

# The Role of Civic Identity on the Pauline Mission in Corinth

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## Introduction

This article seeks to recreate a coherent picture of religious life in Roman Corinth in the first century of our era and then support the thesis that the civic identity of the Christ-followers in Corinth was in transition and because of this Paul's approach to mission was one of social integration. This will allow the development of a framework from which to organize research into the formation of identity<sup>1</sup> in these Christ-followers under the Roman Empire and the ensuing mission that developed.<sup>2</sup> This article is concerned with the relationship between civic-religious identity and the Pauline mission in the Roman world. Civic-religious identity functions at both a personal and a social level, and serves as a "linking device whereby individuals more or less consciously align themselves, or allow themselves to be aligned, with particular groups."<sup>3</sup> The primary model for religious identity was the civic model that linked an individual to a particular city. Consequently, it was a city's public cults that

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1 This article proceeds within the conceptual framework established by Judith Lieu, of identity being that which "involves ideas of boundedness, of sameness and difference, of continuity, perhaps of a degree of homogeneity, and of recognition by self and by others." Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12. William S. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 87. Campbell lays out a persuasive argument for Paul's role as the architect of what was to become Christian identity. This article is clearly indebted to Campbell's particularized understanding of early Christian identity.

2 James B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). A similar approach was followed by Rives in his study on Roman Carthage. James C. Walters, "Civic Identity in Roman Corinth and its Impact on the Early Christians," in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Daniel Schowalter and Steve Friesen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 397-417.

3 Rives, *Carthage*, 4.

embodied and defined the religious identity of civic residents. Moreover, because the city council maintained the public cults and oversaw any modifications, it played a decisive role in shaping the collective religious norm in a city. This article seeks to understand how this civic identity impacted the Pauline mission in Corinth.

## **Description of Corinth**

### **Roman Character of Corinth in the First Century**

In the last sixty-five years archaeologists and classicists have increasingly emphasized the Roman character of Corinth from the mid-first century B.C.E. onwards. New Testament scholars have recently begun debating what to make of this trend: Wayne Meeks argues that among the population only the elites spoke Latin,<sup>4</sup> while Bruce Winter argues that Corinth was a thoroughly Roman city in language and culture, distinct from all its Achaean neighbours.<sup>5</sup>

Corinth flourished from the 8th to the 5th centuries B.C.E. and served as a leader in the Achaean League, a position which ultimately led to its demise. They led an uprising against the Romans in which the Roman consul Lucius Mummius burned and destroyed the city in 146 B.C.E. (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2.1.2). All that remains of the Greek city is sections of the marketplace, pillars of a central temple, and a fountain (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3.22). Julius Caesar rebuilt Corinth in 44 B.C.E. as a Roman colony and named it “Corinth the praise of Julius” (Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.23). The majority of the population was Greek, but a large number of Roman military veterans lived there as well (Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 57.8), with a sprinkling of the urban poor from Rome, Phoenicia, and Phrygia (Appian, *Roman History* 136.46). The Roman character of the city is reflected by the many Latin names associated with it in the New Testament.<sup>6</sup>

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4 Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 63, 79.

5 Bruce Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 11.

6 Meeks, *First*, 55–63, provides a good discussion of these individuals. William F. Orr and James A. Walther, *1st Corinthians* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1976), 42. For example: Aquila, Priscilla, Crispus, Lucius, Gaius, Tertius, Erastus, Quartus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus.

Corinth became the capitol of the Roman province of Achaea in 27 B.C.E. In Roman Corinth, old temples were restored and enlarged (i.e. Apollo and Asclepius), new shops and markets built (i.e. the South Stoa), new water supplies developed and old ones restored (i.e. fountains of Glauke and Peirene), and many public buildings added (i.e. three governmental buildings and an amphitheatre seating over 14,000), all with distinctively Roman architectural elements. In the first century Corinth's marketplace was larger than any in Rome. By 50 C.E., when Paul visited Corinth, it was one of the most beautiful, modern, and industrious cities of its size in Greece.

### **Civic Identity in Transition in the First Century**

The Roman public cults were in a state of flux and experiencing transition and redefinition during this period. The senate, however, still made the final decisions concerning these transformations and had a significant impact on the civic-religious identity of individuals within the empire and enforced a level of suppression if too much religious liberty was exercised (i.e. the Bacchic cult in 186 B.C.E.). The Romans, like other sovereign city-states in the ancient Mediterranean, saw clear connections between religious identity and socio-political authority. As they acquired an empire, the Romans, unaware of any alternative model, supported and maintained the civic model of religion among their subjects. Cities, like Corinth, were allowed to retain and control their own public cults. However, the civic model of religion would soon prove inadequate: into this void Christianity eventually emerged.<sup>7</sup>

### **Result: Corinthian Christ-Followers Did Not Experience Significant External Pressure from the Civic Authorities**

The Corinthian correspondence provides evidence for significant contact with outsiders; however, there is also a lack of evidence for significant conflict with those same out-

