses *παρακαλέω*). However, BDAG holds this passage together with two other Pauline texts (1 Cor 4:13 and 1 Thess 2:12) and cannot make up its mind about how to render the word in these texts. It lists three possibilities: (1) “invite” in the sense of asking someone to come and be where the speaker is; (2) “invite in, conciliate, be friendly to or speak to in a friendly manner” in the sense of “treat someone in an inviting or congenial manner”; or (3) “to

³ *Οἰκονομία θεοῦ* carries a salvation-historical emphasis along the lines of Eph 1:10; 3:9, namely, God’s arrangement for the redemption of mankind. See L. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1986), 133; F. Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 55; and Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (NIBC 13; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 42, 48, 92.

⁴ For fuller treatments of the over-realized eschatological dimensions of the false teaching assumed here, cf. P. Towner’s seminal study, *The Goal of Our Instruction: The Structure of Theology and Ethics in the Pastoral Epistles* (JSNTS 34; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 21–45 and G. Couser, “The Sovereign Savior of 1 and 2 Tim and Titus,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel*, 119–22. For helpful insights on the issue of over-realized eschatology generally, see A. Thiselton, “Luther and Barth on 1 Corinthians 15: Six Theses for Theology in Relation to Recent Interpretation,” in *The Bible, the Reformation and the Church* (ed. W. P. Stephens; JSNTSup 105; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 258–89.

⁵ Cf. G. Couser, “Using the Law Lawfully: A Short Study on Paul and the Law in 1 Timothy,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 2.1 (2003): 47–52.

⁶ G. Knight, commenting on 2 Tim 2:18, describes the theological aberration succinctly: “The error can affect how one regards Jesus’ resurrection and its significance for one’s future standing and hope for eternity, and thus also how one thinks of the Christian’s present relationship to Christ and one’s perspective on the body and conduct in this life and attitude toward material creation. Therefore, Paul regards it as striking at the heart of Christianity and thus a departure from the truth” (*The Pastoral Epistles* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 414).

urge strongly, appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage.”⁷ Beyond the contrast with a “harsh rebuke,” the manner of address envisioned by *παρακαλέω* is to be conditioned by the family status of the individual(s) receiving it. As a result, the manner of address is shaped not only in contrast to a harsh, stinging rebuke but also by accepted norms with respect to the treatment of fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters.

It is here that the present investigation gets its focus. What does this understanding of the church as a household and of Timothy’s approach to its dysfunction say about the cultural forces shaping the church itself? Is this an example of where the prevailing conceptions surrounding the Greco-Roman household are re-shaping the ecclesiology, and the families making up the *ecclesia*, along lines discordant with earlier Pauline conceptions?⁸ Though it is not possible to thoroughly answer these questions from two verses, this text is directly related to the issue and provides us with a genuine point of entry into the discussion. In the end, this study hopes to determine the points of overlap and/or discontinuity with contemporary secular household norms assumed or commended in 1 Tim 5:1–2. This will be accomplished through attention to the social norms that emerge in the manner of engagement urged upon Timothy with respect to the various strata of “God’s household.” Ultimately, this study hopes to give greater definition to the contours of Paul’s conception of the church as the “household of God.”

Contextual Topography

First Timothy 5:1–2 marks the resumption of Paul’s guidance meant to go through Timothy to the (house) churches at Ephesus (“in every place”; 1 Tim 2:8). Paul hopes to realign God’s family with his saving purposes in response to the present crisis. Paul initiated this guidance in 2:1–3:13, directly linking it to Timothy’s commission and God’s saving purposes (specified in 1:3–20 and tied in by the οὖν of 2:1).⁹ Similar to this earlier section, he resumes his guidance in chapter five with general advice for dealing with the

⁷ BDAG, 617.

⁸ According to R. W. Gehring, the fact that the churches met in the homes of their wealthy members led to those members naturally assuming leadership within the church itself. As they came in, “it was quite natural that household patterns impressed themselves upon the social reality of the congregation” (*House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004], 298; cf. also R. A. Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* [SNTW; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994], 153 and D. C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* [SBLDS 71; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983], 160).

⁹ In 1:3–20 God’s redemptive work in Christ forms the backdrop of Paul’s instruction to Timothy concerning his service at Ephesus (1:1, 4, 12–17, 18). This redemptive work is then concisely recapitulated in 2:1–7, even while it is more fully elaborated and further authorized by tradition (“the testimony,” v. 6). This brings

whole of the household before turning to the needs of particular social groups (widows [5:3–16], elders [5:17–25], and slaves [6:1–2]). However, in 3:15–4:16 Paul interrupted this line of thought by a return to Timothy’s commission so that he might further define and ground it in light of God’s saving work in Christ and the circumstances of the current dysfunction in Ephesus. This interplay between sections which recall God’s saving work and Timothy’s commission borne out of a desire to promote that work and those sections which re-order the community as a whole in light of God’s saving work (with particular emphases for certain social strata), forms a pervasive conceptual environment where theology, particularly soteriology, interpenetrates ethics. This is further confirmed as the book concludes with Paul yet again recalling Timothy’s commission while restating and further elaborating on the circumstances and theology driving and shaping Timothy’s commission (6:3–19; cf. Figures 1 and 2 below).¹⁰

