

Oi]koj qeou=: A Theologically Neglected but Important Ecclesiological Metaphor

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Systematic theologians utilize biblical studies conducted by their closely related brethren, the biblical theologians, to help construct their theological systems. The task of the systematic theologian is made easier by those biblical scholars who diligently trace the doctrinal threads and themes of Scripture. For those systematic theologians interested in the area of ecclesiology, the study of the doctrine of the church, Paul Minear's seminal study, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, is an oft-referenced tool.¹ This is partially attested to by the multiple citations of Minear's work by scholars contributing to the *Festschrift* on ecclesiology for James Leo Garrett, Jr., a respected systematic theologian at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.² Focused works on a doctrine by other systematic theologians are also helpful. In the arena of ecclesiology, Hans Küng's *The Church* and Avery Dulles' *Models of the Church* are standards for the field.³

Curiously, however, in spite of the fact that the apostle Paul's organizing metaphor for the church in 1 Timothy is "the household of God," this image receives only cursory mention in the standard ecclesiological literature.⁴ Minear does not see the metaphor as worthy of inclusion in his nearly exhaustive list of analogies, and dismisses the other metaphor from the Pastoral Epistles, "pillar and buttress," as

¹ Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960).

² See the essays by John Newport, Gerald Borchert, Carey Newman, and Robert Sloan in *The People of God: Essays on the Believers' Church*, ed. by Paul Basden and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991).

³ Hans Küng, *The Church*, trans. by Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1968); Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Expanded Edition (New York: Doubleday, 1987).

⁴ Minear, *Images of the Church*, 52, 97. Most of the English quotations in this article are from the New American Standard Bible (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1995).

“relatively inert and lifeless.” Minear might have been driven by the historical-critical penchant to dismiss the Pastoral Epistles as later, pseudonymous works that reflect the accretion of a formal ecclesiology.⁵ Robert Sloan, writing in the Garrett *Festschrift* on “Images of the Church in Paul,” does not refer to οἰκὸς θεοῦ.⁶ For Dulles, the metaphor is only worthy of mention in a footnote, and that as a title of a book.⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, the author of the footnoted work, did not himself address the biblical metaphor.⁸ Küng cursorily considers “the household of God” in the midst of other images.⁹ Only the recent monograph by Clowney discusses the concept of the household, but his treatment is primarily concerned with the place of women in the church. This evangelical scholar is more interested in the laudable task of protecting the modern family than with considering the implications of the family as a metaphor for the church.¹⁰

Among Baptist systematic theologians, Millard Erickson refers to the image of the church as “a spiritual house” but does not elaborate.¹¹ The aforementioned Dr. Garrett does not find the metaphor worthy of inclusion in his list.¹² In his discussion of the metaphors of the church, following the paradigm of Erickson, Stanley Grenz elaborates on the nation of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Spirit, but “household” is not mentioned.¹³ Wayne Grudem identifies the term as a metaphor but barely considers its meaning.¹⁴ Dale Moody mentions the concept in a number of places but subsumes it under other metaphors.¹⁵ Only the outdated work of A. H. Strong seems to consider οἰκὸς worthy

⁵ Minear, *Images of the Church*, 268-69, 52. For a summary of the history of scholarship on the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, see Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy; Titus* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 20-40.

⁶ Sloan, “Images of the Church in Paul,” in *People of God*, 148-65.

⁷ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 233, n. 17.

⁸ I found only one simple reference to the image in this book. Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM, 1953), 115.

⁹ Küng, *The Church*, 171-72.

¹⁰ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 223-31.

¹¹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1049.

¹² James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, Second Edition, Vol. 2 (North Richland Hills, TX: Bibal Press, 2001), 510-13.

¹³ Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 465-67.

¹⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 858-59.