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<sup>7</sup> Mark T. Finney, "Christ Crucified and the Inversion of Roman Imperial Ideology in 1 Corinthians," *BTB* 35:1 (Spring 2005): 27. He sees the missional importance of this fact: "In creating local assemblies within and alongside the peoples of cities of the Mediterranean, Paul was building a multi-ethnic *ekklesia* which would stand as an alternative society to the Roman imperial order."

siders. The Corinthian correspondence provides insight into the relations that the Christ-followers had with the broader civic community in Corinth. Their relationship with those outside the Christ-following community provided opportunities for extending the Pauline mission; however, this relationship also created a number of the problems within the assembly. Paul ultimately presents this relationship as helpful but provides, in the Corinthian correspondence, guidelines for how these relationships should proceed. Paul's writing in the Corinthian correspondence should be seen as a continuation of his missional vocation, which included initial evangelism, community formation, and ongoing nurture (1 Cor 3:1–2; 4:15).<sup>8</sup>

In 1 Cor 4:8–13 Paul describes their experience as lacking many of the difficulties that Paul himself, had experienced. In Corinth, a person's wealth and status were highly valued. This was similar to other cities in the Roman east, however, the demographic makeup of the colony, including the freedmen and retired military may have contributed to this community value (1 Cor 4:8, 2 Cor 8:14).

The Corinthian Christ-followers were also confident in the court system. In 1 Cor 6:1–11 he argues that they were putting too much confidence in this human institution. The courts were not accessible to the majority of individuals in the Roman Empire so the fact that they were engaged in litigious activity argues for individuals of some financial means. Paul chastised the Christ-followers for allowing those on the outside to adjudicate their disputes when their confidence should be in the believing community and their ability to rule on problems, or more importantly, they should be willing to be wronged because of their transformed identity<sup>9</sup> "in Christ."

Their good social relations may also be seen in their willingness to participate in the cultic meals in the various temples in Corinth (1 Cor 8:7–13). The civic identity of the colony was indistinguishable from its religious identity. This

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8 Michael D. Barram, *Mission and Moral Reflection in Paul* (Studies in Biblical Literature, v. 75; New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 10.

9 William S. Campbell, "Perceptions of Compatibility between Christianity and Judaism in Pauline Interpretation," *BibInt* 8.3 (2005): 298–316. Transformed identity is Paul's conception, 307. Campbell notes "it is being recognized that what Paul asserted was the relativisation in Christ of all aspects of a person's life, not the *elimination or obliteration* of one's particularity."

fact may be the reason that many of the Corinthians did not see a problem with continuing the practices mentioned in 1 Cor 8. The difference in economic and social status among the Christ-followers in Corinth may have reinforced this practice. Paul, however, understands that this practice may have broader implications for his mission, so he takes a conciliatory stance on this issue.

As an extension of the previous argument, they also dined with outsiders in their homes and in other communal settings (1 Cor 10:27–11:1). If the Christ-followers in Corinth were not involved in the civic life of the community, one would not expect this to be a significant issue. They did not sense the need to change their approach to their civic life once they had accepted Paul's gospel. Paul ultimately argues they may continue their practice; however, their social ethics should seek the benefit of others and not only for themselves.

Paul also notes that outsiders were visiting the houses that were being used for community gatherings (1 Cor 14:1–25). This fact appears to be important in terms of their openness to those who do not believe in Paul's gospel. Who would these outsiders include? Whether they were unbelievers, spouses, or guests, Paul addresses their sense of social standing and suggests that they present themselves in an orderly way, so that the outsiders may not think they are "mad."

Paul presents the relationships that the Corinthian Christ-followers have with outsiders, on the whole, as good and provides guidance on how to interact with those individuals. Paul sees in this relationship of social integration an opportunity for mission and encourages certain behaviours that will further Paul's mission in Corinth. How did this type of relationship occur in Corinth? The transitional nature of the Corinthian civic identity was one reason for this openness among these Christ-followers, especially in comparison to Thessalonica where such openness did not exist.<sup>10</sup>

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10 John Barclay, "Conflict in Thessalonica," *CBQ* 55 (1993): 514. Mikael Tellbe, *Paul Between Synagogue and State: Christians, Jews, and Civic Authorities in 1 Thessalonians, Romans, and Philippians* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001), 135. Tellbe anticipates Paul's negotiation of identity will produce in later interpreters of Paul: "Paul draws new boundaries between Christians and non-Christian Jews as well as between Christian and non-Christian gentiles that would ultimately have legitimated a separation from the local Jewish community." Peter Oakes,

## Corinthian Assembly Suffered Significant Internal Conflict: Why?

### Socio-Economic Diversity (1 Cor 1:26)

Wealth was the vital indicator of status in the pre-industrial, agrarian society of the Roman Empire. Theissen and Meeks provide unconvincing descriptions of the Pauline community at Corinth as a cross-section of rich and poor through the un-measurable grid of social status.<sup>11</sup> Wealth, however, serves as a more effective measurement of social status. Steven Friesen argues for an economic model based on seven graduated categories of wealth and poverty in the imperial economy and concludes that the majority of the Pauline community lived around the poverty line, more clearly defined as subsistence living.<sup>12</sup> None of the individuals mentioned in connection to Corinth were from the imperial elite; however, there were individuals of moderate surplus wealth: Chloe (1 Cor 1:11), Phoebe (Rom 16:1–2), and Erastus (Rom 16:23). The Pauline community at Corinth closely mirrored the economic structure within the broader civic community within the mid-first century Roman Empire.

