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# Church discipline in the Pauline churches

## A socio-theological approach

A dissertation submitted

in accordance with the requirements for the

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By Sang-Kue Lee

Student Number: 2004208860

Promotor: Prof D F Tolmie

Bloemfontein, Free State

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## Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
<i>Ant</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities of Josephus</i>
<i>ATR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
<i>AusBR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
BBC	The Broadman Bible Commentary
<i>BibTod</i>	<i>Bible Today</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Studies</i>
<i>JRH</i>	<i>Journal of Religious History</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal of the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
KJV	King James Version
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NIB	The New Interpreter's Bible

NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIV	New International Version
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NT	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OT	Old Testament
P. Oxy	Papyrus Oxyrhynchus
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RefRev</i>	<i>Reformed Review</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMA	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>TBT</i>	<i>The Bible Today</i>
<i>TC</i>	<i>The Thessalonian Correspondence</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	World Biblical Commentary

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## Part I Introduction

### 1 Problem statement

When scholars approach church discipline in the New Testament, they tend to focus on theological issues. In other words they concentrate on the nature of the theological issue or on the question of what kind of theological motif gives rise to the problem. Thus, they research the theological background of the particular offence, what kind of theological issue caused the problem, the background of the church discipline and/or what kind of theological perspective surfaces in the study of church discipline.

For example, when scholars interpret the problem of sexual immorality which occurred in the church of the Corinthians, they tend to focus on theological issues. The instance of sexual immorality that occurred in the church of Corinthians had to do with the fact that a man had his father's wife. Paul was shocked when this sin in the church was reported to him. But an even more shocking aspect was the attitude of the church of the Corinthians with regard to the offence. Nevertheless, the man who was living with his father's wife had to be disciplined; the church of the Corinthians had done nothing about the immoral offence and complacently admitted the man and the immoral situation. They accepted the offender in the church as a brother and even displayed a

boastful attitude.

Paul refers to the Corinthians as “puffed up” and “boasting” (1 Cor. 5:2, 6). Why did the Corinthian Christians accept the immoral man into the congregation rather than expelling him? Why were they puffed up and boasting about such an offence?

It is often suggested that the background of the church’s problem was theological grounds such as “spiritual fanaticism,”<sup>1</sup> “Christian freedom”<sup>2</sup> and “realized eschatology.”<sup>3</sup>

For example, Thiselton<sup>4</sup> says that “The eschatological approach pinpoints a single common factor which helps to explain an otherwise utterly diverse array of apparently independent problems at Corinth.” According to him, the Corinthian Christians believed that the *parousia* of Jesus had already come and that they ruled as kings (1 Cor. 4:8). They also believed that they were in the Spirit, and that they were more important than the other people around them. According to Thiselton, the case of immorality thus is a good example of realised eschatology and “the self-styled ‘spiritual’ men at Corinth wished to parade their new-found freedom as a bold testimony to their eschatological status.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> V. C. Pfitzner, “Purified Community – Purified Sinner: Expulsion from the Community according to Matt. 18:15-18 and 1 Cor. 5:1-5,” *AusBR* 30 (1982), 41ff.

<sup>2</sup> G. Harris, “The Beginning of Church Discipline: 1 Corinthians 5,” *NTS* 37 (1991), 6ff.

<sup>3</sup> A. C. Thiselton, “Realized Eschatology at Corinth,” *NTS* 24 (1971), 514-26.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 512. Cf. E. Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 125-26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 515-16.

The approach is similar when scholars research the problem of “the idle” in the church of the Thessalonians. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 Paul deals with a problem that occurred in the church of the Thessalonians. The problem was that some members of the church did not work and this caused problems in the church. The writers say “Some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies” (2 Thess. 3:11 NIV).

As pointed out above, the majority of scholars focus on theological issues when they consider the meaning of the problem with “the idle.” Some scholars<sup>6</sup> find the idleness to be rooted in an eschatological hope originating from the Thessalonians’ belief in the imminence of the *parousia* of Jesus Christ. In other words, their belief that Christ would soon return led them to desert their daily work for a living so that they could concentrate fully on spiritual preparation such as eschatological consideration, prayer and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and/or their belief to believers and/or non-believers.

It seems as if this group then suffered poverty and this caused a problem for both Christians and non-Christians. Some of them even believed that the Day of the Lord had already come (2 Thess. 2:2). If the *parousia* were imminent, then ordinary work and earthly economic life in general were not important any more. Some Christians might even have left their daily work simply to await the *parousia* of Christ. Some of them

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<sup>6</sup> See E. Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: A & C Black, 1986), 331-45; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Waco: Word Publishers, 1982), 204-9; C. A. Wannamaker, “Apocalypticism at Thessalonica,” *Neot* 21 (1987), 1-10.

might have stopped working to concentrate on something they felt more important, that is preaching the gospel. And they obviously were dependent on the charity of others or of the church to support their spiritual life.

On the other hand, if the *parousia* had already come, as some in Thessalonica apparently thought, then the order that God gave humans, that is they should work for a living (Gen. 3:17-19), was no longer important for them. Refusal to do earthly work thus indicated "acceptance of a completely realized eschatology."<sup>7</sup> Thus the excitement over the supposed *parousia* of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:3) or the time and nature of the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:1-11) seemed the motive for the disorderly behaviour in the church of the Thessalonians.

However, some scholars oppose such a theological approach and follow another approach, the so called "sociological approach." They investigate "the social and cultural dimensions of the Biblical text and of its environmental context."<sup>8</sup> They disregard a theological approach and have contributed studies with a broadened understanding of the sociological character of primitive Christian communities. They focus on social and cultural conditions that characterized the Biblical world rather than on the theological notions in the Biblical texts.

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<sup>7</sup> B. Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians. A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 190; M. J. J. Menken, "Paradise Regained or Still Lost? Eschatology and Disorderly Behaviour in 2 Thessalonians," *NTS* 38 (1992), 275ff.

<sup>8</sup> J. H. Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 103.



In particular they focus attention on the system of patronage or the relationship between patrons and clients<sup>9</sup> in antiquity. A prominent instance of this social network was “the relationship between Thessalonica and the Roman benefactors.”<sup>10</sup> For example, according to Green, Roman society had a large number of social levels and economic situations were very different between such levels, so that the social system of patronage sustained “its social equilibrium” and played an important function “on almost every social level and even became an essential component of the Roman bureaucracy.”<sup>11</sup>

Scholars<sup>12</sup> opting for this approach believe that the background for the Corinthians’ boasting was not theological or eschatological views, but rather sociological conditions: a sociologically based network in the community, namely the relationship between a patron and a client, the so called patronage system. Since the man accused of immorality had many

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<sup>9</sup> J. K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 30-32, lists the general features concerning patron/client relationship as follows: 1) A patron-client relation is an exchange relation; 2) A patron-client relation is an asymmetrical relation; 3) A patron-client relation is usually a particularistic and informal relation; 4) A patron-client relation is usually a supra-legal relation; 5) A patron-client relation is often a binding and long-range relation; 6) A patron-client relation is a voluntary relation; 7) A patron-client relation is a vertical relation.

<sup>10</sup> G. L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids/Leicester: Eerdmans/Apollos, 2002), 26. See also R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); A. Wallace-Hadrill, “Patronage in Roman Society: From Republic to Empire,” in *Patronage in Ancient Society*, edited by A. Wallace-Hadrill (London/New York: Routledge, 1989), 63-87.

<sup>11</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 26-27. See also R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); A. Wallace-Hadrill, “Patronage in Roman Society: From Republic to Empire,” in *Patronage in Ancient Society*, edited by A. Wallace-Hadrill (London/New York: Routledge, 1989), 63-87.

<sup>12</sup> See Chow, *Patronage*; M. R. Storm, *Excommunication in the Life and Theology of the Primitive Christian Community* (Michigan: U. M. I., 1992).

material possessions and a high position in the congregation and in the Corinthian society, the church of the Corinthians was not willing to discipline such a patron from the Christian community.

Schlüssler-Fiorenza,<sup>13</sup> moreover, argues that the man's association with his father's wife could be related to material concerns such as dowry, legacy or inheritance and so forth. Chow<sup>14</sup> presents another possibility. He cites the Augustan marriage laws according to which "bachelors were forbidden to receive inheritance or legacies" and concludes that the man's sexual behaviour was a manner to receive his father's inheritance and/or to keep the dowry belonging to his father's wife through the relationship of marriage.

B. W. Winter<sup>15</sup> proposes that the problem that occurred in the Thessalonian church is due to the unwillingness of Christians to abandon their work depending on the patron-client social system, because Paul did not mention the problem of the disorderly conduct in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 and 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 and 5:14. In other words, after Paul's visit to Thessalonica, the Thessalonian converts may have refused to leave their (Christian or non-Christian) patrons and/or they may have returned to the dependent patron-client system.

Winter<sup>16</sup> also suggests that this working relationship may have

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<sup>13</sup> E. Schlüssler-Fiorenza, *1 Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 1175. Cf. Chow, *Patronage*, 135.

<sup>14</sup> See Chow, *Patronage*, 136-39.

<sup>15</sup> B. W. Winter, *First Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World. Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/The Paternoster Press, 1994), 42-60, esp. 45-48.

<sup>16</sup> B. W. Winter, "'If a Man does not Wish to Work...' A Cultural and Historical Setting for 2 Thessalonians 3:6-16," *TynBul* 40 (1989), 309-12. His assumption seems

been caused by hard socio-economic conditions as the result of a famine and earthquakes in A. D. 51, which had driven the poor into dependence on patrons.

Scholars thus tend to focus selectively on their own approach and regard any other approach as in conflict with their own approach. Is it, however, necessary that these two interpretations are in conflict with one another and that one has to exclude the other one? Or is there another option, namely to reconcile these two interpretations?

In my view, it is not necessary that one approach should exclude the other. The relationship between a sociological approach and a theological approach should not be seen as exclusive and conflicting, but rather as complementary and synthetic. To my mind, this offers a more suitable and a better interpretation of the problems that occurred in the practice of church discipline in the Pauline churches. The guiding hypothesis of this study is thus that a combination of a sociological and a theological approach is the best way to explain the problems in the Pauline congregations in Corinth and Thessalonica.

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inadequate because the system of patronage existed before that period. Cf. Green, *Thessalonians*, 26. Nicholl, *Hope*, 164-65, examines Winter's suggestion and reaches a conclusion negatively. H. Hendrix, "Benefactor/Patron Networks in the Urban Environment: Evidence from Thessalonica," *Semeia* 56 (1992), 39-42, indicates that the system of patronage was in the Greek period and Green, *Thessalonians*, 26, says that "the relationship between Thessalonica and the Roman benefactors" was a prominent example of social network of patron-client relation.

## 2 Methodology

In this thesis both a sociological approach and a theological approach will be used to interpret the problems which occurred in the church of the Thessalonians and of the Corinthians. I first explain the two approaches to be followed.

### 2.1 A theological approach

First of all I would like to point out that, in a broad sense, theological exegesis is not just a methodology but rather a basic presupposition for Biblical exegesis. When Biblical scholars interpret Bible texts, they give attention to the theological message(s) and/or theological perspective(s) in these texts. Therefore the scholar studying the Bible pursues theological message(s) and meaning(s) from Biblical texts.

As an exegetical method, a theological approach focuses on theological issue(s), theological meaning(s) and belief(s) in the Biblical text. In other words, scholars concentrate on the nature of the theological issue or on the question of what kind of theological motif gave rise to a Biblical text.

According to Schneiders,<sup>17</sup> there are two ways to approach theological exegesis: Firstly, as traditional understanding this is “historical-literary inquiry into the religion, theology and spirituality in

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<sup>17</sup> S. M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text. Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 121-22; W. R. Tate, *Interpreting the Bible. A Handbook of Terms and Method* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 372; J. B. Green (ed.), *Hearing the New Testament. Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 65ff.

the Biblical text.” The aim of this approach is then to discover the religion of Israel and the Primitive Church, “including beliefs, cultic life, and ethical-moral regimes; the basic theology of Israel and the Church as well as the theologies of the individual writers and/or traditions.” I accept this view in this study.

Secondly, a theological approach is associated with “the appropriation of biblical faith in its institutional, intellectual and personal dimensions by the contemporary believer.”<sup>18</sup>

I briefly review some of the significant studies concerning church discipline in terms of a theological approach.

In 1966 J. E. Mignard<sup>19</sup> researched the Old Testament, the Old Testament apocrypha, the pseudepigrapha, the Qumran texts, the rabbinic literature, the New Testament, and the Apostolic Fathers. He argues for the uniqueness of the primitive church discipline compared to the practices of Jewish discipline. He concludes that “one cannot speak of the dependence of the church on any form of Jewish discipline.”<sup>20</sup> Though his investigation covers a wide span in time, his conclusion is too radical and clearly an overstatement.<sup>21</sup>

The most significant work in recent years concerning church

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<sup>18</sup> Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, 122.

<sup>19</sup> See J. E. Mignard, *Jewish and Christian Cultic Discipline to the Middle of the Second Century* (Dissertation, Boston: Boston University, 1966).

<sup>20</sup> Mignard, *Cultic Discipline*, 255.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix I, *The background of Paul's thought on church discipline*.

discipline has been published by G. Forkman.<sup>22</sup> He raises three questions: (1) Which deviations led to expulsion? (2) How was expulsion carried out? and (3) Which theological motifs were connected with the expulsion?

He identifies two motifs for expulsion: the motif of the kingdom of God and the holiness motif. Though "the motif of holiness dominated both in Qumran, in the Pharisaic fellowship and in primitive Christianity,"<sup>23</sup> he believes that the motif of the kingdom of God is the most important.

More recently Storm investigated excommunication in the Pauline churches, the Matthean church and the Johannine community. He concentrates on three important questions as follows: (1) What was the specific problem? (2) What underlying theological issues were at stake? (3) What was the type and method of discipline taken in each case?

He then investigates church discipline as it was practised in each community and concludes that "the practices and methods of discipline varied among the primitive Christian communities."<sup>24</sup> To explain these variations, he suggests that "the method of discipline in each community was shaped by the organizational structure of the community."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> G. Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism and within Primitive Christianity* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1972).

<sup>23</sup> Forkman, *Limits*, 216-17.

<sup>24</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 346.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 347. I refer to some scholars' studies regarding the primitive Christian communities, such as R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (London: Chapman, 1979); C. J. Roetzel, *Judgment in the Community. A Study of the Relationship Between Eschatology and Ecclesiology in Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 1972); B. W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare*.

## 2. 2 A sociological approach<sup>26</sup>

I would like to explain the sociological approach in more detail than the theological approach mentioned above, since the terminology of the sociological approach is not always so familiar in New Testament scholarship.

The term “sociological exegesis” comes from sociology and the New Testament scholars apply this form of analysis to interpret the Biblical texts.<sup>27</sup>

According to J. H. Elliott<sup>28</sup> a sociological analysis is

[A] phase of the exegetical task which analyzes the social and cultural dimensions of the Biblical text and of its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models and research of the social-sciences.

A basic presupposition of a sociological approach in the New

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<sup>26</sup> For more details, see D. A. de Silva, “Embodying the Word. Social-Scientific Interpretation of the New Testament,” in *The Face of New Testament Studies. A Survey of Recent Research*, edited by S. McKnight and G. R. Osborne (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic/Apollos, 2004), 20ff; J. H. Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); D. M. May, *Social Scientific Criticism of the New Testament. A Bibliography* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1991); D. B. Martin, “Social-Scientific Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning. An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, edited by Steven L. McKenzie & Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville/Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 103ff; W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982); B. W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> May, *Social Scientific Criticism*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Elliott, *Social-Scientific Criticism*, 103ff.

Testament discipline is that “the text of NT is a product, not just of historical conditioning, but of social and cultural conditioning as well.”<sup>29</sup> In other words Biblical texts contain historical circumstances and cultural, social factors as well. Therefore the aim of a sociological approach is to uncover the social and cultural circumstance(s) influencing and constraining the Biblical texts.<sup>30</sup>

In Biblical interpretation scholars have used the sociological approach from the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. In particular this is clear “in the interest of form critics in the setting in life of particular forms of biblical literature”<sup>31</sup> from the works of Friedrich Engels and Bruno Bauer.

This discipline has grown among European scholars and the “Chicago School” in America. In the beginning of the 1970s Gerd Theissen in Germany and E. A. Judge in America reawakened the interest in the sociological approach.<sup>32</sup>

Theissen’s work is based on “the use of social–scientific models to explain behaviours reflected in (or prescribed by) the texts, organizational structures, the legitimation of authority, the cultural

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<sup>29</sup> S. C. Barton, “Historical Criticism and Social–Scientific Perspectives in the New Testament Study,” in *Hearing the New Testament. Strategies for Interpretation*, edited by J. B. Green (Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/The Paternoster Press, 1995), 68.

<sup>30</sup> J. H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless. A Social–Scientific Criticism of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 1–7; Barton, “Social,” 68–69.

<sup>31</sup> De Silva, “Embodying,” 120. The following is taken and summarized from De Silva, “Embodying,” 120–24.

<sup>32</sup> Although social scientific criticism of the Bible has a relatively short history of 20–30 years, it has a long prehistory within historical criticism of the Bible. See De Silva, “Embodying,” 120ff.



patterns." John Gager followed this approach and used "models of authority derived from Max Weber."

Judge's work stands on "a historical mode of investigation, describing social and cultural *realia* in the course of historical-critical investigation." Martin Hengel, as a successor of Judge, focuses on "the cultural as well as the political and linguistic penetration of Hellenism into Palestine." Abraham J. Malherbe, John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch also follow this model.

Theissen assumes a relationship between "the teachings ... of oral tradition of the Jesus materials and the lifestyle of the preachers who proclaimed Jesus." Jesus' teachings concerning poverty, homelessness, and wandering were not to be seen as an "impossible ethic." Rather they were to be seen as "a reflection of the real-life circumstances of those who preached the gospel." W. A. Meeks<sup>33</sup> also studied "the possible correlation between articulated ideology and social location" focusing on the Gospel of John.

Howard Clark Kee<sup>34</sup> developed a similar approach, focusing on the Gospel of Mark. He assumed a correlation between "the kinds of traditions preserved in the Gospel and the life setting of the group that preserved those traditions." He interpreted Mark's message applied by "itinerant teachers."

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<sup>33</sup> W. A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972), 44-72. He depicts "a messiah who is completely not at home in, and indeed experiences the hostility of, this world" and expresses "the social identity of the sectarians among whom these Christological traditions were at home."

<sup>34</sup> H. C. Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977).

Theissen<sup>35</sup> also studied the "Christian movement in Corinth." He researched the church at Corinth and argued that the primitive Christians mainly came from "the lowest strata of society." He surveyed the problems mentioned by Paul and reached the conclusion that these problems reflect "the varying practices and expectations of different status groups."

B. Holmberg,<sup>36</sup> W. A. Meeks<sup>37</sup> and John H. Elliott<sup>38</sup> also studied the Primitive Christian communities and provided a broad interpretation of the "social and cultural environment" and "the pastoral and historical setting of churches."<sup>39</sup>

I now briefly review some of the significant studies following a sociological approach with regard to the problems which occurred in the churches at Thessalonica and Corinth.

R. Russell<sup>40</sup> investigates the problem of "the idle" in the church of the Thessalonians and argues that "whatever encouraged their behaviour preceded these eschatological problems because disorderly behaviour existed from the beginning." He argues that "the opportunities for

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<sup>35</sup> G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

<sup>36</sup> B. Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

<sup>37</sup> W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1983).

