

BOUNDARIES, NOT BARRIERS:
A SOCIOLINGUISTIC EXAMINATION OF INGROUP-OUTGROUP CONCEPTS IN 1 AND
2 CORINTHIANS

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*(A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY)*

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MARCH 8, 2019

ABSTRACT

Since God designed humans to communicate and relate to one another socially, the divinely inspired human authors make use of language in ways consistent with sociolinguistic schema common to other members of humanity. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the sociolinguistic phenomena that occur in the insider-outsider designations Paul employs in his pastoral correspondence with the Corinthians. By focusing on the dynamic words Paul chose to designate members of the Corinthian Christian ingroup (“us”) and the outgroup (“them”), we will more closely observe what he was teaching his beloved congregation. The ingroup designation ἀδελφός contains connective, familial ideas, and is meant to emphasize the unity of faith shared by members of the Christian ingroup. Paul also demonstrates linguistic creativity in his use of ἄπιστος, as he draws the boundary of group membership by defining outsiders as those who lack the key characteristic of members: faith. Before arriving at these points, the relevant sociolinguistic concepts will be defined and then applied to the pertinent passages in 1 and 2 Corinthians, where Paul uses the aforementioned designations as well as others that are pertinent to the discussion. Paul’s word choices are not meant to create barriers between insider and outsider, but healthy boundaries. The terms that draw these barriers are each meant to cause reflection on a key aspect of our identity within the community of faith.

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1 - INTRODUCTION TO PERTINENT SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONCEPTS

Language

God has gifted his creation with the blessed tool of language. Human beings use it to interact on levels both mundane and grave, to traverse the social landscape of communal existence, and to deepen understanding. We need language, written and spoken, to communicate ideas. God, on the other hand, is not so bound to the laws of language, to words on a page, or to sound waves that somehow yield interpretable meaning, but nevertheless he chooses to use language as his tool for communicating salvation to perishing sinners. This thesis will explore the creative power latent in language and its use in God's kingdom by focusing on its utility in the forging communities – drawing boundaries and creating distinct identities within those communities.

Language is also a system. While God is not subject to rules of communication, we creatures certainly are. Human beings abide by laws of custom, cultural appropriateness, and convention to send and receive messages successfully and accurately. Mihalicek and Wilson legitimize the observation of language's system when they say: "Language is systematic in spite of its enormous complexity, and it can therefore be studied scientifically."¹ This thesis will explore the phenomena behind human social interaction and how it is observable in Scripture. Because Paul's inspired letters to the Corinthians contain ready examples of the systematic yet creative use of language, these texts will be taken as case studies. Based on a selective exegesis of pertinent passages and the employment of sociolinguistic concepts, this thesis will

¹Vedrana Mihalicek and Christin Wilson, *Language Files: Materials for an Introduction to Language and Linguistics*, 11th ed. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2012), 5.

demonstrate the observability of Paul's use of language to form community; to designate insiders and outsiders; to make sense of the Christian's position in a social world marred by sin but redeemed by God and guided by his Word.

Communication is simply defined as the sharing of information. The terms one learns from grade school on – grammar, syntax, verb tense, vocabulary – are mere descriptors for an activity any human being participates in. Even silence in the absence of expected speech communicates. A blank stare on the face of a non-verbal autistic child communicates nonetheless. In most cases, an infant will spend the next few years assembling communicative tools, even if she lacks a sufficient linguistic repertoire to convey every thought and feeling that occur to her. By adulthood, she will be able to traverse the jungle gym that is human interaction hardly taking a moment to consciously ponder the rules and tools she has ascertained.

In fact, some may even question the necessity of linguistic metacognition. Why talk about talking? Why embark on a pedantic journey of dissecting the way humans use their tongues?

Anyone with the goal of faithfully exegeting biblical texts is invested in the study of language. Conveying messages clearly and effectively is a skill with tremendous objective value, let alone for pastors. Pastors are highly trained in the grammatical aspects of language. They are aware of how different languages play by similar, yet often different rules. To introduce the social element to these areas of interest is to focus not only on the words on a page, but the human beings God inspired to say or write them and the various contexts in which language is used. This is the case for adopting a social-science analysis.² The application of social concepts to those of linguistics is the primary concern of the field of sociolinguistics.

²This discipline is explored more fully below.

The text of God's Word communicates. When a pastor exegetes a text for a sermon, he first investigates the context surrounding what was written. The factors that precipitated the writing of each biblical text vary greatly.³ However, each text of Scripture must be also set within the wider theological context of the doctrine of inspiration and God's plan of salvation. The human authors of Scripture communicate differently. Aside from the obvious difference in language, they respond to varying circumstances and hold to different objectives, yet it is God's objective that is ultimately fulfilled through his inspired authors. Not a word of Scripture can be said to be so involved in the culture and communication of human beings that it is no longer the Word of God. It is my hope that this thesis leaves no such impression. However, I will argue that investigating the human social aspects of Scriptural communication will facilitate faithful exegesis of God's communication to mankind. With that assumption, relevant concepts from the field of sociolinguistics need to be discussed.

Variation Theory

Before a solid case can be made for the pertinence of sociolinguistics in addressing matters of the exegesis of Scripture, a basic understanding of the field is needed. According to Janet Holmes, a sociolinguist studies "the relationship between language and society."⁴ Sociolinguistics is where the fields of sociology and linguistics meet, forming a complex relationship. Human beings are social creatures, and language is our primary tool to make, break, edit, react to, and enhance our relationships. The way we speak or write inevitably betrays our

³ Compare the Chronicler's authorial intent with that of Paul in Romans.

⁴ Janet Holmes, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 1.

myriad assumptions, biases, traits, and opinions. To illustrate this complex relationship, Holmes provides an illustration in the following dialogue:

Ray: Hi mum.
 Mum: Hi. You're late.
 Ray: Yeah, that [jerk] Sootbucket kept us in again.
 Mum: Nana's here.
 Ray: Oh sorry. Where is she?⁵

Although this situation is hypothetical, it illustrates a universal truth regarding communication. That Ray would not have referred to his teacher so pejoratively if he knew his Nana was home is made apparent by his immediate apology. Even if not with the same vocabulary, the reader likely will relate. We commit the social faux pas of overstepping a boundary if we fail to perceive crucial contextual cues such as Nana sitting in the living room and within earshot. Public speaking advice is teemed with phrases like “read the room” or “know your audience,” and what does that indicate about the way we communicate if not that we speak differently in different scenarios? This example demonstrates that our speech will change depending on who is present. Pastors speak differently during a worship service than at home; to our congregation president than to our children; when out to brunch with another couple or when out to dinner with the state senator; when speaking to unbelievers in the street or writing a letter to the believers under their care. The term sociolinguistics use to describe this phenomenon is “variety.” Variety is defined as: “any set of linguistic forms which patterns according to social factors.”⁶ When we make choices about our dialect, we are assessing contextual cues such as setting or audience.⁷

⁵ Holmes, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 1. The word in brackets has been substituted.

⁶ Holmes, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 6.

⁷ The study of the concept of variation is what begot the subfield of sociolinguistics in the first place. Cf. William Labov, "The Social Motivation of a Sound Change," *WORD* 19, no. 3 (1963): , December 4, 2015, accessed November 15, 2018, doi:10.1080/00437956.1963.11659799.

Language is the primary vehicle we use to navigate the complex social structures in which we live. The study of how language interacts with and shapes social structure and culture is called “linguistic anthropology.”⁸ Anyone who attempts to learn to speak a new language eventually is confronted with a revelation. First, a student pores over the rules of grammar and syntax while also amassing a workable storehouse of vocabulary. But then when afforded the opportunity to interact with native speakers, to the student’s horror, the rules of grammar and syntax are often broken. He hears the vocabulary he carefully assembled used in contexts and constructions that never occurred to him, having been a cultural and linguistic outsider.⁹ To flip the illustration, imagine a non-American English speaker with some understanding of English walking down the street, and is greeted with a “What’s up?” He may have the vocabulary to understand the individual word values of what’s being said but being a cultural outsider, he undoubtedly will experience confusion.¹⁰

If social interaction is a game, who decides the rules? Clearly no individual or group has etched in stone that “How are you?” is a greeting and not a request for information, yet we all are surprised when individuals answer the question directly, especially with some negative comment. At some point this benign question devolved into a simple greeting. Who decided this?

Similarly, how do we arrive at definitions for words? Those who write dictionaries arrive at their definitions by studying the ways speaker of the language use words. Dictionary compilers are chiefly concerned with observation of the usage of a word. In fact, they are less ascribing to a word its universal and immutable definition than simply penning a succinct

⁸ Mihalicek & Wilson, *Language Files*, 468.

⁹ “Knowing a language means more than just knowing how to produce grammatical utterances.” – Mihalicek & Wilson, *Language Files*, 453.

¹⁰ Perhaps he would attempt to answer literally, saying, “The sky,” – a response native speakers give out of sarcasm, which would achieve the opposite effect the non-native English speaker is intending.

summary of the senses of its occurrences in particular social contexts prior to that dictionary's publication date. "There simply is no higher authority on word meaning than the community of native speakers of a language."¹¹ Such is the case when analyzing the concepts of language. Like a detective at a crime scene, we observe what has taken place, and draw conclusions from there. Word definitions are descriptive, not prescriptive. They describe where the word *has been*, so to speak, not *where it will go next*, as usage does indeed change over time. The discussion of linguistic concepts relies entirely on observation and categorization.

This view of language may strike the reader as deconstructive. If concrete rules and word values within language are so elusive, is it possible even to define concepts? What definition of 'language' can be offered? We are aware of the aspects of language that are indubitable. When human beings use language, they rely on the function of symbols, which themselves "(involve) an arbitrary relationship between sign and object, but which (are) understood as a convention."¹² There is no communication without convention; no interchange of information without some degree of commonality.¹³ While a precise definition of language may be elusive, we recognize its correct or incorrect use – that is, where, when, and how to use it. Mihalicek et al. provide a description of the complexity of language, while signaling the difficulty in defining it: "(Language is) a rich and varied human ability – one that we can use effortlessly, that children

¹¹ Mihalicek & Wilson, *Language Files*, 243.

¹² Rajend Mesthrie, Joan Swann, Ana Deumert & William Leap. *Introducing Sociolinguistics* (Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 2.

¹³ For instance, if I started to talk about Garfield, without doubt some Americans would comprehend the reference to an orange cat that eats lasagna and hates Mondays. This could not be assumed for all Americans, however, and certainly not of citizens of other countries in whose entertainment media Garfield is not present. In this example, Garfield is a referent – an entity in the world to which an expression refers. The expression, then, would be "cat." To understand the reference, one must understand the sense it expresses. What is it about Garfield that makes him fit the "cat" expression? You and I must have a common understanding of "cat" before we can agree that Garfield is a referent. Mihalicek & Wilson, *Language Files*, 241-242.

seem to acquire automatically, and that linguists have found to be complex yet systematic and describable.”¹⁴

Linguistic Determinism (or Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis)

This discussion is an assemblage of the tools needed to analyze Paul’s words from a sociolinguist’s perspective. In order to draw closer to accomplishing this task, there is need to comment on the relationship between language and cognition. While it is sufficiently clear that they are indeed related, the question is: to what degree? Does one come before the other? In other words, are individuals confined by their language to be able to understand or think only about concepts that their language can describe?¹⁵ Or is language the cart that is pulled by the progression and free flowing creative thought by speakers and speech communities? Simply put, could I mentally conceptualize a basketball, or similar object, even if I had no vocabulary with which to name or describe such a thing?

The view that cognition is hedged in by language corresponds with the theory of linguistic determinism, championed by Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir.¹⁶ Linguistic determinism would have it that speakers are restricted in their conceptualization of reality only to what their language has the vocabulary to describe. Truth be told, this theory has been rejected since its inception due to its limited view of language and speech in relation to human intellect and the development of self. In the opinion of Mihalicek et al, it is a mistake to attempt to describe the worldview of a speaker and his culture by examining only the language and not also

¹⁴ Mihalicek & Wilson, *Language Files*, 2

¹⁵ Mihalicek & Wilson, *Language Files*, 466

¹⁶ This concept is alternatively referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Mesthrie et al. *Introducing Sociolinguistics*, 8.

accounting for “behavioral, cultural, or cognitive evidence.”¹⁷ In short, the idea behind the theory shortchanges the human being’s cognitive capability to creatively reflect their experience and thinking.

However, this theory does cue discussion on the relationship between language and thought. If not completely, then to what degree does language determine our perception of reality? Do cultural differences exist because of linguistic variations, or does culture reflect the development of language?

Mihalicek et al. provide a useful example with the controversial term “retarded.” Although the term is maintained in professional circles as a designation, it is widely regarded as overtly derogatory and offensive. “Mentally challenged” has since been proposed as more amicable lexical substitute with the hope of avoiding offense. However, as Mihalicek et al. argue, the negative or pejorative associations with “retarded” are simply transferred to this new term. Thus, “mentally challenged” has become every bit as derogatory and offensive as “retarded.” The social concept has remained, even if the linguistic value has been replaced.¹⁸

All of this is to illustrate the complex nature of the relationship between language and thought. They are indeed related, even if it has not been conclusively demonstrated that one precedes the other. Therefore, sociolinguists such as Janet Holmes will use the term “linguistic relativism.” The term means to express a judicious endorsement of bits and pieces of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. It must be granted that language influences perceptions, thought, and behavior, to at least a potential degree, as in the cognitive and social baggage that accompanies a term like “retarded.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Mihalicek & Wilson, *Language Files*, 466.