Not only does 1 Tim 5:1–2 resume the household material from 2:1–3:13 but it could be seen as a hinge passage which looks both backwards and forwards. It is not hard to see its relevance for Paul’s instructions in 2:1–3:14 where Timothy is called upon to deal with the body as a whole (2:1–7), adult men and women in particular (2:8–15), as well as with any man (and his wife and family) who aspires to the offices of elder or deacon (3:1–13). More directly, perhaps, it provides a fitting preface to the household material to follow.¹¹ The difficult dynamics of the issues surrounding widows (5:3–16), especially from the perspective of dealing with them as a young man,¹² readily make sense of Paul’s guidance for dealing with older and younger women. In particular, Paul’s concern for sexual purity in Timothy’s interaction with the young women anticipates the dangers of the sexually charged situation among young widows intimated in 5:11–13, 15 (cf. 4:3).¹³

God’s saving work in Christ explicitly into contact with Paul’s realignment of the community as a whole. It further suggests that this theology is driving all of the instruction directed at the various segments of the household of God.

¹⁰ For the argumentation behind these figures, see G. Couser, “God and Christian Existence in the Pastoral Epistles,” *NovT* 42.3 (2000): 262–68.

¹¹ P. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 330.

¹² Discussions on the definition of “youth” in the first century range from the twenties (R. Overstreet, “The Greek Concept of the ‘Seven Stages of life’ and Its NT Significance,” *BBR* 19 [2009]: 543–45, 559–61) to early forties (E. Eyben, *Restless Youth in Ancient Rome* [trans. Patrick Daly; London: Rutledge, 1993], 6–9). Plausibly, Overstreet suggests that Timothy was in his late twenties in the mid-sixties AD (561).

¹³ With regard to *καταστρηνιάω* in 5:11, Winter notes that it “does not occur elsewhere in Greek but the meaning is clear from *στρηνιάω* = ‘to run riot, become wanton’ and the use of *κατά* simply enforces it” (B. Winter, “Providentia for the Widows of 1 Timothy 5:3–16,” *TynB* 39 [1988]: 97). Winter sees this unbecoming behavior as most likely tied to the way certain young widows were pursuing another marriage.

FIGURE 1	
1 Timothy Structure and Inter-relationships	
<p>Greeting: Authoritative, Soteriological Focus with a Hint of Opposition (1:1–2)</p> <p>Timothy’s Commission 1: Oppose False Teaching so that God’s Saving Work can be Promoted (1:3–20)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Commission Recalled: Nature and Cause (1:3–11)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Attacks Confident Perversion of OT (source of false teaching; 1:3, 6)</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Paul as Encouragement and Counter-Example (1:12–17)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Commission Strongly Restated (1:18–20)</p> <p>God’s Salvation Plan & Family Adjustments Required (2:1–3:13)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">A Corporate Focus on God’s Purpose in Salvation: Paradigmatic Instruction (2:1–7)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Men: Don’t Detract from God’s Purposes through Competitive, Theological Squabbling (2:8)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Women: Don’t Detract from God’s Purpose in Your Adornment or by Your Relationship to Leadership (2:9–15)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Choose Leadership that Is Focused on God’s Purposes (3:1–13)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Elders (Teacher/Overseer; 3:1–7)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Deacons (Helper/Assistant; 3:8–13)</p>	<p>Timothy’s Commission 2: Oppose False Teaching so that God’s Saving Work can be Promoted (3:14–4:16)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Commission Recalled: Nature and Cause (3:14–4:5)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Attacks Asceticism (effect of OT Perversion; 4:3)</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Timothy as Encouragement and Counter-Example (4:6–10)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Commission Strongly Restated (4:11–16)</p> <p>God’s Salvation Plan & Family Adjustments <i>Cont’d</i> (5:1–6:2a)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Appropriate Family Relationships in General (5:1–2)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Appropriate Care of Widows (5:3–16)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Appropriate Approach to the Appointment, Assessment, & Discipline of Leadership (5:17–25)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Appropriate Behavior for Slaves (6:1–2a)</p> <p>Timothy’s Commission 3: Oppose False Teaching so that God’s Saving Work can be Promoted (6:2b–21)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Commission Recalled: Nature and Cause (6:2b–10)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Attacks “Money-love” (effect of Immaturity; 6:3, 10)</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Timothy as Encouragement and Counter-Example (6:11–16)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Commission Strongly Restated (6:17–21a)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Closing Wish-Prayer for Grace (6:21b)</p>

At the same time, given that family members are abrogating their responsibilities to their widowed parents (5:8, 16) and that some young widows are a community-wide destructive influence (5:13), there is little doubt that Timothy would be interacting with every social strata in order to address these issues. Additionally, assuming that those who functioned as elders in Ephesus would be drawn both from the ranks of older men as well as peers,¹⁴ Paul’s

¹⁴ The term *πρεσβύτερος*, “elder,” as a designation of office primarily conveyed “the idea of a wise, mature leader who was honored and respected by those of the

instructions here would certainly be needed to accomplish what he calls for in 5:17–25. Finally, to engage household members who are slaves (6:1–2) calls for a type of interaction within the community that would be no respecter of age, gender or stage of life. In particular, his ability to model brother to brother behavior with a sensitivity to appropriate family dynamics would be crucial for teaching the slaves how to respond to their “brothers” whom they serve (6:2).¹⁵

“Exhort” or “Encourage”:

What Is the Nature of Action Envisioned in Παρακαλέω?