<sup>38</sup> J. H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter. Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> De Silva, "Embodying," 122-23.

<sup>40</sup> R. Russell, "The Idle in 2 Thess 3.6-12: An Eschatological or a Social Problem?" *NTS* 34 (1988), 108.

employment were limited, and with scarcity of work, idleness was more widespread and wages even lower.”<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, some Christian members became poor as a result of unemployment and they received “the support from members of the congregation.”<sup>42</sup> Thus he suggests that “the reason and model lies within the situation of urban poor of the Hellenistic city” and concludes that this “supports a sociological reason for the idleness at Thessalonica.”<sup>43</sup>

B. W. Winter<sup>44</sup> researched the social condition of the first century Christians in the Greco-Roman world and specifically the problem of “the idle” in the church of the Thessalonians. He discusses (1) The patron/client relationship; (2) Paul’s admonition not to be dependent on a patron; (3) *providentia* in the face of famines in Macedonia as the possible cause for the setting aside of Paul’s teaching; and (4) Paul’s teaching on the role of Christians as benefactors to clients. He concludes with the notion of “the *providentia* convention of a patron/client relationship as the cause of the unwillingness of some in Thessalonica to work.”<sup>45</sup>

The most significant work in recent years has been done by J. K.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-13.

<sup>44</sup> Winter, *Seek the Welfare*, 41-60. Cf. Winter, “If a Man does not Wish,” 303-15.

<sup>45</sup> Winter, “If a Man does not Wish,” 305.

Chow.<sup>46</sup> He surveyed the patron/client relationship in Roman Corinth and he suggests that patronage provided an important social network by which social relationships in Roman Corinth were structured. He investigates the problem of immorality which occurred in the church of the Corinthians in the light of the patron/client relationship and thinks that the congregation would perhaps not have practised church discipline on the immoral man, because he was basically “one of the powerful patrons in the church,”<sup>47</sup> and thus had many material possessions and a high position in the congregation and Corinthian society. Therefore he concludes that the basic background for understanding the problems in the church at Corinth, including the immoral offence, can be explained by sociological issues such as patronage rather than theological issues such as Gnosticism, enthusiastic Hellenists or realised eschatology. His study will provide good insights for my thesis.

Most recently, C. R. Nicholl<sup>48</sup> investigated the problem of idleness in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. He argues that it is impossible to find a relationship between eschatological issues and the idleness because 2 Thessalonians does not show “any explicit link between the idleness and eschatology.”<sup>49</sup> He surveys some recent non-eschatological

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<sup>46</sup> Chow, *Patronage*, 11-190, esp. 113-66.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>48</sup> C. R. Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica. Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians*. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 157-221.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

hypotheses<sup>50</sup> and concludes that “the ‘idleness’ probably consisted simply of *inertia vulgaris*, Christian manual labourers exploiting the charity of richer believers.”<sup>51</sup>

A sociological approach provides some advantages to scholarship. According to Barton,<sup>52</sup> the most important are as follows:

Firstly, historical criticism focuses “the interpreter’s attention on relations of cause and effect over time” and the basic objective is to “tell a story drawing on precedents and analogies.” The sociological approach, however, concentrates on “the way meaning is generated by social actors related to one another by a complex web of culturally-determined social systems and patterns of communication.”

Secondly, sociological analysis helps “the interpreter of the NT fill the gaps in understanding created by the fragmentariness of the texts as sources of historical information.”

Thirdly, the sociological approach supplies not only some “possibility

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<sup>50</sup> Nicholl, *Hope*, 163-64, lists the followings: 1) A general reminder of catechetical instruction; 2) The influence of Epicureanism/Cynicism; 3) The problem of unemployment of manual labourers; 4) The patron-client social structure; and 5) The problem of greed and laziness.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>52</sup> S. C. Barton, “Historical Criticism and Social-Scientific Perspectives in the New Testament Study,” in *Hearing the New Testament. Strategies for Interpretation*, edited by J. B. Green (Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/The Paternoster Press, 1995), 69-74. Cf. Barton, “Social-Scientific Criticism,” in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament*, edited by S. E. Porter (Boston/ Leiden: Brill, 2002), 279-81; M. R. Mulholland (Jr.), “Sociological Criticism,” in *Interpreting the New Testament. Essays on Methods and Issues*, edited by D. A. Black & D. S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman publishers, 2001), 176-78. This approach has also disadvantages. For this, see Barton, “Historical Criticism,” 74-76; “Social Criticism,” 280-81; B. J. Malina, “Social sciences and Biblical Interpretation,” *Int* 36 (1982), 238ff; May, *Social Scientific Criticism*, 7ff; Mulholland, “Sociological Criticism,” 178-80.

of increasing our understanding” of “a particular social and cultural milieu” but also “of ourselves as readers of the text.”

### 3 Delineation and scope of the study

This thesis will consist of four parts.

Part I is an introduction where the problem statement, methodology, terminology and the delineation and scope of the study are presented.

In Part II the church discipline in the church of the Thessalonians will be discussed. In this part, I will concentrate on the history of the city of Thessalonica, of the church and the issue of the authorship of 2 Thessalonians. It also includes a discussion of the problem of the idle and two exegetical approaches to the problem in the Thessalonians congregation. I will discuss the background to church discipline as an appendix as well.

In Part III I will examine the church discipline in the church of the Corinthians. In this part I deal with the history of the city of Corinth and of the church at Corinth, the relationship between 1 and 2 Corinthians, the definition of the problem and two exegetical approaches to the case of sexual immorality in the Corinthians church. I will also deal with the motive and the purpose of church discipline as an appendix as well.

In Part IV I will summarize the results of the investigation and conclude my study.

My thesis will focus on just two Pauline churches, namely that in Thessalonica and Corinth although there were more than these. The reasons that I deal with just these two are as follows:

1) These two churches were prominent churches in Paul's missionary work;

2) In the case of these two churches the problematic aspects of church discipline played an important role.

Unless otherwise indicated, the English translation of the Bible used in my thesis is the Revised Standard Version.

## Part II Church discipline in the church of the Thessalonians

### Chapter 1 The setting of Thessalonica

#### 1. 1 The city of Thessalonica

When Paul and his co-workers visited the city of Thessalonica, it was a well-constructed city with a long history.<sup>1</sup> Thessalonica was situated on the great Via Egnatia which was the Roman highway “for both commerce and military movements between Asia Minor and the Adriatic port of Dyrrachium”<sup>2</sup> to the Black Sea and was constructed between 146 and 120 B. C.

Thessalonica was called “the key to the whole of Macedonia.”<sup>3</sup> It had a perfect natural port to the sea and was situated well to give “free access to the hinterland of the city and beyond to the interior of Macedonia”<sup>4</sup> at the crossing of the main trade highways.

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed accounts of the history of Thessalonica, see E. A. Best, *Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: A & C Black, 1986), 1-3; F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1982), xx-xxi; J. E. Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 1-2; G. L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 1-47; C. A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2-6; B. Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 1-9; A. E. Vacalopoulos, *A History of Thessaloniki*, translated by T. F. Carney (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1963), 1-18.

<sup>2</sup> Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 2. The city was at the end of a natural route which led from the Danube to the Thermaic Gulf. In this way Thessalonica formed not only the focal point of East-West communications, but also of those running North-South.

<sup>4</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 3. Cf. J. R. W. Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians. Preparing for the Coming King* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 17.



In earlier times, the city was known as Therme, which probably originated from the hot springs in the region.<sup>5</sup> The new city, Thessalonica, was founded about 315 B. C. by Cassander, a general of Alexander the Great, by bringing together former inhabitants of Therme and 25 neighbouring towns or villages into one city.<sup>6</sup> He named the city Thessalonica in honour of his wife, Thessalonikeia, who was a half-sister of Alexander the Great.

In the Hellenistic period, the city of Thessalonica played a very important role in commerce as well as a military role in Macedonia, because the city's position was on a major trade highway with four crossroads.<sup>7</sup> A fierce war between Peuseus and the Romans broke out and the Macedonian king was totally defeated by the Romans in the battle of Pydna in 168 B. C. The Romans did not incorporate the territory of the Macedonians as a Roman colony, but divided the area into four districts and made Thessalonica the capital of the second region.<sup>8</sup>

The Macedonians attempted to reunite under Andriscus who declared himself "the son of Perseus" in 149 B. C., and under Euphanes, who proclaimed himself "the king of Macedonia" in 148 B. C.<sup>9</sup> After these rebellions the Romans decided to annex Macedonian territory as a Roman province and chose Thessalonica as the capital of the unified

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<sup>5</sup> Best, *Thessalonians*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Stolt, *Message of Thessalonians*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> For more details, see Green, *Thessalonians*, 14-16.

province. In 146 B. C. it became the centre of Roman administration.<sup>10</sup> In 143 B. C. Thessalonica glorified 'the Roman proconsul' with a statue of Zeus.<sup>11</sup>

During the following two centuries "Macedonia and Thessalonica were completely integrated into the life of the Roman Empire."<sup>12</sup> During the civil war the city of Thessalonica supported Antony and Octavian and they then defeated Brutus. As a result of the victory of those the city supported, it was able to celebrate its new status as a "free city" with all the rights including an own independent government, exemption from taxation, own coinage (both imperial and autonomous) and no Roman garrison in the city in 42 B. C.<sup>13</sup>

Even though it was a free city publicly, it functioned according to "the patronage and reciprocity network of the emperor"<sup>14</sup> like other

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<sup>10</sup> Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> The attached inscription proclaimed, "Damon, son of Nicanor, Macedonian from Thessalonica; for Quintus Caecilius son of Quintus Metellus, proconsul of the Romans, to Zeus Olympios on account of his *aretē* [virtue] and goodwill which he continues to manifest to myself and to the home city [Thessalonica] and the rest of the Macedonians and the other Greeks." Cf. H. L. Hendrix, "Thessalonians Honor Romans," (Th. D. diss., Harvard University, 1984), cited from Green, *Thessalonians*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> See Green, *Thessalonians*, 18-20; R. Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence. Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 123; Vacalopoulos, *History*, 11; Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 3. Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 3, explains the meaning of these as follows: "1) It meant that the city was given a degree of local autonomy, as well as the right to mint both its own and imperial coins; 2) The city was promised freedom from military occupation and granted certain tax concessions; 3) It meant that the city did not become a Roman colony. This had two important effects: (1) *Ius Italicum*, which would have replaced local legal institutions, was not imposed, and (2) Thessalonica did not have to absorb a large settlement of demobilized Roman soldiers as happened at Philippi, Cassandria, and elsewhere. This naturally left the local ruling elite in control of the city with its traditional institutions intact."

<sup>14</sup> B. Witherington III, *New Testament History. A Narrative Account* (Grand Rapids:

cities in the Roman Empire.

In 27 B. C. Macedonia was declared a “senatorial province” by Augustus and it became one “imperial province” united with Achaia and Moesia in A. D. 15, and after that power over it reverted to the senate, with the city of Thessalonica as “the seat of provincial administration”<sup>15</sup> in A. D. 44.

Thessalonica had a good relationship with the Roman Empire because of its loyalty and this gave rise to a long and stable development of “political, economic, and religious life”<sup>16</sup> in the city.

Due to the status of a free city Thessalonica had an independent form of government.<sup>17</sup> It had a “democratic civil administration” and it was organized in an assembly of the people (*dēmos*), a council (*boulē*), “local magistrates called the ‘politarchs,’ the city treasurer and other administrative posts.”<sup>18</sup>

The politarchs as agents of Roman rule had the real power in the city, evoked the convened *boulē* and presided over its meetings to keep

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Baker Academic, 2001), 263. He believes that Thessalonica showed her “gratitude for the benefactions of the Roman ruler by responding with celebratory coins.” For more details, see Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 124; Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 3-5.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce, *Thessalonians*, xxi.

<sup>16</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> In Acts 17:5-9 Luke indicates two governing authorities in the city: ‘politarchs’ or politarchoi and ‘assembly of the people’ or *dēmos*. The accuracy of Luke’s reference to the politarchs in Thessalonica was questioned for some years but the evidence that there were politarchs in Thessalonica has been supported by five ancient inscriptions which were found in 1876.

<sup>18</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 123. For more details, see Green, *Thessalonians*, 20-25; Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 123-25; Vacalopoulos, *History*, 12-16.

peace and make major decisions for the city.<sup>19</sup> Generally speaking, the “assembly of the people” or *dēmos* referred to the free citizens who were members of the assembly; it referred to “both the citizenry and their official assembly”<sup>20</sup> in Thessalonica.

In the Hellenistic era, the general economic condition of Thessalonica prospered because of its excellent natural harbour and the vital trade highway, the Via Egnatia.<sup>21</sup> But the prosperity turned to deep poverty after the Macedonians were defeated by the Romans in 168 B. C. The Romans took much of the Macedonians’ property to Rome and they experienced deep poverty. Macedonia, however, recovered its prosperity gradually and Thessalonica played the key role in the economic restoration due to its excellent position, the peace in the area and “the immigrants from Greece, Asia and Rome.”<sup>22</sup> The Roman immigrants, moreover, contributed to the economic and commercial development of Thessalonica because of the social relationship between the Romans and the Thessalonians.<sup>23</sup> The social system of patronage or patron-client relationship played a role “on almost every level of society in the Roman Empire.”<sup>24</sup> According to Wallace-Hadrill,<sup>25</sup> “Patronage was

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<sup>19</sup> Vacalopoulos, *History*, 13. Because the Romans preferred the policy of centralization, the assembly of the people and the council could not have any real power in the city.

<sup>20</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 22.

<sup>21</sup> M. R. Storm, *Excommunication in the Life and Theology of the Primitive Christian Communities* (Michigan: U. M. I., 1992), 18.

<sup>22</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 121.

<sup>23</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 25ff, indicates that the immigrants from Rome to Thessalonica were “from the upper strata of Roman society” and the patron-client relationship between them was a special case of a “wide-ranging social institution of the era.”

<sup>24</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 24ff. Cf. A. Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society*

as central to the structure of Roman society as feudalism was to medieval: it constituted the dominant social relationship between ruler and ruled.”

By the time of Paul the inhabitants of Thessalonica were cosmopolitan. The original Macedonians had mingled with Greek immigrants and assimilated Greek culture and language as their own character.<sup>26</sup> Because of its political and commercial importance, many wealthy people resided there, including Romans. Though this group enjoyed the commercial conditions of Thessalonica, most people belonged to the lower class and were not blessed with this economic situation.<sup>27</sup>

The religious setting of Thessalonica was not monotheism but polytheism and revealed the same diversity as many of the major cities in the Roman Empire. The religious environment of Thessalonica included the cults of Dionysus, Cabirus, Serapis, Isis, Anubis, Zeus, emperor worship and Judaism.<sup>28</sup>

The cult of Cabirus focused on a martyred hero who was murdered by his brothers, but “expected to return to help the lowly and the city of

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(London/New York: Routledge, 1989), 63-87.

<sup>25</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, “Patronage,” 68.

<sup>26</sup> Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 20, says that this group ranged “from rural slave to the urban freedman.”

<sup>28</sup> See K. P. Donfried, “The Cults of Thessalonica and the Thessalonian Correspondence,” *NTS* 31 (1985), 336-56; Green, *Thessalonians*, 31-37; Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 126-32.

Thessalonica in particular."<sup>29</sup>

The god Dionysus was the god of wine and joy, and his cult was symbolized in the area by the phallus.<sup>30</sup> The cults of Serapis and Dionysus were "particularly prominent and well integrated with the civic cult."<sup>31</sup>

The religious cults in Thessalonica were "linked intimately with the affairs of daily life"<sup>32</sup> and it was difficult to distinguish "between the 'religious' and the 'political.'"<sup>33</sup> It is not surprising that the imperial cult was "the supreme manifestation of the city's response to those benefits," because "Thessalonica enjoyed great benefits from her privileged relationship with Rome and the Romans."<sup>34</sup> A temple for Caesar was built in the city of Thessalonica; he was proclaimed a god and coins were minted that were the first to bear the heads of Romans.<sup>35</sup>

Evidence concerning when or how the Jewish community was established in Thessalonica has not been found,<sup>36</sup> but Judaism played a

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<sup>29</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 128. Cf. Green, *Thessalonians*, 44-45. For some structural similarities between the Cabirus figure and the apocalyptic Christ proclaimed by Paul, see Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 128-32.

<sup>30</sup> Donfried, "Cults," 337, states that "the sexual symbols of the cult were not mere representations of the hope of a joyous afterlife; but they were also sensually provocative."

<sup>31</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 126. Cf. Green, *Thessalonians*, 43-46.

<sup>32</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 37.

<sup>33</sup> Donfried, "Cults," 336. Cf. Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 5; Witherington, *New Testament*, 263. Cf. Green, *Thessalonians*, 40-42.

<sup>36</sup> We can get a clue from Josephus' remark that Jewish mercenaries served in the army of Alexander the Great. See Josephus, *Apion*, 1.200-204. It is also estimated that Thessalonica had a significant population of Jews, like other major cities in the Diaspora, and an earlier inscription from the third century A. D. shows that there was

role as a part of the religious environment in the city (cf. Acts 17:1-4). From some inscriptions, references concerning a Samaritan community and the use of the term, "the synagogue," it can be gathered that a "sizable Jewish community"<sup>37</sup> existed in the city of Thessalonica.

## 1. 2 The church in Thessalonica

There are two sources for information concerning the founding of the church in Thessalonica: 1) the letters of the apostle Paul himself and 2) the narratives of Luke in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>38</sup>

The majority of New Testament scholars, however, give priority to the letters of Paul himself; the Acts of the Apostles being regarded as less useful as a source of information for exact chronological accuracy.<sup>39</sup>

It is, however, considered that the Acts of the Apostles can still be a

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a Jewish synagogue and a sizable Jewish community in Thessalonica. C. U. Manus, "Luke's Account of Paul in Thessalonica," in *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, edited by Raymond F. Collins (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 32, claims that Jason is "a Hellenized diminutive for the Jewish name Joshua" and this is the evidence of "the existence of the Jewish population." Cf. Green, *Thessalonians*, 46-47; D. J. Williams, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 1-2; Witherington, *New Testament*, 263.

<sup>37</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 119-20. Cf. Green, *Thessalonians*, 47. Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 4, indicates that "the Jewish community was one of most serious competitors" in the field of diverse religious competition in Thessalonica. Witherington, *New Testament*, 263, indicates that there were a "significant population of Jews" in Thessalonica.

<sup>38</sup> For more details, see Best, *Thessalonians*, 5-7; K. P. Donfried, "1 Thessalonians, Acts and the Early Paul," 1-8 in *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, edited by Raymond F. Collins (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 32; Green, *Thessalonians*, 47-54; Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 113-18; Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 6-16.

<sup>39</sup> The major reason to doubt Luke's accuracy is that in his second volume Luke adjusts many traditions to correspond with his overall theological purpose just as he does in his first volume. For more details, see Best, *Thessalonians*, 5-7; Donfried, "1 Thessalonians," 5-10; Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 114-18; Manus, "Luke's Account," 27-28.

valuable source for Paul's acts and preaching in the city of Thessalonica. Therefore I will provide a description of the founding of the church in Thessalonica based on the Pauline letters and the Acts of the Apostles together.