¹⁸ Mihalicek & Wilson, *Language Files*, 466.

¹⁹ Holmes, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 343.

Power

We can observe the relationship of thought and language playing itself out in the power dynamics that pervade all speech, including what we observe in Scripture. Take, for instance, the power dynamics at work in the public debates between Pharisees and Jesus recorded in the Gospels. Epistle texts exhibit a palpable relationship of power as we read the words a prominent church leader writes to those under his care. Certain linguistic choices reveal dynamics of power, which in turn reveal how individuals cognitively or emotionally conceptualize their relationship.

A simple example of power observed in spoken language is the use of honorifics. For instance, many languages have both formal and informal second person pronouns. The deliberate use of these pronouns reflects a power dynamic. If both speakers are using the formal pronouns, at least one of them does so unnecessarily. That is, one party usually assumes the position of power while the other acquiesces due to a lower social position.²⁰ This concept reflects the theory that language is a means by which individuals or groups exert authority over others. Stated plainly, power denotes a relationship of inequality – that is, a relationship of superiority and inferiority, whether real or assumed.²¹

Language is used in power-based relationships to persuade, to educate, and to influence. Through language we perpetuate, share, critique, or reject ideology. Marxism characterizes ideology as “a system of ideas and practices that disguise the social, economic and political relations between dominant and dominated classes.”²² However, the term need not be understood

²⁰ Unless, of course, both parties agree to adopt more familiar forms, such as when a boss says to his employee, “Please, call me Bill. Mr. Johnson was my father’s name.” The power dynamic remains even when the honorific language is abandoned.

²¹ Mesthrie, et al. *Introducing Sociolinguistics*, 312.

²² Mesthrie, et al. *Introducing Sociolinguistics*, 313.

so negatively. I posit that “ideology” need only be understood as a system of ideas or ideals that is strongly maintained in discourse. To this extent, we as Christians subscribe to a certain religious ideology. This is not to say that Scripture presents a set of ideas that is false, as Marxists would maintain. Nor am I suggesting that Scripture presents one set of ideas that must vie for acceptance as any other religion. For our purposes, it is enough to recognize that language is a medium for conveying important, strongly held ideas. The concept of social power dictates that one group or individual is the primary conveyor of an ideology to their constituents, students, congregation members. This is a social reality that takes place in the church, at the seminary, and in our immediate social circles. Lexical choices reflect the relationship between speaker and audience.

Because Paul was called by God to be an apostle of Jesus (1 Cor 1:1), it is fair to say as he writes to the Corinthian congregation, he holds a position of power. As pastor and spiritual father to the Corinthians (1 Cor 4:15), he is superior to the members by virtue of his leadership.²³ He conveys a set of biblical truths that he intends for his brothers and sisters to endorse – an ideology, as sociolinguists would understand it, but never ceasing to be God’s holy Word. By calling upon Old Testament narrative and the teachings of Jesus, Paul utilizes previously endorsed ideology to influence his congregation’s behavior. The reality of this social behavior in no way diminishes the Holy Spirit’s power to effect change in human hearts, but rather highlights it. God chooses to make use of social interactions such as speech and writing for his almighty purposes. This will be discussed more thoroughly below.²⁴

²³ However, he also frequently downplays this position for rhetorical reasons, placing himself among the members of the congregation as their brother (*ἀδελφός*), which will be discussed fully in chapter 3.

²⁴ Again, in no way does this necessitate the conclusion that Paul’s ideology is false or that his writing is disingenuous. This thesis makes the assumption that Paul’s communication with the Corinthians is not a case of simple human-to-human contact, but that the eternal God who does not lie (Num 23:19) is at work in this process.

Community of Practice

The concepts explored above coalesce into a speaker's community of practice. The community of practice is the social group within which language is used to reach a mutual understanding of a set of principles. Paul Treblico defines community of practice, and relates the term to the early Christian church:

A Community of Practice is characterised [sic] by the mutual engagement of participants in shared practice, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. Examples include people working in a factory or workplace, a sports club, a gang, a religious group, an academic department and so on. Clearly, early Christian groups can be seen as a 'community of practice.'²⁵

It is the "shared repertoire" with which this essay is especially concerned. Members of a community of practice grow to share foundational ideas, and to name those ideas with specific terms that develop complex significance over time. They develop a handy shorthand to refer to mutually held ideas. Pastors can use terms such as "elders," "shut-ins," or "exegesis," and other members of the Christian community, whether pastors themselves or those familiar enough with the ministry, share the cognitive associations packed into these terms, and are able to understand them. This is found in any social group. Whether regular members of a yoga class, teachers in a particular school, factory workers involved in the union – the individuals who make up the group develop their own flavor of vocabulary. They rely on a shared repertoire of concepts to expedite communication.

A group's use of language contributes to the development of the community's identity. Using language, a group defines what it means to be a member or non-member. Whether the members are aware of this process is practically irrelevant. "Language not only reflects societal

²⁵ Paul Treblico, *Self-designations and Group Identity in the New Testament*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6.

patterns and divisions but also sustains and reproduces them,”²⁶ and this process can transpire without our realizing it. The relationships within the community of practice serve as the landscape upon which the development of group identity takes place.

As we work toward analyzing the shared repertoire of ingroup and outgroup designations presented in 1 and 2 Corinthians, it will be necessary to become familiar with the field of social-science analysis, which we proceed to treat in chapter 2. Then, we will be able to analyze and observe the social concepts at work in the Corinthian community of practice in chapter 3. As we analyze the repertoire of insider-outsider designations Paul utilizes, we will see that the function of such designations is not simply to construct social boundaries or barriers between church members and unbelievers, but rather that they serve a higher purpose socially and theologically.

²⁶ Mesthrie, et al. *Introducing Sociolinguistics*, 6.

2 – SOCIAL-SCIENCE ANALYSIS AND THE SOCIAL WORLD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

A Brief Review of Social-Science Analysis

Observing the sociolinguistic models of ingroup and outgroup designations in 1 and 2 Corinthians, the task undertaken in this thesis, falls under the disciplinary category of “social-science analysis.”²⁷ The activity of this type of analysis is characterized by “attempts to interpret early Christian literature and history through categories borrowed from the social sciences, sociology and anthropology in particular.”²⁸ Some of these categories have been discussed above, and will be applied in the following chapter, but at the present it is necessary to acquaint ourselves with the history of the discipline of social-scientific analysis.

Those who study ancient societies pay close attention to the observable aspects of social context. In a certain sense, then, a student of history is also a one of sociology. Sociology rose to stand as an independent area of study in the nineteenth-century, when Max Weber, influenced by biblical scholars Rudolph Sohm, Adolf von Harnack, and Julius Wellhausen, focused his studies on this particular field. In terms of applying sociological schemas to the analysis of Scripture, Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels serve as regrettable precursors to social-science analysis. In the late 1800’s, they sought to draw correlations with the early Christian church and modern working-class movements. This activity involved some scholarly study of the New Testament, but critically so, and not with eyes of faith. Interpretive issues with Marx and Engels’ conclusions abound since they had no regard for religion and no desire to remain faithful to the

²⁷ Most often called “social-scientific criticism,” but given the sharply and historically catastrophic associations with the word ‘criticism,’ it is best avoided. ‘Analysis’ genuinely and positively represents the discipline.

²⁸ Dale B. Martin & Stephen R. Haynes, Steven L. McKenzie eds. *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox. 1993), 103.

biblical text. Their “findings” have since been rejected by sociologists as well as modern Marxists, but the activity of applying sociological methodologies to Scripture grew to develop in arguably more profitable ways.²⁹

This approach began to flourish under interpreters who, to varying degrees, are more concerned than Marx and Engels with preserving the integrity of the biblical text. The study of the social world of God’s people was on the rise. In the early twentieth century, form critics Martin Dibelius and Rudolph Bultmann were highly interested in reconstructing the import of a text in the context of the biblical community to which it originally pertained. However, specific sociolinguistic concepts were not introduced as viable methods of analysis until the 1960s and 1970s. During this timeframe, scholars such as John Gager, John Elliott, Gerd Theissen, and Wayne Meeks introduced these terms and concepts with the goal of portraying the social reality of the biblical authors and their people.³⁰

While scholars such as Gager, Elliot, Theissen, and Meeks share interest in the social aspects of biblical interpretation, their perspectives on the nature of social-science analysis are not the same. Meeks and Gager would prefer to use historical models of analysis to explore the social world of early Christianity. It was Elliott who carried these ideas into the scientific³¹ realm by unofficially christening the method as “sociological analysis.”³² Bruce Malina, one of the foremost practitioners of social-science analysis states, “Any person who seeks to bring order to a seemingly chaotic world of overlapping, independent, dynamic, and intricate processes is a

²⁹ Martin, et al. *To Each Its Own Meaning*, 104

³⁰ Martin, et al. *To Each Its Own Meaning*, 105-106.

³¹ “Scientific” here is used in the sense of a systematic and pragmatic study of a topic or phenomenon based on observation. Here, the phenomenon is language, specifically written text. How can scientific approaches apply to language? Recalling the quote above: “(Language) can ... be studied scientifically.” Mihalicek, & Wilson, *Language Files*, 5.

³² Bruce Malina, “Rhetorical Criticism and Social-Scientific Criticism: Why Won’t Romanticism Leave Us Alone?” in *The Social World of the New Testament*, Jerome Neyrey & Eric Stewart eds. (Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, MA, 2008), 5-6.

‘scientist’ in our contemporary world.”³³ Malina maintains that cross-cultural analysis (like reading Scripture) requires the employment of anthropological and sociological models. In other words, since reading the biblical texts is a cross-cultural experience, the activity necessitates a conscious awareness of the social differences between the world from which the biblical authors are writing and our own.³⁴ As opposed to historical analysis, which seeks to answer the “when” of the text, and make extrapolations on that, social-scientific analysis pursues the questions of “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” “why,” and “to whose benefit” of the social groups described in the text. This is based on the principle that, “human beings are social. They do not construct reality, not even socially. Rather, they interpret all of their experiences by means of socially shared conceptions.”³⁵ The human authors of Scripture share this behavioral characteristic with the rest of humanity, with the crucial caveat that their values and perspectives were normed by the revealed Word of God and not solely the social systems to which they belonged. As members of social groups, they lived and interacted within a community of practice and utilized a shared repertoire. They demonstrated the concept of variance in that they wrote to their congregations, peers, or to readers of all times, practicing a degree of compositional decision-making,³⁶ and by making rhetorical decisions to reflect the right tone and perspective that would fit the situation precipitating the composition of the text. Therefore, by looking deeply into the social contexts and networks alive within Scripture, we maintain that we are honoring the social beings the human authors of Scripture were.

Here, before we proceed, it is necessary to pause and acknowledge the need for caution. Methodologies like social-science analysis and historical analysis often carry negatively critical

³³ Malina, “Rhetorical Criticism and Social-Science Criticism”, 6.

³⁴ Martin et al. *To Each Its Own Meaning*, 107

³⁵ Malina, “Rhetorical Criticism and Social-Science Criticism”, 6.

³⁶ Under the Holy Spirit’s guidance (2 Pe 1:21).

baggage. Various methods of literary biblical criticism analyze sources, structures, genres, et cetera, as fallible human documents, sometimes calling the authenticity of the text into question. They thereby attract the concern of those who want to uphold the doctrine of Scripture's inspiration, in contrast to the goal of finding a "more historical" or more "human" Bible. Social-scientific analysis enters into different territory: studying the text to explore the social world of the human authors who spoke and wrote them. However, it would be disingenuous to imply that this is always done in good faith and with the intention of upholding Scripture as God's Word. Thus, the aforementioned scholars lauded for the inception of this methodology are not free from biases that at various times result in the misinterpretation and misapplication of Scripture.³⁷

As with any method of interpretation, two ditches exist. In this case, one extreme would be to focus so much on the human and social aspects of the environment in which the text was written that God or any theological reality would be obscured or done away with altogether. There are certainly interpreters who commit this error, and may God protect any student of Scripture from falling into their number. If the interpreter falls in the ditch of over-applying these sociolinguistic models on the text to the detriment of the integrity of his interpretation, then social-scientific analysis has certainly done a disservice. Abuse of the text for the sake of the exercise of purely academic processes and application of scholarly theories is an offense against the Word of God. The opposite ditch, however, is to treat the words of Scripture as sacrosanct, as if living, breathing, social beings were somehow not involved. This is also dangerous to proper biblical interpretation. This converse extreme would ignore that the biblical authors were human at all and would isolate them from the social contexts in which they were originally embedded. The social-science analyst is indeed interested in the social values, viewpoints, institutions, and

³⁷ This will be acknowledged with more detailed as we enter the text of 1 and 2 Corinthians.

interactions of the persons involved in the text, on various levels of interpretation, and as long as a hermeneutic that is faithful to Scripture is maintained, these interests will not interfere with right construal of the text. The dangers of this a social-science methodology will be demonstrated in chapter three, but we will be more concerned with demonstrating its exegetical benefits.

For the purposes of this thesis, bridging the cultural gap between Paul's Corinthian readership and the twenty-first century church provides insight into some of the diverse social factors that are packaged within the content of these letters. We turn now to the major characteristics of Greco-Roman culture that underlie Paul's writings, and thereby expand our concept of what the original recipients would have understood their beloved apostolic pastor to be saying.