¹⁵ Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 442-48.

of some discussion, but he was unaware that the term could function as a metaphor.¹⁶

This article seeks to redress this general neglect, both in the standard ecclesiological monographs and in Baptist systematic theologies, of an important theological metaphor by showing the importance and richness of the term, oi]koj qeou=, “the household of God.” The primary focus will be on Paul’s first letter to Timothy, which is, aside from biased accounts against Pauline authorship, considered to be one of the most important ecclesiological texts in the Bible. We will begin with a survey of the frequent use of oi]koj as an image of the church in the New Testament. After this, Paul’s use of oi]koj as central to the purpose in writing his first letter to Timothy will be considered. Finally, the direct uses in the Pastoral Epistles of oi]koj—and its synonym, oi0ki/a—along with their cognates and related concepts will be summarized.

The Frequent Use of oi]koj as an Image of the Church in the New Testament

In spite of its slim treatment by many theologians, the image of the church as an oi]koj is found in a number of places in the New Testament. In his collection of corporate metaphors describing the church, in addition to “living stones,” “holy priesthood,” “chosen race,” “royal priesthood,” “holy nation,” and “people for God’s own possession,” Peter lists “a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:5, 9). Peter is also convinced that judgment should begin with “the household of God” rather than in the world (4:17). The author of the book of Hebrews compares Moses, a servant of God’s house, to Jesus Christ, who is the faithful “Son over his house.” “We are,” the author concludes, “His house if we hold fast our confidence” (Heb 3:1-6). The image is used without much development in a number of Paul’s letters, besides the Pastoral Epistles. In Ephesians 2:19, Paul referred to the Ephesian believers as members “of God’s household.” In Galatians 6:10, Paul called on Christians to benefit all people, but especially those “of the household of the faith.”

A distinction needs to be made between the New Testament image of the church as a physical house and the image of the church as an extended family. Although they share the same word, the relational use of oi]koj and the physical use of oi]koj make them distinct images. In Mark 11:17 and the parallel synoptic passages, Jesus drew upon the common Old Testament image of the physical Temple as *beth elohim*, “the house of God” (Isa 56:7; 60:7). Such concrete imagery may also be found in Hellenistic usage. In 1 Corinthians 3:9-17, Paul further

¹⁶ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1907), 891-93, 961.

developed this idea of the Temple as “the house of God.” Most of these uses failed to appeal to the concept of social relationships. Rather, the first impression is primarily that of a physical building.

However, the physical and relational uses of *oi]koj* and its cognates could easily transition into one another. In Ephesians 2:19-22, Paul began with the relational concept of *oi0kei=oi tou= qeou=*, “members of the household of God”—further evidenced as social by its placement in apposition to *sumpoli=tai tw=n a(gi/wn*, “fellow citizens with the saints”—and proceeded through a number of physical building metaphors with the words *e0poikodome/w*, *qeme/lioj*, *a0krogwniai=oj*, *oi0kodomh/*, *sunarmologe/w*, and *sunoikodome/w*—to describe the Ephesian church as *katoikhth/rion tou= qeou= e0n pneu/mati*, “a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” (Paul’s use of *e0n pneu/mati* after this string of concrete words may be, at least in part, intended to deny too physical an understanding of this favored metaphor). *Oi0kei=oj* brings the relational idea into focus most strongly while *oi]koj* and *oi0ki/a* can interchangeably refer to the relational or the physical senses.¹⁷ In contradistinction to the concrete imagery of Mark 11 and 1 Corinthians 3 or the double image in Ephesians 2, the use which Paul made of *oi]koj* in 1 Timothy 3:15 was obviously relational in nature, and to that passage we now turn.

Oi]koj as Instructive to the Purpose of Paul’s First Letter to Timothy

A number of ideas have been brought forward as to the purpose or major theme of Paul’s first letter to Timothy. For instance, William D. Mounce finds numerous themes in 1 Timothy, including faith, salvation, good works, and other *ad hoc* issues, but he discounts ecclesiology as relatively minor.¹⁸ A once popular, but now mostly discredited, thesis was that Paul intended to write a manual for church order, an ecclesiastical handbook. Reflecting a modern bias against this ancient hermeneutic, Donald Guthrie asserts, “[I]t is quite erroneous to regard these Epistles as manuals of church order in the sense in which later manuals were used, for there is an almost complete absence of instruction on administration, civil relationships or conduct of

¹⁷ Otto Michel, “*Oi]koj*, *oi0ki/a*, (etc.),” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, vol. 5, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, transl. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 119-58.

