1 Introduction

As found in our Bibles, the Pastoral Epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus (=PEs), were originally sent by the apostle Paul to two of his closest coworkers in the gospel, Timothy and Titus. The letters throw open a window on how churches formed their identities and developed responses to altering circumstances.¹ They are personal letters² that have become paradigmatic in the history of the church for pastors, priests, elders, bishops, deacons, ministers, and other church leaders. The letters, however, are as much ecclesial as they are pastoral. The language of these letters to his close coworkers prompts us to focus our attention on the “house” or “household of God,” the oikos/oikonomia theou.³

The PEs are similar enough to categorize them as a corpus, a unit in the Pauline canon of the New Testament. Luke Timothy Johnson’s new grouping of the letters of Paul helpfully makes use of the term “cluster” for letters to “Paul’s Delegates.” He stiff-arms simplistic assignments of these letters to someone other than Paul when he says, “the Pastors are no closer or more distant from Galatians and Romans as those two letters are to the Thessalonian correspondence.” Exaggerations of their differences with the so-called genuine Paulines have been successfully challenged, though this hardly proves Pauline authorship. They are, however, a noticeable cluster, which permits syntheses of the PEs on topics, ecclesial strategies, opponents, and pastoral theology. Yet, each is unlike the others in important respects and thus require to be read separately with integrity. While doing so, overlaps with other clusters in the Pauline correspondence will be often observed.

THE PASTORALS AND THE LIFE OF PAUL

The Acts of the Apostles comes to its end without resolution, at least for the life of Paul. He’s in prison preaching the kingdom of God “without hindrance” (Acts 28:31). The trial, anticipated for several chapters, is not reported in Acts. Instead, the message of the gospel goes to the heart of the Empire in Paul’s preaching. Then Acts ends, full stop, leaving us with unanswered and sometimes unanswerable questions: Did the trial in Rome lead to an immediate execution? Was the model for Luke’s telling of this story of Paul the trial of Jesus so that we are to assume that, like Jesus, Paul...


Johnson, 1:88.
was killed? Or was the case against Paul dropped? Was he released to carry on more mission, perhaps all the way to Spain? Was Acts written up as a kind of defense of the life of Paul before some Roman judge, and now that Luke was done with his account, had he also finished writing about Paul’s life? Acts answers none of these questions. Historians, however, have attempted to do so, sometimes with much confidence.

We don’t know for sure what happened, or at least we should admit we don’t know. There are at least two multilayered options: (1) that Paul died not long after where the account ends, or (2) that Paul was released. If the latter, perhaps he carried on his missionary work in Spain. He told the Romans that was his plan (Rom 15:23–24), and a later pastor in Rome, Clement, confirms this when he says Paul’s mission “reached the farthest limits of the west” (1 Clem 5:7), in which case Paul may, too, have returned to his former mission churches including Crete and Greece (Corinth) and Asia Minor. Perhaps a trip to Spain was cut short due to a lack of success, or perhaps Clement got it wrong, although I don’t find that explanation compelling, since the man has no reason to make things up with an audience that may well have known Paul’s life story—and Paul immediately, with a quick nod of thanks to Nero, returned to the scenes of his former mission churches. If Paul did return—and it appears he did—he changed his mind about going to Spain. In Acts 20:25 we read that Paul had told the elders of the southwest corner of Asia Minor (Ephesus, Miletus) “I know that none of you . . . will ever see my face again,” and in Romans 15:23 he had already made it clear that his mission work was finished in Greece and Asia Minor. Those who read 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 1 carefully will know Paul’s travel plans were in flux most of the time.

To gather the widest reach of the evidence, I collect these details from Paul’s letters to his coworkers that could then be pressed into service for constructing the life of the apostle Paul that can be gleaned from these letters. Each of the letters claims to be from Paul and sent to one of his closest associations (1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Titus 1:1).