The Social World of Paul and the Corinthians

As discussed above, reading the words of the New Testament is an interlingual, cross-cultural experience. However, readers today do enjoy some commonality with the human authors. We are like Paul in that, although millennia apart, we live in the same universe and world of experience. Paul was subject to the same laws of human existence as we are. This may seem like an obvious observation, but it is made in order to shield against the notion that the Apostle Paul existed on a different planet, where life forms interact and communicate with each other in a way that in no way resembles ours. There is commonality in how we as sinner-saints relate to our God, and how we relate to each other. These interpersonal rules, as determined and defined by Scripture, are not different for Paul and us. Yet it behooves us to respect the major

sociocultural differences, lest we err against brothers living in a different age by failing to appreciate the unique aspects of a first century Christian's worldview. Once again, we find ourselves between two ditches. On the one hand, we avoid the pretense that the pastor to the Corinthians was superhuman in the sense that his writings represent an angelic mode of thinking that in no way resembles our own. The other, perhaps more pervasive, ditch is to assume that Paul thought, spoke, acted, and occupied his time with the same viewpoint and lifestyle as a twenty first century American.

To avoid either extreme, we will now discuss two major differences between first century Greco-Roman culture and twenty first century Western culture. Much more could be said about such differences, but the categories below have been chosen as most important to the discussion of ingroup and outgroup designations.

Collectivism vs. Individualism

Not all cultures are created equal. Depending on where in the world the individual finds himself, his role in the commerce and communication of the collective community changes. Arguably the most difficult aspect of the cultural world of the New Testament with which a modern Westerner needs to empathize in this discussion is that of collectivism. Modern Western readers, by and large, approach Scripture, and all other literature for that matter, from an individualist worldview.³⁸ Individualism was a product of the promulgation of humanist and

³⁸ "Modern Western" is an adaptation of Richards and O'Brien's use of the term "Western," with reference to residents of the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. One could argue that they describe a worldview more germane to that of White people than more collectivist cultures such as those of Latinos or African Americans. A future thesis could explore different American subcultures and their response to these alien cultural aspects of Scripture. E. Randolph Richards & Brandon J. O'Brien. *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL), 2012.

modernist ideologies during the Enlightenment.³⁹ Richards and O'Brien fundamentally characterize individualist culture this way:

The most important entity in an individualistic culture is the individual person. The person's identity comes by distinguishing herself from the people around her. She is encouraged to avoid peer pressure and be an independent thinker. She will make her decisions regardless of what others think; she may defy her parents with her choice of a college major or career or spouse. The highest goal and virtue in this sort of culture is being true to oneself. The supreme value is the sovereignty of the individual.⁴⁰

The individualism inherent in twenty first century American culture is abundantly observable. From the benign encouragement to college-aged adolescents to "invest in yourself" or "just be yourself," to the aggressively pointed advertisements that push consumers to purchase their personal care products because "you deserve it," it becomes clear that the individual reigns. To tamper with or impede another's ability to make decisions for and in the sole interest of herself is to trespass against a solemn social right. This cultural phenomenon appears to have been exacerbated by postmodern thought and moral relativity, which at present cannot be discussed at length.⁴¹ For our purposes, to be aware of our potential for individualistic bias, and to contrast such individualism with the collectivistic nature of Graeco-Roman culture will suffice.

Put simply, a collectivist culture prioritizes the needs of the community over against those of the individual.⁴² Neyrey and Stuart posit that seventy percent of the world's population subscribe to collectivist principles.⁴³ "Collective" as a descriptor may be replaced by "group-oriented." The people alive at the time of Jesus and Paul saw themselves first and foremost as

³⁹ Bruce J. Malina & Jerome H. Neyrey, "Ancient Mediterranean Persons in Cultural Perspective: Portrait of Paul" in *The Social World of the New Testament*, Jerome H. Neyrey & Eric C. Stewart, eds., (Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, MA, 2008), 258.

⁴⁰ Richards & O'Brien. *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, 96.

⁴¹ A potential area of study could be the relationship between postmodernism-relativism and individualistic culture. Does the former naturally proceed from the latter?

⁴² To further contrast the two terms: "Individualism means that individual goals precede group goals. In contrast, collectivism suggest that group goals naturally precede individual goals." Malina & Neyrey, "Ancient Mediterranean Persons in Cultural Perspective: Portrait of Paul," 257.

⁴³ Malina & Neyrey, "Ancient Mediterranean Persons in Cultural Perspective: Portrait of Paul," 258.

pieces of a larger closely interconnected puzzle, not jewels meant to shine and stand out on their own. Neyrey and Stuart describe this concept as “embeddedness,”

Ancient Mediterranean people identified and defined themselves as situated in and embedded in various others [sic] persons or unities. Such unities were groups held together by the social glue of loyalty ... Ancient Mediterraneans considered themselves embedded in a range of in-groups with varying degrees of loyalty: family, fictive family ... *polis*, and the like.⁴⁴⁴⁵

The individual is not in charge of himself in such a communal society. He answers to, takes his cues from, and considers the will of his implicitly recognized and/or explicitly designated social superior, be it his group or group leader. Therefore, cohesion, cooperation, and compliance are of utmost importance in such a communal climate. Members are socially obligated to conduct themselves in a way that brings most honor to the group.

Honor-Shame vs. Innocence-Guilt

This brings us to the second major cultural consideration that will be necessary for our discussion, namely that of the honor-shame dynamic of Graeco-Roman culture.⁴⁶ Morality can be interpreted differently across cultures. This is not to say that morality is itself subjective, but the interpretation of morality will differ among individualist or collectivist cultures.

Anthropologists classify Western culture as innocence-guilt. In the United States, legal cases are brought to a court to be heard before a jury, whose assignment is to determine on the basis of

⁴⁴ Malina & Neyrey, “Ancient Mediterranean Persons in Cultural Perspective: Portrait of Paul,” 260.

⁴⁵ “Fictive family” is differentiated from “family” in that it included married sons, their wives and children, as well as servants, slaves, etc. Malina & Neyrey, “Ancient Mediterranean Persons in Cultural Perspective: Portrait of Paul,” 260-261.

⁴⁶ American anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) is credited with popularizing the binary classification of culture as “honor-shame” or “innocence-guilt.” Then in the 1980’s and 1990’s, Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey (along with scholars who subscribed to social-science analysis) began applying the classification to the New Testament culture. “The Meaning of ‘Shame’-A Short History.” HonorShame. May 24, 2018. Accessed November 25, 2018. <http://honorshame.com/meaning-shame-short-history/>.

written laws and the legal code whether or not the defendant is guilty of committing a crime.

“Guilty,” then, indicates personal responsibility for the wrong action and liability for appropriate punishment. We also use the word “guilty” to describe feelings of personal culpability, namely that we have failed in some area of our responsibility or haven’t measured up to a commonly accepted pattern or norm of behavior.

The moral dichotomy of innocence and guilt coincides with individualism. Richard and O’Brien outline the connection clearly:

An important part of mature selfhood, for us, is knowing the difference between right and wrong ... This sense of what is right and what is wrong is expected to be internal, within the heart and mind of each person, and people are expected to choose right behavior on the basis of conscience ...our decisions to act rightly are not necessarily made with other people in mind ... but on the basis of an objective and largely individual sense of right and wrong.⁴⁷

By contrast, collectivist cultures consider the opinions and often unwritten traditions, or mores, of others, that is, of the group to which one belongs, of paramount importance. David Strucely states it this way, “... because of [a collectivist individual’s] concern with relationships and sensitivity to the opinions, needs, and wants of the group, it is the group that defines what is wrong.”⁴⁸ The group also determines according to its best interests how to deal with wrong action. Again, we are not describing unabashed moral relativism, but rather exploring the lenses through which citizens of Graeco-Roman culture interpreted personal and social behavior.

Correct, virtuous conduct in this collectivist context, then, is that which upholds, promotes, and adds to the honor of the group. In fact, “honor is primarily a group value.”⁴⁹ It is associated with strength, courage, generosity, and wisdom. To lack honor is to lack these traits.

⁴⁷ Richards & O’Brien. *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, 114.

⁴⁸ David Strucely, *Honor y Vergüenza: Understanding Honor and Shame in Latin America*, (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary: Mequon, WI, 2018), 5.

⁴⁹ John J. Pilch & Bruce J. Malina et al. *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, (Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, MA, 2000), 107.

To fail to make the most of an opportunity to exhibit generosity is to lose honor, and therefore display weakness, which is to be despised.⁵⁰ The honor-shame dynamic in 1 and 2 Corinthians will be explored more below.

Abnormality, or Deviance

Although the culture of twenty first century America is predominantly individualistic, we who belong to it can recognize the potential for offense in drawing unnecessary attention to oneself. Someone who feels free to shout obscenities in public is demonstrating behavior that does not coincide with the commonly accepted norm of public decency. An individual sporting neon green dreadlocks and a prominent nose ring may receive praise from some for their stylistic choices, but criticism from most others. An overt effort to stand out is not always celebrated.

To a greater extent, in the group-oriented society of Paul's day, such non-conformist behavior was perceived as unwholesome – even shameful. We may not encounter any cases of Graeco-Roman individuals with neon green hair, but for a person to demonstrate by appearance or behavior that they had forsaken the in-groups to which they naturally belonged would be highly offensive, for example, for a man to worship with his head covered, or for a woman to worship with her head uncovered (1 Cor 11:4-7). A public expression of self such as a personal style choice may be celebrated as admirable in twenty first century America, but because of the implications of deviance from one's group associations, it would more likely evoke shame in New Testament culture. For the purposes of this essay, we are concerned with the effect one's

⁵⁰ Pilch & Malina, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, 107.

behavior had on their closest in-group associations. What kind of interpersonal damage is done when a Christian doesn't act like a Christian? This is explored more fully below.⁵¹

If conflict arises in interpersonal relationships in a communal society, the cause is often seen as one party's deviation from the group's characteristics, standards, or goals. Deviation, or abnormality, would be understood as not measuring up to the social and cultural expectations or stereotypes that constitute the identity of the group members.⁵² Even then, the erring party is not seen as being guilty of error as an individual, but as a result of their embeddedness in some unacceptable group. In other words, their error would be explained by their group association, for example: "She was a sinner"⁵³ (a class designation) or "they are tax collectors."⁵⁴

It is with such communally defined and perceived labels that we are chiefly concerned, and to which we now turn as we move forward in our analysis of 1 and 2 Corinthians. With honor-shame and collectivistic concepts as the backdrop, we will see some of the important lessons Paul wishes to teach the Corinthians through the social terminology he employs.

⁵¹ Westerners are normally compelled to comply with social norms because of an internal sense of guilt. An honor-shame culture, on the other hand, relies on the external social pressure of the community. Pilch & Malina, eds., *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, 114.

⁵² Malina & Neyrey, "Ancient Mediterranean Persons in Cultural Perspective: Portrait of Paul," 259.

⁵³ Malina & Neyrey, "Ancient Mediterranean Persons in Cultural Perspective: Portrait of Paul," 259.

⁵⁴ Jesus endures criticism from religious legalists for associating himself with socially perceived immoral groups – the tax collectors and "sinners" in Matt 9:9-12.

3 – THE CORINTHIAN COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Introduction

Having laid the appropriate sociolinguistic foundations, we are equipped to proceed into our analysis of key passages in 1 and 2 Corinthians. In a particular way, the texts below exhibit how God uses a human author like Paul to construct the identity of the community, namely by clearly defining both those who belong to the community, and those who are to be excluded – both designations are profoundly important to Paul, and therefore should be to us as well. Finally, the construction of the Christian community is God’s work, and we will note how he uses the system of human language and sociality to do so.

In the text of these two letters, we observe Paul, a key figure in the Christian community of practice, utilize an array of terms to draw these ingroup-outgroup designations. As discussed above more generally, here we observe specifically how a shared repertoire of designations and concepts is used to create linguistic “shortcuts,” or simple phrases packed with implicit meaning. Such a repertoire is not meant to confuse, but as Paul’s readers cognitively unpack his terms, they are given the chance to see the greater theological picture he is painting along with his vision of a unified Christocentric community through his ingroup and outgroup designations. Paul Treblico explains this social phenomenon and its importance:

Members of a social group have a sense of belonging to a group, of sharing values and norms with other group members, of being ‘ingroupers.’ By virtue of its existence as a group, this sense of the ‘ingroup’ also creates the category of ‘others’, ‘outsiders’, who do *not* belong to the group. These people can be regarded as ‘outgroupers’, as ‘them’, or ‘not us’... Hence, the ingroup-outgroup distinction is fundamental to identity, both for a person and for a group.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Paul Treblico, *Outsider Designations and Boundary Construction in the New Testament*. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2017) 9.

Defining group identity by constructing social boundaries is an activity that inevitably occurs in social groups. In Scripture, specifically in Paul’s letters, language is the tool used in this construction. Thankfully, Paul employed the same linguistic repertoire in his writing that he – assumedly – did in his preaching and face-to-face interaction, thus enabling a Seminary senior to study and write about it two thousand years later.⁵⁶ As Treblico succinctly states, “language and identity are co-constructed.”⁵⁷ When we read 1 and 2 Corinthians, we witness the conceptual construction of the identity of the Corinthian congregation—those who are included as well as those excluded and, since we are their brothers and sisters in faith, our own inclusion as well.