¹⁸ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), lvi-lix, cxxx-cxxxv.

worship.”¹⁹ Although this statement is a timely warning against some of the grosser ecclesiologies put forward in church history, such statements can be patently misleading. The Pastoral Epistles most certainly *are* concerned with instruction, administration, conduct, relationships, and worship. This is especially evident in the epistolary formula explaining Paul’s purpose for writing his first letter to Timothy.

In a number of places in his first letter to Timothy, Paul stated his reasons for writing. There are general hortatory statements directed towards Timothy in 1:3-5; 1:18-20; 3:14-16; 4:6-7; 4:11-16; 5:21; 6:2c; and 6:20-21. Most of these exhortations deal with Paul’s charge to Timothy to faithfully deliver the apostle’s teaching. However, according to P. Ceslaus Spicq, the high point of the epistle is reached in 3:14-16.²⁰ This is made evident with the formulaic saying, “I am writing these things to you,” of verse 14. Commenting on this saying, Quinn and Wacker note that Paul was following “one of the standard epistolary formulae that grew up around the body of the Greek letter”; they give a number of examples from Hellenistic literature to support the contention that this passage is therefore central to the understanding of 1 Timothy.²¹ Why then was Paul writing? The answer is found in verse 15: “So that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God (oijklw| qcou=), which is the church of the living God.” If, as Spicq asserted, the purpose for Paul’s writing is found in verse 15, then outlining standards of conduct in a set of social relationships figuratively known as “God’s household” is the reason why Paul wrote this letter.

Paul wrote his letter to Timothy to give concrete instructions on how the believers in the church at Ephesus should conduct themselves. In the numerous passages mentioned in the previous paragraph, Timothy was repeatedly reminded that it was his task as the apostolic representative to teach these moral instructions to the church. Although the epistle was written to an individual, it was ultimately intended for dissemination to the entire church. Because these instructions deliver an ecclesiastical code of conduct, they have been compared, even identified with the numerous Pauline (and Hellenistic) household codes of conduct, the *Haustafeln*. However, it should be remembered that 1 Timothy is not

¹⁹ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Revised Edition, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 32. See, however, A. T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 28.

²⁰ “Nous avons donc ici non seulement le point doctrinal culminant de l’Épître, mais la clef meme des Pastorales, . . .” (Thus we have here not only the culminating doctrinal point of the epistle, but the very key to the Pastorals). P. C. Spicq, *Les Épitres Pastorales* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1947), 103.

²¹ Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 309-11.

primarily concerned with the household; rather, the household is used as a springboard for an address to the church.²²

Paul's first concern is with the church, not the household. The household is a point of interest, to be sure, and Paul makes a number of statements about Christian duties in the household, but these constitute a secondary concern. A tertiary concern for Paul, after the church (e0kklhsi/a) and the family (oi]koj), is that third member of the social triad for the Christian, the state (po/lij). Paul's primary focus is on the conduct of Christians in the church. Christian conduct in the home and the state matter only because such conduct reflects back on the church. This is a healthy reminder that oi]koj serves as a metaphor for e0kklhsi/a. The church is not a household simply; rather, the church is a household comparatively. The church, literally, is not a household; rather, it is *like* a household.

The church is like a household in some ways but, as with all metaphors, the analogies are not fully extensive. In other words, a metaphor is analogous, located somewhere between the univocal and the equivocal.²³ And yet, the analogies provided by the ecclesiological metaphor of oi]koj are rather numerous and rich. The richness and importance of this metaphor for 1 Timothy and the other Pastoral Epistles can be seen, not only in the crucial purpose passage of 1 Timothy 3:14-16, but also in the number and import of those passages using oi]koj and oi0ki/a and their cognates.