Παρακαλέω is the governing verb in 5:1–2. It is contrasted with ἐπιπλάσσω and it is the expressed or understood verb shaping Timothy’s engagement with each age/gender grouping. As intimated above, there is a diversity of opinion about how this term should be understood. Just what type of interaction is depicted by this term in this context? Does Paul’s counsel reflect an indebtedness to the Greek moral tradition? Would Timothy’s actions be commonplace given contemporary social norms?

R. Mounce contends that Paul is not envisioning Timothy’s interaction with the opponents. In that setting Timothy is to be “firm and commanding, a figure of authority.”¹⁶ Instead, παρακαλέω takes on a gentle tone as Paul prohibits “rebuke.” For Mounce, this seems to “indicate that these instructions apply not so much to the refutation of heresy and the opponents as to Timothy’s general conduct within the church.”¹⁷ In sum, Mounce, citing the secular social customs of the time and the broader biblical mandate (cf. Lev 19:32; Lam 5:12; Sir 8:8), calls for an approach that involves “gentle persuasion rather than browbeating,” a demeanor and approach that grants him (or

community” (B. Merkle, “Ecclesiology in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel*, 190). It cannot be merely equated with “old man.” Yet, given that age was venerated within the Christian (cf. 1 Tim 5:1; Titus 2:3–4) and secular culture (cf. J. Barclay, “There is Neither Old Nor Young? Early Christianity and Ancient Ideologies of Age,” *NTS* 53 [2007]: 234) and that Timothy’s youth was apparently at issue (1 Tim 4:12), there is little doubt that some of the elders were men older than Timothy as well as men esteemed more highly than Timothy in their respective settings. Their older age also would be likely if some of the wayward elders Timothy is to silence were drawn from the ranks of the established local elites (cf. R. Kidd, *Wealth and Beneficence in the Pastoral Epistles* [SBLDS 122; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990], 97–100).

¹⁵ For the relational dynamics here in light of the letter’s backdrop, see Couser, “The Sovereign Savior of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel*, 122–23.

¹⁶ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 269.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; cf. also I. H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 1999), 573.

her) “respect, dignity, and honor.”¹⁸ In terms of BDAG’s aforementioned options, this sounds closest to the sense of “invite in, conciliate, be friendly to or speak to in a friendly manner” so that Timothy might treat the respective parties in “an inviting or congenial manner.” In this light, Timothy’s actions would mark a convergence between secular and biblical social norms.

At the same time, contextual factors seem to demand a stronger rendering for παρακαλέω here. First, the relationship of 5:1–2 to the wider context is important. As discussed above, it functions as a hinge or, perhaps more fittingly, as an introduction to 5:3–6:2. There seems to be no reason for not envisioning what follows in 5:3–6:2 as the content and manner of delivery envisioned by the παρακαλέω of 5:1. This is especially so as the ταῦτα of 6:2b that Timothy is to “teach and urge” (παρακαλέω) looks backward.¹⁹ In other words, the fact that his duties do involve the rebuke and correction of men and women of all ages and positions of authority, makes it harder to see “gentle persuasion” as a necessary or sufficient rendering. Second, the cognate noun (παρακλήσις) in 4:13 accrues strong overtones of authoritative exhortation from the surrounding context. Its goal, when done in conjunction with reading the Scriptures publicly and teaching doctrine, is conformity to the correct teaching and, thus, the promotion of God’s saving purposes in and through Timothy (cf. 4:11–16). Earlier (1 Tim 1:3; 2:1), παρακαλέω itself occurs in contexts urging the subjects enjoined to take action. With Timothy as the subject (1:3), Paul recalls the moment when he “urged” him to take up the prophetically assigned “mandate”²⁰ for the churches at Ephesus (cf. 1:18). In 2:1 the use of παρακαλέω finds Paul, through Timothy, urging those churches toward a communal posture in the world that is consistent with their role in the outworking of God’s saving purposes in Christ. Moreover, the παρακλήσις of 2:1–7, where the re-ordering requested is explicitly grounded in God’s saving work in Christ, is likely intended as a paradigmatic introduction to the whole of the household material that re-orders the various social strata of God’s household affected by the false teaching (i.e., the material in 2:8–3:13 and 5:1–6:2).²¹ And here, the activity envisioned by παρακαλέω involves taking shared doctrine, envisioning the type of action needed by the listeners to appropriately respond to that doctrine, and then urging movement toward that response (cf. also 6:2).²² Also, the extreme harshness of what is prohibited in 5:1 (μὴ ἐπιπλήξῃς) creates ample semantic

¹⁸ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 270.