The Corinthians’ Group Identity

We begin by observing how Paul defines individuals “into” the Christian community. He does so through the use of repeated terms or designations that call upon uniting themes. This is not specific to Christians but is a phenomenon that occurs in a wide variety of social contexts. At present day, the use of ingroup designations is commonly observed in clubs or social groups. Individuals who enjoy listening to the slam of dual pedals against a bass drum accompanied by loud, gritty chugs of a distorted guitar, underneath the seemingly inhuman screeches and growls coming from a lead vocalist, are called “metalheads.” This group is defined by a particular taste in music. A person who often scurries across a green, tracking the little white ball she slugs toward a small recess in the earth is likely referred to as an avid “golfer.” She belongs to a group

⁵⁶ Mesthrie, et al. elevate the sociolinguistic study of written communication to the same status as face-to-face interaction by stating, ““To a large extent, sociolinguists have followed suit in concentrating on the study of human interaction via speech. But ... it is an oversight to exclude writing from the ‘linguistic ecology’ of modern sciences.” Mesthrie, et al. *Introducing Sociolinguistics*, 26-27.

⁵⁷ Treblico, *Outsider Designations*, 92.

that is characterized by a choice in activity. “Runner,” “CrossFitter,” “bodybuilder,” or “Olympic power lifter” are all designations that indicate one’s passion for exercise, some knowledge of exercise science, but these labels also identify adherence to a particular strand of exercise philosophy, which is usually accompanied by a certain degree of animosity toward the other sub-groups of this larger field.

Labels create associations and dissociations, identifying the labeled individual as adhering to one group and not to another. Many an adolescent (particularly in individualistic America) is heard bemoaning the application of labels to their persona,⁵⁸ but it remains an inescapable social practice among humans. Labels contain a host of mental associations, which facilitate the flow of communication. If person A and I are fans of the American football team, the Green Bay Packers, and I mention to person A that person B is a fan of the Minnesota Vikings, I have avowed person A permission to assign the mental “baggage” associated with fans of this particular team to person B. My point in doing so might be to warn person A about person B, in essence saying, “Everything you don’t like about Vikings fans, you can apply to person B.” To this end, labels and designations serve a sinister, socially destructive purpose when they are used to propagate hateful assumptions about individuals belonging to certain races, for example. As we proceed, we will observe a much more sanctified use of labels. Not only do designations serve the role of providing linguistic shortcuts, but as we will see, they are also highly instructive in the points that they emphasize about the individuals pertaining to the group.

To arrive at this conclusion, it is first necessary to describe the general physical and social situation of the early Christian church.

⁵⁸ “Don’t label me!”, “I can’t be put into a box!”, or “you can’t define who I am,” similarly express the same objection to being assigned to a particular social group, even if the assignment fits.

The Dense & Multiplex Church

Sociolinguists use the term “density” to describe the interconnectedness of social networks. Holmes defines density as, “whether members of a person’s network are in touch with each other. Do your friends know each other independently of you? If so, your network is a dense one.”⁵⁹ Plexity accompanies density as a descriptor for social networks. Plexity is “a measure of the range of different types of transaction people are involved in with different individuals.”⁶⁰ A relationship in which two individuals only connect on one dimension (e.g. Bob works with Sally or Ben and Mike attend a course together) is considered *uniplex*. Consequently, a *multiplex* relationship involves interactions across several dimensions, (e.g. Bob works with Sally *and* they are both members of the same bowling league).⁶¹ Therefore, the social network of the church in Corinth can be described as both dense and multiplex. Believers worshipped together, prayed together, and ate together (Acts 2:42-47). They did life together.

As there were no church buildings in which believers could gather, members of the Christ-following group spent considerable amounts of time in each other’s “homes.” Evidence of the “house church” is found in Col 4:15, where Paul bids greetings to the church (ἐκκλησία) in Nympha’s house (οἶκος), hence the appropriateness of the term “house church.” However, οἶκος has a broader range of meanings than what we might envision a “house” to be.⁶² Οἶκος can refer to a Roman atrium, courtyard with adjoining rooms, or an apartment with shops on the ground

⁵⁹ Holmes, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 197.

⁶⁰ Holmes, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 197.

⁶¹ Holmes, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 197.

⁶² That is, an independent structure with several private rooms, and a common area designed to be inhabited by one family.

floor.⁶³ Since most Greco-Roman Christians belonged to the lower socioeconomic strata, they likely lived in tightly-compressed apartment structures, with the exception of slaves living in the costly villas of their masters.⁶⁴ In our day, it is common for families live in suburbs surrounding a city, and members of the household who work commute to and from their jobs within the city. Since such transportation was not nearly as accessible in the first century, they simply lived where they worked, resulting in living conditions that we might consider claustrophobic. The Christians, then, could have met in one individual's house, a converted slave-master's villa, or the commons of an apartment complex.⁶⁵

Despite an apparent level of economic misfortune, this living arrangement occasioned ministerial and evangelistic advantages, facilitating the fortification of ingroup relationships as well as outreach. Despite the need for Paul's corrective reordering, the Corinthian worship life appears to have been a holistic experience, including hymns, sermons, revelations, tongue-speech and the accompanying interpretation (1 Cor 4:26). If we imagine this activity transpiring within the house church context, it is reasonable to assume this activity could be seen and heard throughout the complex. If the worship setting were an atrium or commons area of such a complex, unbelievers and inquirers⁶⁶ (1 Co 14:16) could easily wander into a meeting, whether out of basic curiosity or earnest interest in the gospel message. This explains Paul's concern for

⁶³ Paul Treblico, "Early Christian Communities in the Greco-Roman City: Perspectives on Urban Ministry from the New Testament," *Ex Auditu* 29 (2013), October 10, 2018, accessed November 15, 2018, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=b8c63593-2508-4692-8bd6-c4392aa6db69@sessionmgr4008>, 27-28..

⁶⁴ Treblico, "Early Christian Communities," 28.

⁶⁵ Treblico, "Early Christian Communities," 28. In addition to "house church," Treblico refers to this setup as being a "tenement church." He supposes that the believers at Troas were gathered in such a church, because Eutychus fell out of a third-floor window (Acts 20:9). Treblico, "Early Christian Communities," 29.

⁶⁶ The accuracy of the translation "inquirer" for *ἰδιώτου* in 1 Cor 14:16 warrants attention as we discuss ingroup designations below.

the spiritual benefit of the outsider in 1 Cor 4:23-25. This point will be crucial to our discussion below.

All this is to demonstrate the density and multiplexity of the social network of the New Testament “house church,” and of the Corinthian congregation specifically. In a manner with which a western adult who grew up inhabiting independent home structures is unable to truly empathize, the dense living conditions of the Greco-Roman community inevitably impacted the relationships of these apartment-dwellers. Given that multiple families participated in the worship activity their shared faith produced, their relationships took on multiple dimensions. They didn’t only live together in a physical, spatial sense. They shared a dynamic spiritual life in all of its aspects together. Paul’s encouragements, admonishments, reprimands, and exhortations were meant to guide them to traverse the walk of faith in step with one another. Theirs was a journey to discover, enjoy, and savor the significance of belonging to the most significant social group. Such should be our goal as well.

Defining Insiders

We have touched on the concept of the shared linguistic repertoire and its value for social groups such as a Christian congregation. Now we will discuss its significance in greater detail. Our discussion of contextual factors such as location and proximity gives us a picture of what relationships in the congregation must have been like. We now turn to the actual words that Paul and the Corinthians used to describe their relationship to one another. Doing so will shed light on the theological nature of their social network.

Paul’s heavy use of familial language played a large part in the formation of the church’s identity and self-concept. Relating to other group members as “brother” or “sister”

conceptualizes the congregation as a tightly-knit network of warm familial relationships. This, of course, is Paul's intention. The physically-dense clusters of individual Christians were closely related socially, but even more so spiritually.

Paul as πατήρ

Paul designates himself as the Corinthian's "father" in 1 Cor 4:15 – "Even if you had the thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father (ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς ἐγέννησα) through the gospel." But how are we to understand πατήρ in this context? BDAG offers cursory definitions such as "parent," "forefather, ancestor," "father." Without biological connection, πατήρ can be a term of respectful address (Acts 7:2, 22:1). John appears to use πατήρ as a designation for a position in the church polity (1 Jn 2:13,14). Given the range of possibilities, in what sense was Paul πατήρ to the Corinthians?

It is useful to call upon our previous linguistic discussion. As stated above with regard to word definitions, use determines meaning. Πατήρ, while certainly used in reference to one's male biological progenitor, was also used to designate a patron or benefactor. Pilch and Malina introduce us to the concept this way: "The patron-client relationship is a social, institutional arrangement by means of which economic, political, or religious institutional relationships are outfitted with an overarching quality of kinship or family feeling."⁶⁷ A member of high social standing, i.e. the patron, would engage in relationship with a client, that is: someone of a lesser social stratum⁶⁸. The patron would practice generosity or benevolence toward the client in a

⁶⁷ Pilch & Malina, eds. *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, 151.

⁶⁸ "In Mediterranean societies of the past ... there was not the faintest trace of human equality of all males. Institutionalized relationships between persons of unequal power statuses and resources were and are highly exploitive in nature." Pilch & Malina, eds. *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, 152.

specific way. This action is described by the concept of *χάρις*, *grace* or *favor*. In so doing, the patron would inspire or motivate *honor* for himself.

Scripture provides some examples of this relationship at work. In Luke 7:6, when Jesus is on his way to heal the servant of the centurion, the centurion sends φίλους, “friends,” to relay his message to Jesus. These “friends” were probably clients, participating in this exchange of favor for honor. Pilate, seeking to maintain his client status before patron Caesar, allows himself to be coerced into continuing Jesus’ trial by the Jewish leaders’ implicit threat, “If you let this man go, you are no friend (φίλος) of Caesar,” (John 19:12).⁶⁹ Alicia Batten makes this general comment regarding φίλος as a client designation:

It was common in the Greco-Roman world for patrons and clients to refer to one another as φίλος or *amicus*, despite the fact that friendship and patronage were not identical. Patron-client relationships would disguise themselves as alliances of friendship, and sometimes the boundaries between the two were not crystal clear.⁷⁰

This is reflective of the honor-shame makeup of Greco-Roman culture as explained above.

Clients were concerned with preserving the “friendship” and honoring their patrons, even if a degree of what we might call disingenuity was involved.

The patron or benefactor was often designated by the term “father,” or “savior.” At this point, a relationship of patronage should be differentiated from one of benefaction.⁷¹ While patronage had the *do ut des* undercurrent driving the relationship between patron and client, a benefactor, though in a similar position of power over the client, would not necessarily expect the client to return the favor. Benefactors simply provided and were not concerned with being

⁶⁹ Neyrey, Stuart. *The Social World of the New Testament*, 47

⁷⁰ Alicia Batten, “God in the Letter of James: Patron or Benefactor?.” In *The Social World of the New Testament*, Jerome Neyrey & Stuart, eds. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 50.

⁷¹ Not all biblical scholars agree that benefaction and patronage are different. Cf. Alicia Batten, *God in the Letter of James: Patron or Benefactor?*. Neyrey & Stuart, *The Social World of the New Testament*, 47-61.

repaid. This is likened to the conventional forgiving, giving nature of a father even to an erring child – hence the designation “father” was common for benefactors.⁷²

When in a patronage relationship, the client would avoid speaking out of turn for fear of putting the relationship at stake, a benefactor and his client could communicate frankly, more openly, and therefore become socially closer. Neyrey and Stuart identify a common characteristic of social closeness in this culture:

True friendship was characterized by frank speech as opposed to flattery, unity of mind, control of one’s tongue and passions, and testing to determine loyalty. True friends are able to speak their minds to one another without destroying the relationship. To speak out against a patron typically would cause the end of the relationship and the cessation of the provision of goods. Benefactors, on the other hand, did not stop providing if their friends exposed their faults. True friends, rather, agreed upon their concerns and were loyal to one another without coercion.⁷³

Scholars cut of the same cloth as Neyrey, Stuart, and Batten maintain that the Septuagint, and therefore the New Testament, reflect the Greco-Roman social influence of the benefactor in translations of God’s as *πατήρ*.