A Survey of the Uses of oi]koj/oi0ki/a and Cognates in the Pastoral Epistles

There are seventeen instances in which oi]koj or its feminine synonym, oi0ki/a, or a cognate is used in the Pastoral Epistles.²⁴ The first use of oi]koj or one of its derivatives is found in the leading passage, 1:3-5, where Paul recalled to Timothy why he encouraged the latter to remain at

²² Verner misses this point when he too easily equates the ecclesiological codes of the Pastoral Epistles with the *Haustafeln*. However, as Verner himself admits, the household codes differ radically in order and presentation from the codes delivered in the Pastoral Epistles. Following Dibelius and Conzelmann, it is better to view the household codes of Ephesians and Colossians and 1 Peter as *Haustafeln* and the instructions of the Pastoral Epistles as *Gemeindeordnung*. David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 16-25, 83-107.

²³ John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, Fourth Edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 83-85.

²⁴ The seventeen instances are here numbered according to the priority of their appearance in the traditional, but not chronological ordering: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus. The instance of 1 Tim 3:15 has been treated above and is thus not included in this section of the article.

Ephesus. Apparently, the Ephesian church had finally begun to realize the truthfulness of Paul's previous prophecy. In Acts, Luke records Paul's reminder to the Ephesian elders/overseers that he had taught them "publicly and from house to house" about the gospel. Furthermore, Luke relays the apostle's warning that perverse teachers would arise from within their ranks to lead the flock astray (Acts 20:17-38). As a result of the rise of these false teachers, Paul asked Timothy to stay in Ephesus to instruct "certain men" to refrain from unorthodox teaching. Such teaching gave rise to "mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God" (1 Tim 1:4). The "administration" or "plan" of God, oi]konomi/a, is related to oi]koj and is an important metaphor for God's dealings with His people. Oi]konomi/a originally designated the plan by the head of the household for how the various members of the household would conduct themselves. Within Greek philosophy and Hellenistic Judaism, the term was expanded to include the divine administration of the universe. Under Paul, oi]konomi/a could designate the entire way in which God planned to save the elect, or the way in which God had decided the church should conduct itself.²⁵ In 1 Timothy 1:4, both Pauline meanings may be found. The administration of God's salvation for the elect was made concrete in the administration of the local church, which in this case was God's household in Ephesus.

The second and third uses are found in the criteria for an e]opi/skopoj, an "overseer" or "bishop." A major criterion for the selection of an e]opi/skopoj is how well he rules his own oi]koj (1 Tim 3:4). This is important because such personal household management reveals much about how a man might manage the household of God. "If a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God" (v. 5)? It is implied that the e]opi/skopoj of an Ephesian church is expected to rule that church with the same attitude that he rules his own household. In an obvious parallel to Timothy's own role as the apostolic representative, the overseer is given the leading role of teaching in this divine household of instruction. The only duty which is apparently referred to in Paul's criteria is that a bishop be "able to teach" (v. 2). This is made quite explicit in the criteria for the overseer listed in the third epistle: "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). Because of the reference to managing the household of God, one might assume that the bishop was the oi]kodespo/thj, "householder," or ku/rioj, "master" of the house (cf. Luke 12:39, Mark 13:34-35). However, Titus 1:7 makes clear that the bishop is "God's steward," qeou=

²⁵ Quinn and Wacker, *First and Second Letters*, pp. 74-78; Michel, "oi]konomi/a," in *TDNT*, vol. 5, 151-53.

oiOkono/mon. This is the fifteenth use of oi]koj found in the Pastoral Epistles and indicates a lead servant who is given authority by the householder to manage his household. In other words, the church is like a house which has God as its householder and the bishop as a delegated manager. The e0pi/skopoj is important but secondary; he has “his own household” (1 Tim 3:4) which is distinct from the household of God in which he serves as a steward.

The fourth instance is found in the criteria listed for deacons. Like the overseer, deacons must be “good managers of their children and their own households” (1 Tim 3:12). Unlike the overseer, however, this qualification is not set in comparison to the management of God’s house. Good management of one’s own household was necessary for service as a dia/konoj in God’s household, but a dia/konoj was not a manager in God’s household. The etymology of dia/konoj would have conjured thoughts of household service such as waiting on tables or other practical service rather than household management, both in secular history and in the young church’s history.²⁶

The eighth, fourteenth and sixteenth uses (1 Tim 5:13; 2 Tim 3:6; Titus 1:11) bring Paul back to the critical need which prompted him to send these letters to Timothy and Titus. There were false teachers in Ephesus and in Crete who were leading whole households into trouble. Their teaching, among other issues, seemed to stress the egalitarian nature of Christian fellowship, drawing upon the Law and genealogies.²⁷ In response, Paul did not deny the essential equality of Christians in the church but maintained distinctive roles both within the family and the state as well as in the church.