¹⁹ “As before (3:14; 4:6, 11; 5:7, 21), these things refer to what has already been said, in this case at least to 5:3–6:2, although given the concluding nature of what follows it may go all the way back to 2:1” (G. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 140).

²⁰ On this term, and its relationship to παρακαλέω, see C. Spicq, “Παραγγελία,” *TLNT* 3:11.

²¹ Cf. Couser, “Prayer and the Public Square,” 280.

²² Cf. C. Spicq, “Παραμυθεομαι,” *TLNT* 3:33.

FIGURE 2		
1 Tim 1:3–20	1 Tim 3:14–4:16	1 Tim 6:2b–21
Key Aspects of the Defection and Pointed Response		
1:3–11	3:14–4:5	6:2b–10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attacks OT perversion of “some” (vv. 3, 6) • Promotion of God’s <i>οικονομίαν</i> (“saving plan”; v. 4), with its christological core (v. 15), as the alternative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attacks asceticism of “some” (4:1–5) • Instruction for living <i>ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ</i> (“house of God” = <i>ἐκκλησία θεοῦ</i> [“church of God”]), which is grounded in the christologically-focused <i>το τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον</i> (“the mystery of godliness”; 3:15–16), as the alternative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attacks “money-love” of “some” (vv. 3, 10) • <i>Εὐσέβεια</i> (“godliness”), set alongside the “words of Christ Jesus,” as the alternative (vv. 3, 5, 6).
Personal Call/Charge from God		
1:12–17	4:6–10	6:11–16
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul placed <i>εἰς διακονίαν</i> (“into ministry”) by Christ Jesus (v. 12) • God’s goal for Paul in God’s saving work (vv. 11, 15, 17): to be a <i>ὑποτύπωσιν</i> (“pattern”) of Christ’s patience for those yet to believe <i>εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον</i> (“unto eternal life”). This also makes Paul an encouragement for Timothy and the reverse image of the OT-based antagonism, i.e., he used to be a blasphemer (v. 12) like Hymenaeus and Alexander (v. 20). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timothy exhorted to be a good <i>διάκονος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ</i> (“minister of Christ Jesus”; v. 6) • God’s goal for Timothy in God’s saving work (vv. 10, 14; cf. 1:18): to be a <i>τύπος...τῶν πιστῶν</i> (“pattern...for the believers”; v. 12) in his pursuit of <i>εὐσέβεια</i> (“godliness”), for it alone holds God’s promise of <i>ζωῆς τῆς νῦν καὶ τῆς μελλούσης</i> (“life now and to come,” v. 8; cf. v. 16). This makes Timothy, in his steadfast, holistic adherence to the truth, the reverse image of the ascetics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timothy exhorted to confess Christ’s <i>καλὴν ὁμολογίαν</i> (“good confession”; vv. 12, 13) • God’s goal for Timothy in God’s saving work (vv. 11–13, 15–16): “Keep the commandment spotless” (v. 14), which the context suggests is equivalent to the <i>ἐπιλαβοῦ τῆς αἰωνίου ζωῆς</i> (“lay hold of eternal life”; v. 12) or the <i>εὐσέβεια μετὰ αὐταρκειᾶς</i> (“godliness with contentment”; v. 6). This makes Timothy, in his focus on “real life”/“godliness with contentment,” the reverse image of the wealth-obsessed antagonists.
Stand Strong in Your Opposition by Holding to Your Call		
1:18–20	4:11–16	6:17–21
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charge at Ephesus enjoined (<i>ταύτην τὴν παραγγελίαν παρατίθειμαι σοι</i> [“I entrust the aforementioned command to you”], v. 18) with an explicit reference to the antagonists (v. 20). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call to fulfill the charge at Ephesus (<i>παραγγελλε</i> [“command”], v. 11) with an implicit reference to the antagonists (v. 12). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call to fulfill the charge at Ephesus (<i>παραγγελλε</i> [“command”], v. 17; cf. 13) with an explicit reference to the antagonists (vv. 17–19, 21).

space to contrast such treatment with *παρακαλέω* without necessitating a sense that moves it outside the sphere of urgent, authoritative direction.²³