But is this conclusion necessary? The labels “father” or “savior” for patron or benefactor seem to have developed as a metaphor to describe the role, in the sense that the benefactor has a fatherly, giving attitude toward his client. This is certainly true of God, but in a sense that is greater than metaphor, God is the father of all (Eph 4:6), and we address him as such not in a solely metaphorical sense but in the actual sense that he is our Father (Lk 11:2,13). Why should Paul have a completely different concept else in mind? Admittedly, there is some degree of correlation between the points of emphasis of the label “father,” but that correlation need not

⁷² Batten, *God in the Letter of James: Patron or Benefactor?*, 52

⁷³ Neyrey & Stuart, *The Social World of the New Testament*, 47-48.

compel us to draw a hard connection between God’s activity and that of a Greco-Roman patron or benefactor, as Pilch and Malina do.⁷⁴

If it is possible that benefaction is not in view with Paul’s reference to himself as father of the Corinthians in 1 Cor 4:15, then what is the sense of this self-designation? Lockwood refers the reader to the context in which Paul penned this verse,

Paul’s understanding of himself as father of the Corinthians has already been anticipated by earlier references to his unique contribution as planter and master builder (3:6-10). Now, in calling the saints in Corinth ‘my beloved children’ (4:14), he is reminding them of his special relationship to them ... he also frequently calls an individual he has converted ‘my child.’⁷⁵

Lockwood calls attention to the preceding context – occasions when Paul asserted the legitimacy of his leadership using other metaphors. Paul designates himself as their caring pastor, who fathered them through the gospel (διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς ἐγέννησα). It is from this position of care and earnestness⁷⁶ that he admonishes and teaches, and it is with this teaching seeks to strengthen the ingroup bonds of the community.⁷⁷

This discussion has begun to flesh out Paul’s self-portrait – being at the same time inspired author, pastor, and “father.” The verses considered here were inspired by God, and composed by a concerned community leader, fighting against false teachers who would mislead his flock, and the self-appointed leaders who sought to steal it away. Paul’s mission was to lead

⁷⁴ There is danger in an over-emphasized reliance on social concepts such as these, to which, in my opinion, Pilch and Malina come close. They maintain that God treated Israel as his client in the Old Testament, providing grace/favor and expecting honor in return. If taken too far, this view could be seen as coming short of accurately describing the relationship of grace God maintains with his people. Pilch & Malina, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, 89-92.

⁷⁵ Gregory J. Lockwood. *1 Corinthians*. (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, MO, 2000), 153.

⁷⁶ Cf. the discussion above on frankness as a sign of social closeness.

⁷⁷ The notion of “fatherhood” is thoroughly biblical, and certainly not a New Testament or Greco-Roman social innovation. Old Testament examples of paternal language used to emphasize important aspects of relationships include Job 29:16, 31:18; Ps. 68:5; Proverbs *passim*; Isa. 22:21, 51:2, etc.

his congregation to coalescence and cohesion, which, as the dominant issues Paul addresses in 1 and 2 Corinthians indicate, was under attack.

“One another”

What terms did Paul use to define what it means to be a member of the Christian group—the “body of Christ” (12:27)? How does Paul distinguish, characterize, and illustrate the marks of the life of one who follows Christ? We have already proposed that the analysis of Paul’s designative terms will help us answer these questions. As we turn now to these ingroup labels, we begin with one of the most basic.

In the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul begins his foray, sword drawn, into the congregation’s issue with affiliative cliques⁷⁸ (1 Cor 1:10-17). Apparently, this clique formation centered around the sacrament of Christian initiation, baptism. Malina and Pilch indicate, “In this ritual new members passed from the outside into the inside of the group. The social outcome was characterized by mutual fellowship in Christ.”⁷⁹ Through baptism, then, ingroup members belong to God and not to the baptizer. The baptized are united spiritually in their mutual membership in the community of believers. To adhere to cliques according to which leader did the baptizing was to create fissures in the larger cohesive group – contrary to the community-entrance.

⁷⁸ Malina and Pilch define a “clique” as “a type of coalition, defined as a collection of people within some larger, encapsulating structure, consisting of distinct parties in temporary alliances for some limited purpose. Specifically, a clique is a coalition whose members associate regularly with each other on the basis of affection ... and common interests ... and possess a marked sense of identity.” Bruce J. Malina, John J. Pilch *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul*, (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2006), 63.

⁷⁹ Unfortunately, Malina and Pilch also unnecessarily conclude, “the focus in baptism was not so much forgiveness of sin and repentance as it was in the Synoptic’s story of John the Baptist.” Malina & Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul*, 63-64.

Paul's appeal is that "all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions (*σχίσματα*) among you" (1 Cor 4:10 NIV). In line with what has been discussed vis-à-vis the collectivist culture in which Paul was embedded, Paul encourages cohesion by reflecting the Corinthians' attention back on what defines their ingroup membership. He highlights the value of their Spirit-forged membership to this community of faith. A basic characteristic of community membership then is agreement and likeness of mind with respect to "what is written" in the Scriptures (1 Cor 4:6b).

The criticisms, implicit and explicit, which Paul expresses in 1 Cor 1:10-17 indict the individuals inciting these cliques, but also reflect the Corinthians' attention back onto their community identity. The phrase "one another" (*τὸ αὐτὸ ... πάντες* in 1:10) functions as a community-enhancing term.⁸⁰ At baptism, a believer enters the community of fellow-believers. At the point of entry, rights and responsibilities to the collective are bestowed. Loyalty to the group and love towards other members is expected and encouraged, and the lack of these is sharply reprimanded.

Paul echoes and reinforces this encouragement of mutual edification in 2 Corinthians 13:11, this time using middle imperatives in a reflexive sense, "Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration (*καταρτιζέσθε*), encourage one another (*παρακαλεῖσθε*), be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you." It is also reflected in Paul's concluding command to "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (1 Cor 16:20b; 2 Cor 13:12a)—not simply a social, but a relational act no doubt meant to convey unity and love.

⁸⁰ Treblico, *Early Christian Communities in the Greco-Roman City: Perspectives on Urban Ministry from the New Testament*, 35.

All this calls back to mind Paul's self-designation as the Corinthians' loving father. Paul is utilizing a self-designation both to put an end to these community-contravening challengers and to enhance ingroup relations. Pilch and Malina state, "As the first change agent to proclaim the gospel of God to them, Paul is like their father..."⁸¹

Ἀδελφός

We reach arguably the most important community-enhancing term in the New Testament, and most certainly in Paul's letters: ἀδελφός, "brothers and sisters." The fact that this designation occurs forty-one times in 1 and 2 Corinthians alone signals its importance in Paul's vocabulary, but our aim is to observe what God accomplishes through the inspired author's employment of this designation.

Before we proceed, however, one matter of particular concern to a modern audience warrants our attention, namely, whether not ἀδελφοί can be translated inclusively. In the wider contexts of the New Testament and the Pauline corpus, it would seem so. In Col 4:15, Paul bids greetings to "the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house." NIV 2011 translates ἀδελφούς as "brothers and sisters," and justifiably so, because Paul indicates that the group of ἀδελφοί includes at least one woman, Nympha. Rom 14:10 is also pertinent: "You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister (ἀδελφόν)? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat." Certainly, the final judgment will not be a males-only event!⁸² In Romans 16:17, Paul begins an encouragement and warning by

⁸¹ Bruce J. Malina, John J. Pilch *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul*, (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2006), 77.

⁸² Treblico, *Self-designations*, 24.

addressing his audience as ἀδελφοί, which clearly includes both the males and females to whom he bade greetings in the preceding verses.

As observed above in Paul's writings as well as in the wider Christian community of faith and practice, "brother" is an exceedingly common designation for "fellow group member," and is used often without second thought as to what is being communicated. We are going to see that the designation carries with it a powerful sense of spiritual connection. Paul intentionally utilizes this sense. Perhaps when we refer to a fellow churchgoer or colleague in the ministry as "brother" or "sister," we are simply seeking to reflect biblical terminology. However, we have already observed that the utilization of familial labels strengthens interpersonal relations within the community. Borrowing from our discussion of linguistic relativity in chapter one, language and identity are co-constructed, and Paul's use of ἀδελφός is a prime example of his intentional construction of the Corinthian's identity of closeness.

Paul did not invent this designation. Nor is the "ἀδελφός" concept confined to his epistles. The designation permeates the New Testament.⁸³ Jesus employs this designation in a community-defining moment recorded in Mark 3:34-35, "Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'" At the time when Jesus said this, he was juxtaposing the unbelief of his human family with the faith that characterizes membership in the spiritual family of God. Lane underscores the import of this passage for ingroup membership in the Christian community when he says,

⁸³ Once again, this is not to exclude the Old Testament either. Examples of fraternal language include Ps 22:22a – "I will declare your name to my people (אֶל־אֶחָיוֹ – *to my brothers*)." Cf. also Ps 69:8, 133:1, etc.

At the same time this demand (for obedience to God's will) creates a fellowship in which the common pursuance of the will of God binds a man closely to Jesus and permits him to know another as brother, sister or mother.⁸⁴

Mark's Gospel was likely written a few years after Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians,⁸⁵ but the rich theological concept of the family of believers is thoroughly Scriptural. For the purposes of this discussion, the Mark passage will suffice to demonstrate its place in the theology of the early Christian church.

Whether Paul had knowledge of this specific declaration of Jesus, or he was drawing upon the wider biblical concept of the family of believers, each occurrence of ἀδελφός preached a sermon, declaring "we are united," and "we are a family." This is no superficial classification of social group affiliation. Nor is it entirely appropriate to call the use of ἀδελφός a descriptive metaphor. It is rather a reflection of the theological reality of the familial unity of believers.

Paul reinforces these family-centered social ties throughout these letters in his behaviorally-focused exhortations. He, as a divinely appointed spiritual "father" defines and exhorts the attitudes and actions which characterize the intimate bond of brother to sister. The expression of this familial bond is primarily characterized by love (1 Cor 13), which is extended into expressions of communal concern when a member sins (1 Cor 5; "he has grieved all of you..." 2 Cor 2:4), accompanying communal forgiveness when that brother repents (2 Cor 2:7-11), and regard for the weak in conscience. As is typical of a collectivistic social group, this includes the generous sharing of financial and quality-of-life resources (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9), and in the socio-religious covenant of table fellowship (1 Cor 11:17-33).⁸⁶

⁸⁴ William L. Lane, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Mark* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI, 1974), 148.

⁸⁵ Lane concludes that Mark's Gospel was written 60-70 AD, (Lane, *Mark*, 17). Malina & Pilch maintain 1 Corinthians was sent between 53 and 56 AD (Malina & Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul*), and Meyer states that 2 Corinthians was penned around 57 AD (Meyer, *Ministers of Christ: Second Corinthians*, 1).

⁸⁶ Treblico, *Early Christian Communities in the Greco-Roman City*, 37.

These behaviors and attitudes are reinforced on the basis of a mutually comprehended narrative. Aitken draws comparisons with the use of narrative in Hebrews and 1 Corinthians, “Thus (in Hebrews), as in 1 Corinthians, the cult narrative of Israel is employed as one of the constitutive elements of communal identity,”⁸⁷ and later:

... we find constitutive elements ... in 1 Corinthians: the cult legend of Israel, the renewal of the covenant, and Jesus’ death as the prism through which the narrative, ritual, and ethic of the community whose emphasis, at least at this moment in their life, is not on ‘proclaiming the Lord’s death,’ but on maintaining solidarity in suffering and shame.⁸⁸

Already apparent are aspects of Aitken’s view with which we cannot proceed. Aitken views the early Christian church as one whose theology evolved as the community developed, basing their ideology on a collective narrative (i.e. the Old Testament), whether that narrative is true or false. There is no question that we proceed, along with Paul, with the presupposition of faith that this narrative is an inspired, true account of real events, and that the theology derived from it is timeless, because God is timeless and does not change (Jas 1:17). From Genesis to Revelation, God’s Word is truth (John 17:17), and points to salvation through Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:1-8). Though Aitken’s view is at odds with Scripture in this respect, her insight about the role of this true narrative is valuable to us. Having addressed this discrepancy, we can understand her explanation in a beneficial way:

What particular scriptural narrative provides the foundation for common life? ... What practices – ritual, ethical, and narrative—function to constitute the community, as a community that has been engaged by the activity of God? In what ways is the ethic of the community consonant with the way that engagement with God and Jesus is held by the community? ... These questions and others like them provide a framework for analyzing the ways in which a community’s life, whether in antiquity or in the present, coheres theologically and practically. ... Above all, they serve to connect our experiences of shaping Christian community with those of our ancestors.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Aitken, Ellen Bradshaw. "The Ordering of Community: New Testament Perspectives." *Anglican Theological Review* 85, no. 1 (2003): July 15, 2017. Accessed November 15, 2018. <http://www.anglicantheologicalreview.org/>, 30.

⁸⁸ Aitken, *Ordering of Community*, 30

⁸⁹ Aitken, *Ordering of Community*, 34.

Narrative norms the community. The inspired texts and concepts of the Old Testament are the foundation of Paul's teaching (1 Cor 10; 2 Cor 3). The words of Christ as recorded and recalled in the Gospel narrative serve as a *sedes* for Communion (1 Cor 11:23-26). The Word creates community. The image of a collective group necessitates an object or objective around which the members gather. The community's primary anchor-point is not ultimately Paul and his preaching, but Christ and his Word (1 Cor 1:13,17; 2:1-5, 13).

Membership of the group includes a shared stake, a "partnership" not only in the belief system, but also in the historical narrative of the community, one that traces its roots solidly and steadily back to the Old Testament Scriptures, as Paul teaches in 2 Cor 6:14-18. Therefore, an ἀδελφός is an individual who is at least beginning to be instructed in that narrative and its significance for their terrestrial and eternal life. Paul writes these exhortations, comforts, and admonishments to his ἀδελφοί on the basis of their entrance into the community of believers, whose life and attitudes are informed and changed by the gospel of Christ.

Defining Outsiders

Introduction

As Paul's critique of the instigators of cliques served to bolster community ties within the Corinthian group, so do his identification, definition, and implicit or explicit vilification of outsiders. To be an outsider means to not belong as member of the ingroup, whether by deliberate choice or through the ignorance of true biblical teaching. What disqualified an

individual or group from participation in the collective identity of the Corinthians? What did Paul intend to convey about non-members of the Corinthian community of practice? What do the apostle's designations reveal about the self-concept of the church group? Similar to our approach to ingroup designations taken above, we will answer these questions by examining a selection of some of the salient individual designations and the key passages where they occur.