The majority of the Pauline community was poor and Paul while at Corinth required financial support from the Macedonians (2 Cor 11:8–10). It is interesting to note these people are never mentioned as individuals, only as a group, a further indicator of their economic status (1 Cor 16:1–2, 2 Cor 8:12–15). This group contained “small farm families, laborers (skilled and unskilled), artisans (especially those employed by others), wage earners, most merchants and

“Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians,” *JSNT* 27.3 (March 2005): 301–322. Oakes argues for methodological sophistication when researching the complex relations the individual communities had with the Roman Empire. In Philippi and Thessalonica he sees conflict with Rome in the life of the communities; however, Oakes concludes, “He is not writing anti-Roman polemic. Neither is he aiming specifically at preventing participation in the imperial cult,” 321. Paul’s approach to Roman imperial ideology is particular to each community to which Paul writes.

11 Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 94–96. Meeks, *First*, 72–73.

12 Steven J. Friesen, “Prospects for a Demography of the Pauline Mission: Corinth among the Churches,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Daniel Schowalter and Steve Friesen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 352–370.

traders, [and] small shop/tavern owners.”<sup>13</sup> This economic reality, based on 1 Cor 1:26, would serve as a difficulty for Paul, who was attempting to lead a group from a position of economic status below some within the community.

### **Relationship with Civic Authorities**

There was little interaction between the ruling elites and those living at the poverty level, and this rigid hierarchy of status was reinforced by law. The divisions were, for example, between freeborn and slaves (1 Cor 7:21–22; 1 Cor 12:23), citizen (limited to adult males) and non-citizen, the former having the ability to take someone to court (1 Cor 6:1–11). Within the citizens, however, there were various orders. The senatorial class was the most elite and wealthy, while the equestrians were similar to the senators economically, but beneath them in status. In colonies like Corinth the local elites would have been the governing officials, each of these classes had significant property qualifications for membership, while the rest classified as plebeians. Among the freeborn, there were the privileged and non-privileged, who were defined by law and had certain rights within the judicial system (i.e. those taking others to court in 1 Cor 6 may have been from this class).

These relationships were defined by tradition and the patronage system that was supported by notions of respect and deference within Roman society. The hierarchical nature of the society was necessary for patronage to work. Not everyone was involved in a patron-client relationship, however deference and precedence still marked those relationships. It could be, in the context of Corinth that some of the issues Paul addressed related to individuals resisting this hierarchical structure (1 Cor 5–7). It also should be noted that they may have seen this example in Paul himself, who appears to be resisting offers to become the client (1 Cor 9:1–18).

### **The Result: Struggle for Prestige and Prominence within the Community of Faith**

The Corinthian Christ-followers found themselves in a social system that, despite sharp class divisions, provided

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<sup>13</sup> Friesen, *Demography*, 365. Though not mentioned above, the presence of slaves in the Corinthian community should be understood based on 1 Cor 7:17–24.

much needed social cohesion. The Pauline community was populated by a large number living at the subsistence level and a smaller number having moderate to surplus financial resources (1 Cor 1:26). This situation led to a struggle for spiritual-prestige and influence and vying for positions of prominence within the community of faith, similar to what was done within the broader Corinthian community; in which dependents of the person of prestige jostled for positions close to the person in the center. A similar dynamic may have given rise to the factions alluded to in 1 Cor 1:12 (cf. 1 Cor 3:22). Some members within the community aligned themselves with Paul, Apollos, or Cephas thereby increasing their own status through an association with these missionary leaders. These same members then would gather others around themselves thereby increasing their own status within the community. This resulted in the formation of factions around those local leaders within the community in the name of the better-known missionary leaders. In this way, the Corinthian Christ-followers were acting in manner similar to the broader community in Corinth.

## **How Did Civic Identity Function at Corinth?**

### **Civic Identity in Transition**

Corinth in the early Empire was the administrative center of a relatively small area. The land area of Corinth was approximately 318 square miles. Within that area the ancient population was probably in the 80,000 to 100,000 range.<sup>14</sup> At first glance one might conclude that the relatively small area and population of Corinth would minimize any problem of civic identity. However, the discursive nature of civic identity and the past history of Corinth combined to produce a fluid civic identity, one in which various identities could be exchanged or reinterpreted very easily (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 43.50.3–5). Civic identity resulted from participating in communal-ritual life. It was not primarily established through a legal definition or a concept imposed by the colonizing power or educational system.