Paul, with his co-workers, Silas and Timothy, founded the church in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10; 1 Thess. 2:1-12). They came to Thessalonica from Philippi where they had suffered insolent treatment and persecution (1 Thess. 2:1-2).

When they had arrived in Thessalonica, Paul followed his regular custom, namely going to the synagogue on three (maybe successive) Sabbaths.<sup>40</sup> He did not wish to rely on the financial assistance of his converts in Thessalonica, so he and his fellow workers practiced the tent-making trade while they stayed there (cf. 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8, 9). They, however, received some financial support from the believers in Philippi (cf. Phil. 4:16). During his stay Paul explained the Scriptures and argued with the Jews from the (Hebrew) Scriptures. His arguments were as follows: (1) The correct interpretation of the Scriptures is that the Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the dead, (2) Jesus died on the cross and rose again as he and many eyewitnesses testified, (3) Therefore, the Jesus whom Paul himself was proclaiming to

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<sup>40</sup> The accounts in 1 Thessalonians and the Acts of Apostles suggest that the total period of time which Paul, Silas and Timothy spent in founding the new church was somewhat longer than three weeks. For the period of Paul's stay in Thessalonica, see Best, *Thessalonians*, 3; Frame, *Thessalonians*, 7; Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 117.



them had to be the Messiah.

It is then not surprising that we are told in Acts 17:4 that “some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas.” They were not only some of the Jews, but also a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a number of prominent women (cf. Acts 17:4).

After three Sabbaths they could not preach in the synagogue any more. Probably Paul and his colleagues stayed at Jason’s house and taught the new converts concerning the Christian faith and life, including the *parousia* of Jesus Christ.

However, Paul’s success provoked the jealousy of the Jews and they “rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace” (Acts 17:5 NIV) to help them. The crowd set the city into turmoil and they attacked the house of Jason and tried to bring Paul and his co-workers out to the crowd. When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers, presumably Christians, before the politarchs, shouting “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them; and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar,<sup>41</sup> saying that there is another king, Jesus” (Acts 17:6-7).

The crowd and the politarchs were disturbed when they heard this (Acts 17:7-8). Acts 17:8-9 indicates that the officials regarded this as a serious matter and then acted immediately, in effect banishing Paul and

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<sup>41</sup> See E. A. Judge, “The Decrees of Caesar at Thessalonica,” *RTR* 30 (1971), 1-7. Cf. Best, *Thessalonians*, xxiii-xxiv; Green, *Thessalonians*, 50; Manus, “Luke’s Account,” 33-34; Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 7.

Silas from returning to Thessalonica during their rule, a fact probably alluded to in 1 Thessalonians 2:18.<sup>42</sup>

Then the politarchs made Jason and the other converts “post bond”<sup>43</sup> (Acts 17:9 NIV) and let them go. And Acts 17:10 indicates that that very night Paul and Silas were sent off to Berea and this new born congregation in Thessalonica was left without leadership.

In spite of the frightful harassment of the Thessalonians, including the Jews, however, the new Thessalonian congregation not only “became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit,” but also had become “an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia” (1 Thess. 1:6, 7).

It seems as if the Thessalonian Christians were primarily Gentiles.<sup>44</sup> The primary sources of evidence for the Gentile composition of the Thessalonian church are the Acts of the Apostles 17:4, which refers to “a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women”

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<sup>42</sup> William, M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 228-31; Green, *Thessalonians*, 28.

<sup>43</sup> It probably refers to Jason providing guarantee of the good behaviour of his friends, in this case that Paul and his company would leave the city quietly and would not return so long as this ruling was in force or that they would not allow the Christian messengers to cause any more trouble in the city nor would they be a party to any trouble. Cf. Green, *Thessalonians*, 51; H. H. Hobbs, “1-2 Thessalonians,” in *2 Corinthians-Philemon*, edited by C. J. Allen (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 258; Ramsay, *St. Paul*, 231; Williams, *Thessalonians*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> See R. S. Ascough, “The Thessalonian Christian Community as a Professional Voluntary Association,” *JBL* 119/2 (2000), 311-12, presents the pieces of evidences that the Thessalonian community was composed of Gentiles mainly as follows: 1) “worshiping idols”; 2) “little use of the Hebrew Bible or the LXX.” Cf. Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 118-23.

(NIV) and 1 Thessalonians 1:9, which states that "You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (NIV). 1 Thessalonians 1:9 also indicates that in former times the converted Thessalonians had been associated with "worshiping idols." Ascough<sup>45</sup> insists that Paul does not employ the phrase "worshiping idols" in order to describe turning to God of Jews or God-fearers.

The social status of the converts in the church of the Thessalonians is debated.<sup>46</sup> Some<sup>47</sup> argue that they were poor and from the lower classes. The evidence for this opinion is as follows: (1) Paul and his co-workers "worked night and day, labouring and toiling" in order that they "would not be a burden" to the new believers (2 Thess. 3:8; cf. Acts 18:3); (2) Paul welcomed the financial support from the Philippians (Phil. 4:16); (3) There were "the idle" who relied on the patron-client relationship or the charity of church in the church of the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 3:11. Cf. 1 Thess. 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:13).

Others<sup>48</sup> hold the opposite view: The Thessalonian converts were of

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<sup>45</sup> Ascough, "Professional Voluntary," 312ff. For more details, see Best, *Thessalonians*, 82; R. F. Collins, *Studies on the First Letter to the Thessalonians* (Louvain: Louvain University Press, 1984), 287; Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 118-19; W. Neil, *The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1950), 27.

<sup>46</sup> For some debates between the scholars, see Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 1210-21; Storm, *Excommunication*, 25-33.

<sup>47</sup> A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, translated by R. L. M. Strachan (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927), 55ff; Frame, *Thessalonians*, 6; J. C. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1975), 20-43.

<sup>48</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 29ff. Cf. E. A. Judge, "The Early Christians as a Scholastic Community. Part II." *JRH* 3 (June 1961), 125ff; A. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1977), 31ff.

high class and they were not poor but wealthy. The evidence for this opinion is as follows: (1) The narrative in the Acts of the Apostles mentions many "prominent" or noble women (Acts 17:4); (2) Jason had enough riches to support Paul and his company (Acts 17:5) and was a well-known person in the city of Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-7, 9); (3) Some members of the church were wealthy enough to support "the idle" as patrons (1 Thess. 4:9-10; 2 Thess. 3:13) and were thus from the high classes.<sup>49</sup>

In summary, we do not have accurate information about the social origins of the Thessalonian converts. In my opinion some of the converts, such as Jason, Aristarchus and the prominent women, belonged to the higher classes and had sufficient wealth to support the poor believers in the congregation. The biggest part of the congregation, however, was from the low, working class, as was the ratio for the rest of the city.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> In a list of politarchs from the ancient inscriptions in Thessalonica, there occurs the name of Aristarchus. It has been proposed that the person who appears in this list can be identified with the Aristarchus who appears in Acts 19:29; 20:4. Cf. C. J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989), 236.

<sup>50</sup> See Part II. 1. 1.

## Chapter 2 The authorship of 2 Thessalonians

One of the main issues in the study concerning 2 Thessalonians is its authorship.<sup>1</sup> The church accepted 2 Thessalonians as an authentic epistle of the apostle Paul himself until the end of the sixteenth century. In terms of internal evidence 2 Thessalonians opens with Paul identifying himself and his company, Silas and Timothy (1:1). In terms of external evidence various ancient Christian authors also refer to it as a Pauline letter.<sup>2</sup>

In the early seventeenth century Hugo Grotius raised doubts concerning the order of Thessalonian letters.<sup>3</sup> In the nineteenth century, J. E. C. Schmidt, in his essay *Vermutungen über die beiden Briefe an die Thessalonicher*, raised questions on the authenticity of the Second Epistle of the Thessalonians, arguing that 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 was not a Pauline letter but an interpolation because the eschatology

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed discussions, see J. A. Bailey, "II Thessalonians," *NTS* 25 (1978-9), 131-145; Bruce, *Thessalonians*, xxxix-xlvi; Best, *Thessalonians*, 37-59; Frame, *Thessalonians*, 39-54; Green, *Thessalonians*, 59-74; D. E. Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 285-92; M. J. J. Menken, *2 Thessalonians* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 27-42; Colin, R. Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica. Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3-12; L. Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids/Leicester: Eerdmans/IVP, 1991), 26-31; C. A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 17-45.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Ignatius, *Romans* 10.3; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 32.12; Polycarp, *Philippians* 11.3; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.7.2; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.3; Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5.16. Cf. Green, *Thessalonians*, 59-60.

<sup>3</sup> C. A. Wanamaker, "1 Thessalonians," in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament. A Book-by-Book Survey*, edited by K. J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 149. See also, Wanamaker, "2 Thessalonians," *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament. A Book-by-Book Survey*, edited by K. J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 156-57.

between two epistles was contradictory.<sup>4</sup> Since Schmidt's work many scholars have debated the issue.<sup>5</sup> I will not research the matter fully because the debate is still under way and it is not my major point in this thesis. I, however, will examine it broadly because it is a main topic of study whenever 2 Thessalonians is considered.

## 2. 1 2 Thessalonians as a pseudonymous letter

There are essentially four primary problems concerning 2 Thessalonians which have given rise to hypotheses of pseudonymity: 1) the literary resemblances between 1 and 2 Thessalonians; 2) the difference in the eschatology of 1 and 2 Thessalonians; 3) the difference in tone between 1 and 2 Thessalonians; and 4) the signatures of authenticity in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 and 3:17.

### 2. 1. 1 Literary resemblances<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 17-19.

<sup>5</sup> For more details on the historical debate, see Best, *Thessalonians*, 37-59; Bruce, *Thessalonians*, xxxii-xlvi, esp. xxxiii, xl-xlvi; Frame, *Thessalonians*, 40-45; Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 17-28.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholl, *Hope*, 4-8, summarizes seven proposed main theories to explain the literary parallels: (1) While 1 Thessalonians is authentic, 2 Thessalonians is pseudonymous; (2) Paul kept a copy of 1 Thessalonians, which became the basis for 2 Thessalonians; (3) The period separating the letters was so brief that 1 Thessalonians was still fresh in Paul's mind when he penned 2 Thessalonians; (4) Paul had formed particular ways of thinking and feeling about his converts, and these paradigms remained frozen from 1 to 2 Thessalonians; (5) Paul was employing stock words and phrases in both; (6) 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written within a very short period of time, addressed to different sections of the same community, whether 1 Thessalonians to Gentile believers and 2 Thessalonians to Jewish believers, or 1 Thessalonians to a 'special circle of the church' and 2 Thessalonians to the entire community; (7) The situations addressed in the letters were similar. For more details, see Nichol, *Hope*, 4-8. Cf. also Frame, *Thessalonians*, 45-51.

### 1) Structural similarity

When the two epistles are compared, the structural similarity between 1 and 2 Thessalonians had been founded to be extraordinary. After W. Wrede<sup>7</sup> compared 1 and 2 Thessalonians and found that the same terminology and phrases occur in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, he concluded that the similarity between 1 and 2 Thessalonians was exceptional and claimed that it “could be explained by deliberate forgery.”<sup>8</sup> Even though one often finds similarities in the Pauline epistles, the structural similarity between 1 and 2 Thessalonians is unprecedented. Bailey<sup>9</sup> indicates the structural similarity as follows:

	2 Thessalonians	1 Thessalonians
A. Letter opening	1: 1-12	1: 1-10
1. Prescript	1: 1-2	1: 1
2. Thanksgiving	1: 3-12	1: 2-10
B. Letter body	2: 1-16	2: 1-3: 13
1. Thanksgiving in the middle		2: 13 2: 13
2. Benediction at the end	2: 16	3: 11-13
C. Letter closing	3: 1-18	4: 1-5: 28
1. <i>Paraenesis</i>	3: 1-15	4: 1-5: 22
2. Peace wish	3: 16	5: 23-24
3. Greetings	3: 17	5: 26

<sup>7</sup> W. Wrede, *Die Echtheit des Zweiten Thessalonicherbriefs untersucht* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903). Cf. K. P. Donfried, *Paul, Thessalonica, and Early Christianity* (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2002), 51ff.

<sup>8</sup> Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Bailey, “II Thessalonians,” 133. Cf. Frame, *Thessalonians*, 46; Green, *Thessalonians*, 71; Menken, *Thessalonians*, 36-39; Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 49, 51.

## 2) Similarity in vocabulary

It is observed that most of the language and style of 2 Thessalonians is Pauline.<sup>10</sup> There is, however, also unusual similarity in vocabulary between the two epistles.

Some words are present in the same part of the letters and others in different parts. It is observed that the addressers, addressees and the phrase at the beginning except “us,” are identical in the two epistles. According to Bailey,<sup>11</sup> “grace and peace,” “give thanks,” “*agape*,” Paul’s pride about the Thessalonians’ conduct “in afflictions” occur in the same section, and the same vocabulary is employed in 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:7 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13b-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:14 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 7, 11. Nicholl<sup>12</sup> observes that the writer of 2 Thessalonians manifests the “use of stock words and phrases” from 1 Thessalonians with extraordinary parallels.

## 3) The thematic similarity

2 Thessalonians contains the same themes as those that appear in 1 Thessalonians. The most notable topic in the two epistles is eschatology, though the content of it seems to be contradictory.

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<sup>10</sup> See Bailey, “II Thessalonians,” 132.

<sup>11</sup> Bailey, “II Thessalonians,” 133-34.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholl, *Hope*, 7, lists the examples as follows: 1 Thess. 2:9/2 Thess. 3:8; 1 Thess. 1:1/2 Thess. 1:1-2; the use of “Lord/God of peace” in 1 Thess. 5:23/2 Thess. 3:16 and the occurrence of *autos* with “God” or “Lord” in prayers in each epistle.



There are no other Pauline letters in which eschatological issues are handled as the main topic of the epistle except the two Thessalonians epistles.<sup>13</sup> Another prominent topic in the two letters is the problem of “the idle” (1 Thess. 4:11-12; 5:14 and 2 Thess. 3:6-15).

In sum, according to some scholars, these evidences of literary resemblance prove that 2 Thessalonians reveals an unusual dependence on and imitation of 1 Thessalonians. This indicates that 2 Thessalonians was not written by Paul himself, but it is “simply excerpt, paraphrase and variation” from the larger epistle, 1 Thessalonians, by a clever imitator.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. 1. 2 Difference in eschatology

Despite the literary resemblance between the two epistles as pointed above, 2 Thessalonians exhibits a remarkably different eschatological emphasis. According to the eschatology of 1 Thessalonians the *parousia* of Christ is imminent (1 Thess. 4:15) and there are no reference to times and dates for the end of the world (1 Thess. 5:1-11).

On the other hand, the eschatology in 2 Thessalonians stresses that the *parousia* of Christ is not imminent and there are several signs which must take place before the end comes (2 Thess. 1-12). Donfried<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bailey, “II Thessalonians,” 134.

<sup>14</sup> Frame, *Thessalonians*, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Donfried, *Paul*, 53, claims that this is rejected in the first epistle but that it is similar to the “apocalyptic thought of Revelation”: “The idea of punishment and reward as coming from God (2 Thess. 1:5, 6) is found in Rev. 6:10; 7:14; 11:18; 13:6; the phrase

asserts that the eschatology of 2 Thessalonians is more apocalyptic than that of the first epistle and that it depends on “apocalyptic devices about time-calculations.” J. Bailey<sup>16</sup> summarises this matter as follows:

These two eschatologies are contradictory. Either the end will come suddenly and without warning like a thief in the night (I Thessalonians) or it will be preceded by a series of apocalyptic events which warn of its coming (II Thessalonians). Paul might have said both things – in differing situations to one church, or to different churches – but he can hardly have said both things to the same church at the same time, i.e. to the Thessalonian church when he founded it.

It is thus asserted by some scholars that Paul could not have written 2 Thessalonians since its eschatology is contradictory to that in 1 Thessalonians.

## 2. 1. 3 Difference in tone

Scholars have noticed a difference in tone between the two epistles. Although 1 Thessalonians is filled with expressions of personal warmth, compassion, encouragement and friendship to the congregation, the tone in 2 Thessalonians seems to be colder, more formal than that in 1 Thessalonians and shows an official mood with the exception of 1:7 and 3:1.

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‘mighty angels’ (1:7) is paralleled in Rev. 19:14 as are the phrases ‘flaming fire’ (1:7) in Rev. 19:12 and ‘eternal destruction’ (1:9) in Rev. 20:10.” Cf. Hiebert, *Thessalonians*, 285–86.

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, “II Thessalonians,” 136.

Paul indicates his travel plan, circumstances, feeling and pride to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians (2:17-18; 3:5-7), and he seems to be familiar with them.<sup>17</sup> The author of 2 Thessalonians, however, makes no mention of his conditions and/or his feelings with the exception of 1:7 and 3:1 and he seems to have no personal relationship with the Thessalonian congregation.

The verb παρακαλέω which is translated “to comfort,” “to encourage” is used eight times in the first epistle (2:12; 3:2, 7; 4:1, 10, 18; 5:11, 14), but only twice (2:17; 3:12) in the second epistle. Moreover, the rigorous and intense verb “command” occurs four times in 2 Thessalonians 3 (vv. 4, 6, 10, 12 KJV).

According to some, the evidence with regard to a different tone mentioned above points to a difference of authorship between the two epistles to the Thessalonians.

## 2. 1. 4 Signature of authenticity<sup>18</sup>

In 2 Thessalonians 3:17 we read “I, Paul, write this greeting in my

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<sup>17</sup> Bailey, “II Thessalonians,” 137, argues that the whole passage of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-3:10 alludes to Paul’s personal report of his feeling and circumstance.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholl, *Hope*, 9-10, summarises the hypotheses by scholars to overcome this issue as follows: (1) The authentic 2 Thessalonians actually preceded 1 Thessalonians; (2) The problem underlying the authentic 2 Thessalonians may have been caused by a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of 1 Thessalonians; (3) The pseudonymous 2 Thessalonians was intended to complement 1 Thessalonians, a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of which had led to the problem giving rise to 2 Thessalonians; (4) The pseudonymous 2 Thessalonians was designed to discredit 1 Thessalonians as a forgery and to undermine what the author of 2 Thessalonians regarded as the heretical over-imminentist eschatological expectation of 1 Thessalonians, which was being employed by his opponents; (5) Paul feared that a forgery in his name might have given rise to the community’s new eschatological problem. For more details, see Nicholl, *Hope*, 9-11.

own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write" (NIV). It means that the autograph greeting is a mark or sign of authenticity of this letter. Though Paul mentions that he writes "with my own hand" in 1 Corinthians 16:21 and Galatians 6:11, no other passage refers to the fact that he writes the signature for authenticating purposes, not even 1 Thessalonians.

It is observed that 2 Thessalonians 3:17 makes sense "as the product of the pseudonymous author who wished by it to allay any suspicions of inauthenticity his letter might arouse."<sup>19</sup> Van Aarde<sup>20</sup> insists that the writer of 2 Thessalonians depended extraordinarily on 1 Thessalonians as his text and used Paul's name "in a pseudepigraphic manner" to indicate his letter as Paul's epistle.

2 Thessalonians 2:2, moreover, indicates that pseudonymous letters were already circulating in Paul's name and it seems that the writer of 2 Thessalonians attempts to attest that his letter is authentic, at the same time warning against pseudonymous letters circulating in his times.