Οἱ ἔξω, οἱ ἔξωθεν

It is logical to begin with designations that most apparently reflect the outside-ness of their referents. ἔξω occurs in the Septuagint predominantly in a spatial sense, more specifically, one hundred and four times having a geographical reference, such as “outside the camp” (ἔξω τῆς παρεμβολῆς – Exo 29:14). In other places, such as Judg 12:8-9,⁹⁰ it is a designation of social significance, in this instance indicating non-membership to the community of one's clan.

Along these lines, Treblico suggests that ἔξω and ἔξωθεν, when operating as substantive designations, resonate with familial language. He explains,

.... given that those not in the family could be thought of as ‘outsiders’, *as well as* the prevalence and significance of familial language in early Christianity, we can readily understand the use of the language of οἱ ἔξω, ‘outsiders’, within our NT texts ... Given this situation, it is entirely understandable that the language of οἱ ἔξω resonated strongly with someone like Paul.⁹¹

Treblico draws upon passages like 1 Thes 4:9-12, in which Paul commends the Thessalonians for their practice of brotherly love (φιλαδελφία), their love for “all the brothers and sisters (πάντας τοὺς ἀδελφούς)” (4:10), proceeding to reflect on the effect such practices can have on outsiders

⁹⁰ “After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem led Israel. He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He gave his daughters away in marriage to those outside his clan (LXX – ἔξω; MT – הַצִּוְוִיִּם), and for his sons he brought in thirty young women as wives from outside his clan (LXX ἔξωθεν; MT – יְרִיבֵי־גִבּוֹן). Ibzan led Israel seven years.”

⁹¹ Treblico, *Outsider Designations*, 99.

(πρὸς τοὺς ἕξω). The proximity of ἕξω with familial language seem to indicate a direct contrast.

This would mean that ἕξω would carry the sense of referring to someone not simply on the other side of a line of demarcation, but in a perhaps more vivid sense, “outside the family.”⁹²

The term can be observed in an ethically-defined social sense as it occurs in 1 Cor 5:12,13, as Paul addresses the issue of the incestuous church member. After exhorting the Corinthians to rebuke their erring brother, instead of encouraging his immorality exemplified by sleeping with his father’s wife (1 Cor 5:1-8), Paul concludes his remarks on this subject by clarifying that it is this individual’s ostensive membership in the faith community that makes his behavior especially odious, and that is the basis on which the Corinthians should rebuke him. It would be a different matter if the situation involved an outsider. Paul has no need to address the wickedness acts of individuals outside the church with the specificity he uses here. He explains, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church (τοὺς ἕξω)? Are you not to judge those inside (τοὺς ἔσω)? God will judge those outside (τοὺς δὲ ἕξω)” (1 Cor 5:12-13a). Paul contrasts the role of his spiritual fatherhood over the Corinthians with the Christian’s place in the world. As Garland explains:

...Paul intends his readers to apply what he says to themselves. He means ‘What do we have to do with judging outsiders?’ ...Christians have no jurisdiction over outsiders and have no business usurping a task that belongs to God alone. Those outside are left in God’s hands, and the church has the responsibility to them to seek to win them over, not to nag, browbeat, or seek to control them.⁹³

We will return to the significance of this point as we consider the general application of Paul’s outsider designations. Here it suffices to identify the use of ἕξω as one such term, and to observe the manner in which Paul clearly conceptualizes the difference between spiritual outsider and

⁹² Treblico makes a similar point with the proximity of “household” and “outsider” in 1 Thes 3:7. Treblico, *Outsider Designations*, 101-103.

⁹³ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003) 190.

insider behavior. Malina and Pilch state it this way: “It is necessary to live in a society (the world), hence necessary to mingle with all sorts of people, even evil ones. This holds for interacting with the outgroup. But it does not hold for ingroup interactions.”⁹⁴ At present we might summarize his point thus: “There is plenty of wickedness among unbelievers. As members of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 10:14-22), you should not share in this with them. On that basis, discipline the erring brother.” Likewise, Paul’s exhortation that the Corinthians examine themselves “... to see whether you are in the faith” (2 Cor 13:5) clearly implies the dangerous possibility of being outside the faith.

Ἰδιώται

In 1 Cor 14 Paul addresses the Corinthian’s worship life, and the unfortunate effect it is having on outsiders. This is seen especially in 14:16, where Paul highlights the awkward position into which an ostensive display of unintelligible tongue-speech inevitably places an ἰδιώτης. BDAG offers definitions such as *layperson*, *amateur*, *one not in the know*, *outsider* for ἰδιώτης. NIV 2011 translates the phrase ὁ ἀναπληρῶν τὸν τόπον τοῦ ἰδιώτου as “who is now put in the position of an inquirer.” Garland offers, “the one who fills the place of the uninitiated,” and maintains the position that an ἰδιώτης in this context is anyone who finds themselves in the role of the novice when someone engages in tongue-speech, including some Corinthian Christians who had ignorantly adopted this practice.⁹⁵ This would be a readily-acceptable understanding if not for Paul’s repetition of the term in clear connection with ἄπιστοι (“unbelievers”) in 14:23. Fee explains the use in 14:17 thus:

⁹⁴ Malina & Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul*, 81.

⁹⁵ There is also disagreement as to whether τόπος refers to a physical, literal “place,” as in a seat reserved in the house church for outsiders, or in a metaphorical sense. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 641.

The concern to this point (in 1 Corinthians) has been the edification of *the church*. In v. 17 this *idiotes* is referred to as ‘the other person’ who ‘is not edified’ by hearing praise in tongues ... Paul says this person is unable to say the customary ‘Amen’ *to your thanksgiving*, which implies wholehearted endorsement by one who regularly affirms the praise of the living God.⁹⁶

Yet Fee admits that in 14:23, *ἰδιώτης* cannot refer to a believer.⁹⁷

We might conclude that *ἰδιώτης* is not a hard designation for “unbeliever,” but carries with it the sense of one who is uninitiated or unlearned.⁹⁸ In other words, an *ἰδιώτης* is someone who stands to lose something in the worship service, if the haphazard endorsement of unintelligible tongue-speech without appropriate interpretation leaves them confused. Thus is the sense of its occurrence in 14:16. In 14:23, however, it is clear that Paul is speaking about one who belongs to the outgroup, an outsider who is also untrained.⁹⁹ His concern for the spiritual edification of someone who is an *ἰδιώτης* or an *ἄπιστος* clues us in to his attitude toward outsiders, a theme that will be addressed further below.

Ἄπιστος

What determines membership or exclusion from the Corinthian ingroup? Is it moral behavior? What precisely is it that excludes an individual from membership of the Christian community of practice? How did Paul intend these designations to be heard? As we address these questions, we give our attention to the theological truth beneath one of the most important outsider designations in 1 and 2 Corinthians: *ἄπιστος*.

⁹⁶ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI, 1987), 673.

⁹⁷ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 684.

⁹⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 684.

⁹⁹ Trebilco, *Outsider Designations*, 109. Cf Also BDAG *ἰδιώτης*

When 1 Corinthians 14:23 was discussed above, we identified “unbeliever” as a useful definition of ἀπίστος, but now we will qualify that definition. Similar to our discussion of ἀδελφός, we first encounter ἀπίστος in Jesus’ speaking of one of his disciples. In Mark 3:34-35, Jesus was designating the spiritual family of God. In John 20:27, the resurrected Christ warns disciple Thomas, “μὴ γίνου ἀπίστος,” which NIV 2011, along with many translations, renders, “Stop doubting.” Πιστός and the πιστ- root are associated with trust, trustworthiness, faith, belief, etc. One who is described as being α- (without) πιστις is one who does not possess faith. When Jesus commands Thomas μὴ γίνου ἀπίστος, one might be led to translate, “Don’t be an unbeliever.” While in the context of rejecting the witness of those who had seen the resurrected Christ, translators seem to shy away from the interpretation that Jesus was accusing Thomas of outright unbelief. Thus, they choose “doubt.”¹⁰⁰

However, what precisely is semantically packaged within the concept of πίστις? If someone is to be classified as an ἀπίστος, then what precisely are they being said to be “without”? In 2 Cor 4:4, Paul says, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers (τῶν ἀπίστων), so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” Faith is the eye that sees the light of the gospel, and the gospel is truth (2 Thes 2:12); it is the power of God (Rom 1:16; 1 Co 1:18). The gospel is the saving message of forgiveness won by Christ. Faith lays hold in a personal way of the content of the gospel, which has the power to transfer an individual from the position of one perishing to one saved (1 Co 1:18).¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Other Greco-Roman texts use ἀπίστος in the sense of “disobedient, disloyal,” or “not to be trusted,” and in other places appears in verbal form for “to be incredulous.” Treblico, *Outsider Designations*, 44-45.

¹⁰¹ The pertinence of this passage will be explained in greater detail below.

Ἄπιστος occurs as a designation for an “unbeliever” in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians fourteen times (eleven in 1 Cor, three in 2 Cor). Paul uses it to classify outsiders, excluding them from the ingroup on the basis of their lack of faith. Treblico suggests that this is a linguistically innovative outsider designation. He explains his point of view this way:

In (Greco-Roman texts, and Jewish texts written in Greek), ἄπιστος is not used as a designation with the meaning of ‘all outsiders’, for in each case it is a sub-group ... who are acting in a particular way on a particular occasion that is in view. These people on these occasions are ‘unfaithful’, ‘disbelievers’, ‘disloyal’. Pauline usage where ‘the unbelievers’ is a label for *all outsiders* ... and refers to a social group that *continues to exist*, is quite distinct.¹⁰²¹⁰³

As we observed in 1 Cor 14:22, Paul utilized ἄπιστος in contrast to those who have faith (“τοῖς πιστεύουσιν”). Treblico explains the function of such a contrast: “The construction of this boundary, and the designation of outsiders as οἱ ἄπιστοι, reinforces the identity of the group itself as οἱ πιστεύοντες, ‘the believing ones.’ Further, the boundary is *fully* defined – it is the boundary between οἱ πιστεύοντες and οἱ ἄπιστοι.”¹⁰⁴ To fully “define out” a group on the basis of their lack of faith as manifested in the moral behavior of the individuals (1 Cor 14, 10:1-13; 2 Cor 6:14) appears to be a uniquely Christian phenomenon. While the concept of connection to God’s family through faith, and therefore the exclusion from the community of believers on account of lack of faith, did not originate with Paul as a theological concept, it should be noted that Paul makes use of ἄπιστος as a designation for outsiders only in 1 and 2 Corinthians. Thus, it seems that although the theological truth within the designation is not new, the socio-religious function of the line of demarcation served Paul’s purpose in writing these letters.

¹⁰² Treblico, *Outsider Designations*, 46.

¹⁰³ The “Jewish Texts” to which Treblico refers to LXX’s addition to Prov 17:6, “The faithful has the whole world full of money, but *the faithless* (τοῦ δὲ ἀπίστου) not even a farthing,” Liv Pro. 3:14, where Ezekiel is snatched up to rebuke “*those who were faithless* (τῶν ἀπίστων).” Josephus mentions ἀπίστοι 19 times, but never as a designation. Treblico *Outsider Designations*, 45.

¹⁰⁴ Treblico, *Outsider Designations*, 47.

Like *ιδιώτης*, there is some debate regarding the referent of *ἄπιστος*, specifically in 2 Cor 6:14a. Paul warns the Corinthians, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers,” (*Μὴ γίνεσθε ἑτεροζυγοῦντες ἀπίστοις*). Other definitions for the *hapax* *ἑτεροζυγέω* include “be unevenly yoked, be mismated,”¹⁰⁵ or “heterogeneously yoked up with.”¹⁰⁶ To translate “mismated” would fall short of the metaphor of the unequal yoke, which, as Meyer posits, is a reference to Deut 22:10 “Do not plow with an ox and a donkey together.” The issue lies in having a ceremonially clean animal, the ox, pull the plow alongside an unclean animal, the donkey.¹⁰⁷ Clunky as it may seem, “unequally yoked” or “unequally joined” may be the most understandable sense of the verb. Paul goes on to drive the point home in 6:14b-16a:

For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer (*πιστῶ*) have in common with an unbeliever (*ἀπίστου*)? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.

Paul goes to great lengths to warn the Corinthians against sinfully yoking the clean with the unclean in a mismated fellowship. Treating faith and unbelief as the same thing amounts to declaring harmony between Christ and Belial, the devil.¹⁰⁸ Once again, cohesion of the ingroup is Paul’s goal, and the fellowship practices of the Corinthians were putting their own group identity at risk.

The question raised by many is: Is Paul now referring back to the *ψευδαπόστολοι* dealt with in 2 Cor 10-13, rhetorically depicting them as unbelievers and idolaters?¹⁰⁹ Or can the

¹⁰⁵ BDAG “ἑτεροζυγέω”

¹⁰⁶ (Quoting Lenski critically) J. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ: A Commentary on the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, (Northwestern Publishing House: Milwaukee, WI, 1963), 132.