The Greco-Roman civic identity interacted within a nexus of culture, identity, and power to produce fluid identity. The most prestigious identity during the early Empire was Ro-

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<sup>14</sup> Donald W. Engels, *Roman Corinth; An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 28.



man and normally was far more prestigious than Greek in political terms. Also, the transitional nature of civic identity would be relative to how the individuals saw themselves in the context of Corinthian civic life and their role in the maintenance of civic culture and values (e.g. full citizens, local residents, settler, slave, or free). The Romans initially embraced Hellenistic ideas; however, that acceptance was not consistent over time (i.e. percentage of Latin versus Greek dedications and inscriptions).<sup>15</sup>

There was no one single religion in Roman Corinth. The various groups within the colony brought their own traditions and religious viewpoints and they were tolerated within the community. There was, however, an expected system of symbols that the cultural elite expected to be normal within the community. This system was a result of negotiation and provided much needed stability and civic cohesion. Contemporary concepts of religion did not exist during the early Empire. Religion was more a matter of ritual than a system of belief. The complex interaction of individuals with the divine was not separated from other aspects of their life. The maintenance of the public cult, which was the primary responsibility of the elite, was considered most important, while one could honour other expressions of the divine in private worship and the individual would not be disturbed, unless those beliefs impacted community concord.

The political upheaval following the assassination of Caesar and the ensuing civil war made it difficult for Corinth to thrive. It did, however, experience significant growth under the reign of Augustus (27 B.C.E. to 14 C.E.), who established it as the provincial capitol in 27 B.C.E., repairing the roads and public buildings, and re-establishing Corinthian control over the Isthmian Games which were celebrated at the temple of Poseidon.<sup>16</sup> In 44 C.E., under the reign of Claudius, Corinth was reaffirmed as a senatorial province and the capitol of Achaea (Tacitus, *Annales* 1.76.4; 1.80.1; Suetonius, *Divus Claudius* 25.3) which had been removed

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15 Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (2 vols.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 1184, notes "[o]f the 104 inscriptions that date before Hadrian, 101 are written in Latin and 3 in Greek; of the inscriptions dating to the time of Hadrian, 10 are written in Latin and 15 in Greek."

16 David Gilman Roman, "A Roman Circus in Corinth," *Hesperia* 74 (2005): 609. He argues that, based on the existence of a circus in Corinth that the games may have been contested "within the *limites* of the Roman city of Corinth."

by Tiberius in 15 C.E., and provided the necessary support for Corinth to, once again, emerge as a key center of trade and commerce (Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.20).

It was during the reign of Claudius that Paul's mission to Corinth emerged. Corinth was a colony whose unique history and culture provided a vital opportunity for success in the Pauline mission. The glorious history of the Classical city of Corinth still impacted the civic identity of the newly founded Roman colony. Favorinus chastised the inhabitants of the city by saying they were Romans acting like Greeks.<sup>17</sup> The Romans in Corinth and throughout the empire adopted Greek culture and made it their own. Romans are seen adapting the mythological stories of ancient Corinth and appropriating them for their civic purposes. The transitional nature of the Corinthian identity led to a unique set of problems and approaches to mission, not experienced by other communities of Christ-followers Paul had established.

### **Civic Identity and Roman Religion**

Roman religion, that which was practiced and honoured by the state officials, was not overly concerned with individual morals and ethics, rather with the proper observance of ritual. This reliance on ritual and disinterest in morals may be in the background in 1 Cor 5, where the Christ-followers at Corinth had to be corrected for their misunderstanding of a very basic moral issue. The purpose of Roman religion was to maintain peace with the gods alleviating displeasure when it arose or obviating it before it arose; the relationship was referred to as respecting authority. The application of ritual took on three forms: prayers, sacrifice of animals or plants, and divination (Cicero, *On Divination* 2.34.71–72). The outcome of the endeavour undertaken was the only way to know if the prayer or sacrifice had been accepted.

17 Jason Koenig, "Favorinus' Corinthian Oration in its Corinthian context," *PCPS* 47 (2001): 141–44. L. Michael White, "Favorinus's 'Corinthian Oration,'" A Piqued Panorama of the Hadrianic Forum," in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Daniel Schowalter and Steve Friesen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 61–110. See page 101 for the Greek and English translation where Favorinus accused the Romans in Corinth of acting like Greeks. (*Dio Chrysostom*, Or. 37, sections 25 and 26). Bruce W. Winter, "The Toppling of Favorinus and Paul by the Corinthians," in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald, Thomas H. Olbricht, and L. Michael White (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 303. Comparing the defense of Favorinus with Paul, he also notes in Corinth "Romanitas was the dominant force in the Roman colony."

