

S O U T H E A S T E R N

THEOLOGICAL REVIEW



Vol. 7, No. 2 Winter 2016

Introduction to the Volume

STR Editor

1

Πιστός ὁ λόγος: An Alternative Analysis

L. Timothy Swinson

57

Kinship, Christian Kinship, and the Letters to Timothy and Titus

Charles J. Bumgardner

3

Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus: A Literature Review (2009–2015)

Charles J. Bumgardner

77

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

Gregory A. Couser

19

Interview with Ray Van Neste of Union University

117

Paul's Family of God: What Familial Language in the Pastorals Can and Cannot Tell Us about the Church

Gregory J. Stiekes

35

Book Reviews

125

Southeastern Theological Review

Is published biannually for the faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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Unsolicited article submissions to the journal are welcomed and should be directed to the editor. All submitted articles to *Southeastern Theological Review* are evaluated by double-blind peer review. All articles that are submitted to *STR* should present original work in their field. Manuscripts should conform to the *SBL Handbook of Style* (2nd edition).

This periodical is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database® (ATLA RDB®), a product of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, USA. Email: atla@atla.com, www: http://www.atla.com.

This periodical is also indexed with Old Testament Abstracts®, The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC 20064, USA. Email: cua-ota@cua.edu.

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Note: The views expressed in the following articles are not necessarily those of the STR editorial board, the faculty, or the administration of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Individual authors are responsible for the research and content presented in their essays.

ISSN 2156-9401

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CONTENTS

ARTICLES

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction to the Volume..... | 1 |
| <i>Benjamin L. Merkle</i> | |
| Kinship, Christian Kinship, and the Letters to Timothy and Titus..... | 3 |
| <i>Charles J. Bumgardner</i> | |
| Divergent, Insurgent or Allegiant? 1 Timothy 5:1–2 and the Nature of God’s Household..... | 19 |
| <i>Gregory A. Couser</i> | |
| Paul’s Family of God: What Familial Language in the Pastorals Can and Cannot Tell Us about the Church | 35 |
| <i>Gregory J. Stiekes</i> | |
| Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος: An Alternative Analysis..... | 57 |
| <i>L. Timothy Swinson</i> | |
| Paul’s Letters to Timothy and Titus: A Literature Review (2009–2015) | 77 |
| <i>Charles J. Bumgardner</i> | |
| Interview with Ray Van Neste of Union University | 117 |
| Book Reviews | 125 |

BOOK REVIEWS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Craig G. Bartholomew. <i>Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Framework for Hearing God in Scripture</i> | 125 |
| <i>Grant D. Taylor</i> | |
| Christopher J. H. Wright. <i>How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth</i> | 126 |
| <i>Allan Moseley</i> | |
| Rodney A. Whitacre. <i>Using and Enjoying Biblical Greek: Reading the New Testament with Fluency and Devotion</i> | 128 |
| <i>Thomas W. Hudgins</i> | |
| Helen K. Bond and Larry W. Hurtado, eds. <i>Peter in Early Christianity</i> | 130 |
| <i>David R. Beck</i> | |
| Gary G. Hoag. <i>Wealth in Ancient Ephesus and the First Letter to Timothy: Fresh Insights from Ephesiaca by Xenophon of Ephesus</i> | 132 |
| <i>Benjamin L. Merkle</i> | |
| L. Timothy Swinson <i>What Is Scripture? Paul’s Use of Graphe in the Letters to Timothy</i> | 134 |
| <i>Peter Link, Jr.</i> | |

Rodrick K. Durst. *Reordering the Trinity: Six Movements of God in the New Testament* 136
Matthew Y. Emerson

Jerry L. Walls. *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory: Rethinking the Things that Matter Most*..... 137
Alan S. Bandy

S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams. *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* 140
Alan Branch

Kirk R. MacGregor. *Luis de Molina: His Life and Theology*..... 142
Kenneth Keathley

Kyle C. Strobel, ed. *The Ecumenical Edwards: Jonathan Edwards and the Theologians* and Oliver D. Crisp. *Jonathan Edwards among the Theologians*..... 144
Nathan A. Finn

Carolyn Curtis and Mary Pomroy Key, eds. *Women and C. S. Lewis: What His Life and Literature Reveal for Today's Culture* 147
Adrianne Miles

Philip Turner. *Christian Ethics and the Church: Ecclesial Foundations for Moral Thought and Practice* 149
Erik Clary

Stephen Finlan. *Bullying in the Churches* 151
James P. Porowski

Kinship, Christian Kinship, and the Letters to Timothy and Titus

Charles J. Bumgardner

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

After a brief discussion of Paul's use of the family as a metaphor for the church, this essay addresses two points regarding Paul's use of this metaphor of church as family as it is used in the Letters to Timothy and Titus (LTT). First, over against the recent argument of Raymond Collins, it is argued that the way that kinship terminology is used in the LTT does not invalidate the letters' claim to have been written by Paul. Second, the essay demonstrates that Paul's use of the metaphor in juxtaposition with his references to physical family in the LTT provide significant insight into the interplay between the two.