In the end, with Mounce, this passage can be partially accounted for as a caution to Timothy not to overreact given the disrespect he is receiving from some because of his youth (4:12; cf. 2 Tim 2:22–26). However, by all indications, *παρακαλέω* still involves an exercise of authority, though one that should be conditioned to some degree by the social circumstances. Importantly, as G. Knight notes, this is where parallels to Greek moral teaching differ significantly. Timothy is not just to honor but to instruct those older than himself. The former is a commonplace in the Greek moral tradition,²⁴ but not the latter. He writes, “The keynote of this passage is the responsibility and authority of the minister of God to give such instruction, albeit to give it with respect, and this makes it different from those accounts in its most central aspect.”²⁵ Paul’s admonition does not treat social boundaries as sacrosanct. The household of God privileges truth, centrally in 1 Timothy, the promotion of God’s saving purposes in Christ by life and word (cf. esp. 3:15–16). Aspects of behavior proper to the social space of the “older man” (father-figures) are shockingly taken over by the “younger” Timothy. Even Timothy’s interaction with the other social strata, older women and male and female peers, gets re-ordered as son/brother. Timothy stands in a position of authority over the whole family.²⁶ Social norms for ages/stages are relativized and/or re-appropriated without abolishing them in some senses.²⁷

²³ “[I]t suggests a very severe censure” (Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 573).

²⁴ Cf. M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress), 72 and Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 573–74.

²⁵ Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 215.

²⁶ At the same time, this is not wholly distinct from first century understandings of “brother.” Contra D. G. Horrell (“Disciplining Performance and ‘Placing’ the Church: Widows, Elders and Slaves in the Household of God,” in *1 Timothy Reconsidered* [ed. K. P. Donfried, Colloquium Oecumenicum Paulinum 18; Leuven: Peeters, 2008], 116), brother connotes relationships of mutuality rather than equality. The relationship depicted is one that implies a close bond and a solidarity but would not preclude distinctions in status and authority within the home (A. D. Clarke, “Equality or Mutuality: Paul’s Use of ‘Brother’ Language,” in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of B. W. Winter on His 65th Birthday* [ed. A. D. Clarke et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 164). Timothy’s function here is still striking with respect to older men and maintains its distinctiveness from the broader secular culture in terms of the gospel basis of his authority (cf. 4:10) and, thus, the direction toward which his authority is exercised (cf. 1:4–5; cf. A. Mahlerbe’s related comments in “Paraenesis in the Epistle to Titus,” in *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context* [ed. J. Starr and T. Engberg-Pedersen; BZNTW 125; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004], 316–17).

²⁷ For similar conclusions with particular reference to 1 Tim 4:12, see D. Pao, “Let No One Despise Your Youth: Church and the World in the Pastoral Epistles,” *JETS* 57.4 (2014): 743–55. Note also, M. Y. MacDonald who notes that “there is a

Exhorting Family Members

What is the impact on παρακαλέω when it is conditioned by the conceptions of the recipients as fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters? In 1 Tim 5:1–2, παρακαλέω carries the sense of authoritative exhortation that has conformity to the correct teaching as its goal. Yet, Paul goes on to call for this activity to be further conditioned by the age and gender of those addressed. In doing so, Paul does not define how this would condition Timothy’s exhortation. What this would mean is assumed. Does Paul simply assume distinctly Christian or broadly secular ideals here? If it is the latter, does he do it because they conform to a (partially) pre-existing, theologically-shaped notion of the household of God? Or, does he transform/conform God’s household to the household conceptions expressed in Greek moral teaching?

As previously suggested, Mounce sees two streams converging in the family emphasis. Paul’s “teaching not only builds on the social custom of the time that demanded a high degree of respect and honor for one’s parents, but in a much more significant sense it is an extension of the gospel teaching that all believers are fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters (Mark 3:31–35).”²⁸ Although Mounce claims it is reminiscent of “common Greek instruction,” he agrees with Knight that “the motivation and ultimate truth of the teaching is based not on social custom or etiquette but on the reality of the corporate nature of Christian salvation, that all who are in Christ are part of the same body.”²⁹

Towner, however, sees a more thoroughgoing indebtedness to “Greek moral teaching.” With “as” (ὡς) Towner contends for a “fictive” view of the relationships depicted here (“as if”). Paul’s instructions call into play the relational dynamics proper to a family without arguing that this is indeed what the church is. Nonetheless, this “dynamic of kinship,” though fictive, serves to “strengthen the cohesion of the otherwise diverse group of believers and provide the church with the structural and behavior paradigm of family responsibilities and rules for relating.”³⁰ There is a transference of the carefully patterned behavior related to age, gender, and role for those related by blood to those related by faith. This is something Towner once again traces back to Greek moral conventions. In sum, this backdrop can account for both facets of Paul’s instructions to Timothy. Not only does Paul help Timothy conform to what “Greek moral teaching” specifies with respect to appropriate demeanor toward age groups, but he also helps him navigate the tensions arising from that teaching due to his youth (cf. 4:12).³¹

sense that the Pastorals leave room for younger men exercising authority in surprising ways” (*The Power of Children: The Construction of Christian Families in the Greco-Roman World* [Waco, TX; Baylor, 2014], 125; cf. also 145). MacDonald, however, leaves this observation largely unexplored.

²⁸ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 269.

²⁹ Ibid.; cf. Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 215.

³⁰ Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 330.

³¹ Ibid.; cf. Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 572–73.