¹⁰⁷ Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, 132-133.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. BDAG, “Βελιάρ”

¹⁰⁹ David Sterling, “The Apistoi of 2 Cor 6:14: Beyond the Impasse,” *Novum Testamentum* 55 (2013): 45-60, March 5, 2018, accessed November 15, 2018. <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/15685365>, 51. Cf also 2 Cor 11:5, “I do not think I am in the least inferior to these ‘super-apostles’ (*ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων*)” These super apostles apparently were disparaging Paul’s name as an apostle. Paul responds to their claims of superior

occurrences of ἄπιστος in 2 Cor 6:14-16 be understood in the simple sense of “unbelievers,” as we have thus far described?

One is inclined to understand ἄπιστος in the metaphorical sense in conjunction with the overall context of the letter. Given that Paul deals with these false apostles so handily in 2 Cor 11, it is possible that 6:14 is a foreshadowing of the later argument. In such a case, however, Paul is not softening his indictment of the “false apostles” (11:13) – he thus calls them “unbelievers” in so many words, to their indubitable objection.¹¹⁰ Sterling frames Paul’s reprimand this way, “Their influence is fostering rather than combating the Corinthians’ captivity to the pagan mindset of the surrounding culture.”¹¹¹ Paul uses strong words to portray the false teaching of these imposters for what it is: dangerous, and destructive to group identity.

However, Treblico understands 6:14 as a more general reference to unbelievers, not to the specifically targeted “false apostles.” His argument is based on the dichotomies Paul calls upon in 6:14-16, quoted above. The antithetical partners of righteousness, light, Christ, the believer, and the temple of God in these verses are all characteristic of the idolatrous worship of the pagan unbelievers. Therefore, Treblico concludes that the ἄπιστοι here are unbelievers at large, or those seeking to participate in worship of the true God, while wholeheartedly devoting themselves to the pagan worship of the outsiders. This conclusion may be viable, but it is not necessary to assume that Paul would not speak this way about the false apostles as well.¹¹² As we saw above, Paul could be using language associated with idol-worship to portray the vehement

rhetorical skill (11:6-7). They preached a message other than the true gospel of Christ (11:4). They exacted payment of some sort from the Corinthians for their “services” (11:8-9). Therefore, Paul calls them “false apostles” (ψευδαπόστολοι) (11:13). As discussed above, Paul’s frankness in chapter 11 would have been received as a sign of his care and concern, as well as a genuine defense of the legitimacy of his ministry.

¹¹⁰ Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, 133-134

¹¹¹ Sterling, “The Apistoi of 2 Co 6:14,” 60.

¹¹² Treblico, *Outsider Designations and Boundary Construction in the New Testament*, 63-69.

disapproval he has over the activity of these false apostles. The contrast of the light of the gospel with the darkness of sin and Satan is drawn in both 6:14 and 11:14, forming an apparent connection.

Understanding ἄπιστος in this general sense, however, does not disqualify the term from being a more specific outsider designation. In fact, Paul's employment of the term highlights its usefulness in designating outsiders. Meyer explains:

Paul does not question their sincerity when they claim to preach Christ – they were deceivers who themselves had been deceived... he calls them unbelievers in spite of the fact that they professed allegiance to Christ.¹¹³

And later:

... any cooperation with adulterators of the Gospel of justification or with violators of the Holy Spirit of truth must be avoided. Not to do so would result in a mismatched yoke-fellowship with unbelievers.¹¹⁴

Paul is so disgusted with the false apostles that he is willing to declare their non-membership, in effect, their excommunication from the ingroup of the body of Christ, branding them as “unbelievers.” In doing so, he indicates how serious the jeopardization of the Corinthians’ group identity would be if they continued to subscribe to the false theologies of these false apostles.

Therefore, we maintain that ἄπιστος is perhaps the strongest label Paul applies to a member of the outgroup. Its point of emphasis is what the individual or group lacks, the primary characteristic that distinguishes a member of the Christian community of practice: faith. One may conclude, then, that the term is a scriptural, difficult but necessary judgment on Paul's part, a public proclamation of the exclusion of the individual from the family of faith. After all, he associates ἄπιστος with many damning pagan practices in 2 Cor 6:14-16. Unbelief is itself

¹¹³ Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, 133

¹¹⁴ Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, 134

damning. But we will see shortly that Paul's point of emphasis in this and other terms is not solely to condemn. More on that below.

Binary Contrasting Constructions

Up to this point, we have been content to highlight the major ingroup and outgroup designations. For purposes of scope, this has sufficed. However, it pays to take an excursus through a few of the other designations in the Corinthian correspondence that, while less prominent or significant to this particular discussion, serve to illustrate the drawing of social boundaries that occur within them. At present, we will consider the binary word pairs that designate both ingroup and outgroup, pausing at each pairing to consider its significance to the whole picture.

Paul's use of oppositional concepts to solidify truth is not unique to 1 and 2 Corinthians, but his employment of dual identifying designations appears to be particular to these letters, as compared to Romans, for instance. This is Treblico's supposition, based on the premise that Paul felt less compelled to draw such designations, as the Romans were not in the same identity crisis as the Corinthians.¹¹⁵ Treblico explains, "The effect of naming both outsiders and insiders in each context is to fully construct and inscribe the social and ideological boundary in each case."¹¹⁶ Setting these designations side-by-side achieves a strong contrast between the true members of the ingroup and their outgroup counterparts. This device was Paul's Spirit-inspired strategy to combat the issues that were unique to the Corinthian congregation.

¹¹⁵ In this respect, the needs and problems of the Corinthian congregation might bear more similarity to the Galatians.

¹¹⁶ Treblico, *Outsider Designations and Boundary Construction in the New Testament*, 218.

1 Corinthians 1:18 is an obvious example of such a contrast. Paul says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Paul contrasts the substantive participles ἀπολλυμένοις, “those who are perishing,” and σωζόμενοις ἡμῶν “we who are being saved.” The significance of this dichotomy is not lost on those acquainted with the underlying theology. Those who reject the message of the cross will perish for their unbelief, while everyone who believes in God’s Son is saved from this fate (John 3:16-21). However, it is interesting that Paul here contrasts “foolishness” not with “wisdom” as he will in the verses to follow, but with “power.” Malina and Pilch explain the significance of this comparison for members of an Honor-Shame society:

“Folly or foolishness points to a lack of influence, a lack of the ability to have effect on others with appropriate knowledge, reasons, or information... Power, on the other hand, is the ability to produce some effect backed by a sanction of force; here it is the effect of disengaging and releasing persons from God’s wrath.”¹¹⁷

Foolishness and power are appropriately oppositional in this respect. Malina and Pilch continue to explain the theological significance of this contrast:

“God has reduced the wisdom available in society as we know it to an obvious lack of good sense or normal prudence. Hence those who pursue that wisdom are like dishonorable people, shameless and without concern for their reputation. That is quite significant in a society concerned with honor and shame.”¹¹⁸

Paul makes use of the terms again in 2 Cor 2:15, “For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved (σωζόμενοις) and those who are perishing (ἀπολλυμένοις),” achieving the same effect as in 1 Cor 1:18. The outcome of one’s position is in view. Salvation is entailed through ingroup membership, which is concordantly achieved only through coming to genuine, saving faith (πίστις, that which distinguishes between an ἀδελφός

¹¹⁷ Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul*, 66.

¹¹⁸ Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul*, 67.

and an ἄπιστος). To remain an outsider is to be among the perishing. In 1 Cor 1:18, the point of emphasis was how one reacts to the content of the gospel message. In 2 Cor 2:15, it is the “aroma of Christ” that elicits reaction, being recognized as either the smell of life or of death. In a sense, Paul is defining ingroup and outgroup members by their final destination. In so doing, he puts Judgment Day on the forefront of the Corinthians’ minds, and reinforces the importance of Christians’ reaction to and treatment of the gospel of Christ.

Paul draws a similar contrast in 1 Cor 2:14-15, “The person without the Spirit (ψυχικός δὲ ἄνθρωπος) does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit (ὁ δὲ πνευματικός) makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments.” Garland explains,

The natural person analyzes divine truth with his or her limited, earthbound faculties and, not surprisingly, finds this truth wanting (cf. Rom. 1:28). Only one with spiritual perception can examine beyond the visible evidence and attest that the foolishness of God plus the weakness of God equals the power of God. If the message does not come with authenticating signs or sophisticated wisdom (1:22), it whizzes right by those dependent only on natural faculties.¹¹⁹

Once again, an individual’s Spirit-led reaction to the truth of the gospel message is in view. In this instance, the delineating characteristic is whether one is ψυχικός “natural, unspiritual, worldly,”¹²⁰ or that they are “consistent with the (divine) Spirit” (πνευματικῶς).¹²¹ The outcome in view is one’s ability to comprehend the “things of the Spirit.” The defining characteristic of ingroup members, spiritual faith, does not subsist of simple intellectual acceptance of the facts embedded in the narrative of God’s salvific history. Such assent is impossible without the Spirit.

¹¹⁹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 101.

¹²⁰ BDAG, “ψυχικός”

¹²¹ BDAG, “πνευματικῶς”

An outsider without the Spirit will regard the theological truths propagated by the group as irrational silliness with no relevance to their life or death. Therefore, the Corinthians need not take personal offense to the accusations of stupidity levied by the outgroup. Nor should they follow their desire to alter God's truth to make it palatable to human wisdom, for such a thing is impossible. Without the Spirit, God's truth will always appear foolish.

Garland interprets this distinction as different than what Paul presents in 1 Cor 3:1-4, where Paul accuses the Corinthians of behaving in a worldly (*σαρκικοί*) way by adhering to the clique mentality that was assailing their group identity. Garland's view is that here Paul is not accusing them of outright unbelief but admonishing their lack of spiritual maturation.¹²² Just as *ἄπιστος* was used as a term of judgment against the false apostles in 2 Cor 6:14, for Paul here to call the Corinthians' clique mentality dangerously akin to unbelief would fit his point nicely. We have discussed at length the identity issues prevalent in the Corinthian congregation. In the verses leading up to 1 Cor 3:1-4, Paul has driven a wedge between the attitudes and behaviors of the world and those of genuine Christians. Paul's purpose here is to expose cliquish behavior as characteristic of worldly unbelievers, not of the people of God. To cling to petty loyalties is to abandon the true group loyalty – loyalty to the one true God, who alone brings individuals into the group (1 Cor 3:5ff).¹²³ Therefore, Garland is correct in that Paul is reprimanding the spiritual immaturity of the Corinthians, as exhibited by their predilection for factions, but we maintain that Paul is not avoiding outsider terminology in his indictment, but making use of it to highlight the seriousness of the effect of cliquishness among God's people.

¹²² Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 101.

¹²³ Cf. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 106.

Conclusions Regarding the Overall Function of Outgroup Designations

So far, we have identified the major lines of delineation Paul draws with the use of group designations. In our introductory chapters, we discussed the role of language in shaping a conceptualization of reality for group members. The language used in a group inevitably impacts the way ingroup members see themselves. As Treblico states: “The effect of naming both outsiders and insiders in each context is to fully construct and inscribe the social and ideological boundary in each case.”¹²⁴ This is especially important coming from a collectivistic cultural point of view, in which one sees their personal identity embedded within that of the group. So, what conclusions can be made about the group identity that is informed by Paul’s designations of group members and outsiders? How are group members meant to see themselves relating to outsiders?

In the discussion above, we raised the question of whether Paul uses outsider designations in order to condemn those not in the group. One certainly might make that conclusion, as Paul describes them as being outside of the exclusive group of the saved. They lack the Holy Spirit. They do not possess saving faith. Their fate is sealed as ones who are perishing.

Along these lines, then, it would seem that Paul’s aim is to create a sectarian society; that the best provision of the spiritual integrity of the church would be to withdraw from the influence of the infectious ideology of the unbelievers. After all, “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough,” (1 Cor 5:6).

However, the content of 1 and 2 Corinthians clarify that this is not Paul’s objective. Paul assumed participation to some degree of non-Christian observers in the Corinthian worship

¹²⁴ Treblico, *Outsider Designations and Boundary Construction in the New Testament*, 218.

setting (1 Cor 14:16-17, 22-25). He explicitly encourages table fellowship with unbelievers (1 Cor 10:27), as long as it not expressive of religious fellowship (1 Cor 10:14-22). He exemplifies a personable style of evangelism (1 Cor 9:19-23). He encourages the Corinthians not to break from the vocations they possessed prior to coming to faith (1 Cor 7:17-24). In places such as 1 Cor 5:10, 12-13 Paul acknowledges the believer's embeddedness in an unbelieving society, without advocating for a cessation from such a society. This anti-isolationist view is especially apparent in Paul's encouragements regarding an interfaith marriage. In 1 Cor 7:12-14, Paul encourages Christians with unbelieving spouses to remain in these marriages, certainly not congruent with a sectarian, isolationist agenda.¹²⁵

Paul is not advocating a total retreat from all associations with unbelievers, but as has been thoroughly illustrated above, separation is necessary, as he categorically states, and even prays for in 2 Cor 13:5-10. Membership in the ingroup necessitates a differentiation of behavior. Behavioral evidence of the inworking of faith by the Spirit is encouraged. In 1 Cor 6:1-20, Paul exposes prevailing philosophical assumptions ("I have the right to do anything," 6:12, and "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food," 6:13)¹²⁶ as being incongruous to the life of faith of the believer. The Corinthians had indulged in all sorts of depraved activities prior to conversion and subsequent entrance into the body of Christ (1 Cor 6:11). Now that they constitute the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27), along with other believers, a distinct pattern of behavior is expected. In 2 Cor 7:1 Paul calls upon the content of their faith as basis for holy living, "Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body

¹²⁵ Paul even declares that in such a marriage, "the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife" and that resultant children of this marriage are holy (1 Cor 7:14). As Garland frames it, "Paul is not arguing for 'sanctification by proxy' but making an argument against divorce ... Mixed marriages have the same status as Christian marriages and should not be abandoned. Continuing the marriage accords with God's design for marriage, and it should be hallowed." Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 289.