In his letters, Paul uses a number of metaphors for the church—body, bride, building—but a convincing case can be made that the most foundational metaphor he has in mind for the church is that of a family.¹ The metaphor of church as family may also be considered from the perspective of a number of what we might call sub-metaphors, other metaphors that contribute to the larger one. Several of these sub-metaphors are conveniently given in 1 Timothy 5:1–2, where Timothy is instructed to treat older men as fathers, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters. The metaphor of church as family may also be considered in connection with the idea of the church as the *household of God*.

This metaphor of church as family is particularly noteworthy when it comes to the Letters to Timothy and Titus (LTT) for several reasons, and two of those will be addressed in the present essay.² First, family metaphors have been engaged in discussions of the authorship of the letters and related

¹ Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting* (rev. ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 55–56. From his own research in Paul, Trevor Burke is inclined to agree that “the family is not only an important metaphor but is the most pervasive one that [Paul] employs in describing the Church” (*Family Matters: A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians* [JSNTSup 247; London: T&T Clark, 2003], 9 n. 25).

² While the term “Pastoral Epistles” (“PE”) has been for some time the traditional designation of the three canonical letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus, the nomenclature is not without its concerns. These are detailed perhaps most helpfully in Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 83–89, esp. 88–89. Notably, Towner asserts that the term “Pastoral Epistles” has become “something of a restraining device” (88) which encourages a corpus-reading of the three epistles.

matters. In this regard, some see a shift from the church in other Pauline epistles as *a brotherhood* (with connotations of equality and a broad egalitarianism) to the church in the LTT as *household* (with connotations of structural hierarchy). Second, these letters (and 1 Timothy in particular) touch on relationships of physical family (i.e., not ones which are solely Christian) more than is usual in a NT epistle. This in turn provides opportunity to examine real kinship and Christian kinship in juxtaposition, an exercise which is helpful both theologically and practically. The purpose of this essay is to provide an overview of the metaphor of church as family as it is used in the LTT. More specifically, the greater part of this essay will argue that the way that kinship terminology is used in the LTT does not invalidate the letters' claim to have been written by Paul. In addition, some initial soundings will be taken of the intersection of Christian kinship and physical kinship, as these two are juxtaposed in the LTT.³

Introduction: Paul and the Church as Family

Before we engage the two areas of interest mentioned above, we will briefly discuss Paul's use of family metaphors in relation to the church. It was noted above that the metaphor of church as family may well be the most foundational metaphor Paul has in mind when he thinks of the church. This is suggested perhaps most strongly by his pervasive use of sibling terminology when he addresses and refers to believers in Christ. Paul sprinkles his letters liberally with *ἀδελφός* (brother) and *ἀδελφοί* (brothers, or brothers and sisters), and *ἀδελφή* (sister) is also found a few times. This sibling language is used far and away more frequently in terms of Christian kinship than it is used in terms of physical kinship.⁴ It should be noted that this use of Christian sibling terminology is by no means an exclusively Pauline phenomenon

³ As a brief note on terminology, for the purposes of this essay, the terms "kinship" and "family" are used as roughly equivalent in a broad sense, and "household" and "family" as roughly equivalent in a narrower sense. So in common English, we might speak of "family" as a broad relational concept and also more specifically of "a family" or what might be called a "family unit." Similarly, the term "kinship" will be used as a broad relational concept and more narrowly "household" as a sort of "kinship unit," although in NT times, households might include slaves as well as those related by blood or marriage. As well, "Christian kinship" will indicate a relationship between Christians described *in terms of* a kinship relationship, though it is not necessarily one, as when Paul calls Timothy "his son," although Paul is not Timothy's physical father. On terminology for "family" in antiquity, see the important essay by Halvor Moxnes, "What Is Family? Problems in Constructing Early Christian Families," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (ed. Halvor Moxnes; London: Routledge, 1997), 13–41; and the discussion in Burke, *Family Matters*, 5–7.

⁴ Aasgaard has noted that "the sibling metaphor is Paul's most frequent way of speaking of his co-Christians, and almost his only way of addressing them directly"

in the NT: every other NT writer and every NT book not written by Paul—except for Jude and his short epistle—employs sibling language for followers of Jesus, whether vocatively, descriptively, or both, reflecting a widespread conception among early Christians of the church as family.