To sum up, the unusual usage of the sign of authenticity in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 and 3:17 leads some scholars to conclude that 2

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<sup>19</sup> Bailey, "11 Thessalonians," 138.

<sup>20</sup> A. G. van Aarde, "The Struggle against Heresy in the Thessalonian Correspondence and the Origin of the Apostolic Tradition," in *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, edited by Raymond F. Collins (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 422. Van Aarde, "The Struggle," 419-25, argues that 2 Thessalonians does not reflect Paul's theology, especially Paul's "typical soteriology" and the writer of 2 Thessalonians employed the concept of "*apostolic tradition*" in order to explain a theological problem such as the delay of the *parousia* of Jesus Christ to the Thessalonians. The italics indicate Van Aarde's emphasis.

Thessalonians is a pseudonymous letter using Paul's apostolic name.

## 2. 2 2 Thessalonians as a Pauline letter

As I mentioned above, based on internal and external evidence, the church accepted 2 Thessalonians as an authentic epistle of the apostle Paul until the end of the eighteenth century. I will discuss the objections against the hypothesis of pseudonymity in order to show the acceptability of the option that 2 Thessalonians is indeed a Pauline letter.

### 2. 2. 1 Literary resemblances

According to the hypothesis of pseudonymity on 2 Thessalonians, the literary parallels such as the structural similarity, similarity in vocabulary, thematic similarity, have been presented as proof of pseudonymity.

As I mentioned in the previous section, according to internal and external evidence, Paul is the writer of 2 Thessalonians. Moreover, the vocabulary used in 2 Thessalonians is definitely Pauline and the general Pauline epistolary form is exhibited with small variation in detail. Hendriksen<sup>21</sup> lists the phrases that appear in 2 Thessalonians and other Pauline letters but not in the first as follows: "God our Father" (1:1; Rom. 1:7); "obey the Gospel" (1:8; Rom. 10:16); "comfort your hearts" (2:17; Col. 2:2); "have confidence in the Lord" (3:4; Phil. 2:24); "our word"

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<sup>21</sup> W. Hendriksen, *I & II Thessalonians* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 28. Hendriksen, *Thessalonians*, 21, also lists the phrases that appear in 1, 2 Thessalonians and other Pauline letters.

(3:14; 2 Cor. 1:13).

If the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians was written soon after the first was sent, and its purpose was to correct some misunderstanding created by the First Letter to the Thessalonians, the literary parallel between two letters is probable.<sup>22</sup> W. Neil<sup>23</sup> accounts for the literary similarity between the two letters by proposing that Paul read “the customary draft copy of his first letter before writing the second” and that the first epistle’s language and ideas, therefore, were still vividly in his mind when he wrote the second.

Though it is true that the structures of the two epistles are closer than those of other Pauline epistles, it is also true that there are some differences. The significant theological theme of 2 Thessalonians (2:1–12) occurs before the second thanksgiving part, but that of 1 Thessalonians appears in a different section.<sup>24</sup> If there were a forger, why should he not follow the structure of 1 Thessalonians perfectly but imperfectly? Therefore it is not difficult to conclude that the literary resemblances are not decisive proofs of the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians.

## 2. 2. 2 Difference in eschatology

It is sometimes presupposed that the difference in eschatology

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<sup>22</sup> Hiebert, *Thessalonians*, 287, 291. See Nicholl, *Hope*, 7–8, 202.

<sup>23</sup> W. Neil, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1950), xxiii.

<sup>24</sup> Best, *Thessalonians*, 53. He has more examples of this argument, such as different times of thanksgiving and prayer in the two epistles.

between the two Thessalonian letters can be explained by means of the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians.

Scholars who believe that 2 Thessalonians is Pauline, however, argue that the eschatology of 2 Thessalonians reflects a different situation and that it focuses on another aspect of the eschatology.<sup>25</sup> Paul mentions “times and dates” (NIV) in 1 Thessalonians 5:1ff. and says that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2 NIV). He mentions the suddenness of the Lord’s *parousia* in order that the Thessalonians congregation will be “alert and self-controlled” (1 Thess. 5:6 NIV).

However, the sequence of signs in 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff. is not meant to give a clue to estimate the dates and times of Lord’s *parousia*. Rather it seems as if these signs are given to the Thessalonian Christians as a warning in order for them to recognize and be ready at the time of the Lord’s *parousia*, as in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8.

In fact it has been indicated that the concept of the suddenness of the coming of the day of the Lord and the notion of warning signs already appear together in Jesus teaching on the end of the ages (Matt. 24:3-44; Mark 13:3-37; Luke 17: 22-37; 21:7-36). Jesus also refers to the signs of the end of the ages, as Paul mentions the signs of the Lord’s *parousia* in 2 Thessalonians 2. However, with regard to the suddenness of the end of the ages, Jesus also says that “no one knows about that day or hour” (Matt. 24:36 NIV), as Paul refers to the suddenness of the Lord’s

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<sup>25</sup> Best, *Thessalonians*, 55; Nicholl, *Hope*, 8-9.

*parousia* in 1 Thessalonians 5.<sup>26</sup>

Some<sup>27</sup> assert that the Thessalonians have misunderstood Paul's teaching on eschatology in 1 Thessalonians and that Paul therefore wrote 2 Thessalonians to correct it.

Therefore, the apparent difference in eschatology between the two letters cannot be used as a decisive proof of pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians. Rather both epistles will be accepted as authentic Pauline letters with a different aspect of eschatology emphasised in each.

### 2. 2. 3 Difference in tone

To respond to the hypothesis that the difference in tone between the two epistles indicates a difference in authorship, some<sup>28</sup> objections have been raised.

Some<sup>29</sup> point out that 2 Thessalonians also has warming expressions such as Paul's calling the audiences/readers "brothers" (1:3; 2:1, 13, 15; 3:1, 6, 13, 15) and his pride in the Thessalonian Christians' progress (1:3).

The most important claim is that the different tone in 2 Thessalonians

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<sup>26</sup> Frame, *Thessalonians*, 44, suggests that 1 Thessalonians is not concerned with new teaching "either on times and seasons" ... "or on the suddenness of the coming of the Lord" but "encouraging the faint-hearted" congregation that it should not overtake them as a thief. For more details, see Bruce, *Thessalonians*, xliii; Frame, *Thessalonians*, 44-45; Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Bailey, "II Thessalonians," 136-37. Some even argue that Paul has changed his eschatological views in 2 Thessalonians; however, it is not necessary to accept this theory in order to respond to the hypothesis of pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians. For more details, see Best, *Thessalonians*, 55.

<sup>28</sup> See Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 1, 17; Nicholl, *Hope*, 11; Morris, *Thessalonians*, 24-25; Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Williams, *Thessalonians*, 12. Cf. Storm, *Excommunication*, 13.



shows the changed situation when Paul wrote his second letter. Some suggest that the reason for the colder and more formal tone of 2 Thessalonians is that Paul's circumstances were not happy when he wrote it. However, this is a random conjecture because Paul tells the Philippians to rejoice although he is in prison (Phil. 3:1, 4). It seems rather as if the circumstances in Thessalonica forced Paul to use more formal terms. The persecution of the Christians was severer and they were in peril. He, therefore, needed to encourage them to stand firmly in their faith in the midst of persecutions (cf. 2 Thess. 1:3-2:17).

Moreover, if 2 Thessalonians was written as "an appendix of 1 Thessalonians"<sup>30</sup> and written soon after 1 Thessalonians, it is explicable that the personal and warm remarks are absent from the second letter.

It is clear that some of the teachings given in the first letter had to be repeated in the second letter. Though Paul gave instructions on the problem of "the idle" (1 Thess. 4:11-12; 5:14) to the Thessalonians, there was no result; the situation rather grew more serious. Moreover, if the Thessalonian congregation misunderstood and distorted Paul's teaching on eschatology, it is understandable that Paul would change his mood in the second letter.<sup>31</sup>

The character of the letters would also make for a different tone. It has been argued that, while 2 Thessalonians shows a "deliberative argument" attempting to correct some beliefs and behaviour of the Thessalonians, the first epistle is designed to be a letter of "consolation

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<sup>30</sup> Nicholl, *Hope*, 211-12.

<sup>31</sup> See Part II. 2. 2. 2.

or encouragement.”<sup>32</sup> Though Philippians and Galatians were sent to different churches, they also show how Paul responded to different situations.

#### 2. 2. 4 Signature of authenticity

To respond to the hypothesis that the signatures of authenticity in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 and 3:17 (and might be added 2:15) indicate a pseudonymous author, one can ask if it is not rather the case that that 2 Thessalonians 2:2 simply indicates that pseudonymous letters with Paul’s name were circulating and that 3:17 indicates Paul’s own signature to indicate the authenticity of the letter, as is the case in 1 Corinthians 16:21 (and, might be added, Galatians 6:11).

It has been also suggested that 2 Thessalonians 3:17 was designed “to empower the readers to distinguish a possible forgery from Paul’s authentic letters.”<sup>33</sup> Hendriksen<sup>34</sup> explains the autographic signature and provides two reasons for this: 1) to take precautions against troubled persons saying that this letter does not contain the apostle Paul’s teaching; 2) to prevent “the spread of spurious epistles” (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2).

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<sup>32</sup> Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholl, *Hope*, 10. For more detailed discussions, see Nicholl, *Hope*, 115-43; 183-221, esp. 208-11.

<sup>34</sup> Hendriksen, *Thessalonians*, 208-209. Cf. Donfried, *Paul*, 54-56; Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 182ff.

## 2. 3 Alternative theories

Scholars have also attempted to overcome the problems with regard to the authorship, such as literary similarity, difference in tone and difference in eschatology between the two epistles to the Thessalonians as follows: 1) Co-authorship; 2) Different recipients; 3) Reversal of the order of the two epistles.

### 2. 3. 1 Co-authorship

Some<sup>35</sup> consider Timothy or Silas as the co-author of one or both epistles with Paul simply adding a general authentication. Timothy and/or Silas were in Paul's company and their names are present with that of Paul in the greeting of some other letters (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1:1). However, although this is very likely, there is no explicit proof for it.

Some<sup>36</sup> think that 2 Thessalonians is not one letter but might be composite and suggest "an interpolation of later material into 2 Thessalonians." It is assumed that a writer interpolated some sections into 2 Thessalonians after Paul's death. This theory admits that 2 Thessalonians was written by Paul, but suggests an additional writer to overcome the problems which the hypothesis of pseudonymity on 2

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<sup>35</sup> See J. W. Bailey, & J. W. Clarke, *I & II Thessalonians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 250; Donfried, *Paul*, 53-54; R. W. Thurston, "The relationship Between the Thessalonian Epistles," *ExpTim* 85 (1973-74), 54. Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 10, suggests the possibility that Timothy or Silas may have been the scribe of the epistles but he concludes that they might not have "participated in the writing."

<sup>36</sup> W. Schmithals, "Die Thessalonicherbriefe als Briefkompositionen," in *Paulus und die Gnostiker*, 138ff. cited from Best, *Thessalonians*, 45. For more details, see Best, *Thessalonians*, 38, 45-50.

Thessalonians highlights. This is an intriguing hypothesis, but there is no clear evidence for it.

### 2. 3. 2 Different recipients<sup>37</sup>

This hypothesis assumes that the two Thessalonians epistles were sent to different groups or different recipients because the literary similarity is so close. Several options have been suggested:

1) 1 Thessalonians was written to Gentile Christians who constituted the majority of the congregation of the Thessalonians, whereas 2 Thessalonians was written to a small minority of Jewish Christians, the reason being that the second epistle uses the Old Testament and lacks any specific reference to the Gentiles.<sup>38</sup>

2) 1 Thessalonians was sent to the leaders of the Thessalonian church, whereas 2 Thessalonians was written to the whole congregation.<sup>39</sup>

3) 1 Thessalonians was sent to the Thessalonian church, but 2 Thessalonians was sent to the church in Berea.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> For more details, see Bailey, "II Thessalonians," 140-43; Best, *Thessalonians*, 38-42; Hiebert, *Thessalonians*, 288-89; Morris, *Thessalonians*, 31-33; Williams, *Thessalonians*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> A hint for this hypothesis was suggested originally by W. Wrede, *Die Echtheit des Zweiten Thessalonicherbriefe* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903), 95-96, and A. Harnack, "Das Problem des zewiten Thessalonischerbriefs," *Sitzungsberichte der königlichen Preussischen Akademie für Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 31 (1910), 560-78, developed this fully. See Storm, *Excommunication*, 13-14. For more details, see Best, *Thessalonians*, 38-39; Frame, *Thessalonians*, 53-54; Hiebert, *Thessalonians*, 288.

<sup>39</sup> M. Dibelius, *An die Thessalonicher I-II. An die Philipper, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 11 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1937), 57-58, suggests this hypothesis. See Best, *Thessalonians*, 39-40.

<sup>40</sup> This hypothesis was originally suggested by Goguel. See Bailey, "II Thessalonians," 140; Best, *Thessalonians*, 40.

4) 1 Thessalonians was sent to the Thessalonian church, but 2 Thessalonians was sent to the church in Philippi.<sup>41</sup>

Though these hypotheses are intriguing, there is no exact evidence to prove them. Furthermore, it is not acceptable to claim that, when Paul wrote his letters to the Thessalonians, he had different groups in the same church in mind, because it “would contradict all of Paul’s emphasis on unity in the church.”<sup>42</sup>

### 2. 3. 3 Reversal of order<sup>43</sup>

This theory inverts the order of the two Thessalonian letters to resolve the difficulties of the relationship between them, especially the contradictory eschatology. Best<sup>44</sup> summarizes Manson’s arguments in this regard as follows:

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<sup>41</sup> This was suggested by E. Schweitzer. See Bailey, “II Thessalonians,” 141; Best, *Thessalonians*, 40.

<sup>42</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> For more details, see Best, *Thessalonians*, 42-45; Green, *Thessalonians*, 64-66; Hiebert, *Thessalonians*, 289-92; Morris, *Thessalonians*, 34-36; C. A. Wanamaker, “2 Thessalonians,” in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament. A Book-by-Book Survey*, edited by K. J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 155-61. Whereas Morris, *Thessalonians*, 36, says that the traditional order of these epistles is the right one, Wanamaker, “2 Thessalonians,” 157, assumes the priority of 2 Thessalonians.

<sup>44</sup> Best, *Thessalonians*, 42-43. He adds the following arguments from Gregson and West: (6) Differences in the eschatological teaching of the two letters ... (7) ... in everything on which 1 & 2 Th. teach 1 Th. is fuller and introduces new material. (8) The church looks much more advanced in 1 Th. than in 2 Th. (9) There is no reference in 2 Th. to Paul’s proposed visit (2 Th. 2.17-3.5) because when he wrote 2 Th. he had not yet had the idea of visiting Thessalonica again. (10) It would be natural that when Timothy went to visit the Thessalonians he would take written greetings from Paul; these written greetings are in fact 2 Th. But he rejects this and gives the objections for this theory. See Best, *Thessalonians*, 43-45. Cf. Thurston, “Relationship,” 52-56.

In 2 Th. the persecutions are a present reality whereas in 1 Th. they belong to the past (2.14). (2) In 2 Th. the unwillingness of some members to work is a new development of which Paul has just been told (3.11-15) but in 1 Th. the same problem seems to be well known (5.14; cf. 4.11 where 'just as we instructed you' refers to 2 Th. 3.5ff). (3) The emphasis in 2 Th. 3.17 on the letter's genuineness is only appropriate in a first letter. (4) 1 Th. 5.1 says that there is no need of instruction about dates and times for this has already been given in 2 Th. 2.3-12. (5) In 1 Th. 4.9-5.11 Paul is replying to points raised by the Thessalonians and each of these points depends on previous discussions in 2 Th.

## 2. 4 Conclusion

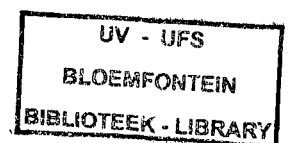
I investigated the authorship of 2 Thessalonians in this section. The debate is still under way and it is safe to say that to reach a definite conclusion on it is difficult. I myself, however, stand on the side of scholars who believe 2 Thessalonians was written by Paul. Though Timothy and Silas are mentioned as co-senders in the epistolary prescript, it seems correct to accept that they might not have contributed directly to its writing.

In conclusion, the arguments for the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians are multifarious, but they are not decisive, as I have indicated above. Most of the evidence is "in the collective force of various weak arguments."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 63.

Moreover, even though it may be accepted that 2 Thessalonians was not written by Paul and it is pseudonymous, it is still true that 2 Thessalonians represents conditions that existed in the church in Thessalonica. In other words, 2 Thessalonians reflects the specific situation of the church in Thessalonica. Therefore it can not be questioned that 2 Thessalonians may be used as a source to get information concerning the situation of the church in Thessalonica.



### Chapter 3 The problem of the ἄτακτοι in the church of the Thessalonians

In 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12, 5:12-15 implicitly, and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 (more obviously), Paul deals with a significant problem that occurred in the church of the Thessalonians. Though he gives instructions both with regard to eschatology and “the idle” as main themes, the majority of New Testament scholars gives attention only to the former, neglecting the latter.

In this chapter, I will define the problem of “the idle” in the church of the Thessalonians and investigate the disciplinary measures offered by Paul.

#### 3. 1 Definition of ἄτακτοι

In the first half of 1 Thessalonians Paul mentions his boasting about the conduct of the Thessalonians (1:2-10), his preaching of the gospel in Thessalonica (2:1-16) and his desire to return to them (2:17-3:13). Then he provides general instructions (4:1-12), followed by a significant teaching on the resurrection of the dead (4:13-18) and on the times and dates of “the day of the Lord” (5:1-11). Paul specifically discusses these issues, because he probably was told that the Thessalonians were unsure about the resurrection of the dead and the coming day of the Lord (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13; 5:1). This part is then again followed by general instructions (5:12-22) and Paul closes his letter with some inquiries and a last greeting (5:23-28).



In 1 Thessalonians, though Paul mentions “the idle” (5:14; cf. 4:11-12), it is not clear whether “the idle” had really become an issue in the church. In 2 Thessalonians, however, Paul recognizes the seriousness of the problem of “the idle” (2 Thess. 3:11) and he admonishes the Thessalonians in this regard, suggesting church discipline (2 Thess. 3:6-15). This means that “the idle” have caused problems in the church and that part of the congregation has been influenced negatively by them.

Paul was told that “there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies” (2 Thess. 3:11 KJV). It is unsure who/what the source of the report was, but perhaps it might have been Timothy who carried 1 Thessalonians to the congregation of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:2); otherwise it might have been a letter from the church in Thessalonica.<sup>1</sup> The first possibility seems to be the best; It is likely that Timothy carried 1 Thessalonians to the congregation and brought back some reports on the congregation, including the problem of “the idle” in the church.

When Paul shifts his attention to the problem of “the idle” in the church in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 11, he employs the term *ατακτ-/ἄτακτοι*. In some English translations, this is translated as follows:

“Some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are

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<sup>1</sup> A. J. Malherbe, “Did the Thessalonians write to Paul?” in *The Conversation Continues. Studies in Paul & John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, edited by Robert T. Fortna & Beverly R. Gaventa (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 248-57. Malherbe assumes communications (either an oral report or a written letter) between Paul and the Thessalonians before Paul sent 1 Thessalonians to the church of the Thessalonians.

busybodies" (KJV);

"Some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies"

(NIV);

"Some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work"

(RSV).