From 1 Timothy: (1) with respect to travel we read that Paul, in the past, was in Ephesus on his way to Macedonia when he asked Timothy to remain in Ephesus for more careful instruction (1 Tim 1:3), that he hoped to come to Timothy in Ephesus soon (3:14–15); (2) Paul uses his conversion and call to support arguments (1:12–16; 2:7); (3) Paul knows about the elders’ prophecies over Timothy (1:18; 4:14) and knows his age (4:12; cf. 5:1–2) and his health challenges (5:23), and Paul knows (4) about the faith failure of Hymenaeus and Alexander (1:20; cf. Acts 19:13–34). Thus, (5) a close relationship of Paul to Timothy is emphatic throughout the letter.
From 2 Timothy: (1) Paul connects himself to his ancestors (1:3) and once again recalls his conversion and calling (1:11) and during his mission work he taught Timothy (1:13; 2:2; 3:10–11); (2) the closeness of Paul’s relationship to Timothy is emphatic again (1:2; 2:1); Paul knows his tears (1:4) and the names of his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (1:5; 3:14–15), he knows about laying his hands on Timothy for his (prophetic?) gift (1:6), he knows about his suffering (1:8; 2:3; cf. 3:11–12) and his age (2:22); (3) he knows about the faith failure of Phygellus and Hermogenes (1:15) and perhaps Demas (4:9), and he knows about the faithfulness of Onesiphorus to Paul in Rome during his confinement (1:16–18; 2:9) as well as to the gospel work in Ephesus (1:18); (4) he knows too of the faith failure of Hymenaeus and Philetus (1:17–18; perhaps 3:8–9; cf. 1 Tim 1:20); (5) Paul’s own life is coming to an end (4:6–8) and he is (6) increasingly alone, as Demas and Crescens and Titus and Tychicus are all gone (4:10, 12) and only Luke remains (4:11); (7) he asks Timothy to bring Mark with him when he comes to Rome (4:11, 21), and when he does come, to bring his cloak and books and parchments (4:13); (8) Alexander is mentioned (4:14–15; cf. 1 Tim 1:20 and Acts 19:33–34), and Timothy is warned about him. A decisively significant element comes now: (9) Paul mentions a “first defense” (4:16) when he was abandoned by everyone (cf. 4:10), but that he was “rescued from the lion’s mouth” (4:17) and thinks the rescue will lead to great ministries (4:18). Also, (10) he mentions more names: Prisca and Aquila, Onesiphorus (4:19) and Erastus were left in Corinth and Trophimus in Miletus (4:20), Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia send greetings from Rome (4:21), and finally (11), his bigger concern is that Timothy join him in Rome (4:21).

From Titus: (1) as is the case of a close relationship with Timothy, the term Paul uses for Titus is endearing (1:4) and Paul may see him as a young man too (2:2, 3); (2) Paul has been to Crete in ministry and left Titus there to carry on that ministry (1:5); (3) Paul generalizes about his conversion and calling (3:3–7); (4) Paul plans to send to Crete Artemas or Tychicus (3:12; cf. 2 Tim 4:12) and (5) is in Nicopolis when he sends this letter to Titus (3:12), and (6) he wants Titus to commission Zenas the lawyer and Apollos (3:13).

The density of these personal data, the apparent triviality of some of them, and the coherence of some of the names with the Pauline mission mean the letters strike many readers as either very clever forgeries or genuine letters from Paul.

**AUTHORSHIP**

If we begin with the earliest evidence after the PEs we land upon Polycarp (To the Philippians 4.1; 5.2) and 1 Clement 2.7; 60.4; 61.2, and both texts know of our PEs (Polycarp knows 1 Tim 6:7, 10 and 3:8–13; Clement of...
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Rome knows of 1 Tim 1:17; 2:7; and Titus 3:1), which means the PEs are known to them at the turn of the century into the second century CE. Irenaeus stated that Paul wrote 1 Timothy (e.g., Against Heresies 1. Preface; see also 1.23.4; 2.14.7; 3.1.1; 4.16.3; 5.17.1). Clement of Alexandria refers to all three PEs (Stromateis 1.1.9, 10; 4.7; Exhortation 1). The letters are in the Muratorian Canon. All to say that by the end of the second century these letters are both Pauline and “canonical,” Marcion’s omission of them being most likely intentional. Towner throws down a challenge at this point: “the evidence of early second-century reception and use (let alone the still earlier attestation possible in the case of 1 Clement) has not been adequately accounted for by the majority, pseudonymity view.” Pauline authorship, then, is not disputed in the early church.