This ubiquitous use of family metaphor is doubtless grounded in Christ's own teaching, as the Evangelists show us. Each of the Synoptics, for instance, relates an incident in which Jesus teaches us something about priorities when it comes to physical vs. Christian kinship. Here is Mark's account:

And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:31–35)⁵

Grounded in this passage and others, the broad NT theological perspective is that followers of Christ comprise a new family over against their blood family. As disciples of Jesus, they were considered to be children of God the Father, and thus brothers and sisters of each other, and even at one level, of Christ himself, whom Paul reminds us in Romans 8 is the firstborn among many siblings.⁶

By one count, Paul uses sibling terminology for other believers vocatively 71 times and descriptively another 64 times, totaling 135 times in 13 epistles or an average of 10–11 times a letter. While this is an average—Titus has no uses at all and 1 Corinthians has 39—it gives an idea of how frequently Paul uses this sort of metaphorical language.⁷

Family Metaphors and Pauline Authorship

Some scholars have suggested that the question of authenticity for a given letter in the traditional Pauline corpus is connected with how often and in what ways metaphorical family language is used in that letter. This is particularly the case with the language of Christian siblingship; since Paul so commonly uses ἀδελφός to refer to fellow believers, a correspondence is often

(Reidar Aasgaard, "My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!" *Christian Siblingship in Paul* [JSNTSup 265; London: T&T Clark, 2004], 309).

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

⁶ The NT use of Christian kinship language is somewhat flexible, and although this pattern (God = father; Christ = son; Christians = brothers and sisters) seems to be the most pervasive, it is not the only one. In 1 Tim 5:1–2, Paul uses a different pattern (older men and women in the church = fathers and mothers; younger men and women in the church = siblings). One might think of the first pattern as more ontological and the second as more functional.

⁷ Note the helpful and detailed charts of sibling terminology usage in the NT in Aasgaard, "My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!" 313–14.

drawn between how many times this happens in a given letter and the likelihood that the letter is pseudonymous. A look at Paul's use of the sibling metaphor does show noticeable differences between those letters of his commonly accepted as authentic and those that are often considered inauthentic. For instance, Paul uses the plural vocative ἀδελφοί fairly regularly in Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. He does not use it at all in Ephesians, Colossians, or the LTT, all letters which are often deemed inauthentic. But statistics are often a rather blunt instrument by which to determine authenticity, and in this case the general pattern is marred by 2 Thessalonians, more often than not deemed inauthentic by critical scholarship, but with the second-highest frequency of the plural vocative ἀδελφοί among the letters attributed to Paul.

In discussing this connection between Christian sibling terminology and the question of the authenticity of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, we should note a recent article by Raymond Collins. Collins has made a number of significant contributions to the study of the letters to Timothy and Titus, culminating in his commentary in the NTL series by Westminster John Knox, which came out in 2002, a few years before his retirement.⁸ In his retirement, however, he has contributed to a *Festschrift* for Jerome Murphy-O'Connor and Joseph Fitzmyer an essay entitled "Where Have All My Siblings Gone? A Reflection on the Use of Kinship Language in the Pastoral Epistles."⁹

As one would expect from a scholar of Collins's stature, his essay is nuanced and thorough. He suggests that the question in his title, "Where have all my siblings gone?" would have been on Paul's lips, so to speak, if Paul had read the LTT, which in Collins's judgment he did not write.¹⁰ This question would be forthcoming from Paul for two reasons, Collins suggests. First, though Paul uses the designation "brother" for both Timothy and Titus in other letters, he does not use it for them in the letters addressed to them. Second, these letters do not engage the sibling metaphor for believers in gen-

⁸ Raymond F. Collins, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

⁹ Raymond F. Collins, "Where Have All My Siblings Gone? A Reflection on the Use of Kinship Language in the Pastoral Epistles," in *Celebrating Paul: Festschrift in Honor of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.* (ed. Peter Spitaler; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2011), 321–36. There are some similarities between this essay and one Collins wrote previously: "Timothy and Titus: On Reading the Pastoral Epistles," in *Forschungen zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt: Festschrift für Albert Fuchs* (ed. Christoph Niemand; Linzer Philosophisch-Theologische Beiträge 7; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), 367–81.

¹⁰ Collins summarizes his case for pseudonymous authorship of the letters to Timothy and Titus in *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, 2–9.

eral to the extent that other letters from Paul typically do, and in this particular regard, Collins avers, Paul would find them lacking.¹¹ Is Collins's judgment accurate? Or does he perhaps overstate his case?

Addressing the second reason first, we observe that Collins is certainly correct to note the reduced amount of Christian sibling language in the LTT. Paul engages this language only four times in the three epistles: three times in 1 Timothy, once in 2 Timothy, and not at all in Titus. From a strictly statistical viewpoint this is indeed at variance with the letters commonly accepted as authentically Pauline by critical scholarship. However, three points should be urged against Collins's working assumption that infrequent Christian sibling language reflects pseudonymity.

First, it should be noted that even if this metaphor were entirely absent from the letters, such absence would not necessarily indicate inauthenticity. The metaphor of the church as family, and specifically as siblings, seems to be very much a live metaphor for Paul,¹² and when he uses it, he tends to use it with a purpose.¹³ Put another way, Paul may choose to use or not to use the metaphor as he sees fit in a given writing; it is not simply an unconscious way of speaking—though it is a common one.