Roman state religious staff came from the elites: generals and politicians. There was no separation of religious identity from political identity. The four chief colleges of priests in Rome were staffed by senators. The most prestigious college was the pontificate, whose president was chief priest of Rome. The Roman elite provided the religious, political, and military leadership in the empire; however, local temples and cults could have their own priests. This was one of the problems Paul was dealing with at Corinth; he was trying to influence their ethics and morals from the position of an elevated equal. Paul was not a person of status within the empire. He was not of the senatorial or equestrian class. He was attempting to influence the behaviour of a community who were used to enjoying good relations with their civic leaders. Paul's preaching if applied and lived out, could create a public separation with those civic leaders; the Corinthians resisted this aspect of Paul's gospel.<sup>18</sup>

Roman state religion was tolerant and dignified because of its emphasis on public ritual. They were suspicious of any belief system that appeared superstitious, especially if it was characterized by overly emotional or fanatical behaviour by its adherents. They, for example, disparaged magic, even though it was popular with the masses. In 1 Cor 14:23 Paul is concerned that the Corinthians would appear "mad" when "outsiders" would visit their meetings. It could be that Paul was anticipating the charges that would be levelled against the assembly if they were perceived to be engaging in behaviour the outsiders would interpret as superstitious, overly emotional, or fanatical. He knew they could continue their private association, as long as, this did not adversely impact community concord (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.640).

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18 It should be noted that while Paul used their civic identity to further his mission, that does not mean that he embraced Roman imperial ideology. Paul was subversive in the Corinthian correspondence when Roman imperial ideology was not congruent with the ethos of his alternative community. Kathy Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged: Feminism and the New Perspective in Pauline Studies* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 157. She rightly notes "the political system of the Roman Empire was not political in a modern sense, but interwoven with religious overtones, as for instance in the cult of the emperor. Hence, the use of words that had a specific meaning in the imperial system and the proclamation that "the rulers of this age are doomed to perish" (1 Cor 2:6), could not be heard as purely religious statements. Since there was nothing purely political, there was nothing purely religious. The spheres could not be separated."

Roman state religion absorbed new cults as they emerged or were encountered by the Romans. This process was known as the translation of divine names, where local deities would be given equivalent Roman names (e.g. Jupiter for Zeus and Minerva for Athena). The Romans, however, occasionally suppressed cults that they considered politically or socially subversive. The Corinthian Christ-followers, however, had good relations with the civic leaders because they were not politically or socially subversive, especially in comparison to the Christ-followers at Thessalonica and Philippi who experienced significant problems with the civic leaders.<sup>19</sup>

Senatorial intervention in private worship, though rare, did occur. The tolerance of the Romans ended when the cult in question was seen as an alternative to public religion instead of a supplement to the state religion; when the private pursuits of the citizens started affecting their public identities. In the Corinthian correspondence, there is no indication that their behaviour had impacted their public identities.<sup>20</sup> In other words, they were still engaged in the Roman state religion, at some level.<sup>21</sup> This is not a major problem: citizens were not required to attend the public rituals and these nascent Christ-followers could simply 'move about' without drawing too much attention to their lack of participation in the public rituals. Senatorial intervention also occurred when private religious specialists began to acquire independent social power. In the Corinthian correspondence Paul is not arguing for his role as the *Paterfamilias*, wielding the dominating power of a Roman father among the Corinthians but rather he is teaching the Corinthians within the context of the Jewish teaching and

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19 Craig Steven De Vos, *Church and Community Conflicts: The Relationships of the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Philippian Churches with Their Wider Civic Communities* (SBLDS 168; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999), 155–75.

20 John Barclay, "Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity," *JSNT* 47 (1992): 57.

21 Peder Borgen, "'Yes,' 'No,' 'How Far?': The Participation of Jews and Christians in Pagan Cults," in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 56–57. Borgen concludes, "on the level of daily life there was a variety of behavioral patterns among Jews relative to pagan cults. Thus, there were Jews and Christians who followed a practice similar to that of Paul, and some who went further than he did. Tension between different views and practices existed, as is also seen in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians chapters 8 and 10."

learning discourse.<sup>22</sup> In 1 Cor 4:15, for example, Paul refers to himself as their “father” who has “given birth” to them “through the gospel.”<sup>23</sup> While this imagery served in the furtherance of his mission, it could, ironically, draw undue attention to the Corinthian Christ-followers and adversely impact their situation, which is one of the reasons Paul rarely uses father imagery to refer to his role within his communities.<sup>24</sup>

Roman state religion was an important aspect of Roman cultural and civic identity. In Corinth, the elites drew on the colony’s Classical traditions and created a unique combination of deities and rituals. Their public religious expression was an important focus for civic and ethnic identity. The challenge for the Corinthian Christ-followers was: how does their transformed identity “in Christ” inform their civic identity as a member of the Roman colony of Corinth? Particularly in the Roman east, identification and participation in the public cults created a sense of community and what it meant to be Roman and rejecting the public rituals would be seen as rejecting their participation in the broader community. This would have economic, as well as social implications. Why? Roman state religion was intimately bound up with power relationships between the gods and humankind

22 Kathy Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power Communication and Interaction in the Early Christ-Movement* (LNTS 325; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 117–136. Cf. Stephan J. Joubert, “Managing the Household: Paul as *Paterfamilias* of the Christian Household Group in Corinth,” in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context*, ed. Philip F. Esler (London: Routledge, 1995), 213–223.