Does this make the PEs Pauline? No, but it tightens the screws on those who deny Pauline authorship. What remains, however, to explain is how these three letters fit into the life of Paul, and their fit is anything but simple. A common explanation is that Paul was not put to death at the hands of Nero but was released, carried on the facts we find in the PEs, was then re-arrested, and from Rome Paul sent these letters later in his life, say in the late 60s. Many have read 1 Clement 5:6–7 as indicating he believed Paul had gone to the far west on a mission trip, and this could indicate the anticipated trip to Spain. I translate that text as follows:

... becoming a proclaimer in both the East and the West, he received a noble honor for his faith, teaching righteousness for the whole world, coming to the end of the West and witnessing before the governors, so he was released from the world and taken up into the holy place, becoming the greatest paradigm of resilience.

The doubled use of “West,” with the second one having the “end of the West,” suggests he got to the western end of the Roman Empire. If this reading is accepted, Clement of Rome at the end of the first century believed Paul had gone to Spain. This would require both a release from prison in Rome followed by a second arrest and second imprisonment.

7 Towner, Timothy and Titus, 5.
8 Towner, 6.
9 The missing seven pages in P46 can be explained in a variety of ways, and so nothing certain can be inferred from the absence of the PEs in P46 (see Towner, Timothy and Titus, 6–7). That Paul’s name is not mentioned in the earliest patristic citations of the PEs is taken by some to indicate the name was attributed later. See A. Hultgren, “The Pastoral Epistles,” in James D. G. Dunn, ed., The Cambridge Companion to St Paul (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 141–155, here pp. 141–142. For a sketch of the early textual evidence, see Mounce, Pastoral Epistles, lxiv–lxix.
Eusebius knows this too (Church History 2.22.2). The church tradition, then, is consistent in a release from Rome, a subsequent arrest, and martyrdom. The evidence of movements and people in the PEs cannot be squared easily with the Book of Acts.¹⁰ If, however, one grants a release, an opening is also given to locate the movements and persons in a life of Paul. Many today are disinclined to trust the early church evidence, but one must at least grant the possibility that a release would open up for the details in the PEs.

Did Paul write the PEs? Let it be said that the cluster-theory of Johnson mentioned above is eminently reasonable and indicative of a number of hands in the Pauline letters.¹¹ Paul did not physically “write” any of his letters. Each of his letters was the result of conversations with coworkers, with drafts and final drafts, and then – and only then – someone actually putting a quill to parchment.¹² The style differences that are sketched by Johnson indicate that the people who wrote his letters used their own style and even vocabulary. The fundamental implication of such a conclusion is that there is no singular “Pauline style,” usually attributed to Galatians, Romans, and the Corinthian letters, against which other letters can be compared.

This does not prove that Paul wrote the PEs, but that conclusion pushes against people who assume Paul could not have written the letters. Their arguments are not only many, but for many they are compelling.¹³ Four