As the English translations show, scholars disagree on the meaning of ἄτακτοι. What is the meaning of the term ἄτακτοι? Were some of the Thessalonians simply idle and lazy? Or did they behave wrongly and walk disorderly? Was the conduct of "the idle" an occasional slip? Or was it a persistent act? Could they not find the work? Or did they not want to work?

Some<sup>2</sup> suggest that "the idle" did not work because they were lazy and idle. Choosing for the possibility of laziness rather than disorderly behaviour, Ellingworth and Nida<sup>3</sup> state:

In the notes on 1 Thess. 5.14, reasons have been given for thinking that Paul's main attack is against laziness rather than disorderly conduct, though both meanings are possible. Verses 7-10 show clearly that the first meaning is primarily intended here. Paul insists, not on the fact that

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<sup>2</sup> P. Ellingworth & E. A. Nida (eds.), *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), 199-200; C. R. Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica. Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 167-68.

<sup>3</sup> Ellingworth and Nida, *Translator's Handbook*, 199

he lived an orderly life in Thessalonica, but on the fact that he worked.

T. J. Burke<sup>4</sup> gives the reason that some scholars believe that ἄτακτοι refers to being idle or lazy as being that the term originates from “the papyri of the Hellenistic period,” where it “means ‘idle’ or ‘lazy.’”

Most scholars<sup>5</sup>, however, accept the view that ἀτακτ- meant “out of order,” “disorderly” or “undisciplined,” and that “the idle” were not just lazy or idle persons, but disorderly persons in the church. To them it is clear that ἀτακτ- indicates “an unwillingness to work for one’s keep but a willingness to be a burden on others.”<sup>6</sup>

Some<sup>7</sup> argue that the term ἄτακτοι is connected to a military term employed for a soldier who was out of rank or for an undisciplined army. Though it is linked to a military term, it indicates “unruliness and

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<sup>4</sup> T. J. Burke, *Family Matters. A Social-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians* (London/New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2003), 216-17. Nicholl, *Hope*, 167, also gives some clues to interpret it and says that scholars opting for this view “often appeal to P. Oxy. 2.275.24-5 and 4.725.39-40, which, they claim, lend credence to the possibility that in contemporary parlance ἀτακτ- could be used of idleness.” The italics indicate Burke’s emphasis.

<sup>5</sup> E. Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: A & C Black, 1986), 331-45; T. J. Burke, *Family*, 241-44; B. R. Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1998), 127-29; G. L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 341-53; D. E. Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 367-77; R. Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence. Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 104-105; B. Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians. A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 188-93.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholl, *Hope*, 167.

<sup>7</sup> Burke, *Family*, 216; Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 104; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 456.

insubordination” and a “general lack of submission to the accepted rules of life, disruptive and disorderly behavior in general.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, “the idle” were not just lazy or idle; they rather rebelled against order, behaving in an undisciplined and disorderly way. They did not walk in accordance with the tradition<sup>9</sup> passed from Paul and the example of Paul and his company (2 Thess. 3:6-9). They thus broke Paul’s teaching that “if any one will not work, let him not eat” as well (2 Thess. 3:10).

R. Jewett<sup>10</sup> has linked “the idle” to “resisting authority” because they were not living according to the tradition handed to them. Though the tradition passed from Paul had authority in the church, they refused to obey the authority of the church, behaving in a controversial way.<sup>11</sup>

Some<sup>12</sup> believe that “the idle” were ashamed of labour for one’s livelihood because they were influenced by certain Cynic preachers who disregarded manual labour as humbleness. The definite evidence for this is not clear, but it is possible that Paul and his colleague performed manual labour (2 Thess. 3:8; cf. Acts 18:3) in order to correct such wrong ideas. Such an example of Paul and his company would have been “particularly forceful because…they had the right to such support, but

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<sup>8</sup> Thurston, *Reading*, 190.

<sup>9</sup> M. J. J. Menken, “Paradise Regained or Still Lost? Eschatology and Disorderly Behaviour in 2 Thessalonians,” *NTS* 38 (1992), 276, indicates that the example tradition of primitive Christianity had “an ethical object …, which derives, via Jewish tradition, from the OT.”

<sup>10</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 104-105. Cf. C. A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 281-82.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholl, *Hope*, 168, understands the tradition to refer to “generally accepted catechetical apostolic ordinances on account of the definite article.”

<sup>12</sup> J. M. G. Barclay, “Conflict in Thessalonica,” *CBQ* 55 (1993), 523; Burke, *Family*, 217.

chose to forfeit their right with a view to setting an example in regard to *willingness* to work, especially for manual labourers.”<sup>13</sup>

The problem caused by “the idle” is not that they did not work for their living but that they were dependent on others such as patrons, either wealthier members of the congregation or unconverted patrons, and that they were busybodies. In 1 Thessalonians Paul commands the Thessalonians “to work with your hands . . . to be dependent on no body” (1 Thess. 4:11, 12). This indicates that “the idle” did not work with their own hands but were dependent on others.

Moreover, 2 Thessalonians 3:11 suggests that “the idle” caused trouble.<sup>14</sup> In 2 Thessalonians 3:11 Paul uses the participle περιεργαζομένους which means “to meddle,” “to intervene,” “to interfere.” It is used only here in the whole New Testament (cf. Acts 19:19; 1 Tim. 5:13 in the noun form). Thus, “the idle” were not busy working for their livelihood but busy meddling in others’ business.<sup>15</sup>

In 1 Thessalonians Paul referred to “the idle,” but it does not seem as if they had caused any trouble yet. In 2 Thessalonians, however, the problem of “the idle” had intensified and had an effect on the believers and/or non-believers. Paul, therefore, gave some instructions to them in

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<sup>13</sup> Nicholl, *Hope*, 169. The italics indicate Nicholl’s emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> The trouble caused by “the idle” was not plain in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, but Barclay, “Conflict,” 522, believes that “the idle” ceased their work “in order to engage . . . preaching of the gospel” to outsiders in the manner of “aggressive evangelistic activity.” Burke, following Barclay’s view, *Family*, 221, indicates that “aggressive evangelistic activity” provoked the Thessalonian citizens so that persecution followed.

<sup>15</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 351.

order to resolve the problem of “the idle” in the church in Thessalonica.

What is the nature, then, of the problem of “the idle” in the church of the Thessalonians?

Firstly, “the idle” violated the rule of God rather than a social criterion or a social rule. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6, Paul says that “the idle” were “not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.” What kind of tradition did they receive from Paul? Within the context it is indicated that a man should work for his living. In keeping with the tradition Paul and his company “did not eat any one’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labour we worked night and day” (2 Thess. 3:8).

Paul, moreover, indicates that the conduct of “the idle” was contrary to the order of God himself. When Paul was with the Thessalonians he gave them the command “If any one will not work, let him not eat.” In this teaching the word of God to Adam can be traced. Genesis 3:17-19 states:

... cursed is the ground because of you;  
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread  
till you return to the ground ...

It is clear that, according to Paul's teaching and the tradition, man has to work hard for his living, but "the idle" disobeyed this and were unwilling to work for their living.

Secondly, the behaviour of "the idle" was contrary to the example of Paul and his company. When Paul did missionary work in Thessalonica, he did not depend on the new converts. Rather he and his colleagues worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that they might not burden any of them, wanting to set them an example to imitate (2 Thess. 3:8, 9). In other words, Paul and his co-workers demonstrated that they did not want to burden the converts, showing that dependence on others was contrary to the order of God.

However, "the idle" were hostile to the teaching and example of Paul and his company and did indeed depend on other believers and/or non-believers. Though Paul worked hard in order to set an example to them, they refused to follow his example and teaching.

Thirdly, the essence of problem of "the idle" was that they were a burden to believers and caused trouble in the church. In 1 Thessalonians Paul gives a command "to aspire to live quietly." What does Paul mean by "to aspire to live quietly"? Does it mean to stop the normal earthly life? Or does it mean something else?

B. W. Winter argues that Paul's command refers to withdrawal from

“the public activities,”<sup>16</sup> including political propaganda for patrons. Burke<sup>17</sup> states:

[A] client's duties included not only greeting the benefactor each morning with the *salutatio* or ‘morning salute’ but also appearing with them in public, being involved in their political campaigns and so on, activities that it is difficult to square with being idle.

Barclay<sup>18</sup> suggests that Paul's command “to be eager to live quietly” pointed to those who refused to work in order to concentrate upon preaching of the gospel to non-believers in an aggressive manner. This was necessary because the Thessalonian Christians' attitude scorned “Greco-Roman religion” and they made “public attacks on the ‘idols’ and ‘so-called gods’” which might have had “enormous potential for causing offense.”<sup>19</sup>

It is, therefore, likely that Paul's command “to aspire to live quietly” means that they as clients had to keep away from political propaganda or public affairs for their patrons for their livelihood. Instead Paul exhorts the disorderly believers “to work with your hands” in order that “you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody” (1 Thess. 4:12).

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<sup>16</sup> B. W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/Paternoster Press, 1994), 48.

<sup>17</sup> Burke, *Family*, 216. Cf. Green, *Thessalonians*, 208-11.

<sup>18</sup> Barclay, “Social Contrast,” 53; “Conflict,” 522, 528.

<sup>19</sup> Barclay, “Conflict,” 521-25. Cf. Burke, *Family*, 220-24.



Fourthly, the conduct of disorderly people did not only discourage the congregation, especially the brethren from doing well (1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:13), but also gave non-believers a bad idea of the church (1 Thess. 4:12). In 2 Thessalonians 3:13 Paul exhorts them "Do not be weary in well-doing." This indicates that some of the congregation were negligent in doing what was right.<sup>20</sup>

1 Thessalonians 4:12, moreover, indicates that the action of "the idle" was not the proper way to behave toward outsiders; it harmed the good reputation of the church amongst the non-believers. Therefore Paul gave a command "to work with your hands" in order to get the respect of outsiders.

### 3. 2 Disciplinary measures offered by Paul

Paul did recognize the problem of disorderly believers in 1 Thessalonians; however, it seems that he did not find it necessary to deal with it seriously. He did give instructions to "the idle" more than once (cf. 1 Thess. 4:11; 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:10), but the Thessalonian congregation apparently did not obey his teaching. In the mean time while the problem had become more serious and Paul accordingly dealt with it as a main issue in 2 Thessalonians. I will now investigate the disciplinary measures indicated by Paul and then explain the meaning of

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<sup>20</sup> Scholars have different opinions on what "doing well" means. Some understand it as doing charity, doing well generally or working for one's living, but Lenski, *Interpretation*, 465, believes that it does not mean "extending charity" but "doing excellent things." Green, *Thessalonians*, 353, interprets it as abandoning "client status." For more details, see Lenski, *Interpretation*, 465-66; Hiebert, *Thessalonians*, 377; Green, *Thessalonians*, 353.

them in this section.

In 1 Thessalonians Paul commands the Thessalonians “to aspire to live quietly,” “to work with your hands” (1 Thess. 4:11) and exhorts them to give a warning to the disorderly members in the congregation (5:14). Paul’s statements thus indicate that the situation of the disorderly members’ conduct was not yet serious.

However, this mood changed and it became more severe in 2 Thessalonians. Paul commands the Thessalonian Christians to “keep away” from the disorderly believers (2 Thess. 3:6) and “do not associate with him … who does not obey our instruction in this letter” (3:14 NIV).

Moreover, his command is given “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When Paul gives this command to the Thessalonians, he does not announce it in terms of his own authority but in terms of the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup> Paul thus believes that the source of his teaching and preaching is God himself (cf. 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:4, 13; Rom. 1:5). Therefore the title “our Lord Jesus Christ” offers “dignity to His person, recalling all that believers acknowledge Him to be” and forces the Thessalonians to carry out “disciplinary responsibility as those who acknowledge His lordship.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> B. Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 250. However, Hiebert, *Thessalonians*, 368, says that this supplies “a tone of dignified formality” and points out “the gravity of the command.” On the other hand, Lenski, *Interpretation*, 453, says that the phrase “our Lord Jesus Christ” does not mean “the authority of Christ” but always “the revelation,” so that Paul’s statement means “in connection with the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

<sup>22</sup> Hiebert, *Thessalonians*, 368. Ellingworth and Nida, *Translator’s Handbook*, 199, say

Scholars investigate the meaning of “keep away” and “do not associate” because Paul does not give the detail of the action the congregation ought to take. Nicholl<sup>23</sup> summarises the possibilities to resolve the debate as follows:

1) interpreting *στέλλεσθαι* in verse 6 as temporary excommunication and the warnings of verse 15 as administered outside the context of community meetings; or 2) restricting the disassociation to a bar on fellowship at meals (and perhaps church meetings); or 3) interpreting verse 15 as referring primarily to the conduct of the majority at the initiation of the disciplinary ostracism rather than during it; or 4) viewing verses 14-15 as belonging to a distinct section from verses 6ff.

The word *στέλλεσθαι* means “shun,” “avoid,” “keep away” or “withdraw.”<sup>24</sup> Scholars disagree whether this command indicates excommunication of the offender. Most<sup>25</sup> of them suggest that Paul’s command does not focus on compulsory excommunication but on denial

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that Paul gentles his command in several ways: 1) He uses the pronoun “we” instead of “I”; 2) He does not ask the Thessalonians “to do anything that he and his companions have not done themselves”; 3) He uses the softer word “warn” in verse 12.

<sup>23</sup> Nicholl, *Hope*, 167. He says that options 3) and 4) would be difficult to accept as a proper interpretation, but that it is too difficult to decide between 1) and 2).

<sup>24</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 344-45, lists several forms used in the New Testament. Thurston, *Reading*, 190, says that this form is rare and the root first means “get ready” and then means “gathering up.” It also connotes “flinching” or “avoiding” in this context.

<sup>25</sup> Ellingworth and Nida, *Translator’s Handbook*, 200-201; Hiebert, *Thessalonians*, 368-69; Lenski, *Interpretation*, 454-56.

of association with the disorderly believers. Calvin,<sup>26</sup> however, does not exclude the possibility that Paul commands the congregation to expel the disorderly believers. He believes that Paul's command in verse 6 was not connected with a "public excommunication" but with a "private intercourse," but in verse 14 he assumes that Paul commands the disorderly believers "to be excommunicated."<sup>27</sup>

In 2 Thessalonians 3:14 Paul uses the term *συναναμίγνυμι* which means "mix with," "associate with" or "to do with." It appears only here and 1 Corinthians 5:9 in the New Testament. Paul commands the Thessalonians not to "mix with" the disobedient believers or to "associate with" the disorderly members in the congregation. Ellingworth and Nida<sup>28</sup> indicate that Paul's statement presents "a kind of ostracism" because his command is equivalent to "do not have a talk to" or "do not invite" the disobedient Christians. Green<sup>29</sup> suggests that this means a "social separation"; in this case this does not mean "contemplate such drastic measures," though this sometimes means "excommunication of the member from the community of faith."

Hiebert<sup>30</sup> also suggests that Paul's command indicates that the Thessalonians have to reject the disobedient members' request to

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<sup>26</sup> J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 353, 359. Cf. Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 289.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Ellingworth and Nida, *Translator's Handbook*, 209.

<sup>29</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 344-45.

<sup>30</sup> Hiebert, *Thessalonians*, 369.

participate "in the love feasts of the congregation as well as the Lord's Supper." Wanamaker<sup>31</sup> proposes that Paul commands the Thessalonians to expel the disobedient brothers from "any form of participation in the common meals of the community where the Lord's Supper took place."

Many scholars<sup>32</sup> think that the command in 2 Thessalonians 3 does not mean excommunication from the congregation but exclusion from the Lord's Supper and/or the love feast, because Paul says "Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother" in verse 15.

However, it is not necessary to conclude that Paul's words in verse 15 exclude excommunication from the congregation. Though Paul's command does not mean a forced excommunication, it would include expelling the disorderly members from the congregation in the final stage.<sup>33</sup>

We should also ask who is the subject in the practice of the church discipline in the church of the Thessalonians. I. Havener<sup>34</sup> insists that

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<sup>31</sup> Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 289. K. Hein, *Eucharist and Excommunication* (Bern: Herbert Lang & Co., 1974), 77, and W. Baird, *The Corinthian Church: A Biblical Approach to Urban Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 69, suggests that the verb *συναναμίγνυμι* in 5:9 and 11 refers to the Eucharist.

<sup>32</sup> R. L. Thomas, *I, 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 335-36; G. B. Wilson, *I & II Thessalonians. A Digest of Reformed Comment* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 114.

<sup>33</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation*, 455, says that this step is a preliminary one to "the effect of which is calculated to make unnecessary the final step." If this step were not successful, the congregation would have to expel the disobedient believers from them completely.

<sup>34</sup> I. Havener, "A Curse for Salvation - 1 Corinthians 5:1-5," in *Sin, Salvation and the Spirit*, edited by D. Durken (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1979), 334. For more details, see Part III. 3.

“ecclesiastical discipline” was practised “in a completely undemocratic, highly authoritarian manner.” In other words, Paul had already decided on the judgement of “the idle” and the congregation only had to act according to Paul’s decision. Therefore, one could think that the congregation only played a role in the sense that they had to approve Paul’s conclusion.

However, it is important to take note that Paul appeals to the whole congregation for a decision with regard to the disorderly believers. Although he was obviously using his personal influence with the congregation (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6), the practice of discipline was left ultimately to the Thessalonian Christians. Therefore, the whole church bore responsibility for the discipline; not only the apostle or church officials.<sup>35</sup>

It is observed therefore that the subject of the church discipline was neither only the apostle nor the elders of the community; rather it was a co-operational action with Paul the apostle and the Thessalonian congregation.

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<sup>35</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 345.

## Chapter 4 A theological approach to the problem of the idle in the church of the Thessalonians

As I indicated in Part I, a theological approach focuses on theological issue(s), theological meaning(s) and belief (or beliefs) in the text. In particular, when scholars following a theological approach interpret the problem of “the idle”, they concentrate on the theological background of the particular conduct, which kind of theological issue caused the problem, the background of the church discipline and/or what kind of theological perspective surfaces in the study of church discipline.

As I indicated in the previous chapter, the nature of “the idle” was not so much that they were lazy and idle, but that they did not want to work and were dependent on others for their livelihood.

Paul expected the Thessalonians “to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands” (1 Thess. 4:11), but the disorderly did not obey him. Moreover, Paul, together with his company, were an example for them in that he worked with his own hands for his livelihood (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8-9; see also Acts 18:2-3; 1 Cor. 4:12); yet the Thessalonians did not follow in Paul’s footsteps, but instead depended on others. Why did they not obey Paul’s teaching? It is observed by some that they were familiar with the system of patronage or the relationship between patrons and clients in terms of the social network in Thessalonica and therefore did not want to give up this

status.<sup>1</sup>

Though this point of view could go some way as an explanation to resolve the problem of "the idle," it does not explain sufficiently why these Christians rejected Paul's command and example. From Paul's letters, it is clear that the Thessalonians had served idols, but when they heard the gospel from Paul they "turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). Moreover, Paul was proud of his converts, because "When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13).

From Paul's statement one can reasonably deduce that, although they were familiar with the system of patronage and used to living in a client status, they gave up this social custom when they received the teaching and the example from Paul, which made it clear that they should work with their own hands for their living. Paul offered himself as an example and gave such an instruction in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 and 5:14 (cf. also 2 Thess. 3:9-10). However, they would not obey God's word as it was preached by Paul and preferred to keep on depending on others for their livelihood.