Second, the simple fact is that the language of Christian siblingship is not entirely absent from the LTT. Further, where this language *is* used, it is compatible with Paul's use in his other letters.¹⁴

The first use is in 1 Tim 4:6, where Christian sibling language that is descriptive (not vocative) and plural is used, and this is common in Paul.¹⁵ Here,

¹¹ It should be carefully observed that Collins by no means rests his entire case for inauthenticity on the lack of sibling language; it is one factor among others which to him reflect pseudonymity.

¹² See, e.g., Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 51.

¹³ Aasgaard notes that Paul often simply uses the metaphor as an implicit way "to arouse a family 'feel' in his co-Christians," but in more pointed ways as well ("*My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!*" 310–12).

¹⁴ Collins does admit that "the Epistles to Timothy use the plural ἀδελφοί in a way that retains something of Paul's rich metaphorical use" ("Where Have All My Siblings Gone?" 334).

The fact must be acknowledged that the Christian sibling metaphor is not used in Titus. At the same time, even with a working assumption of pseudonymous authorship, it is commonly acknowledged that the letters to Timothy and Titus all appear to have been written by the same author, and on this datum certain points predicated on one or two of the letters may have application to all three. For the view that the epistles have more than one author, see, e.g., Michaela Engelman, *Unzertrennliche Drillinge? Motivsemantische Untersuchungen zum literarischen Verhältnis der Pastoralbriefe* (BZNW 192; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012); Jens Herzer, "Rearranging the 'House of God': A New Perspective on the Pastoral Epistles," in Empsychoi Logoi—*Religious Innovations in Antiquity: Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst* [ed. Alberdina Houtman et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2008], 564–66).

¹⁵ Rom 8:29; 16:14; 1 Cor 6:8; 8:12; 15:6; 16:11, 12, 20; 2 Cor 8:23; 9:3, 5; 11:9;

in reference to the creation theology Paul has just given against the false teaching at Ephesus, he says:

If you put these things before the brothers (τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς), you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.

The Ephesian congregation as a whole may be in view here.¹⁶ Given the discourse of the entire chapter, “the brothers” here could be seen as parallel to Timothy’s envisioned audience described in other ways in the context: “those who believe and know the truth” (v. 3); “the believers” (v. 12), “all” (v. 15), and “your hearers” (v. 16).

It is also possible that “the brothers” is a reference not to the entire congregation but to a subset within it—its leaders.¹⁷ Paul does seem to use the designation “the brothers”—ἀδελφοί with the article—at times to refer specifically to congregational leaders or missionary co-workers in contradistinction to the church as a whole,¹⁸ and that may be the case in the present passage.¹⁹ If this is true, then the instruction here would be along the lines of that in 2 Tim 2:2, where Timothy is to pass along Paul’s instruction to faithful men who will be able to teach others as well.²⁰ In either case, however, whether the entire congregation is in view here in 1 Timothy 4 or only its leaders, the use of “brothers” is compatible with what we find elsewhere in Paul.

Another Christian sibling reference is found in 1 Tim 6:2:

Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers (ἀδελφοί); rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service

Gal 1:2; Phil 1:14; 4:21; 1 Thess 4:10; 5:26, 27.

¹⁶ So I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 548–49. Paul is likely using “the brothers” in this sense in 1 Thess 5:27.

¹⁷ E. Schlarb, *Die gesunde Lehre: Häresie und Wahrheit im Spiegel der Pastoralbriefe* (Marburg: Elwert, 1990), 282, 289.

¹⁸ See esp. E. Earle Ellis, “Paul and His Co-Workers,” in *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity: New Testament Essays* (WUNT 18; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1978), 13–22. Note, e.g., Phil 4:21–22: “Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household” (emphasis added).

¹⁹ If Paul does indeed use “the brothers” in a specialized sense to refer to Christian leaders at times—and it seems that he does—this consideration would affect the statistical comparison of Christian sibling terminology among letters attributed to Paul and provide additional hesitation for putting a great deal of weight on such a comparison in matters of authorship. This is a point for further research.

²⁰ Considerably less likely, but perhaps still possible, “the brothers” here might include elders who have bought into the false teaching themselves.

are believers and beloved. (1 Tim 6:1–2)

This interesting passage will be examined more closely later, but it may simply be noted here that in the particular situation at Ephesus, the immediate and pressing need was for slaves to do what was appropriate in their present circumstances: to relate to their believing masters with respect and good service. Apparently, Paul had knowledge that this was not consistently happening. He, of course, elsewhere enjoins slaves to obey their masters, but the connected caution here not to presume wrongly upon the notion of Christian brotherhood is admittedly rather unique in Paul. Some have contrasted it with Paul's use of "brother" in his implied request to Philemon that he free his slave Onesimus,²¹ but the two situations are not actually incompatible.²²

A third reference to Christian siblingship should briefly be noted in 2 Tim 4:21:

Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.