23 Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power*, 128–130. Ehrensperger notes the juxtaposition of paternal and maternal imagery is expected within the context of Jewish teaching and learning discourse (cf. Prov 1:8; 6:20). Cf. Reidar Aasgaard, *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters! Christian Siblingship in Paul* (JSNTSS 265; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 290. He notes that even though the caring aspect is in view, the hierarchical aspects of this position are never completely in the background. “First, he contrasts himself with those who are only ‘guardians’ and also with other ‘fathers’: he is their primary father, to whom they owe their being ‘in Christ’ (4.15). Second, he exhorts them to be his imitators, which implies that he expects them to regard him as a person with authority (4.16). Third, he depicts Timothy as his ‘beloved and faithful child in the Lord’ (4.17a). As a child Timothy is here submitted to Paul, and acts on his behalf.” Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 58. He points out that Aletes was considered the founding father of Corinth.

24 Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power*, 126–127.

as well as between individuals living together in the community. Roman state religion existed in the dynamic interaction of culture, identity, and power,<sup>25</sup> and Paul was intent on using this relationship for the furtherance of his mission.

## **How Did Civic Identity Impact the Pauline Mission at Corinth?**

### **Lack of Boundaries Because of No External Pressure Requires Mission as Social Integration (1 Cor 5:9–13)**

In 1 Cor 5:9–13 Paul is concerned with establishing the boundaries for civic identity and activity within the Corinthian community's context. Paul's argument has broader concerns than simply providing ethical direction for what should have been a relatively simple issue. He desires to establish a distinct ethos of identity<sup>26</sup> requiring boundaries that he negotiates through his rhetoric, an identity that will allow for a more stable internal situation and mission in Ro-

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<sup>25</sup> James Rives, "Religion in the Roman Empire," in *Experiencing Rome: Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire*, ed. Janet Huskinson (London: Routledge, 2000), 245–275.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Wolter, "Ethos und Identität in Paulinischen Gemeinden," *NTS* 43 (1997): 430–444. He makes the connection of the inseparability of ethos and identity. A more recent approach to this issue, which focuses on the role the commandments play in identity formation is: Jan G. van der Watt, ed. *Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the New Testament* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 141; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006). Also, David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 91–95. Horrell follows Geertz and connects identity, belief, behavior, ethos, and worldview.

man Corinth.<sup>27</sup> Paul does not advocate separation from those on the outside of the Christ-following community but for social integration in which their lifestyle serves as a witness within the broader community.

The rhetoric of Paul in 1 Cor 5:9–13 is based on the concepts of kinship systems and purity rules — these two concepts affected the establishment of new boundaries and of a negotiation of the identity between Paul and those listening to him. Paul's rhetoric functions symbolically to include and exclude those whom he thinks are behaving outside of the acceptable communal boundaries. He uses language of the outsider quite often in these verses, for example: v. 9 "immoral people," v. 10 "the immoral people of this world," "covetous," "swindlers," "idolaters," and v. 12 "wicked." These are terms that most of the Corinthian Christ-followers would agree should label an outsider. However, in a rhetorical flourish Paul uses many of the same terms to describe someone on the inside, for example: v. 11 "so-called brother" (an insider with the characteristics of an outsider), "immoral person," "covetous," "idolater," "reviler," "drunkard," and "swindler." He uses these terms interchangeably, redefining who is on "the outside" while at the same time signalling what the insider should be doing: "judging those on the inside" and allowing God to judge those outside of the community.

Paul clearly identifies the Corinthians as "judges" and this aspect of their identity appears to be one in which there is confusion and division among their community members and it is an issue that he will have to address again in 1 Cor 6. He then concludes, with a quotation from Deut 17:7: "Remove the wicked man from among you." Paul is clear: there is a missional reason for integrating with the "the sexually immoral of this world," however, this same integration does not apply to "the immoral person" from among the community of Christ-followers; he must be cast out so that the witness of the community may still be effective.

### **Negotiation of Identity and the Establishing of Boundaries (1 Cor 6:1–11)**

Paul had learned that the Corinthian Christ-followers were taking each other to the magistrates and he concluded

<sup>27</sup> John P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities* (WUNT 2 vol. 159; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 230.

that this was shameful. His assessment of the court system would have been considered consistent with what others living under the colonial power of Rome would have felt; however, Paul's concern is couched in the language of the other. He considers these judges to be "unbelievers" in v. 6 and defines them as "individuals who should not be held in high esteem within the believing community" in v. 4. This begs the question, why would the Corinthian Christ-followers even wish to involve themselves in the court system? This article has argued that the Corinthian Christ-followers, because of civic circumstances exclusive to Corinth, had a good relationship with the civic authorities, rulers, and community (1 Cor 10:27–11:1). This fact may have contributed to the internal conflict, in that most of the other communities Paul founded experienced conflict with the local governing powers (1 Thess 3:2–5; 4:10b–12; 5:15; Phil 1:28–30). Thus it could be that Paul is basing his negative assessment of this situation as much on his experiences with the other Christ-following communities that he founded, as well as on the general disdain for the local courts in both the Greco-Roman and Jewish communities.