Why did the disorderly disobey Paul's command and choose to keep on depending on believers in the church and/or non-believers? In my view, the theological background behind the problem of the disorderly

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<sup>1</sup> See Part I. 1. 1; 1. 2 and Part II. 5.



gave rise to this situation. In this chapter, I will thus investigate the theological background of the problem of “the idle” in the church of the Thessalonians and what kind of theological background gave rise to this situation.

#### 4. 1 Spiritual enthusiasm

In the research of the situation in Thessalonica, it has been proposed by some that “spiritual enthusiasm” formed the background for the problem of “the idle.”<sup>2</sup> After Wilhelm Lütgert had researched the circumstances of the church of the Thessalonians and had compared it with the churches in Corinth and Galatia, he identified a different style for each Christian community.<sup>3</sup> According to Jewett, some Thessalonian believers “identified the gift and manifestations of the Spirit that they had experienced with the strange ‘*parousia*’ of which Paul spoke.”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, this group associated with “a group of leaders who vied with Paul’s authority by offering a superior level of charismatic freedom and power.”<sup>5</sup> They thought that they had the Spirit and the *parousia* of Jesus Christ had already occurred. According to Lütgert,<sup>6</sup> the core of their thought was that

If the day of the Lord is already present, it follows that what one expected

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<sup>2</sup> R. Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence. Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 142-49; Wilhelm Lütgert, “Die Volkommenen im Philipperbrief und die Enthusiasten in Thessalonich,” *Beiträge zur Forderung christlicher Theologie* 13 (1909), 547-654.

<sup>3</sup> Lütgert, “Volkommenen,” 547-623.

<sup>4</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 143. Cf. Lütgert, “Volkommenen,” 632.

<sup>5</sup> Lütgert, “Volkommenen,” 618-23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 637ff.

as resurrection has already occurred. There is therefore no more resurrection to be expected.

J. M. Reese<sup>7</sup> employs the term “radical enthusiasts” to refer to the Thessalonian Christians who thought that the *parousia* of Jesus had already occurred. C. L. Mearns also investigated the religious context of the church of the Thessalonians and describes the disorderly as “enthusiasts who felt oversure that they enjoyed the present possession of the Kingdom of God, with its accompanying charismatic powers.”<sup>8</sup>

The Thessalonian Christians probably believed that “the new age was realized in their enthusiastic activities”<sup>9</sup> and accordingly, they felt that they should focus on spiritual activities instead of earthly manual work for their living.

It is further suggested by some scholars that the problem of the disorderly was associated with “a radicalization of what Paul had taught”<sup>10</sup> to the Thessalonian Christians. F. F. Bruce<sup>11</sup> thinks that some Thessalonian Christians who had lived in a disorderly manner had “an

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<sup>7</sup> James M. Reese, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1979), 90. Cf. E. W. Saunders, *1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, Philemon* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 2ff, 41, who states that “the distorted views of spiritual perfection” and “heady enthusiasm” were rife in the Thessalonian church.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher L. Mearns, “Early Eschatological Development in Paul: The Evidence of I and II Thessalonians” *NTS* 27 (1980-81), 141.

<sup>9</sup> Colin R. Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica. Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 105.

<sup>10</sup> C. A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 54-55.

<sup>11</sup> F. F. Bruce, “St. Paul in Macedonia: 2. The Thessalonian Correspondence.” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library in Manchester* 62 (1980), 333.

over-enthusiastic expectation of the imminent advent of Christ” because Paul’s teaching on eschatological issues was “imperfectly digested.” According to Bruce, it is likely that Paul taught the Thessalonian Christians concerning “the Parousia of the Lord” and some of them then interpreted it in a “spiritual enthusiastic form.”<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, they believed that they were spiritually superior and that “in receiving the Spirit they had experienced the eschatological event of the Parousia of the Lord.”<sup>13</sup>

Because some members of the Thessalonian church thought that the *parousia* of Jesus Christ had already occurred, they did not feel the need to work for their living. It is also pointed out by some that spiritual enthusiastic movements have a tendency to foster the notion that “labor was unnecessary for the ecstatic.”<sup>14</sup> Moreover the notion that “Spirit-filled leaders” could demand “monetary compensation from the less enlightened admirers as an acknowledgement of transcendent superiority”<sup>15</sup> was widespread in the Greco Roman world. Accordingly, it is likely that the disorderly in the Thessalonians church thought that they had the Spirit and that they were superior to ordinary Christians in the congregation and that they could therefore demand support for their living instead of working with their hands.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 54-55.

<sup>14</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 144.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

#### 4. 2 Paul's opponents

Other scholars,<sup>16</sup> such as T. J. Burke and K. P. Donfried, have suggested that the erring members were associated with Paul's opponents in the church of the Thessalonians. According to them, the disorderly in the church opposed the authority and teachings of Paul and/or the leaders of the church.

After Paul had fled from Thessalonica to Berea on short notice (Acts 17:10), the Thessalonian Christians were left with no leadership. Although Paul was eager to see and to come to the Thessalonian converts again, this did not materialize because of Satan's hindrance (1 Thess. 2:17-18). He probably received some reports from Thessalonica about his flight and his apostleship, and then he wrote a letter to the Thessalonians to reply to it.

During Paul's absence some members of the Thessalonian church criticized the "charismatic authority"<sup>17</sup> of Paul, because it was a "self-claimed authority," and, also because, by fleeing to Berea, he abandoned the Thessalonian converts. It is likely that some Thessalonian Christians argued that if Paul really were an authentic apostle, he would not have fled and deserted them. It also seems that they did not only deny Paul's apostolic authority but also the authority of the church leaders (cf. 1 Thess. 5:12) and thus acted in a disorderly manner against

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<sup>16</sup> T. J. Burke, *Family Matters. A Social-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians* (London/New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2003), 241-44; K. P. Donfried, *Paul, Thessalonica, and Early Christianity* (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2002), 62-67. Cf. R. Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 149-57.

<sup>17</sup> B. Holmberg, *Paul and Power* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 159.

Paul's teaching and example (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6-9).<sup>18</sup>

Although Wanamaker<sup>19</sup> presents Jewett's hypothesis that the disorderly in the Thessalonian church were connected to travelling preachers who accepted a "divine man ideology" and that they thought that they "transcended the normal bounds of human experience" he concludes that "Jewett has misunderstood the questions of the ἄτακτοι by not considering the proper social origin of the problem."

Though this hypothesis might be a reason why some members of the Thessalonian Christians refused Paul's teaching and his example of daily work, it is difficult to say that this was the definite motive.

#### 4. 3 Realised eschatology

Most scholars<sup>20</sup> approach the problem of "the idle" in the

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<sup>18</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 104-105, believes that the disorderly members of the Thessalonian congregation were "resisting the authority" of Paul, because they were not in accord with the tradition received from Paul (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6) and rebelled against his teaching and example. Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 281-82, also considers this, but does not accept it. Nicholl, *Hope*, 168, believes the tradition to refer to "generally accepted catechetical apostolic ordinances on account of the definite article." Though the tradition coming from Paul had authority in the church; the disorderly members refused to obey it, behaving in a controversial way.

<sup>19</sup> Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 55, 57. Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 151-55, presents four forms of evidence for this suggestion: 1) Negative correlations with features of undesirable leadership; 2) Connections with divine man behaviour in Corinth; 3) Competitive correlations with divine man ideology; 4) General similarities between the Thessalonian radicals and divine men. For more details, see Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 149-57.

<sup>20</sup> E. Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: A & C Black, 1986), 331-45; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Waco: Word Publishers, 1982), 204-209; C. H. Giblin, "The Heartening Apocalyptic of Second Thessalonians," *TBT* 26 (1988), 350-54; K. Grayston, *The Letters of Paul to the Philippians and to the Thessalonians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 108ff.; M. J. J. Menken, "Paradise Regained or Still Lost? Eschatology and

Thessalonian congregation from the perspective of eschatology. They believe that the root of the disorderly behaviour was an eschatological hope originating from the Thessalonians' belief in the imminence of the *parousia* of Jesus Christ. In other words, their belief that Jesus Christ would return soon led them to desert their daily work for a living so that they could concentrate fully on spiritual preparation such as eschatological reflection, prayer, and the preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and/or their belief to believers and/or non-believers. It seems as if this group then suffered poverty and this caused a problem for both Christians and non-Christians.

Some of the congregation apparently even believed that the Day of the Lord had already come (2 Thess. 2:2). According to 2 Thessalonians 2:2, they should "Not be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by a letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come (NRSV)." This implies that Paul had been told that the Thessalonian church thought that the *parousia* of Jesus Christ had already occurred and that he was weary of it and gave an instruction to the Thessalonian Christians with regard to it.

If the *parousia* of Jesus were imminent or had arrived already, as some members thought, then ordinary work and earthly economic life in general were of no meaning anymore. Some Christians might even have

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Disorderly Behaviour in 2 Thessalonians," *NTS* 38 (1992), 271-89; B. Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians. A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 190ff.; C. A. Wanamaker, "Apocalypticism at Thessalonica," *Neot* 21 (1987), 1-10. Cf. Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 161-78.

left their daily work simply to await the *parousia* of the Lord. Some of them might have stopped working to concentrate on something they felt more important, that is preaching the gospel of the *parousia* of Jesus Christ. And they obviously depended on the charity of other believers and/or non-believers and/or the church to support their living. It seems as if this group then suffered poverty and this caused a problem for both insiders and outsiders.

Scholars<sup>21</sup> differ on the interpretation of the phrase ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου in 2 Thessalonians 2:2. Though it could be translated as “the day of the Lord is imminent,”<sup>22</sup> most scholars understand it as follows: “the day of the Lord has already come” (NIV); “the day of the Lord has come” (RSV); “the day of the Lord is already here” (NRSV). It is possible that majority of the Thessalonian believers were convinced that “the day of Christ is at hand” (KJV), but the disorderly thought that “the day of the Lord has already come” (NIV) and that they already lived in the new age.

What did the statement “the day of the Lord has already come (NIV)” mean? Some scholars distinguish between “the day of the Lord” and “the *parousia* of the Lord” and suggest that it does not mean that the day of Christ has already come but that “the chain of events which eventually lead up to the Parousia has began.”<sup>23</sup> However, it seems as if Paul

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<sup>21</sup> J. E. Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 248ff.; Menken, “Paradise,” 280-85.

<sup>22</sup> Menken, “Paradise,” 280. KJV follows this and translates it “the day of Christ is at hand.”

<sup>23</sup> Frame, *Thessalonians*, 248. Cf. G. S. Holland, *The Tradition That You Received from*

employs the two phrases in the same way in his epistles (cf. 1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 15:23; Phil. 1:10; 2:16; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:14; 5:2, 23).<sup>24</sup>

Therefore it should be accepted from the context of 2 Thessalonians that the disorderly thought that the *parousia* of Jesus Christ had already occurred, that he had begun the new age and that they accordingly lived in the new age.<sup>25</sup>

Y. Talmon<sup>26</sup> investigated the religious condition of the Thessalonian church and she employs the terms "millenarian movement" to describe it. The peculiarities of such religious movements include "a sense of impending crisis, a this-worldly orientation, a tendency toward ecstatic, antinomian behavior, and competition between inspired prophets and local organizers."<sup>27</sup> Talmon<sup>28</sup> points out that "The majority of millenarian movements are *messianic*" and include the advent of a "god-ordained representative of the divine," a "long departed warrior hero

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*Us: 2 Thessalonians in the Pauline Tradition* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), 96-121. Holland also distinguishes between "the day of the Lord" which starts the day of God's wrath and "the Parousia of Christ" which precedes the former event.

<sup>24</sup> See Frame, *Thessalonians*, 248-49.

<sup>25</sup> Menken, "Paradise," 283-85.

<sup>26</sup> Y. Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," *Archives européennes de sociologie* 7 (1966), 159-200. Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," 161ff., says that "The millenarian conception of salvation is *total* in the sense that the new dispensation will bring about not mere improvement, but a complete transformation and perfection itself ... The believers will be liberated from all ills and limitations of human existence ... The millennial view of salvation also is *revolutionary* and *catastrophic*. The world has broken away from the divine and is the incarnation of negativity, a counter-creation... The transition from the present intensified missionary activity and new into the ultimate future is...a sudden and revolutionary leap into a totally different level of existence. The transition is usually accompanied by terrible tribulations which are the birth pangs of salvation." The italics indicate Talmon's emphasis.

<sup>27</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 171. For more details, see Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 171-78.

<sup>28</sup> Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," 169. The italics indicate Talmon's emphasis.



who comes to life again and rescues his people," or a "culture hero or a departed leader who had been persecuted and put to death by the authorities."

Talmon's observation implies that the Thessalonian converts were under social pressure. According to the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, Paul and the Thessalonian converts had experienced considerable social pressure from the Jews/non-believers in Thessalonica. As I mentioned above, Paul was the target of the Jews and he fled to Berea under pressure (cf. Acts. 17:1-10).

It is obvious that the Thessalonian Christians were under considerable affliction as well. Paul writes "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6); "For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews" (1 Thess. 2:14 NIV). Paul also mentions the "afflictions" of the Thessalonian believers several times (cf. 1 Thess. 3:3, 4, 7; 2 Thess. 1:4, 6, 7). It is thus clear that the Thessalonian believers experienced social hostility and persecution.<sup>29</sup>

J. M. G. Barclay investigated the social contrasts in Pauline Christianity, especially in Thessalonica and Corinth and observes that "these sibling communities developed remarkably different

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<sup>29</sup> Though there is no clear evidence that those who are "asleep" were martyred for their faith, the possibility of it could not be excluded completely. For more details, see K. P. Donfried, "The Cults of Thessalonica and the Thessalonians Correspondence," *NTS* 31 (1985), 349-50.

interpretations of the Christian faith” because of “the social relationship between Christians and non-Christians.”<sup>30</sup> While the social circumstances between believers and non-believers at Corinth were characterized by “the absence of conflict,”<sup>31</sup> in Thessalonica the relationship between them was full of conflict.

J. M. G. Barclay<sup>32</sup> thinks that the social harassment was linked to eschatological notions which Paul proclaimed: The Thessalonian Christians were under persecution and social harassment and they endured the hardship with “an apocalyptic perspective,”<sup>33</sup> including the notions of a clear distinction between insiders and outsiders, and the *parousia* of Jesus Christ which would save the believers and lead to the

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<sup>30</sup> J. M. G. Barclay, “Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity.” *JSNT* 47 (1992), 50.

<sup>31</sup> Barclay, “Social Contrasts,” 57. For more details, see Barclay, “Social Contrasts,” 57-72. Barclay, “Social Contrasts,” 69-71, explains the reasons why the social context between believers and non-believers in Corinth was harmonious: “Firstly, the Corinthian focus on knowledge and possession of the Spirit creates a distinction from the mass of ordinary people, but *a distinction without a sense of hostility*...the Corinthian symbolic world is structured by contrasts, to be sure, but not such contrasts as represent struggle or conflict; Secondly, Corinthian theology correlates well with the practice of *differentiation without exclusivity*; Thirdly, their religious ethos permits an *involvement in the church which does not entail significant social and moral realignment*.” The italics indicate Barclay’s emphasis.

<sup>32</sup> J. M. G. Barclay, “Conflict in Thessalonica,” *CBQ* 55 (1993), 512-30; “Social Contrasts,” 516-30. L. Hartman, “The Eschatology of 2 Thessalonians as included in a Communication,” in *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, edited by Raymond F. Collins (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 478, believes that the assumption that the Thessalonian Christians “interpreted their suffering as being those of the end” is very reasonable. Cf. also Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 172-78.

<sup>33</sup> Barclay, “Conflict,” 516. For more details, see Barclay, “Conflict,” 516-20. It is argued that Paul provided the Thessalonian Christians with an apocalyptic perspective which connected with the social harassment they experienced. In his epistles to the Thessalonians Paul depicts non-believers as “Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thess. 4:5 NRSV), “outsiders” (1 Thess. 4:12), “others who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13) and “sons of the night or of darkness” (1 Thess. 5:5). While believers will be rescued in the *parousia* of the Lord, “sudden destruction will come upon them...and there will be no escape” (1 Thess. 5:3).

outpouring of God's wrath on the unbelievers. Some of the Thessalonian believers preached "the threat of the imminent outpouring of God's wrath" to non-believers and practised an "aggressive evangelical activity."<sup>34</sup>

On the one hand, this apocalyptic expectation probably helped the Thessalonian believers to endure the social harassment and persecution positively. The apocalyptic understanding that "their sufferings are only to be expected (they are part of the apocalyptic agenda)" and that "they cannot last for long"<sup>35</sup> would encourage them to stand firm.

On the other hand, it distinguished between insiders and outsiders and this would cause a "fundamental social dualism"<sup>36</sup> of believers and unbelievers in Thessalonica. The Thessalonian believers probably made a clear distinction "between those destined for salvation and those destined for wrath"<sup>37</sup> and adopted a hostile attitude towards outsiders. In such an eschatological atmosphere some members in the church apparently stopped their daily work in order to preach the gospel/the *parousia* of the Lord to the believers/non-believers and were dependent on the others for their evangelism. To them the most serious and important thing was not their daily work but evangelism. They might have thought that though the *parousia* of the Lord had already come and Jesus had already inaugurated his work on earth, the rest still had no

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<sup>34</sup> Barclay, "Conflict," 522. Probably some of them also scorned non-believers because they worshiped the idols.

<sup>35</sup> Barclay, "Social Contrasts," 54-55.

<sup>36</sup> Barclay, "Conflict," 517.

<sup>37</sup> Barclay, "Social Contrasts," 55.

knowledge of it.<sup>38</sup> Therefore it is likely that they gave up their daily work and concentrated on preaching the *parousia* of the Jesus Christ and depended on the others for their living.

It has furthermore been suggested that, if the *parousia* of the Lord had already come, as some members of the Thessalonian congregation apparently thought, the command that God gave humans, that they should work for a living (Gen. 3:17-19), was regarded by them as no longer compelling.<sup>39</sup> In this regard it should be pointed out that some prophetic passages of the Old Testament and Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic writings deal with the bliss of the new age and the restoration of Paradise. "Absence of hunger and thirst," "plenty of food and drink" and "freedom from labour" are regarded in such passages as the main contents of the blessings of the new age.<sup>40</sup> For example, *2 Baruch* 73-4<sup>41</sup> seems to echo the curses of Genesis 3:16-19, albeit it in a contrastive way:

And it will happen that after he [the Anointed One] has brought down everything which is in the world, and has sat down in eternal peace on the throne of the kingdom, then joy will be revealed and rest will appear. And then health will descend in dew, and illness will vanish, and fear and

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<sup>38</sup> Menken, "Paradise," 285.

<sup>39</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 173-74; Maarten J. J. Menken, *2 Thessalonians* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 129-41; Menken, "Paradise," 285-87; Thurston, *Reading*, 190.

<sup>40</sup> Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 138.

<sup>41</sup> J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, translated by A. F. J. Klijn (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), 645-46.

tribulation and lamentation will pass away from among men, and joy will encompass the earth. And nobody will again die untimely, nor will any adversity take place suddenly...And women will no longer have pain when they bear, nor will they be tormented when they yield the fruits of their womb. And it will happen in those days that the reapers will not become tired, and the farmers will not wear themselves out, because the products of themselves will shoot out speedily, during the time that they work on them in full tranquillity.