The similarity to Pauline final greetings elsewhere is immediately apparent.²³

Finally, Paul refers to Christian siblings in his instructions to Timothy in 1 Tim 5:1–2:

Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

Oddly, Collins disallows this instance. That is, he sees only the three references already mentioned (1 Tim 4:6; 6:2; 2 Tim 4:21) as "sibling language used to identify a member of the believing community."²⁴ Collins discusses this passage, but insists that it does not count as a passage of Christian siblingship because, considered in isolation, the terms "brothers" and "sisters" must, strictly speaking, refer to biological siblings: Timothy is to treat younger

²¹ See esp. David G. Horrell, "From ἀδελφοί to οἶκος θεοῦ: Social Transformation in Pauline Christianity," *JBL* 120 (2001): 307. Note also Aasgaard, "My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!" 258–59 n. 129; Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, 564 n. 53; Lorenz Oberlinner, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, vol. 1: *Kommentar zum 1. Timotheusbrief* (HThKNT 11/2; Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 267 n. 13.

²² For one thing, Paul addresses the *master*, Philemon, in the one case, and *slaves* in the other case, and in each case engages the notion of Christian siblingship as appropriate to the addressee. As well, to uncritically equate *siblingship*, Christian or not, with unqualified *equality* is not justified by the evidence, as shall be seen. Finally, the sort of thing Paul enjoins upon slaves here seems to cohere with his teaching in 1 Cor 7:21–24.

²³ E.g., 1 Cor 16:19–20: "The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss."

²⁴ Collins, "Where Have All My Siblings Gone?" 335.

men and women *as if they were* biological sisters and brothers.²⁵ But surely this is too fine a distinction. The fact that Paul uses a simile here, not a metaphor, does not negate the larger point: that the language of siblingship is being used for Christians who are not actually siblings.

More to the point, though Collins does not discuss this, Paul here speaks of the congregation in Christian kinship terms not only as brothers and sisters, but also as fathers and mothers, and this is not typical of Paul (though it is also not incompatible with Paul). This is balanced, however, by Paul's flexibility in his use of family metaphors. He can, for instance, speak of himself as being like a mother to the Thessalonians, and in the next breath call them brothers, then note how he was like a father to them, and immediately after this call them brothers again—all in the span of eight verses (1 Thess 2:7–14).²⁶ A writer who can do this can certainly speak of an entire congregation as siblings in one place and in one sense and speak of them in terms of being fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters in another place and in another sense.

A third reason weakens the case that infrequent Christian sibling language fails to convincingly support pseudonymity for 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus: Paul is writing to individuals, his delegates, and this naturally has implications for the mode of address he uses.²⁷ Over half of the instances of Christian sibling language in Paul's epistles are used in direct address, and in the LTT, Paul simply chooses to address his delegates (not all the Christians in a given congregation, the recipients of most of his other letters) in filial terms like "son" and "child," not in fraternal terms like "brother." David Horrell considers this explanation and rejects it, pointing out that in the other epistle where Paul writes to an individual, Philemon, he uses "brother" as a vocative three times in a very short letter.²⁸ That observation is certainly true, but the situations are clearly different, and Paul's rhetorical strategy varies correspondingly. He has a point in calling Philemon "brother" and a point in calling Timothy and Titus "son" and "child,"²⁹ and this necessitates neither inconsistency in Paul nor pseudonymous authorship of the letters to Timothy

²⁵ Ibid., 334.

²⁶ See Raymond F. Collins, *The Power of Images in Paul* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2008), 13–19.

²⁷ Campbell highlights recent studies in register, noting that while letters may share the same genre, "they nevertheless exhibit a certain amount of register variation as a result of their being written at different times in the apostle's life, for different purposes, and to different audiences. Letters written to individuals, for instance, clearly differ from congregational correspondence" (Constantine R. Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015], 142).

²⁸ "From ἀδελφοί to οἶκος θεοῦ," 306. Horrell is followed in this argument by Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 561–62.

²⁹ Paul is not appealing to *Timothy* as the head of household to free a slave, nor is

and Titus.

It has been shown above that infrequent Christian sibling language is not determinative of pseudonymity in the LTT. As noted, however, Collins also thinks Paul would ask of these letters, “Where have all my siblings gone?” because of a particular shift of language: in certain of his epistles, Paul speaks both of Timothy and of Titus as “brother” and of Timothy as “child.” In 1–2 Timothy and Titus, however, the filial language remains for Timothy and Titus, but the fraternal language is absent, so that Collins observes, “since neither Timothy nor Titus is described as a sibling in the Pastoral Epistles, the apostle might well have asked, ‘Where have my siblings gone?’”³⁰

This objection is even less problematic than the question of *overall* frequency of Christian sibling language. When considering individual letters of Paul and not a particular subcorpus—such as writings deemed authentic—this perceived problem vanishes. In 1 Corinthians, Philippians, and 1 Thessalonians, Paul speaks of Timothy as child and not as brother;³¹ in 2 Corinthians, Colossians, and Philemon, he speaks of Timothy as brother and not as child;³² and in 2 Corinthians, he also speaks of Titus as brother and not as child.³³ So, in no single epistle does Paul use *both* filial and fraternal terminology for either Timothy or Titus which, even given Paul’s inclination to mix metaphors at times, should not be particularly surprising. Thus, in this regard the LTT actually fit quite well with all the other letters attributed to Paul—which should also not be surprising.