The above uses have referred primarily to the church. Oi]koj/oi0ki/a is also used in reference to the Christian life. The ninth, tenth and eleventh uses are indicative or participial forms of the verbs oi0ke/w or e0noike/w, “to dwell.” Stressing the transcendence of the Father, Paul affirms that he “dwells” in unapproachable light and cannot be seen by man (1 Tim 6:16). On the other hand, God in his immanence as the Holy Spirit “indwells” and empowers the church to guard the treasure of the gospel, “the standard of sound words,” against false teaching (2 Tim 1:14). Not only does the Holy Spirit indwell the church, but “the faith” in a substantive way has “indwelt” Timothy’s mother and grandmother (v. 5). The thirteenth use is found in 2 Timothy 2:20-21, where Paul contrasts vessels of honor with vessels of dishonor. As a household

²⁶ Hermann W. Beyer, “diakone/w, diakoni/a, dia/konoj,” in *TDNT*, vol. 2, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, transl. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 81-93.

²⁷ Verner, *Household of God*, 175-80. Mounce has a much fuller account but makes little of the sociological issue. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, lxix-lxxx.

contains both types of vessels, the Christian should seek to be serviceable to the master of the house as a vessel of honor.

Although many of the instances of oijkoj/oi0ki/a are used metaphorically for the church, other uses refer to the family in principle. With the sixth and seventh uses, Paul encouraged the children of widows to responsibly provide for the needs of these widows as members of their own households (5:4, 8). The purpose behind Paul's admonition here is to relieve the church of the burden of caring for widows who should be cared for by their Christian children.²⁸ In the seventeenth use, in Titus 2:5, Paul commanded the older women to encourage the younger women to keep their houses. The twelfth use is the only case where Paul used oijkoj in its most literal sense by referring to a specific household. In 2 Timothy 1:16, Paul prayed for the Lord to give mercy to the household of Onesiphorus for the ministry the latter gave to Paul during his latest imprisonment.

Of the 17 uses of oijkoj/oi0ki/a and their cognates in the Pastoral Epistles, only once is the family of words used literally of a specific household. Thrice oijkoj/oi0ki/a is used of a family in principle, while four times it refers to the Christian life. Significantly, this family of words is used metaphorically of the church or of some part of the church some nine times (including 1 Tim 3:15).

A Summary of the Uses of Related Concepts in the Pastoral Epistles

The ancient Romans and Greeks had a different understanding of the household than that held by moderns.²⁹ We tend to view a household as synonymous with a nuclear family, generally composed of a husband, wife, and their immediate children. The ancient household was "the basic socio-political unit" which had major religious and economic functions, and was composed of extended families and their dependents. The head of the household—variously described as lord (ku/ri0j), master (despo/thj), husband (po/sij), or father (path/r)—possessed wide authority over the household property, his wife, his children and his slaves. The wife was expected "for the most part to stay at home and supervise the household." Under her care, the children were to be nurtured and educated, the boys attending school under the watchful eye of a slave known as a paidagwgo\j, the girls learning linguistic and household skills at home. Slaves, considered as both persons and property, had minimal protection under the law. Although there were some differences between Roman and Greek customs, the father's

²⁸ Verner, *Household of God*, 162.