There is also ample evidence that Paul's rationale for avoiding the local courts may be identity driven, that is, Paul understands the Corinthians to be transformed "in Christ" and that has an ontological impact on the boundedness of the community.<sup>28</sup> He engages in apocalyptic boundary formation in 1 Cor 6:2–3 by arguing that they do not realize that they are capable of judging, because, for example, in the future they will judge the world and angels. So, the function of Paul's argument is to redefine who should be a judge and he uses the terminology of honour and shame to communicate that to them. He honours them, by informing them that they will one day judge the world and angels and then challenges them in v. 5 by shaming them because their practice is not congruent with this reality.

Paul negotiates identity not from a position of the social status of the elites but from a position of a contested equal seeking to affect mission within this nascent alternative community of Christ-followers. His main argument seeks to connect their local engagement with the civic authorities

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<sup>28</sup> Craig S. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians* (TNCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 53.



with their apocalyptic identity “in Christ.”<sup>29</sup> He concludes this section by reminding them, by the use of a vice list (Cicero, *De finibus* 3.35) and an ironic statement of what happens to those who “do wrong,” that the primary reason for not going to those on the outside for justice is that they, as believers “in Christ,” had been “washed... sanctified... [and] justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). This phrase was part of a baptismal formula.<sup>30</sup> This is important because identity formation is embedded in rituals and early Christian rituals serve as boundary-markers for the new community of Christ-followers.

### **Banquet as Missionary Approach (1 Cor 10:31–11:1)**

The Corinthians attended meals that both Christ-followers and pagans attended, as seen in 1 Cor 8–10.<sup>31</sup> These meals provided opportunities for mission and it is not surprising that the situation in Corinth provides ample evidence for how their social integration impacted Paul’s mission. A portion of these individuals participated in public activities of the Roman state religion (1 Cor 8:10). Paul sets out to clarify the boundaries for participation in meals connected to pagan sacrifices and remind them what he expects their conduct to be as they integrate into the larger civic community in Corinth. Philip Esler is clear on this point “[t]he role of communal sacrifice in maintaining and legitimating civic identity in the Greco-Roman cities of the

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29 J. Paul Sampley, *Pauline Partnership in Christ. Christian Community and Commitment in Light of Roman Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 4.

30 Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 208.

31 Peter D. Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8–10 in Its Context* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993), 37. He concludes “If Corinthian Christians following Paul’s advice were to attempt to avoid any situation where they would be asked to eat food explicitly identified as idol-food, then it is very likely that they could not accept invitations to frequent and important occasions. They could not attend weddings, funerals, celebrations in honour of birthdays, or even formal or relatively elaborate banquets — special meals of whatever occasion — since rites performed at the meals or referred to by the participants would mark the fare as idol-food.”

East no doubt meant that Christ-followers who withdrew from this practice ran the risk of being labeled a-theist.”<sup>32</sup>

Paul's overarching missionary approach is summarized in 1 Cor 10:31: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” This summary is then limited by ethnic reasoning, encouraging them not to offend “Jews, Greeks, or the church of God.”<sup>33</sup> The listing of these ethnic categories and the juxtaposition of “the church of God” next to these indicates identity formation is important to understanding what Paul was attempting to accomplish in 1 Cor 10:31–11:1. There was a close connection between their identities as Christ-followers, Roman citizens, civic-minded residents, and their own ethnicity. Paul was navigating these multiple identities throughout the Corinthian correspondence and sought to capitalize on its dynamic nature to further his mission in Corinth. The use of the phrase “the church of God” is another way of referring to them being “in Christ” and not part of the universalizing tendency of later early-Christianity. It does, however serve as “a way to define themselves relative to ‘outsiders’ and to compete with other ‘insiders’ to assert the superiority of their varying visions of Christianness.”<sup>34</sup>

In applying these questions in the Corinthian case it may be worth noting that the Corinthians confronted what most other Greeks in the Roman empire faced — competing claims of multiple identities: their family unit, membership in the colony, and identification with other Greeks. For Corinthians that would mean strong links to other

32 Philip F. Esler, *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 164.

33 Denise K. Buell, *Why this New Race?: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 88. Buell notes “Ethnic reasoning refers to the modes of persuasion that may or may not include the use of a specific vocabulary or peoplehood.” As it relates to v. 32, she is clear, “when early Christians discuss themselves in a context that makes “Christians” analogous with “Greeks,” “Romans,” and/or “Egyptians,” I see ethnic reasoning at work,” 172.

34 Buell, *New Race*, 2–3. The rhetorical strategies related to ethnic reasoning include: “race/ethnicity was often deemed to be produced and indicated by religious practices. [A]lthough ancient authors frequently refer to membership in a *genos*, *ethnos*, *laos*, and *phylon* as a matter of one’s birth and descent, such membership was nonetheless seen to be mutable. [The] juxtaposition of fluidity and fixity enabled early Christians to use ethnic reasoning to make universalizing claims, arguing that everyone can, and thus ought to, become a Christian. [E]arly Christians also used ethnic reasoning polemically, especially to compete with one another.”