¹²⁶ NIV2011 translates 1 Cor 6:13 including "... and God will destroy them both" as part of the hypothetical rationale for immoral behavior.

and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” The Corinthians are not meant to leave the world, but as believers they are expected to behave in a markedly different way than outsiders.

The issues Paul addresses in 1 and 2 Corinthians were so problematic because they demonstrated the corroding state of the Corinthian ingroup identity by way of the potentially fatal embrace of the outsider worldview. For instance, believer takes his dispute with another believer to be judged by unbelievers (1 Cor 6:1), a disgraceful thought in a society in which the norm was for social groups to arbitrate their own cases.¹²⁷ Outsiders would conclude that the Christian group do not practice the compassionate brotherly love by which they claim to define their behavior (1 Cor 13).

Behavior acts as a visible confession of affiliation. For worldly unbelievers to act in an ungodly way makes sense (1 Cor 5:10, 12-13), and it is God’s prerogative to judge such individuals. However, as Paul states in 1 Cor 5:11, there is profound issue with someone who claims to be a brother or sister (τις ἀδελφὸς ὀνομαζόμενος) yet behaves in a way that is characteristic of the world. They make explicit claim of group membership but fail to adhere to behavioral principles of the ingroup. Outward behavior is the only evidence of faith that is visible to other Christians.¹²⁸ In the case of 1 Cor 5, this is what the brother engaged in incest was doing. This behavior is set so strongly against man’s knowledge of basic morality that not even the pagans (τοῖς ἔθνεσιν) engage in it. How inappropriate it is, then, for one who belongs to a group that is morally set apart and sanctified by God (1 Cor 6:19-20). This results in a vitiated witness to the unbelieving world.

¹²⁷ Treblico, *Self-designations*, 34.

¹²⁸ God, of course, looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7).

Divergence from the behavioral standards germane to the group identity is technically referred to as “deviance.”¹²⁹ In 1 Cor 5, Paul exposes the deviant of the Christian ingroup by uncovering his sin of incest as contrary to the moral standard necessitated by sanctified faith.¹³⁰ This individual participated in the worship life of the congregation, yet his behavior confessed, “I am not a member of this group.”

In his epistles, Paul is not stating that sinlessness is required to be a member of the Christian group. He preached a clear message of forgiveness of sins through Christ (1 Cor 15:3, 17, 22, 56-57; 2 Cor 5:14, 19, 21). He expressed the need for patience for other believers who are weaker in their understanding of Scriptural truth (1 Cor 8:9-13). Paul is talking about the public nature of a sinful lifestyle, not an individual’s struggle against temptation (for which he provides encouragements in 1 Cor 10:12-13 and 2 Cor 6:14-7:1). As Lockwood explains, “Paul is concerned here with those who surrender themselves to sin as a way of life. In other words, they ‘let sin *rule*’ over themselves (Rom 6:12).”¹³¹ Paul is calling upon the thoughts Christ expressed in John 17:14-19, that Christians are *in* the world but not *of* it.

Outing the deviant for his moral failure serves not only to expel the influence of open sin on the healthy formation of group identity (1 Cor 5:6-7), but also leads the Corinthians to reflect on what moral implications their group membership entails. Alertness to what qualifies as deviance within the group enlightens its members to what characteristics and qualities they share.¹³² There is occasion to distinguish true members of the group from “false believers” (ψευδαδελφοίς, 2 Cor 11:26) who deviate from the essential characteristics of an ἀδελφός, namely: true, saving faith. In conclusion of this point, Paul’s goal is not to condemn all

¹²⁹ Cf page 2

¹³⁰ This serves a similar purpose of Paul’s condemnation of syncretistic “idolatry” in 1 Cor 10.

¹³¹ Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 183.

¹³² Treblico, *Outsider Designations*, 19-21.

unbelievers on the basis of their behavior (cf. discussion of above), but to expose the incongruity of the behavior of those who call themselves ἀδελφοί yet demonstrate by their actions a dangerous level of allegiance to the outgroup, thus calling their faith into question. Paul passionately calls all sinners to repentance, and once the Holy Spirit has worked that in the heart and life of individuals, he just as strongly encourages the group to forgive and welcome the offender back into their fold (2 Cor 2:5-11).

Therefore, the function of these admonitions is not to take God's place in passing judgment on unbelieving individuals for their behavior, but to simultaneously practice proper discipline for the erring brother and encourage members of the ingroup to pursue godly living as ones set apart from the world. As suggested above, Paul is explicitly concerned with the spiritual wellbeing of the outsider, with an objective of winning them over through the clearly-delivered message of Law and Gospel (1 Cor 14:24-25). Paul is likewise interested in the effect the Corinthians' behavior has on the outsider groups and their impressions of church members, and by extension their confession. Paul has an evangelistic attitude toward all outsiders, whether they are cognizant of their spiritual situation or not. His sociolinguistic and scriptural designations are not meant to create barriers to isolate the church from the outside world, but he does intend to draw distinctions. Paul creates these behavioral boundaries to distinguish what it means to be a Christian in the world but not of the world. His intention is not to construct barriers to keep unbelievers out, but to clearly reveal to them the boundaries that they have crossed upon coming to faith and thereby entering the fellowship of Christ's body, the Church.

Conclusion

Building on the survey of chapters one and two, which treated the history and development of sociolinguistic concepts in the field of exegesis, this thesis has further demonstrated that such an application is by no means revolutionary. Sociolinguistic principles are clearly at work within Paul's letters to the Corinthians, and our task has been simply to observe and describe them. In so doing we have witnessed the role that ingroup and outgroup designations play in the construction of a group's identity. The key to this development has been the reflection necessarily motivated by Paul in his correspondence to Corinthians with regard to the key aspects of their group identity as emphasized uniquely by each socially-relevant term. We have suggested that the most significant designation for ingroup membership is ἀδελφός, drawing upon the familial bond shared by those brought into the church through conversion. The status of ἀδελφός comes with an associated standard of moral behavior, not to earn salvation but to present evidence of the spiritual status change that has taken place as one shifts from ἄπιστος to ἀδελφός – a dynamic status that believers are encouraged to continually develop in their life of sanctification (1 Cor 12, 2 Cor 8-9). The Corinthians' shortcomings regarding this moral standard were Paul's chief concern in his letters, as it manifested in cliquishness, disregard for the weak of faith among them, mistreatment of the Lord's Supper, and a detrimental level of similarity with the unbelieving world. Paul's pleas and encouragements were based on his desire that the Corinthians be focused once again on who they are in Christ: the ones being saved, and brothers and sisters. Paul had fathered them through the gospel, and still acting as father disciplined them in love and frankness, encouraging them on to love one another and cling to the things that unite them: love in Christ, and the message of reconciliation to God that Paul had preached to them. That same message is given to us in God's Word to hear, to preach, and to

teach. This message, using the appropriate contemporary but biblically-based social terminology, defines, informs, and shapes our identity as the group of believers, brothers and sisters in Christ. Faith in Christ distinguishes us from the world. God makes us ἀδελφοί when we were ἄπιστοι. Now, as Paul encouraged his Corinthian congregation, so God encourages us to live out our lives in-but-not-of the world, so as to glorify his name, and to be witnesses to the world of what being “in-Christ” really means.

4 – APPLICATIONS & AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Applications for the Modern Christian Congregation

Although we are greatly removed chronologically and culturally from the Corinthian congregation, a core commonality remains – we worship the same God, are forgiven by the same Jesus, and congregate around the same historical narrative of God’s grace among his people, adoring and adhering to the same theological import of that narrative.¹³³ Normed by the texts of Scripture, we put into practice the same fellowship principles vis-à-vis Holy Communion (1 Cor 11:17-34). Our discussion of the formation of the ancient church’s identity yields many profitable applications to the contemporary Church of Jesus Christ, especially in cross-cultural settings, where true spiritual criteria need to be clearly distinguished from purely sociological differences. Admittedly, however, this exploration of the sociolinguistic activity within Paul’s Corinthian correspondence has been by no means exhaustive, leaving plenty of room for further study.

¹³³ Ideally and Lord-willing.

Regarding ingroup and outgroup terms, it pays to reflect on the designations to which we are accustomed. Many a pastor is wont to begin his sermon in such a way that involves the words “my brothers and sisters in Christ,” or to include this phrase at some point in his preaching – no doubt influenced by the speech patterns Paul uses. The vernacular of preaching will often make use of this familial language, in a similar way to Paul’s expressions. Like Paul’s usage of such terminology, the words a pastor uses to label his sheep in no small way pieces together his mental conceptualization of who they are to him. Are they brothers and sisters? Are they fellow saints, and co-workers? Could pastors do more to explain the spiritual significance of the ingroup designations that naturally appear in their preaching and teaching, rather than assume the layers of meaning within these designations are always readily understood just because they are familiar?¹³⁴

Furthermore, does the pastor vocalize concerns that so-and-so might be a ψευδάδελφος? Does the pastor accuse his congregation of behaving like ἄπιστοι? This would not appear to be wise. We discussed the difference in Paul’s collectivistic, honor-shame culture. In our individualistic, innocence-guilt culture, a condemnation like invoking the label ψευδάδελφος or ἄπιστος would be a weighty accusation of guilt against an individual. Paul could make use of frank speech to demonstrate his care and concern for his flock. In this writer’s view, our culture does not give leaders the same permission to speak with the same verbal literalness or emotional timbre in public settings such as a worship service.

So then, what may we draw from Paul’s employment of such language? This thesis has made the case that Paul used ingroup and outgroup labels to stimulate reflection on certain aspects of his people’s identity. Therefore, I suggest it is no small thing to begin a sermon with

¹³⁴ Perhaps a sermon or Bible study series could treat this topic.

“*My brothers and sisters in Christ,*” or “*Dear members of the body of Christ.*” One might contest that this language is overly used and is crusted over with stale vestiges of “churchiness.” If that is the case, then what other terms of theological endearment might we use to emphasize important aspects of the group identity we share as fellow Christians? Have we really exhausted every ounce of significance of calling one another “brother or sister in Christ?” Are there other ingroup terms that could be readily used to teach the same glorious truths and encourage church members? Are we measuring the imagery behind our words and actions, and what they communicate about who we are as a group?

Likewise, it pays to reflect on the way we conceptualize members of the outgroup. We are certainly accustomed to referring to them as unbelievers, or “unchristian,” but as we have done with Paul we must also ask ourselves: what is the point of reference and the communicative purpose? These individuals lack the defining characteristic of ingroup membership: faith. They are defined as being out of the group because of the true biblical faith that they lack, meaning that their overt disobedience of God’s will is concordant with their confession or lack thereof. One is then led to question the importance and pertinence of pastors and church members spending precious minutes on a Sunday morning bemoaning the horrors of the behavior of the ἄπιστοι.¹³⁵ Such discussions may have their place, but unless the goal of the discussion is to draw the simple distinction between “their” behaviors and “ours,” one wonders if an extended excursus during a Bible study, for instance, is entirely necessary.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Unless, of course, there is evidence that such people remain in the current register of communicant membership.

¹³⁶ However, this is not to say there is never a need for a pastor to explain the worldly forces serving as undercurrents for social movements in our day, but it is this writer’s experience that such conversations might quickly devolve into expressions of mutual despair over the sinfulness of sinful man. As stated above, the purposes of these discussions should be to inform or to distinguish.

Other Possible Theses

This thesis has attempted to consider the discussion of linguistic labels in order to generate reflection on matters of identity – that is, the Corinthians’ identity as a congregation, as Paul describes through his points of emphasis, and by extension our identity as the modern church as well. From the perspective of church history, much more could be said about the construction of the modern church’s self-concept, whether universal or specific to our synod’s context, either from the perspective of ecclesiastical history or from the application of sociological or anthropological models. In other words, another thesis could flesh out the sociolinguistic concepts at work in the modern church and the complexities of denominationalism. Or, along similar lines, a future thesis could compare these concepts as exemplified in Scripture with another non-western culture.

Aside from a focus on church history, further work could be done with these exegetical principles. The endeavor of this thesis to employ social-science criticism to the exegesis could be applied to other inspired texts such as the epistles of John, the Gospels, or Acts. One could apply these same sociolinguistic principles to the Jew-Gentile distinction in epistle, Gospel, or Old Testament texts. One could also follow Thompson’s approach in analyzing the writer to the Hebrews’ construction of community.¹³⁷ Finally, this study has not exhausted the richness of meaning embedded within the group designations Paul uses, and much more could be said regarding ingroup or outgroup designations on a specific basis.

My hope is that this thesis stimulates further discussions of the sociolinguistic principles readily apparent in Scriptural correspondence. I pray the investigation presented in this thesis has

¹³⁷ James W. Thompson, “Insider Ethics for Outsiders: Ethics for Aliens in Hebrews,” *Restoration Quarterly*, no. 534 (2011): 207-219, Abilene Christian University.

been fruitful to the reader as we have pondered along with the Corinthians who we are, and who we are not, in Christ.

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