²⁹ Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 30.

position was enhanced by the fact that in general, wives could be summarily divorced, widows were expected to return to their father's household upon a husband's death, and sons remained under their father's authority until the latter's death.³⁰

As the basic unit of society, the household served political, religious and economic functions. In the area of religion, there was often a cult associated with a household's gods in which the householder functioned as the leader. These household cults could even become the basis for religious associations which might expand far beyond the original households. Household structure and terminology was frequently co-opted by religious associations. The organizational structure of the household can be seen in the adapting of local houses for use by a religious community, a pattern traceable among pagans, Jews, and Christians. Moreover, "the language of familial affection"—"father," "mother," "brother"—was used by pagans in Thracia, Jews in Macedonia, and Christians in Asia Minor.³¹

The adaptation of the language of familial affection to the ecclesiastical context is done effectively by Paul in a number of places. In 1 Timothy 5:1-2, Paul instructs Timothy, "Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father (pate/ra), to the younger men as brothers (a0delfou/j), the older women as mothers (mhete/raj), and the younger women as sisters (a0delfa\j), in all purity." The apostle intended Timothy's behavior in this respect to serve as an exemplar to the entire church. The church, like a household, is composed of people who have close, family-like relationships. In some touching words in his introductory salutations, Paul reminds both Timothy and Titus that each representative is the apostle's te/knon e0n pi/stei, "child in faith" or a0gaphto/n te/knon, "beloved child" and gnh/sion te/knon kata\ koinh\n pi/stin, "true child according to our common faith."³² Yet, Paul is careful in the same introductory passages to explicitly note that prior to such a figurative apostle-as-father/disciple-as-child relationship is the real head of the household, God himself, who is path/r h(mw=n, "our Father."

Beyond the language of familial affection, there are also some indications of an adaptation of the structure of the household in the churches addressed in the Pastoral Epistles. First, while there is little doubt that some of the titles for church officials have roots in the Jewish

³⁰ The Roman *paterfamilias* seemed to hold even greater power than his Greek counterpart, yet the Greek wife (gunh/) had fewer rights than her Roman counterpart. Verner, *Household of God*, 28-35.

³¹ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 30-33, 271-74.

³² The father-son metaphor as applied to Paul's relationship with Timothy and with Titus is found in 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4. Cf. 1 Tim 1:18; 2 Tim 2:1.

synagogue or the Greek city-state, the strongest influence comes from the realm of the household. 0Epi/skopoi were originally state officials who visited or oversaw areas of administration for a higher authority, although cultic use of the term is attested.³³ However, if, as we believe, e0pi/skopoj is an ecclesiological synonym for presbu/teroj, “elder,” the connection to the household is made.³⁴ When the description of the overseer mentioned above is remembered, the connection becomes quite explicit. The common ecclesiological title of the dia/konoi, as mentioned above, was widely used of household servants in secular Greek. Timothy, the official apostolic representative, was referred to as a dia/konoj (1 Tim 4:6), and the apostle Paul himself described his work as one of service (1:12). If the xh/ra, “widow,” possessed a distinct office in the church, then this first aspect of the argument for the adaptation of the household structure to the church’s needs is substantiated (5:3-16).

Second, it appears that some of the earliest conversions occurred in the households (Acts 11:14; 16:15, 31-34; 18:8; 1 Cor 1:16). Private homes thus seem to have been used as congregational houses of worship for the early church and it is likely there was some interchange between the two institutions (Acts 2:46, 16:40; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19).³⁵

Third, one of the major functions of the ancient household was instruction; this, too, is the major assignment given to the churches in the Pastoral Epistles. The churches are pictured as households established for the purpose of instructing their members in the standards of Christian conduct. Fourth, Paul identified some errant members of the Ephesian church who paideuqw=sin, “must be disciplined” (1 Tim 1:20). Paideu/w is a term which finds its roots in both Greek and Hebrew home life. Paul used the same term when giving Timothy general instructions about church practice, and when describing what the instructive uses of Scripture were (2 Tim 2:25; 3:16).³⁶ Interestingly, some of the sins characteristic of the errant teachers in the Ephesian church are sins against the family. Besides educating other members of the household

³³ Hermann W. Beyer, “e0piske/ptomai, [etc.],” *TDNT*, vol. 2, pp. 611-14.