¹⁰ The “gap theory” has been posed to attribute the actions of the PEs between Acts 19:20 and 19:21 where 19:21’s “after these things” could encompass a long stretch of time. Others pose other unknown and unknowable gaps. For a summary, Towner, Timothy and Titus, 12–15.
¹¹ See too Michael Prior, Paul the Letter-Writer and the Second Letter to Timothy (SNTSsup 23; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989). 2 Timothy shows signs of co-authorship, a secretary is not likely, and the letter is private – these three factors deserve attention in all discussions of authorship. He argues that neither of the fragments hypothesis nor pseudonymity are as conclusive as some believe.
¹³ The now standard study against Pauline authorship is Lewis R. Donelson, Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles (Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie 22; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986); see also James D. G. Dunn, Neither Jew nor Greek: A Contested Identity, Christianity in the Making 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 677–682; Gorman, Apostle of the Crucified Lord, 612–615; Lyn M. Kidson, Persuading Shipwrecked Men: The Rhetorical Strategies of
basic arguments have been lodged against Pauline authorship of the PEs. First, the vocabulary of the PEs varies from the other Pauline letters, the vocabulary has glaring absences of typical Pauline words, and it uses different terms for the very same ideas (e.g., *epiphaneia* instead of *parousia*). I don’t consider this argument easy or even necessary to counter, though the various authors who actually wrote the letters can explain some of it. Second, the church organization of the PEs shows significant development from what is found in the other Pauline letters, so much so that “early Catholicism” was at the time invoked over the PEs. The assumption was that the earliest churches were charismatic and unstructured, and leaders were organically formed instead of institutionally appointed. The either–or approach here has been questioned on a number of fronts, including the absence of church order in 2 Timothy and the variety of order between 1 and 2 Timothy. The ethic of the PEs, especially as we unfold it as “civilized piety” as brilliantly explained by Christopher Hoklotubbe, is more urbane and socially conscious than the other Pauline letters. Again, this is difficult and unnecessary to counter. Instead, we need to admit this significant difference, which could be explained as a later development in Paul’s own mission work as he sought to keep more under the radar of the Roman Empire. We have already touched upon the fourth argument: the non-fit of these letters into the chronology of Paul’s life on the basis of either his letters or the Book of Acts, or both.

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15 T. Christopher Hoklotubbe, *Civilized Piety: The Rhetoric of Pieta in the Pastoral Epistles and the Roman Empire* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017). For an earlier study, see Reggie M. Kidd, *Wealth and Beneficence in the Pastoral Epistles: A "Bourgeois" Form of Early Christianity?*, SBLDS 122 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990). Essentially, the bourgeois nature of the PEs can be summarized as socially ascendant, culturally accommodative, and unheroically conservative (pp. 9–25). For some this implies distance from Paul who was more critical of any such bourgeois social status and ethic. Kidd concluded there was more in common with the authentic Paulines and the PEs when it came to such factors. The word “bourgeois” carries too much baggage to be historically helpful.
These arguments, as Towner sketches them, formed into a four-legged foundation: the PEs are pseudonymous, they are a unique cluster of letters, they are from the early second century, and the church has now adjusted to life in the empire by learning various forms of compromise and assimilation. Towner, who has spent his academic life studying and publishing about the PEs, has countered these in reasonable and respectable ways. We turn now to his rebuttals.

It remains an important consideration that a community rooted in truthfulness, a community opposing deception and not the least deception at the level of leadership, a community that did not consider pseudonymity acceptable (I’m speaking here of nascent Christianity as is clear in 2 Thess 2:2 and Tertullian, On Baptism 17), and that three letters with the level of incidental details we find in the PEs that are not by the author attributed in the opening line (considering these “thats”), that a letter sent in Paul’s name by someone who lived two generations after Paul would be given immediate status in the Christian community is most unlikely. Early Christianity shows no acceptance of other texts written in someone else’s name. For many it is impossible to distinguish deception from pseudonymity. True enough, but it is a fact that the Jewish community’s standards of truth-telling were every bit as strong as very early Christianity’s, and that the Jewish community’s relatively common form of pseudepigraphy was not done (normally) as forgery, fraudulence, or deception but showed respect and continuity with someone a new author sought to follow. I consider pseudonymity unlikely for the PEs but dismissal of pseudonymity as necessarily fraudulent or forgery overstates the evidence.