The notable themes of the restoration of Paradise or paradiselike conditions are “the abundance of food,” “tree of life and the absence of toil, labour.”<sup>42</sup> Apparently some members of the Thessalonian Christians believed that the *parousia* of Jesus Christ had already come and the new age had been inaugurated.<sup>43</sup> Therefore they might have believed that the curse of Genesis 3:17-19 had been annulled and thought that “there is no need to work any more, in toil and trouble, for a living.”<sup>44</sup> They concentrated on “their activities to proclaim their message of the

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<sup>42</sup> Menken, “Paradise,” 286. Menken, “Paradise,” 285ff., presents passages of descriptions of paradiselike blessings from apocalyptic writings such as Isa. 11:6-8; 51:3; 65:25; Ezek. 36:35; Hos. 2:20; 2 Baruch 73-4; 4 Ezra 8:52; Rev. 7:16; 21:1-22:5. For more details, see Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 138-41; “Paradise,” 285-87.

<sup>43</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 173, says that “The basic idea is that work as a symbol of the old, fallen age should be replaced with innocent play when the new age arrives or is celebrated.”

<sup>44</sup> Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 140. Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 138-39, believes that the church of the Thessalonians “developed a quirky belief in an overly intense eschatology that led to an impractical abandonment of jobs, an unrealistic expectation of an end to earthly troubles, an inappropriate concern for governmental affairs that were none of their business, an otherworldly distraction from proper responsibilities, and resultant poverty.”

realized *parousia* (2 Thess. 2:2)"<sup>45</sup> to believers and/or non-believers and depended on the others for their living.

It is likely that such a refusal of earthly work indicates "acceptance of a completely realized eschatology."<sup>46</sup> Some of the Thessalonian Christians gave up their daily work and depended on the others because they believed that the *parousia* of Jesus Christ had already occurred and the old curse of labour had been replaced. Thus the excitement over the supposed *parousia* of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:3) or the time and nature of the day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:1-11) seems to have been the main motive for the disorderly behaviour in the church of the Thessalonians.

#### 4. 4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have researched the theological background of the problem of "the idle" that occurred in the church of the Thessalonians. I investigated three main possible theological backgrounds, namely spiritual enthusiasm, Paul's opponents and realised eschatology.

Though these possibilities would help one to understand why some of the Thessalonians Christians refused Paul's teaching and his example of working, as well as why the rest could not practise church discipline on them, I conclude that the last is main motive.

It thus has become clear that, because some of the Thessalonian

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<sup>45</sup> Menken, "Paradise," 287.

<sup>46</sup> Thurston, *Reading*, 190; Menken, "Paradise," 275ff.

Christians believed that the *parousia* of the Lord had already come, the new age had been inaugurated, the curse of labour of Genesis 3:17-19 had been lifted, and accordingly acted in a disorderly manner, Paul tries to correct their over-realised eschatology, attempting to give them “a sense of ‘eschatological realism’” that “definite salvation has not yet been realized” and “the order of Gen 3.17-19 is still in force, as the example of his own conduct shows (3.6-12).”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 140.

## Chapter 5 A sociological approach to the problem of the idle in the church of the Thessalonians

As I have indicated in Part I, a sociological approach focuses on the social and cultural conditions that characterized the Biblical world rather than on the theological notions found in the Biblical texts.<sup>1</sup> In other words, scholars opting for this approach focus on social and cultural features and the surrounding environment that are important for understanding a text rather than on issues such as the theological background of a particular kind of behaviour, what kind of theological issue caused the problem, and/or what kind of theological perspective surfaces in the study of church discipline.

In particular, when scholars following a sociological approach investigate the problem of “the idle,” they concentrate on the social and cultural elements and surroundings underlying the problem of the disorderly in the church of the Thessalonians. In this regard it is clear that the Thessalonians were familiar with the Hellenistic surroundings because they had lived in the Hellenistic society and had been influenced by the Hellenistic culture and thought since birth.

As I indicated in Part II. 3, the nature of “the idle” is not so much that they were lazy and idle, but that they did not want to work and were dependent on others for their living. Though Paul commanded them “to

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 103.



aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands" (1 Thess. 4:11), the disorderly did not obey him. Moreover, although Paul and his company set an example of how to work with one's own hands for a living (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8-9; see also Acts 18:2-3; 1 Cor. 4:12), they did not follow in Paul's steps and chose to depend on the other believers and/or non-believers.

I also linked the reasons for some disorderly members of the Thessalonian Christians refusing to follow Paul's teaching and example to theological issues. As I indicated, some of the Thessalonian Christians abandoned their daily work and might have concentrated on the preaching of the gospel/the *parousia* of the Lord and depended on others, because they believed that the *parousia* of Jesus Christ had already occurred and furthermore believed that the curse of labour of Genesis 3:17-19 had thus been replaced.

While a theological approach to the problem of "the idle" in the church of the Thessalonians helps one to understand why the disorderly abandoned their work and caused trouble in the church, this approach does not go a long way in explaining why the problem of "the idle" specifically occurred in the Thessalonian church. In other words, a theological approach overlooks the fact that the Thessalonian converts lived in a particular social and cultural environment.

From a sociological perspective, the following is important: When the Thessalonian Christians converted to Christianity on hearing the gospel

from Paul, they were new born believers. In other words, although they became Christians, they could not easily replace the customs and thoughts of the Hellenistic environment with those of Christianity. In a sense they lived in a transitional situation. Therefore it is best to accept that they blended notions from a Hellenistic environment with those of Christianity.

In this chapter, I will thus investigate the social and cultural environment underlying the problem of “the idle” that occurred in the church of the Thessalonians.

### 5. 1 Hellenistic philosophy

Some scholars<sup>2</sup> believe that the theological background of “the idle” should be linked to Hellenistic philosophy, according to which physical and manual labour was regarded as menial. In other words, because the Thessalonian converts were familiar with such notions from Hellenistic philosophy, they preferred not to follow Paul’s teaching in this regard.

It is suggested in particular by some scholars that the Thessalonians were affected by Epicureanism. Epicurean philosophers believed that happiness could be obtained by “a quiet life of retirement from the

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<sup>2</sup> R. Aus, *II Thessalonians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 217; R. Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence. Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 147ff.; A. J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 24-27; C. R. Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica. Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 163ff.; B. Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians. A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 191-93.

world.”<sup>3</sup> Thus some of the Thessalonian Christians who followed Epicurean philosophy tended to leave their daily work and responsibility for their livelihood.

It is suggested by others that they were influenced by “Cynic social attitudes.”<sup>4</sup> Cynics taught that the purpose of life was to live a life of virtue in harmony with nature and that happiness could be gained by living totally detached from any possessions. Accordingly, Cynics usually abandoned their daily work in order to preach their belief and used their belief “as a pretense of laziness.”<sup>5</sup> For example, Lucian of Samosata called the Cynics “idle frauds [who] live in unlimited plenty, asking for things in a lordly way, getting them without effort.”<sup>6</sup> The erring believers in Thessalonica might have been influenced by such an attitude, abandoning their daily jobs and depending on others for their livelihood.

Other scholars<sup>7</sup> suggest that it was Gnostic thought that had an influence in Thessalonica and that some of the believers were influenced by Gnosticism, although it does not mean that Gnosticism was already present in its later completely developed form. For example, F. L.

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<sup>3</sup> Thurston, *Reading Colossians*, 190-91.

<sup>4</sup> Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 24-27; Nicholl, *Hope*, 163-64. Cf. also A. J. Malherbe (ed.), *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> Thurston, *Reading Colossians*, 193.

<sup>6</sup> Cited from Thurston, *Reading Colossians*, 193.

<sup>7</sup> See F. L. Fisher, *Paul and his Teachings* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974); R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1966); R. Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence. Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); G. W. MacRae, *Studies in the New Testament and Gnosticism* (Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987); W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971); R. M. Wilson, *Gnosticism in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968).

Fisher<sup>8</sup> proposes that elements of Gnosticism were already common in the Hellenistic world of Paul's time. This was also the case in Thessalonica: The Thessalonians were familiar with the surrounding culture and the Thessalonian believers were converts coming from such a Hellenistic environment. W. Schmithals<sup>9</sup> even presents a list of elements of Gnosticism found in 1 Thessalonians. For example, he interprets 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 9 and 2:1-12 as a response to "typical Gnostic charges" and 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 as a response to "Gnostic libertinism."<sup>10</sup> In particular he believes that an essential premise for understanding the problems in the Thessalonian church is "Gnostic missionaries from other churches."<sup>11</sup>

I thus conclude that Hellenistic philosophies such as Epicureanism, Cynicism and Gnosticism might have influenced the Thessalonian converts. However, to my mind, it is not possible to indicate with certainty that elements of Hellenistic philosophy had a decisive influence on the problem of "the idle."

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<sup>8</sup> Fisher, *Paul*, 145-46.

<sup>9</sup> See Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 31-46, 147-49; C. A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 53-54.

<sup>10</sup> Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 148. For more details, see Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 148-49. He interprets Paul's exhortation to respect the church leaders in 1 Thess. 5:11-12 as an attempt to assimilate "to later Gnostic struggles against church authority."

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5. 2 Voluntary associations

R. S. Ascough<sup>12</sup> has suggested that the background of the disorderly in the church of the Thessalonians should be connected with a “professional voluntary association” in Thessalonica.

For example, Ascough investigated the social formation of the church of the Thessalonians and suggests that the Thessalonian congregation was thoroughly acquainted with “composition and structure to a professional voluntary association.”<sup>13</sup> After an investigation of the constitution of the Thessalonian church, he concludes that “the Thessalonian Christian community was made up of Gentiles”<sup>14</sup> mainly.

Ascough indicates that the Thessalonians were familiar with voluntary associations because they were prevalent throughout Greco-Roman society.<sup>15</sup> These associations existed not only in the urban areas but also in rural districts in the Greco-Roman world. There were two main forms of association. According to Ascough,<sup>16</sup>

- 1) Religious associations organized themselves around the veneration of a particular deity or deities and attracted adherents from the various strata of society;

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<sup>12</sup> R. S. Ascough, “The Thessalonian Christian Community as a Professional Voluntary Association,” *JBL* 119/2 (2000), 311-28.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 313. For his investigation of the member of church, see Ascough, “Professional Voluntary,” 312-13. See also part II. 1. 2.

<sup>15</sup> R. S. Ascough, *What are They Saying about the Formation of Pauline Churches?* (New York/ Mahwah: Paulist, 1998), 71-94, especially 74-79. For more details, see J. S. Kloppenborg, “*Collegai* and *Thiasoi*: Issues in Function, Taxonomy and Membership,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, edited by J. S. Kloppenborg and S. G. Wilson (London/ New York: Routledge, 1996), 16-30.

<sup>16</sup> Ascough, “Professional Voluntary,” 316. Cf. Kloppenborg, “*Collegai*,” 24.

2) Professional associations were more homogeneous, attracting members from within a single profession or related professions.

He assumes that the leaders of the Thessalonian church were linked with “the leaders of many voluntary associations” and then suggests that the Thessalonian church was the very image of a “professional voluntary association.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore one has to read the epistles to the Thessalonians “in light of the data from the voluntary associations”<sup>18</sup> to understand the situation and the problem in the church of the Thessalonians.

I conclude that although the structure of voluntary associations in Thessalonica might help one to gain insight in understanding the problem of “the idle” in the church of the Thessalonians, it does not seem to really provide a sufficient answer from a sociological perspective to the question as to what caused the problem.

### 5. 3 System of patronage

The majority of the scholars<sup>19</sup> following a sociological approach to

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 317, 328. Ascough, “Professional Voluntary,” 318, thinks that the leaders of the Thessalonian church were “chosen from within the association itself and carry on with their everyday tasks as workers while having some authority in official meetings of the association.”

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 318. Ascough, “Professional Voluntary,” 322, also thinks that there are differences between the Thessalonian Christians community and the voluntary associations such as “a community *ethos*.” yet he believes that this is “analogous to the voluntary associations.” The italics indicate Ascough’s emphasis.

<sup>19</sup> J. K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); G. L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*

the problem of “the idle” believes that the system of patronage should be viewed as the main background because, in spite of the fact that eschatological enthusiasm can be indicated with certainty in the Thessalonian church, Paul does not connect the idea of the *parousia* of the Jesus Christ with the problem of “the idle;” neither in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 nor in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 and 5:14. In other words, if the relationship between the disorderly behaviour and an over-realised eschatology were obvious, Paul would have mentioned it.

First of all, I would like to present an outline of the system of patronage generally and then I will focus on the problem of the disorderly behaviour that occurred in the church of the Thessalonians.

According to Green,<sup>20</sup> Roman society had a large number of social levels and the economic situations differed quite extensively between these levels, with the result that the social system of patronage sustained “its social equilibrium” and played an important role “on almost every social level and even became an essential component of the Roman bureaucracy.”

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(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 25ff., 209-13, 341-42; H. Hendrix, “Benefactor/Patron Networks in the Urban Environment: Evidence from Thessalonica,” *Semeia* 56 (1992), 39-58; Nicholl, *Hope*, 163-66; R. Russell, “The Idle in 2 Thess 3.6-12: An Eschatological or a Social Problem?” *NTS* 34 (1988), 105-19; Bruce, W. Winter, “‘If a Man does not Wish to Work...’ A Cultural and Historical Setting for 2 Thessalonians 3:6-16,” *TynBul* 40 (1989), 303-15.

<sup>20</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 26-27. See also R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); A. Wallace-Hadrill, “Patronage in Roman Society: From Republic to Empire,” in *Patronage in Ancient Society*, edited by A. Wallace-Hadrill (London/New York: Routledge, 1989), 63-87.

R. Russell<sup>21</sup> suggests that “the poor developed a relationship (friendship) with a benefactor or patron where they would receive support, money, or food in exchange for the obligation to reciprocate with an expression of gratitude.” The core of the patron-client relationship thus was “the social convention which was called ‘giving and receiving.’”<sup>22</sup> R. P. Saller<sup>23</sup> writes:

The aristocratic social milieu of the Republic continued into the Principate, and with it the basic notion that a man's social status was reflected in the size of his following—a large clientele symbolizing his power to give inferiors what they needed. If a man's *clientela* was indicative of his current status, his potential for mobility depended on the effectiveness of his patrons whose wealth and political connections could be indispensable. Perhaps partly because of the unchanging social structure and values, financial institutions developed little, and so Romans appear to have continued to rely largely on patrons, clients and friends for loans or gifts in time of need, and assistance in financial activities.

J. K. Chow<sup>24</sup> investigated the patron-client relationship and summarised it excellently. According to him, its general features may

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<sup>21</sup> Russell, “The Idle,” 112.

<sup>22</sup> P. Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), 157. For more details, see Marshall, *Enmity*, 157-64.

<sup>23</sup> Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 205. The italics indicate Saller's emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> Chow, *Patronage*, 30-33. Cf. S. N. Eisenstade, and L. Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 43-162.



be outlined as follows:

- 1) A patron-client relation is an exchange relation;
- 2) A patron-client relation is an asymmetrical relation;
- 3) A patron-client relation is usually a particularistic and informal relation;
- 4) A patron-client relation is usually a supra-legal relation;
- 5) A patron-client relation is often a binding and long-range relation;
- 6) A patron-client relation is a voluntary relation;
- 7) A patron-client relation is a vertical relation.

B. W. Winter<sup>25</sup> proposes that the problem that occurred in the Thessalonian church was due to the unwillingness of Christians to abandon their dependence on the patron-client social system. Though scholars following a theological approach suggest that the main background to the disorderly behaviour was over-realised eschatology; Paul did not mention the problem of the disorderly conduct in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 and 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 and 5:14. Winter<sup>26</sup> thus assumes that the social relationship may have been caused by hard socio-economic conditions as a result of the famine and earthquakes in A. D. 51. However, this seems inadequate because the system of patronage already existed before that period.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> B. W. Winter, *First Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World. Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/The Paternoster Press, 1994), 42-60, esp. 45-48.

<sup>26</sup> Winter, "If a Man does not Wish," 309.

<sup>27</sup> Hendrix, "Benefactor/Patron," 43-56, especially 43-48, lists four instances of "non-Christian benefactor/patron relations known from epigraphic or literary remains" in Thessalonica: 1) The youths and a gymnasiarch; 2) The youths and a prince; 3) Damon and the proconsul; 4) A poet and his patron.

As I indicated in Part II. 3. 1, the nature of the disorderly was not simply that they were just lazy or idle and that they did not work but, in fact, that they rebelled against order and refused to work with their own hands. In other words “the idle” were not busy with their own business; they were “busybodies” (2 Thess. 3:11 NIV). This indicates that they caused some troubles to the believers and/or non-believers, interrupting other persons’ business (cf. 1 Tim. 5:13).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 Paul charges the Thessalonian Christians “to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands ... so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody.” In 2 Thessalonians 3:12 the command to “the idle” is “to do their work in quietness.” Though what the phrases “to aspire to live quietly” and “to do their work in quietness” mean is disputed, at least, it is clear that they refer to the withdrawal from the political field because a client’s duties included the morning greeting of his patron, supporting and the propagating the cause of his patron in the *politeia*.<sup>28</sup> In other words, Paul’s command “to live quietly” refers to the withdrawal from political support of benefactor(s). Thus, though the disorderly were told to work with their hands for their living, they might have refused to abandon their client status with believers/non-believers

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<sup>28</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 351; Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 26; Winter, *Seek the Welfare*, 48-51. Winter, *Seek the Welfare*, 49, says that the phrase “to live quietly” was employed “to describe a person who had given up his honorary public duties in order ‘to be at rest.’”

serving as their benefactor(s) and to obey Paul's command.<sup>29</sup>

It has been proposed that the problem of the disorderly occurred after Paul's departure from Thessalonica and that the idle might have converted after Paul's mission,<sup>30</sup> but such hypotheses should be rejected because Paul indicates that he himself gave the command "If any one will not work, let him not eat (2 Thess. 3:10)" and he himself set an example to be imitated (2 Thess. 3:9) when he stayed with the Thessalonians.

It thus seems likely that the Thessalonian Christians were familiar with the social network of patronage and that some of them preferred to maintain their client status to support their living and refused to follow Paul's teaching and example. Thus, in particular, a sociological approach helps to explain why the specific problem of "the idle" occurred in the church of the Thessalonians.

#### 5. 4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have researched the sociological background of the problem of "the idle" that occurred in the church of the Thessalonians. I have investigated three main possible sociological backgrounds, namely Hellenistic philosophy such as Epicureanism, Gnosticism, voluntary associations and the system of patronage.

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<sup>29</sup> Green, *Thessalonians*, 28. Winter, *Seek the Welfare*, 47, says that to sever the relations of patron and client would cause a "relationship of enmity" between them. Cf. Winter, "If a Man does not Wish," 307-308.

<sup>30</sup> See Nicholl, *Hope*, 165.

Though any of these sociological backgrounds might have influenced the disorderly conduct in the church of the Thessalonians, the best explanation is provided by the social network of patronage, which helps one to understand why some of the Thessalonians Christians refused Paul's teaching and his example of working, as well as why the specific problem of "the idle" occurred in the church of the Thessalonians.

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

In Part II, I have investigated church discipline in the church of the Thessalonians. The particular problem in the Thessalonian church was “the idle.” Some members of the Thessalonian congregation acted in a disorderly way. They gave up their daily work and started to depend on other believers and/or non-believers for their livelihood. They thus refused to work with their hands; they were not only lazy or idle, but also busybodies (2 Thess. 3:11; cf. 1 Thess. 4:11-12; 5:14).