At the same time, given the previously argued force of *παρακαλέω* and the pervasive, developed theological backdrop (which is itself a response to an OT-infused distortion of the way God saves in the present), it is at least fair to ask if the contact is essentially incidental or fundamental. This line of enquiry gains additional traction when the OT backdrop of the teaching concerning widows and elders is noted, as will be seen below.

What is often left out of the discussion of 5:1–2 is that it is followed by two sections of exhortation (as 6:2 indicates) where Paul develops his thought with strong ties to the OT. It is likely that Paul's exhortation concerning widows is an elaboration on the implications of the fifth commandment (Exod 20:12).³² B. Winter argues that Paul is applying the commandment to the current problematic situation of providing *providentia* for widows in the church.³³ As with the fifth commandment, this passage makes explicit the necessity of proper respect (5:3; LXX, *τιμάω*) for parents, although coopting contemporary terminology to elaborate on it (*εὐσεβέω*; v. 4a).³⁴ Honoring one's parents now includes satisfying the demands of godliness with respect to them. Additionally, it is this mode of conduct which meets with God's approval, "for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God" (v. 4b; God's approval is expressed in Exodus by the promise of blessing from God for the obedient). Consequently, the indebtedness to OT ethical structures is evident both in the allusion to the fifth commandment and by the way the exhortation is grounded. It is a commonplace in OT ethics that conduct finds its determinative ground in the expressed will of God, which is in essence a call to conformity to his own character (e.g., Lev 19:2, 9, 14). As W. Kaiser states regarding OT ethics: "The standard for the good, the right, the just, and the acceptable is nothing less than the person of the living God . . ." ³⁵

An even stronger tie to OT ethical thought is evident in Paul's exhortation regarding the handling of elders (5:17–25). W. Fuller's study takes its key from the "two or three witnesses" principle quoted in 5:19.³⁶ Fuller submitted Deut 19:15–20 and 1 Tim 5:19–25 to a thoroughgoing comparison. Conceptually, as in Deuteronomy, he noted that 1 Tim 5:21 lies within an "ethico-legal" context where the concern revolves around "the obligation of the community to ensure a fair examination of the man accused of 'sinning'" (cf. Deut

³² So C. K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NCB; Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 74.

³³ Winter, "Providentia," 83–99, esp. 98. The concern for widows is commonplace in Jewish and Christian piety (cf. Deut 14:29; Job 31:16; Ps 146:9; Isa 1:17, 23; Luke 2:36–38; Acts 6:1; Jas 1:27).

³⁴ Dibelius and Conzelmann, *Pastoral Epistles*, 74.

³⁵ W. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 6.

³⁶ W. Fuller, "Of Elders and Triads in 1 Timothy 5. 19–25," *NTS* 29 (1983): 258–63; cf. also P. Wolfe, "The Place and Use of Scripture in the Pastoral Epistles" (PhD dissertation; University of Aberdeen, Scotland, 1990), 43–48 and G. Couser, "God and Christian Existence in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus" (PhD dissertation; University of Aberdeen, Scotland, 1992), 57–64.

10:15 and 1 Tim 5:20). Moreover, in both passages fairness is assured through witnesses (Deut 19:15; 1 Tim 5:19); the desired effect is fear (Deut 19:20; 1 Tim 5:20); and there is a warning against partiality in judgment (Deut 19:21; 1 Tim 5:21). Finally, structurally, he contends that both in Deut 19:17 and 1 Tim 5:21 “there is a triad of persons whose job it is to make sure that the trial is fair to those being examined”; the triad in both passages results from the outworking of the “two to three” principle.³⁷ Fuller concludes that there appears to be more than a casual dependence on the Deuteronomy passage as “the argument seems to have been developed almost step for step with the development of the argument of Deut 19,” pointing to a single common “OT seed-bed.”³⁸ Though Fuller’s work may overstate the OT connections at some points and may miss other factors at play,³⁹ his work is still significant. It suggests that Paul’s exhortation concerning elders has strong, substantial ties to the OT ethical tradition

In addition to the OT underpinnings, an additional supporting thread for Paul’s exhortations emerges explicitly in 5:17. Paul’s exhortation regarding elders involves something similar to what he does in 1 Cor 9:8–14. There, Paul appeals to the teaching of Jesus (v. 14)⁴⁰ in conjunction with OT teaching (vv. 9, 13). In 1 Tim 5, he offers an explicit source of what he essentially credits to Jesus in 1 Corinthians. Alongside Deut 25:4, he appeals to Jesus’ teaching as relayed in Luke 10:7: “the worker deserves his wages.”⁴¹ This tie to Jesus suggests another possible influence that could account for what is assumed in Paul’s use of family terminology. When Jesus’ teaching is brought into view, his teaching on the impact of the kingdom on family ties seems especially relevant. Jesus relativizes the blood family but co-opts the social institution of family in order to structure and define the nature of the relationships within the people of God. Jesus’ family is made up of “whoever does God’s will” (Mark 3:35, *par*). At the same time, for those who give up family as a consequence of embracing Christ, they will receive a family in

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 260.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 260–61.