³⁴ The subject of the relation between e0pi/skopoi and presbu/teroi must be discussed at length elsewhere. The biblical evidence for some type of equivalence between the two terms can be found in Acts 20:18-38, where the terms are used interchangeably of the Ephesian church leaders; in Phil 1:1, where e0pi/skopoi are coupled with dia/konoi when presbu/teroi would otherwise be expected; and, in Titus 1:5-9, where the description of an e0pi/skopoj is listed after the qualifications for the presbu/teroi, whose qualifications are very similar to the qualifications for an e0pi/skopoj in 1 Tim 3:1-7.

³⁵ “House, household,” and “house church,” *The Revell Bible Dictionary*, ed. by Lawrence O. Richards (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1990), 501-2.

³⁶ Georg Bertram, “paideu/w [etc.],” in *TDNT*, vol. 5, 596-618.

improperly (1 Tim 1:3) and forbidding marriage (4:3), they are disrespectful towards their parents (2 Tim 3:2), and they kill their mothers and fathers and practice sexual sin (1 Tim 1:9-10).

Finally, God himself is twice identified as the head of the house known as the church in the central thematic passage of the first letter to Timothy: “the church of God” is “the house of God” (3:15). Many levels of the ancient household structure have some parallel in the structure of the churches of the Pastoral Epistles, except for that of wives and children. The implication is that wives and children are not to engage in active church office. Many of the functions of the ancient household—political, educational, disciplinary, and religious—thus found their parallels in these churches.

While most of our attention has been focused on the metaphorical use of *oikoj/oi0ki/a* and related concepts in the churches of the Pastoral Epistles, there are also numerous literal uses of the related terms. Interestingly, most of the literal uses are employed in discussions of how members of literal households must conduct themselves in the church, or in the household as it reflects back on the church. Householders should care for widows who originated from their households and not burden the church (1 Tim 5:4, 16). Bishops and deacons are to be one-woman husbands who manage their children well (3:2-3, 12) and widows are to be one-man wives (5:9). Men are to worship in a holy way in church (2:8). Women in the church are to refrain from self-centered conduct and not exercise teaching authority over men. Rather, they should focus on the task of bearing children (2:9-15). Older women are to teach the younger women how to love their husbands and their children, keep their homes, and submit to their husbands (Titus 2:3-5). Younger widows who cannot handle their station in life should marry, bear children, and manage their households well (1 Tim 5:11-14). Slaves are to serve their masters and masters are to treat their slaves well (6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10).

Conclusion

Why Paul chose to use such extensive household language is a matter of speculation. It might have been that Paul was reflecting the terminology that the churches of Ephesus and Crete had already adopted for themselves. He might have been responding to the threat that the false teachers posed to not only the church but also the household. The metaphor might have its roots in the paternal feelings Paul had towards his children in the faith, Timothy and Titus. Then again, it might have had something to do with Paul’s knowledge that Timothy’s own mother and grandmother apparently meant so much to the young man. What better way to connect with a man appreciative of his own upbringing than to tap into that well of goodwill. Whatever the immediate reasons

behind Paul's decision to employ the household metaphor, there is little doubt that the household is an important Pauline image for the church.

The discipline of systematic theology has largely ignored or misunderstood this vital Pauline ecclesiological image. The New Testament image of the church as an oijkoj qcou= has roots in the Old Testament and in Hellenistic culture, yet the imagery was often less about social relationships than about a structure. In Ephesians 2, Paul began a transition towards a relational understanding of this metaphor. In the Pastoral Epistles, the relational metaphor came into its fullness. As Spicq has shown, the metaphor of the household of God as applied to the church is the central thesis of 1 Timothy. This is verified by the numerous instances referring to the oijkoj/oioiki/a family of words in all of the Pastoral Epistles. These instances overwhelmingly serve as figurative references to the church. Paul envisioned the churches of Ephesus and Crete as households of instruction in Christian conduct. This theme is further buttressed by the number and import of concepts related to the family in the Pastoral Epistles. There should therefore be little doubt that this favored metaphor of Paul's last writings was rich with meaning and possible allusions to the context of the church. The neglect with which this important ecclesiological metaphor has been treated in the major Baptist systematic theologies and the major ecclesiological monographs in use today is unwarranted, to say the least.