It has been shown in this essay’s first major point that the use of Christian sibling language in the LTT is compatible with Paul’s use of this language elsewhere and not indicative of pseudonymity. The use or non-use of Christian kinship language in the LTT might simply be considered a curiosity, but it actually proves to be a key piece of evidence for some theories of the development of the early church.

It is common to read that the LTT are pseudonymous and reflect a distinctly later stage in the development of the early church, generally involving a decline in vitality and an increasing institutionalization.³⁴ This shift is often spoken of in terms of moving from an egalitarian to a hierarchical church.³⁵

he instructing *Philemon* on rooting out false teaching in the church.

³⁰ Collins, “Where Have All My Siblings Gone?” 333. He also notes, “Given Paul’s predilection to call Timothy his brother, it is striking that neither the author of First Timothy nor the author of Second Timothy uses the vocative ἀδελφῆ in appealing to ‘Timothy,’ the purported recipient of these missives” (326).

³¹ 1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:22; 1 Thess 3:2.

³² 2 Cor 1:1; Col 1:1; Phm 1:1.

³³ 2 Cor 2:13.

³⁴ See esp. Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-Historical Study of Institutionalism in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings* (SNTSMS 60; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

³⁵ See, e.g., Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological*

From another perspective, and of greater interest for our examination of kinship language in the LTT, this shift is also spoken of in terms of moving from siblingship to patriarchalism, or as David Horrell has succinctly put it, “from brothers to household of God.”³⁶ In one of the more nuanced treatments of this position, Horrell acknowledges that Christians are “described both as siblings and as household members throughout the Pauline corpus,” but he sees differences in how this language is *used* that reflects a shift “from the model of an egalitarian community of ἀδελφοί toward the model of a hierarchical household-community,” that is, “from a loosely organized sectarian-type movement where the language of brotherhood predominates, into one that is more structured and ‘churchlike,’ which mirrors the conventional household hierarchy in its own internal organization.”³⁷

Horrell takes pains not to overstate his case. For instance, he acknowledges that (the “authentic”) Paul uses metaphors for the church other than that of siblings, and thus sibling language “should not be taken to imply that Paul’s vision is unambiguously that of an egalitarian community”; in this vein, he recognizes that even in the earliest Christian communities, “there were people in positions of leadership and power, both resident members of the congregations and itinerant leaders such as Paul himself.”³⁸ Additionally, and importantly, while he sees Paul’s use of the Christian sibling metaphor as essentially implying equality, he admits that “distinctions can be, and are, made among the ἀδελφοί (cf. Gal 6:6; 1 Thess 5:12), and Paul certainly does not restrict himself to a role as an ἀδελφός among equal siblings.”³⁹

While the nuance of Horrell’s treatment is appreciated, his thesis still must ultimately be rejected. As a general flaw, articulations of this egalitarian-to-hierarchical model of development in the early church tend to rely upon a non-Pauline reading of 1–2 Timothy and Titus. While this position prevails in the broader academy, those who are convinced the letters are authentic will have corresponding objections to theories grounded in pseudonymity. As well, in seeing language of brotherhood as indicating a greater egalitarianism, Horrell seems to tie the notion of brotherhood too tightly to that of equality (though he acknowledges exceptions). To the contrary, Trevor Burke has shown that “hierarchical relationships were an important feature of brotherly relations in antiquity.”⁴⁰ Similarly, in an important essay, John Elliot

Reconstruction of Christian Origins (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Klaus Schäfer, *Gemeinde als “Bruderschaft”*: Ein Beitrag zum Kirchenverständnis des Paulus (Europäische Hochschulschriften 23/333; Bern: Peter Lang, 1989).

³⁶ Horrell, “From ἀδελφοί to οἶκος θεοῦ,” 293–311.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 310.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 303, 304.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁴⁰ Burke, *Family Matters*, 231. Within Burke’s primary source research on this point, he helpfully cites Plutarch regarding brothers: “it is impossible for them to be on an equal footing in all respects” (*Frat. amor.* 484C). See further, Andrew D. Clarke,

has asserted that “brothers can be quite unequal in terms of position or privilege.”⁴¹ And in his thorough study of Christian siblingship in Paul and the ancient world, Reidar Aasgaard notes,

Contrary to the view of many scholars, neither Paul nor the other sources appear to stress ideas of equality. Although some sources have a thrust towards a levelling of sibling relations, this tendency is not very pronounced. Differences among siblings arising from age, disposition, and status, from varying degrees of strength or weakness, appear to be viewed as given and acceptable. Hierarchy seems to have been inherent in the sibling relationship as well, although to a lesser degree than in other relations within the family. Generally, such an idea of sibling equality appears as a modern construct, which is not grounded in the classical sources. At most we may speak of elements of equality within siblingship, along with elements of hierarchy.⁴²

Hence, even though sibling language is used more in some of the writings attributed to Paul than in others, it is more likely that this reflects various scenarios he was addressing rather than a broad egalitarian-to-hierarchical shift.