³⁹ Fuller’s work presses the correspondence between 1 Tim 5 and Deut 19 to a breaking point at times. E.g., the tribunal of “the Lord . . . the priests and the judges” (Deut 19:17) functions to ascertain the veracity of the witnesses, while the tribunal of “God, Christ Jesus and the elect angels” in 1 Tim 5:21 functions as witnesses to the admonition given in order to encourage the individual concerned (Timothy) to act impartially in his role as judge. Timothy’s witnesses will hold him accountable for his actions. Similar to Paul’s approach in 1 Cor 6:1–6, it seems better to see Paul drawing from a number of relevant OT texts (e.g., Exod 18:15–27 and Deut 1:15–18) to guide Timothy in this difficult matter (cf. B. Rosner, “Moses Appointing Judges: An Antecedent to 1Cor 6,1–6?” *ZNW* 82 [1991]: 275–78).

⁴⁰ “In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (cf. Matt 10:10; Luke 10:7).

⁴¹ See the convincing case for a connection to the Lucan Jesus in P. Wolff, “The Sagacious Use of Scripture,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel*, 211–16.

return—not just in the age to come but for the present age as well. Should faithfulness forfeit a relationship with a father, mother, sister or brother, the believer will find many a mother, brother, or sister to stand in their place (Mark 10:29–30). Even beyond providing a family for those socially orphaned, the new family relativizes the old so that the primary loyalties now shift to God’s family in Christ. Additionally, Paul frequently uses family terminology to describe his relationships to his coworkers (e.g., 1 Tim 1:2; Phil 2:22, 25) and to the church (e.g., 1 Cor 4:14–15; 1 Thess 2:11–12), as well as the relationship of the members of the church to each other (e.g., Gal 6:10; Rom 16:13).⁴² In fact, B. Witherington argues that “Paul by no means simply Christianized or baptized the Greco-Roman household structure, nor did he take his cues from that structure when he exhorted the body of Christ.”⁴³ And J. Hellerman adds, “For both Jesus and Paul, commitment to God was commitment to God’s group. Such an outlook generates a rather different set of priorities, one that more accurately reflects the strong group-perspective of the early Christians: (1st) God’s Family—(2nd) My family—(3rd) Others.”⁴⁴ In sum, there is a rich source of background material to inform Paul’s approach here. Moreover, since this manner of treating the various genders, ages, and roles is not absolutized (i.e., these relationships shape the way Timothy brings the truth to these groups but does not call for him to subordinate his message or ministry to those who stand above him in the social hierarchy), the biblical tradition coming through Jesus makes for a more likely backdrop to Paul’s instruction here.

Any consideration of the biblical tradition as the backdrop for the sub-

⁴² See Clarke, “Equality or Mutuality,” 152.

⁴³ Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 268.

⁴⁴ J. Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family: Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 94. It is important to note here that this does not call for a paradigm that encourages a believer to sacrifice their family on the altar of ministry, as if the call of Christ justifies an abrogation of one’s role as father, mother, etc. This is to assert that the reality of membership in God’s family provides the potential, shapes the direction and prescribes the limits of how one lives out their role within the biological family. E.g., what it means for a father to love his family as a father is driven by God’s expectations for fathers within his family, not by cultural expectations. This holds true for whatever social space a believer might occupy and it holds true for believers whether they are in believing or unbelieving households. This does mean, as Jesus taught (cf. Matt 10:21–33) and Paul reflects (cf. 1 Cor 7:15), that believers may not be able to preserve their relationship with their biological family. Relationships to biological family members stand subordinate to a believer’s commitment to Christ. Believers are obligated to stand over against family if to maintain their relationship would mean that they must deny or reject their primary identity as a member of the family of God. Likewise, believers may have to accept the dissolution of their relationship with their biological family if their biological family rejects them because of their commitment to Christ.

stance of what is assumed by father, brother, mother, sister raises the question as to whether “fictive” is an appropriate descriptor (i.e., “exhort . . . as if . . .”). God’s saving work in Christ has constituted his people as a family. They are the “assembly of the living God” (3:15).⁴⁵ In saying that they are the “assembly of the living God” this means that they are a people among whom God dwells, manifesting his presence for their blessing and thrusting ethical obligations upon those vouchsafed with his glory and mission (cf. Eph 2:19; 3:15; 5:1). There is something substantive and real to their family bonds effected by God’s saving work in Christ by the Spirit (1 Tim 3:16). This household is made up of all the sinners from every corner of the world that have believed on Jesus (cf. 1:15–16; 2:5–7; 3:16). There are real bonds in Christ that unite the various ages and genders. Paul can truly call Timothy “a genuine child in the faith” (1:2; cf. 2 Tim 1:4; Titus 1:4). In the light of the family bonds effected by God’s saving work as illustrated in Paul’s designation of Timothy as his “genuine son in the faith,” it seems fair to see Paul’s use of ὡς as a way to draw on a rich vein of an established redemptive reality. Paul’s designation of Timothy as his “genuine son in the faith” conditions the exhortation consistent with someone who occupies the social space of a father (or mother, brother, sister) *within God’s household*.⁴⁶