Peloponnesian Greeks. An individual Corinthian might then begin to answer the question "Who are you?" by specifying family membership, "I am the son of Pericles;" citizenship, "a Roman;" cultural identity, "a Greek;" and religious identity, "a follower of Christ." His personal identity, as the individual Tyrtaios, would then be in part the result of negotiation among these varied and potentially conflicting roles.

In v. 33 Paul encourages them to continue their approach to mission as social integration, but provides the internal boundaries for the community from which to undertake that mission: "do not seek your own advantage." This principle would allow for the various interactions that have come to characterize the Corinthians, however, it provides a much needed control on the excesses of certain expressions of social integration. Paul concludes with an imperative "be an imitator of me." This imitation relates directly to Paul's missional behaviour.<sup>35</sup>

### **Sending Out as Mission (1 Cor 16:6, 11; 2 Cor 1:16)**

Social integration not only included their interaction within the broader civic community in Corinth but also their proper understanding of their identity within the broader Pauline community and other Christ-followers throughout the Roman Empire. Judith Lieu's framework for identity suggests that it "involves ideas of boundedness, of sameness and difference, of continuity, perhaps of a degree of homogeneity, and of recognition by self and by others."<sup>36</sup> Paul is engaged in this process throughout the Corinthian correspondence. As for boundedness, the establishment of boundaries becomes the internal community organizing principle that allows implementation of Paul's mission. The concepts of "sameness and difference" are seen in the terms Paul uses to describe those in the outgroup and those in the ingroup. Concerning continuity, in 1 Cor 16:6 Paul envisions them sending him out from Corinth and in 2 Cor 1:16 he expects them to participate, at least financially (1 Cor 9:1–18) in sending him to the region of Judea. Paul reminds

<sup>35</sup> Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power*, 154. Ehrensperger argues that this is not "an instrument of domination and control" but "serves as one particular means to guide and teach members of the Christ-movement about life in Christ."

<sup>36</sup> Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12.

them of their missional responsibility to other communities besides their own.

One of the key structural points in Paul's rhetoric of identity formation in Corinth is connecting what he is teaching them with the other communities he has established (1 Cor 7:17; 11:16; 14:33; 16:1); this provides a sense of homogeneity that reinforces Paul's vision of their identity, even if it does not cohere with their local vision of their identity.<sup>37</sup> This tension produces the need for negotiation and Paul's argument becomes his primary means of negotiating their identity. The final aspect of Lieu's definition, the recognition by self and others may be what originally created this issue. The Corinthian Christ-followers had such a good relationship with the civic authorities that they 'dropped' some of their identifying boundary markers that should have distinguished them from those who did not follow Christ. He felt also that they did not recognize who they were "in Christ" and had settled for a status beneath this reality. Paul engages in apocalyptic identity formation in which he reminds them that they are transformed in Christ and thus members of the kingdom of God and that transformation and membership should reveal itself in the way they interact with others for the purpose of extending the Pauline mission. In the Corinthian correspondence Paul instructs the Corinthians on how to live in their transformed identity and to recognize that their good relations with those on the outside should be used for purposes of mission and not for claiming personal rights to engage in behaviours that would not further Paul's mission in Corinth.

## Conclusion

The transitional nature of civic identity in Corinth created ambiguity in the colony's religious identity. This provided inhabitants of Corinth with the opportunity to develop their own religious identities without too much interference from civic authorities. The result was that they could meet in their household gatherings without the same level of hostility experienced, for example, in Thessalonica and Philippi.

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37 Reidar Hvalvik, "All Those Who in Every Place Call on the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ: The Unity of the Pauline Churches," in *The Formation of the Early Church*, ed. Jostein Ådna (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 123–143.

The lack of conflict with outsiders had the unintended consequence of producing more internal conflicts based on boundary issues for this liminal community. Since there was not a requirement to change one's social situation concomitant with conversion (1 Cor 7:17), individuals (of at least surplus financial means) were attracted to Paul's message (1 Cor 1:26). So the various assemblies in Corinth contained individuals from diverse economic backgrounds, levels of commitment, and mixed allegiances, which, when combined within the Pauline community, ended up in conflict.

How did these individuals end up in the same private religious association? Paul's gospel was appealing; the open religious 'mind-set' in Corinth contributed as well, and the civic identity of the colony provided enough 'cover' for individuals to interact beyond the hierarchical structures prevalent in Roman society in general. Paul may have been surprised, however, that the community had difficulty in establishing proper moral boundaries from which to organize the community. As noted, Roman state religion had no moral code and it may not have been clear why a gentile community should choose the ethical code inherited from Judaism, even though this was clear to Paul. So, Paul was writing to the Corinthians because the lack of external conflict produced in them a lack of proper boundaries from which to establish stable house churches. The communities that Paul founded may have relied more on conflict with civic authorities to provide the impetus to establish behavioural norms than upon received moral or ethical traditions.

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