The Interplay between Christian Kinship and Physical Kinship in the LTT

In the letters to Timothy and Titus, what was the interplay like between one’s role in the Christian family on the one hand and one’s social family on the other hand? Or to put it another way, what happened when household life in antiquity intersected with the Christian household in the LTT? This is a significant question. Reidar Aasgaard’s monograph on fictive siblingship in Paul addresses the interplay between one’s role as a Christian *sibling* and one’s role in the social family;⁴³ it is helpful and thought-provoking as far as it goes,

“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* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 151–64.

⁴¹ John H. Elliot, “Jesus Was Not an Egalitarian: A Critique of an Anachronistic and Idealistic Theory,” *BTB* 32 (2002): 82.

⁴² Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 307.

⁴³ See “Brothers in the Flesh and in the Lord: Family Role Encounters in Paul (Philemon *et al.*),” in Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 236–60. Along with his major case study in Philemon, he also mentions several other specific instances of “family role encounters”: Paul’s speaking of one having “a sister, a wife” (1 Cor 9:5); Rufus’s mother, whom Paul says was a mother to him as well (Rom 16:13); the mixed marriages of 1 Cor 7:12–15, where Paul specifically refers to believers as “brother” (vv. 12, 14, 15) and “sister” (v. 15) over against an unbelieving spouse.

but because Aasgaard's project concerns Paul and he views the LTT as inauthentic, he does not engage them in any significant way in the study.⁴⁴

The LTT provide a number of scenarios illustrating this intersection between Christian family and social family. One might consider:

- An overseer or deacon in the church needing to be faithful to his wife and to manage his own household well (1 Tim 3:2, 4–5, 12; Titus 1:6).
- Christian (grand)children who are to care for their widowed Christian (grand)mother (1 Tim 5:4).
- Any Christian who might need to provide for their own relatives, especially those of their own household (1 Tim 5:8).⁴⁵
- An “enrolled widow”⁴⁶ needing to have been faithful to her husband and to have brought up children (1 Tim 5:9–10).
- Younger widows who should not be “enrolled” because they will want to marry when their passions draw them away from Christ, but who instead should marry, bear children, and manage their households (1 Tim 5:11–14).
- A Christian woman who is to care for her widowed relative (1 Tim 5:16).
- Christian slaves (who would have been part of the “social family”/household) who were not to be disrespectful to their masters if (and because) their masters are Christian brothers, but who were to

⁴⁴ Engaging Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon, he characterizes this interplay in (the undisputed) Paul as “a dialectical interaction between the old family with its manifold expectations of its members’ rights and obligations, and the Christian groups as communities in the making,” and argues that Paul doesn’t see Christian siblingship as a new family which replaces the old, but “simply employs and adapts the notions generally associated with social siblingship and living in a family to that of Christian relations.” On the other hand, Aasgaard views the LTT as belonging to the next generation of Christianity, and in that context, “the new family of Christians has superseded the old family . . . the Christian siblingship of Paul has been turned into the Christianized household of the Pastorals” (ibid., 311–12).

⁴⁵ This item is particularly interesting: in his rhetorical motivation, Paul asserts that the one who will not do this “has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” “That such a one would be counted ‘worse than an unbeliever’ . . . indicates that even outside the Christian group such sharing of possessions and coming to the aid of kin in need would be the expected norm” (David deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000], 171).

⁴⁶ A “true widow” (v. 3) who is simply supported by the church, or who is part of an official “order of widows,” depending upon one’s reading of the passage.

serve them all the more because their masters are brothers (1 Tim 6:1–2).

- Possibly, Timothy’s grandmother Lois and mother Eunice teaching him the Scriptures from his earliest days (2 Tim 1:5; 3:15).
- Older Christian women who are to train younger Christian women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be submissive to their husbands (Titus 2:4–5).
- Christian slaves who are to be submissive to their masters (Titus 2:9).

These intersections of Christian family and social family are, of course, of varying sorts. We might place them into several categories, though there is some overlap here:

1. Fulfilling one’s role in the social household as significant for a role in the Christian household (overseer, deacon, enrolled widow).⁴⁷
2. Providing for needs in one’s social household (and beyond) to lessen the burden on one’s Christian household (1 Tim 5:4, 8, 16).
3. Not allowing one’s status in one’s Christian household to bring one to go beyond appropriate bounds in one’s social household (1 Tim 6:1–2).
4. Training those in the Christian household to fulfill their role in their social household (Titus 2:4–5). This is also, in one sense, the burden of much of 1 Timothy as a letter, probably in response to the false teaching in Ephesus.⁴⁸

It can be immediately seen that many of these intersections of one’s role in the Christian household with one’s role in the social household simply come down to the need to properly fulfill one’s responsibilities in the social household. Why should this be done? Paul generally connects the proper

⁴⁷ A man must lead his household well to be qualified to be an overseer. Paul is very explicit about this in 1 Tim 3:4–5 and alludes to it in Titus 1:7 with ὡς θεοῦ οἰκονόμον. An overseer must also be faithful to his wife and keep his children in subjection (similarly, Titus 1:6). Further, a man must lead his household well to be qualified to be a deacon (1 Tim. 3:12) and must also lead his children well. Finally, an “enrolled widow” must have been faithful to her husband and have brought up children.