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18 This challenges the curriculum in schools of someone writing in the name of another as an assignment as proposed by Huizenga, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, xlvi–xlviii.
21 For a sophisticated approach to what happens rhetorically when an author chooses to write pseudonymously, see now Kidson, Persuading Shipwrecked Men, 37–54. An older study of the rhetoric is Mark Harding, Tradition and Rhetoric in the Pastoral Epistles (Studies in Biblical Literature 3; New York: Peter Lang, 1998).
Second, Towner offers a fair assessment of an assumption of disjunction in the events and person in Acts and Paul’s letters when compared with the PEs. He questions the disjunction on the basis of realistic gaps found both in letters and the Book of Acts. For instance, Luke does not account for all that Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 11:23–29 about his travels, plots, sufferings, and adventures. Third, Towner questions the literary contradictions and tensions between the genuine Paulines and the PEs. I myself have argued that too many assume a genuine Pauline style in Galatians, Romans, and 1–2 Corinthians and use those criteria as the standard by which they measure all other letters, arguing that letters that don’t match that style aren’t from Paul. But Paul did not write any of his letters. He had other people write them for him, and we can neither assume the same writer for each letter or that those various authors were not given freedom to express something in their own way. This is not a cop-out but a measured conclusion of how writing occurred for Paul and his coworkers.\footnote{Scot McKnight, \emph{The Letter to Colossians}, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 5–12.} There is, too, a methodological flaw: what is discontinuous with the supposed genuine Paulines proves pseudonymity and what is continuous proves pseudonymity! That is, if it is discontinuous with Paul it shows he didn’t write it, while if it is continuous it shows the author was fabricating. The logic that concludes in favor of pseudonymity is not as compelling for me as it is for many today, but I contend that there is a pseudonymity for these letters that is neither deceptive nor forgery. I doubt that is the case for these letters, but the case should not be made against pseudonymity on the basis of deception. Rather, it should be rooted in clear literary and historical evidence, which, as indicated above, presents challenges that are not unchallengeable or even undefeatable. Many of the cases for Pauline authorship are erudite and informed. Howard Marshall and his student, Phil Towner, both contend for what they call “allonymity” (“another name”), which is what I have indicated above, that is, for an honest pseudonymous composing of the letters in a way that is expressing only what they thought the deceased Paul would have said. I contend, however, that too much is made of the tension between the PEs and the artificial construct of what is called “genuine” Paulines. The voices of the Pauline letters fall naturally into clusters, and each cluster reflects a given (perhaps more than one) writer (not Paul) whose task it was to give expression to Paul’s and his coworkers ideas, as they themselves developed and
interacted with various churches, and this author wrote from a location that had its own linguistic and ideological context. A letter by the same author from Cenchreae would not sound in all ways like that author’s letter from Thessalonica. Towner, however, concedes this: “It is not possible to prove the authenticity of the letters to Timothy and Titus.”

If Paul wrote the letters, they are from the 60s and the latest (2 Timothy) from probably 67 CE. If not, they can be dated between the late 60s to the first decade of the second century CE. The order of the letters is disputed, with some today thinking Titus was the first of the PEs. It is reasonable to think 1 Timothy is written from Macedonia (1 Tim 1:3), 2 Timothy from Rome (2 Tim 1:16–17), and Titus from Nicopolis to Crete (Titus 1:5).

THE OPPONENTS IN THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

Opposition to the Pauline mission and the gospel lurks in every chapter and comes to the fore often enough for readers to be unable to avoid pondering who the opposition was and what it taught. So, notice the following: 1 Timothy 1:3–7, 18–20; 4:1–10; 6:2–10, 20–21; and 2 Timothy 2:14–26; 3:1–9; 4:1–5; and Titus 1:9–16; 3:9–11. These descriptions by Paul, whom we designate often in the Commentaries below as the Apostle, were not objective descriptions but often polemical denunciations or pastoral disappointments, and the language Paul uses for these opponents is typical enough that precise identification becomes fraught with weaknesses. We delineate the concerns of the Apostle in six basic categories, though there

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23 More than a generation ago a reasonable case was made that Luke was the writer of the PEs; see S. G. Wilson, *Luke and the Pastoral Epistles* (London: SPCK, 1979). This line of thinking has been developed in Witherington, *Letters and Homilies*, who said “the voice is the voice of Paul, but the hand is the hand of Luke” (60).