This, of course, does not mean that Timothy’s treatment of the various age/gender strata would be wholly incommensurate with what one would find in the Greco-Roman surrounding culture. The following exhortation gives examples of Paul doing what he is admonishing Timothy to do in 5:1–2, i.e., exhorting various strata within the household with an appropriate sensitivity to the social space they occupy given their age/gender. Paul’s παρακλήσις to the widows and the elders can be taken as a sub-species of what he wants Timothy to do in any encounter with the various strata of the household.⁴⁷ Paul treats these strata against the backdrop of what is expected

⁴⁵ The indefinite relative, ἥτις, which links οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ with what follows, is feminine by attraction to ἐκκλησία. Attraction “occurs when the focus of the discourse is on the predicate nom.: the dominant gender reveals the dominant idea of the passage” (D. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 338; cf. also J. Roloff, *Die Erste Brief an Timotheus* [EKK 15; Zürich: Benziger, 1988], 199). Thus, grammatically, ἐκκλησία stands as the controlling metaphor for Paul’s use of the preceding οἶκῳ θεοῦ. Moreover, its controlling function is reinforced contextually by the extensive elaboration in the following phrase, “belonging to the living God, a support and pillar of the truth.” The οἶκῳ θεοῦ is nothing other than the ἐκκλησία, the people who experience God’s active presence which both constitutes them as a people and drives and constrains their life as a people. Once again, this points away from the surrounding culture as the driving force shaping Paul’s conception of what it means to be in “God’s household.”

⁴⁶ For the importance and theologically shaped nature of “social spaces” for Paul’s re-ordering of God’s household in 1 Timothy, see discussion of the “quiet and tranquil life” in Couser, “Prayer and the Public Square,” 291–93.

⁴⁷ J. Quinn and W. Wacker (*The First and Second Letters to Timothy* [ECC; Grand

of members of God's household so that his affirmations, corrections, or rebukes are driven by who they are as members in God's family. There is overlap with Greek moral tradition where that tradition complements or corresponds with expectations for God's family, e.g., as suggested by Winter's work with respect to secular concepts of *providentia* and Paul's teaching on the care of widows.⁴⁸ Yet, given the extensive OT backdrop of Paul's teaching, one should not read 1 Tim 5:8 as implying that Paul's teaching is merely a recapitulation of the accepted ethical expectations of the surrounding culture, much less that those expectations are reshaping God's family into the mold of the secular household. While a believer's neglect of their widowed mother would make them "worse than an unbeliever," what it means for a believer to care for their widow is driven and uniquely shaped by the demands of "godliness" (εὐσεβεῖν), the manner of life throughout these letters that is driven and shaped by God's saving mission in Christ.⁴⁹ The driving forces giving shape to what is assumed for "exhort older men as a father, older women as mothers, etc." are coming from above (OT teaching mediated through the teaching of Jesus and, now, Paul), not from below. In fact, this is the only way to account adequately for the appropriateness of Timothy's activity with any of the age groups/genders. Taking an authoritative posture toward those above him in the social hierarchy as well as toward his peers, especially in regard to the basis of his authority and the direction toward which it is exercised, puts him outside secular cultural expectations.

Conclusion

It seems clear that Paul's direction to Timothy in 5:1–2 goes against the cultural grain. Indeed, the role that he plays at Ephesus would be shocking on many levels. It is hard to account for Timothy's prescribed pattern of behavior given contemporary cultural norms. And, alongside Pao's work on 1 Tim 4:12,⁵⁰ the role that Timothy plays adds additional reasons for seeing Paul's ethic as *fundamentally* driven from "above." Paul seems to be extending a pre-existing, theologically-shaped notion of the character and manner of life appropriate in the household of God. Drawing on the OT as mediated through Jesus and his own earlier apostolic reflection, Paul determines the character and manner of Timothy's interaction within the family of God.

Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 411) suggest that the singular suggests a man-to-man encounter and separates it from the public admonishment required for the sinning Elder (5:19–20). However, this reading seems hard to sustain. Rightly, Towner sees Elders as at least a part of the group envisioned here. 5:1–2 are intended to shape the envisioned correction so that it is "done in a conciliatory and positive way, one that seeks to restore fellowship rather than to isolate those in error" (*Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 331).

⁴⁸ Winter, "Providentia," 83–99.

⁴⁹ P. Towner, *Goal of Our Instruction*, 150; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 83; Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 117; and Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 142–43.

⁵⁰ Pao, "Let No One Despise Your Youth," 743–55.

God's saving purposes are primary for God's household. It is only those purposes which can sufficiently account for its creation, for the shape of its internal life, and for its mission in the world. It is those purposes which drive the re-appropriation (or reclamation) of the social spaces in the secular household toward the fulfillment of God's purposes in and through his family. As such, they are co-opted and reinvested with new norms which both overlap and diverge from their secular counterparts.