⁴⁸ The frequent mention of role interactions between Christian and social households, and of social family references in general, may well be a result of the emphases of the false teaching in Ephesus. After all, the opponents were “forbidding marriage” (1 Tim 4:3), and this sort of asceticism is suggestive of forbidding childbearing as well. See recently Dillon Thornton, *Hostility in the House of God: An Investigation of the Opponents in 1 and 2 Timothy* (BBRSup 15; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 251–52.

navigation of these “intersections” with missionary concern for what those outside the church will think,⁴⁹ likely because false teaching and its results in households have damaged the church’s reputation. So,

- the overseer is to fulfill his responsibilities in the social household so that he may be beyond reproach and well thought of by outsiders;
- deacons by doing likewise will gain a good standing for themselves before the outside world.⁵⁰
- Young widows need to properly fulfill their responsibilities in the social household so as “to give opponents no occasion for criticism.”⁵¹
- Young wives are to be taught to love and to submit to their husbands, and to love their children, so that in properly fulfilling their responsibilities in the social household “the word of God [the gospel message] may not be reviled” (Titus 2:4–5).

This missionary concern for outsiders is helpful in considering one final example of intersection between Christian household and social household: the situation of a Christian slave who is part of a household led by a Christian *paterfamilias*. Although it happens a number of times in other Pauline writings, this is the single time in the LTT that Christian sibling language is juxtaposed directly with the language of the social household. In this case, the Christian *paterfamilias* has a dual role as regards his slave: he is both a brother and a master. Both roles are clearly affirmed in 1 Tim 6:2:

Those who have believing *masters* must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are *brothers*.⁵²

As mentioned earlier, some have found this passage to be incompatible with the letter to Philemon, reflecting a post-Pauline stage of the early

⁴⁹ The missionary orientation of Paul’s concern for the opinion of outsiders is brought out in Chiao Ek Ho, “Mission in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder; Nashville: B&H, 2010), 241–67; see also Andrie B. du Toit, “Sensitivity Towards the Reaction of Outsiders as Ethical Motivation in Early Christian Paraenesis,” in *Sensitivity to Outsiders: Exploring the Dynamic Relationship between Mission and Ethics in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (ed. Jacobus Kok et al.; WUNT 2/364; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 340–56.

⁵⁰ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Nelson, 2000), 205–6.

⁵¹ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 604. The ἀντικείμενος could be the devil. However, as Marshall notes, it is the majority opinion that “a human adversary of the gospel” is in view; additionally, this coheres more tightly with other statements of concern for outsiders in the LTT.

⁵² Emphasis added here and in the following English Bible citations.

church,⁵³ but this is not actually the case. Care must be taken not to neglect v. 1 when we read v. 2, for it says something very much like the other passages just perused:

Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, *so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.*

Here again, slaves are to fulfill their role in the social household in light of missionary concern for outsiders. And it is important to realize that v. 1 *governs* v. 2: “Let *all* Christian slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor *Those who have believing masters* must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers.”

It will be helpful at this point to compare this passage with Paul’s guidance in 1 Cor 7:17, 20–24:

Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. *This is my rule in all the churches.* . . . Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

Note carefully Paul’s strategic use of ἀδελφοί: After *directly addressing* slaves and telling them that they should be unconcerned if they must remain slaves, he *directly addresses* them as “brothers.”⁵⁴

Conclusion

This essay has examined Paul’s use of family as a metaphor for church in the LTT. It has demonstrated that the way the metaphor is used in the letters is compatible with its use in other Pauline letters and thus provides no sure indication of pseudonymous authorship of the LTT. Indeed, Paul’s engagement of this metaphor in the LTT, in connection with the many references to physical family contained in the letters, provides insight into the relationship between one’s Christian family and one’s physical family.

⁵³ David Horrell makes a strong contrast between (1) Paul’s use of “brother” where Philemon receiving Onesimus as “a beloved brother” implies “a real change in the social relationship between slave and owner, and not merely a spiritual reevaluation in the sight of God” (“From ἀδελφοί to οἶκος θεοῦ,” 302), and (2) the exhortation of 1 Tim 6:2, where “slaves are warned *against* drawing from [the fact of their spiritual kinship with their masters] any ideas about the restructuring of the social relationship between slaves and masters” (307).

⁵⁴ I acknowledge that this passage is a bit different than 1 Tim 6:1–2 in that the slaves of 1 Cor 7:21–24 are not explicitly said to have believing masters and to be brothers *with those masters*—but neither are they said *not* to.