Paul taught the Thessalonian Christians “to work with your hands ... so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody” (1 Thess. 4:11-12) and “If any one will not work, let him not eat (2 Thess. 3:10)”. Moreover Paul and his company themselves had set an example to be imitated during their stay in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-9).

Strangely “the idle” did not follow Paul’s teaching and example and thus chose against the tradition that the Thessalonian converts received from him (2 Thess. 3:6). They gave up their earthly work and began to depend on other believers/non-believers for their living.

What were the reasons for their decision not to follow Paul’s teaching and example? Why did they give up their daily work and start to depend on others for their living? In order to provide an answer to these questions, I investigated two possible approaches, a theological approach and a sociological approach.

According to a theological approach, the main reason for the conduct of the disorderly is realised eschatology. Scholars following this approach believe that "the idle" thought that the *parousia* of Jesus Christ had already come and that they were living in the new age that Jesus himself inaugurated. The curse of manual labour (Genesis 3:17-19) had thus been annulled due to the new age. Therefore they did not need to do daily work for a livelihood. Instead they concentrated on the preaching of the gospel/the *parousia* of the Lord to the believers/non-believers and depended on others for their living.

On the contrary, in terms of a sociological approach theological reasons do not carry any weight when the problem of "the idle" in the Thessalonian church is investigated. According to a sociological approach, the disorderly conduct in the Thessalonian congregation should be connected with the system of patronage. Roman society had a large number of social strata and economic situations between such strata were very different, so that the social network of patronage played an important function on almost every level.<sup>1</sup> Especially the relationship between Thessalonica and the Roman benefactors was a prominent example of this patron-client system. In other words, the

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<sup>1</sup> G. L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 25-27; H. Hendrix, "Benefactor/Patron Networks in the Urban Environment: Evidence from Thessalonica," *Semeia* 56 (1992), 39-43. See also R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); A. Wallace-Hadrill, "Patronage in Roman Society: From Republic to Empire," in *Patronage in Ancient Society*, edited by A. Wallace-Hadrill (London/New York: Routledge, 1989), 63-87.

Thessalonian converts were familiar with the social network of patronage and they would not object to entering into a social network of patronage and to maintaining their client status.

As I have indicated in previous chapters, scholars tend to focus selectively on one approach and regard the other approach as in conflict with their own approach. Is it, however, necessary that these two approaches are in conflict with one another and that one has to exclude the other one? As I indicated, it is not necessary that one approach exclude the other; it rather seems better to accept that the two approaches may be reconciled so as to provide a more suitable answer. To my mind, the relationship between a sociological approach and a theological approach should thus not be seen as exclusive and in conflict, but rather as complementary and synthetic. This offers a more suitable and a better interpretation of the problem occurring and of the practice of church discipline in the church of the Thessalonians.

Paul probably recognised that the Thessalonian converts were familiar with the system of patronage and that some of them had client status while others were benefactors; furthermore he recognised that to cling to the system of patronage opposed God's order granted to humankind in Genesis 3:17-19 and that this caused troubles to both believers and/or non-believers in the Thessalonica.

Therefore when Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica, he gave

an instruction to the Christians to work for their own living and, working night and day, set an example which could be imitated by them. However some of the Thessalonians refused to obey Paul's instruction and example and wanted to maintain their client status, and thus caused some troubles.

At the same time, "the idle" held that the *parousia* of the Lord had arrived already, attempted to persuade the other believers/non-believers about this and also tried to justify their disorderly conduct. This resulted in a situation in which the rest of the Thessalonian congregation would not take action against "the idle" in their church, although they had Paul's instruction.

If one follows one approach only to interpret the problem of "the idle," one does not arrive at a fully-fledged explanation. A sociological approach supplies us with knowledge both of the Greco-Roman social and cultural environment in which the Thessalonian converts lived, as well as a reason that the disorderly could depend on the others for their living.

At the same time, a theological approach helps us to understand the reasoning of "the idle." They thought that the *parousia* of the Lord had arrived already and that they lived in the new age in which the curse of labour was annulled; therefore they did not obey Paul's command.

Therefore the two approaches, a sociological approach and a theological approach, should thus not be taken as exclusive or in conflict.



Rather, when one takes the two approaches as complementary, one reaches a more suitable answer to the problem of the disorderly in the church of the Thessalonians.

## Appendix I The background of Paul's thought on church discipline

When Paul was informed about the problems occurring in the churches of the Corinthians and the Thessalonians, he exhorted the congregations not only to reject the false teaching and erring members but also to act to discipline them.

If one focuses on the problem of church discipline, the question arises: What is the background of Paul's thought concerning church discipline? In order to answer these questions, I will pay special attention to Paul's formula "hand this man over to Satan" (NIV) in 1 Corinthians 5:5.

### 1. Hellenism

Some scholars believe that Paul's instructions for church discipline, especially in 1 Corinthians 5:5 have parallels in the ancient pagan curse formulas, particularly in the Greek magical papyri. For example, A. Deissmann<sup>1</sup> found a 4<sup>th</sup> century A. D. papyrus which can be translated as follows: "Demon of the death, whoever you are, I hand over to you such and such a person, in order that he shall not commit this or that deed."

According to this Greek magical papyrus, a number of elements would lead to the desired result, one of which was the spoken word, i.e., the address of a ghost or demon involving the "handing over" of a human

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<sup>1</sup> A. Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927), 302. Cf. A. Y. Collins, "The Function of 'Excommunication' in Paul," *HTR* 73 (1980), 255-56; J. T. South, "A Critique of the 'Curse/Death' Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5.1-8," *NTS* 39 (1993), 541-42.

being to the demon, so that the cursed one came under the ghost's power.<sup>2</sup>

Conzelmann<sup>3</sup> points to another text which reads as follows: "Go out, demon, for I shall bind you with unbreakable fetters of steel, and I give you over to the black chaos in perdition." However, this text is not a complete parallel to 5:5, since it is a demon who was handed over but not a human being.

These two texts were written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A. D., but the formulas show that such powerful curses were well known in the ancient pagan world. Even though it is possible that 1 Corinthians 5 shared the language and the concepts of other religious groups in Paul's time, one should say that there are no direct connections between them.

I thus conclude there are some parallels between the Hellenistic magical papyri and Paul's thought, but that they are remote, because of the following two differences: 1) The communal circumstances and 2) the eschatological allusion. Church discipline in 1 Corinthians 5 takes place in and by the community and for the sake of the community, but there is no mention of a community in the Hellenistic magical papyri. Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 5 refers to "the day of the Lord" (v. 5), an eschatological term, of which one finds no reference in the Greek magical papyri.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>3</sup> Cited from G. Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community. Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism, and within Primitive Christianity* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1972), 143.

## 2. The Qumran community

Some<sup>4</sup> scholars focus on the practices of the Qumran community to find the background of Paul's thoughts on church discipline. For example, R. B. Brown<sup>5</sup> believes that the discipline practised in the Qumran community (I QS 5.26-6.1) has some parallels to church discipline which Paul recommends to the congregations, especially in the case of the Corinthian community. In the Qumran community strict discipline was enforced to safeguard the purity of the sect. Various levels of punishment were imposed on offenders, from a small monetary penalty to permanent expulsion, all to keep a "state of readiness for the coming Kingdom of God."<sup>6</sup>

There are three main documents about expulsion from the Qumran community, namely 1) *The Manual of Discipline*, 2) *The Damascus Document* and 3) *The Rule of the Congregation*.<sup>7</sup>

Although the expected result of the curses is not clear, *The Manual of Discipline* contains several curse formulae that refer to the death of the offender. According to *The Manual of Discipline*,

Cursed be thou for all thy guilty, evil deeds! May God make thee an object

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<sup>4</sup> R. B. Brown, "1 Corinthians," in *Acts-1 Corinthians*, edited by C. J. Allen (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971). Cf. Collins, "Function," 261-63; South, "Critique," 542-43.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, "1 Corinthians," 319.

<sup>6</sup> C. J. Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 117. Forkman, *Limits*, 41-47, displays the deviations that led to exclusion as follows: Idol worship (I QS II 11-17), defiance of God (I QS V 11f.), violation of the ritual norms (I QS V 13f.), and social obligations (I QS IV 2-6). But Forkman, *Limits*, 42, says that "the attitude of the Qumran Sect to sexuality is much debated."

<sup>7</sup> See Forkman, *Limits*, 39-41.

of shuddering through all exactors of vengeance (1 QS 2.5-6).

Cursed for entering with the idols of his heart be he who enters this covenant and puts the stumbling block of his guilt before him so as to backslide through it (1 QS 2.12-18).<sup>8</sup>

In *The Damascus Document*<sup>9</sup> it is said

The apostates were given up to the sword; and so shall it be for all members of His Covenant who do not hold steadfastly to these (Ms B: to the curse of the precepts). They shall be visited for destruction by the hand of Satan (Heb., Belial). That shall be the day when God will visit.

The discipline of the Qumran community contains two aspects which one does not find in Hellenistic magical papyri. So, it should be said that the discipline of the Qumran community has closer parallels to 1 Corinthians 5 than that of Hellenism. This connection could be explained in two ways:

Firstly, any community enforcing their own moral and social standards must have steps for exclusion of erring members, because this sometimes becomes necessary in order to maintain the identity and purity of their own community; Secondly, the Qumran community and Paul share the Old Testament as the common foundation for discipline of the community.

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<sup>8</sup> Cited from South, "Critique," 543.

<sup>9</sup> Cited from Collins, "Function," 257.

However, we cannot draw direct lines between the practice of judgment in Qumran community and the process recommended by Paul in the congregation.

### 3. Rabbinic Judaism

Powerful curses and formulas of exclusion from the community were well-known in the Jewish milieu.<sup>10</sup> The Jewish parallels to the wording of 1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Thessalonians 5:14 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14 would include the various degrees of the synagogue ban and the *birkat ha-minim*.

The synagogue ban is widely attested in Rabbinic literature; the details however are not complete. The synagogue ban has three "levels." Firstly, the mildest was a "reprimand" or "warning" which lasted from one to seven days and then was automatically withdrawn. Secondly, the "little ban" lasted for thirty days. Thirdly, the most severe level was the "great ban" which was used when the "little ban" had been imposed twice without achieving the desired repentance. The "great ban" involved excommunication from the community for an indefinite period.<sup>11</sup>

The *birkat ha-minim* was the twelfth prayer of the so-called Eighteen Benedictions. Though this prayer was euphemistically called "the blessing-over the heretics," in fact it was a curse formula on

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<sup>10</sup> See Forkman, *Limits*, 87-108. Cf. Collins, "Function," 254-55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

Christians who deviated from Judaism and on "heretics or sectarians."<sup>12</sup>

It reads,

For apostates let there be no hope.

The dominion of arrogance do thou speedily root out in our days.

And let Christians and the sectarians perish in a moment.

Let them be blotted out of the book of the living.

And let them not be written with the righteous.<sup>13</sup>

The ban was laid on a person who broke the ritual law, and also for social violations and "offences against the unity of the Jewish nation and sexual sins."<sup>14</sup> Anyone falling into such a category would be unable to recite the prayer, and would thus exclude himself from the community.

To sum up, Rabbinic Judaism contains some parallels which provide a background of Paul's thought in the church of the Corinthians and of the Thessalonians, such as excommunication from the community for an indefinite period or a limited period of time. This is reasonable, because Paul was the inheritor of Jewish tradition (Acts 22:3; Phil. 3:5-6). But at the same time it should be pointed out that although Paul might have been influenced by notions from Rabbinic Judaism, it is inappropriate to indicate this tradition as the main source.

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<sup>12</sup> Collins, "Function," 254. Cf. Forkman, *Limits*, 90-92.

<sup>13</sup> Forkman, *Limits*, 91.

<sup>14</sup> Forkman, *Limits*, 92-93.

#### 4. The Old Testament

There are precedents in Hebrew history for the exclusion and punishment of those who committed offences against the nation (Josh. 7; Ezra 10; Neh. 9). The idea of excommunication occurs regularly in the Old Testament. Forkman<sup>15</sup> gives a useful summary of the situations where death and expulsion were imposed for various offences in the Old Testament.

The Leviticus Code stipulates that those who commit various sexual offences must be “cut off from their people” (Lev. 18:29). Deuteronomy 27:15-26 lists a whole series of curses for various offences which are said to require the death penalty. According to Joshua 7, Achan brought the Lord’s disfavour upon all Israel by his secretive act of claiming forbidden booty from the destroyed city of Jericho. Furthermore, Paul was possibly influenced by παραδίδομι (Job 2:6) with regard to terminology when he refers to church discipline, but this is not certain.

We can thus find several similarities between the Old Testament and Paul’s thought with regard to church discipline, especially the notion of corporate offences. According to Hays,<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Forkman, *Limits*, 16-28. Forkman, *Limits*, 27-28, lists the offences that lead to expulsion as follows: idol worship (Ex. 22:17; Lev. 20:3, 5; Deut. 27:15 etc.), contempt of Yahweh (Lev. 24:16; Num. 15:30; Deut. 27:26 etc.), sexual offence (Gen. 38:24; Lev. 18:29; Deut. 27:20 etc.), ritual offense (Gen. 17:14; Ex. 12:15, 19; 19:12; Lev. 7:20, 25; Num. 1:51 etc.), social crime (Gen. 9:5-6; Ex. 21:2-17; Lev. 20:9; Deut. 27:15 etc.).

<sup>16</sup> R. B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 82.



The covenant blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28 apply not just to the fate of individuals who obey or disobey the Law but to the nation as a whole. This helps us to understand more clearly why Ezra "mourned" over the faithlessness of the exiles (Ezra 10:6; the LXX uses the same verb that Paul employs when he says the Corinthians should have mourned over the offence in their midst [1 Cor. 5:2]) and why the great prayers of national confession in Ezra 9:6-15; Nehemiah 9:6-37; and Daniel 9:4-19 all assume the reality of corporate guilt and the hope of corporate redemption.

The individual offender had to be expelled from the midst of the community, since he had sinned against the good name and witness of the Christian community. In line with this notion, Paul uses the image of leaven in the context of his command of excommunication of the sinner(s).

Moreover, this symbolic language is drawn from the feast of the Passover that celebrates the liberty of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. In this regard, it is not difficult to assume that Paul expected not only that the Corinthians would understand this symbolic illustration, but also that they would identify themselves figuratively with Israel delivered from slavery in Egypt by God's power.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

## 5. Conclusion

I thus conclude that the background of Paul's notion concerning church discipline is to be found in the Scriptural tradition and in the Old Testament. In Paul's case, this is more likely than the possibility that it is to be found in either the Qumran community or Hellenistic magic papyri. Since he was a Jew and familiar with the Old Testament, it is certain that he would draw the notion of church discipline from the Old Testament.

## Part III Church discipline in the church of the Corinthians

### Chapter 1 The setting of Corinth

#### 1. 1 The city of Corinth<sup>1</sup>

By the time Paul came to the city of Corinth in the first century, it was the leading commercial and political centre of Greece.<sup>2</sup> The city of Corinth was located at the foot of the Acrocorinth and was also situated at the western end of the isthmus linking central Greece and the Peloponnesus. It was located in a significant geographical position at the crossroads connecting routes from four directions.<sup>3</sup>

In the ancient era Corinth was prosperous because of the distinctive geographical position. Strabo<sup>4</sup> writes:

Corinth is called 'wealthy' because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbours, of which one leads straight to

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on the city of Corinth and its inhabitants, see J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Corinth," in *AB Dictionary*, edited by D. N. Freedman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1.1134-39; J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Saint Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983); G. D. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 1-4; V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984), 4-22; R. P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1986), xxvii-xxxiv; A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1-17; B. W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 7-22; B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 5-35.

<sup>2</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 5. Witherington, *Conflict*, 5, says that Corinth was "the most prosperous city" as well as "the largest."

<sup>3</sup> C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1982), 1. Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 1, says that the land route ran between north and south and the sea route passed through the Corinth Canal between east and west.

<sup>4</sup> Cited from Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 1. The original is in Strabo, *Geography of Strabo*, 8. 6.

Asia, and the other to Italy; and it makes easy the exchange of merchandise from both countries.

The city of Corinth lay to the south of the narrow strip of land between the Corinthian Gulf and Saronic Gulf. It had two harbours, Cenchræe which faces east across the Saronic Gulf to Asia and Ephesus, and Lechaëum which faces west across the Corinthian Gulf to Italy and the west.<sup>5</sup> Merchants preferred sending their loads or even light ships across the Isthmus to sailing the six-day journey around the tip of Greece, because it was easier and safer than sailing.<sup>6</sup>

Corinth enjoyed a long history as a Greek city until the Roman troops led by the consul Lucius Mummius Achaïus destroyed her in 146 B. C.<sup>7</sup> It was a tragic turning point in the history of the city. It was totally destroyed and the surviving inhabitants were killed or sold into slavery. It lay in ruins for a long time because the rebuilding of the city was forbidden.

The domain became public land of Rome<sup>8</sup> and the city was rebuilt in

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<sup>5</sup> C. Kruse, *Second Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 13; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> For ships going east to west or west to east, merchants unloaded their cargoes or even their ships at one of two ports of Corinth and had it carried to the other port, where they could be reloaded on to another ship or on to the same ship if it was small enough to be dragged across the Isthmus. Cf. Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 13, who mentions that "The over-land journey between the two ports was approximately ten miles, while the journey by sea around the southern tip of the Peloponnesus (Cape Maleas) was about two hundred miles" and it was "notorious for its violent storms and treacherous currents." See also Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 1; G. F. Snyder, *First Corinthians: A Faith Community Commentary* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1992), 1; Witherington, *Conflict*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 1, states that some part of Corinth "was given to the neighboring state of Sicyon, on the understanding that henceforward Sicyon, in place

44 B. C. by Julius Caesar.<sup>9</sup> He commanded the rebuilding of the city as a Roman colony with “a new local government modelled after the administration of the city of Rome itself.”<sup>10</sup> The architecture of the city followed Roman style and it was controlled by “a Roman form of government with Roman officials.”<sup>11</sup> In particular, it was considered to be “a loyal center for the advance of future eastern campaigns, perhaps to Dacia or Parthia.”<sup>12</sup> The official name of the city was “Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis”<sup>13</sup> in honour of Julius Caesar and it was called “Roman Corinth.”<sup>14</sup> The best description of Corinth would be “Greco-Roman.”<sup>15</sup> Though Corinth was a Roman colony and the official language of the city was Latin, it also had the character of Hellenistic culture and the spoken language was Greek.<sup>16</sup>

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of Corinth, would maintain the Isthmian Games.”

<sup>9</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 5-6. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 8, says that the city of Corinth “remained a ruin, probably with squatters, but without a political life” for over 100 years.

<sup>10</sup> D. A. de Silva, *An Introduction to the New Testament. Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove/Nottingham: IVP Academic/Apollos, 2004), 555.

<sup>11</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 7-8, states: “Roman Corinth was certainly never simply a ‘Hellenistic’ city. Taken as a whole, the architectural, artifactual, and inscriptional evidence points to a trend in the first century to Romanize the remains of the old city that went well beyond simply making Latin the official language and Roman law the rule of the city. There is evidence to suggest that the buildings of the rebuilt city were patterned on buildings in southern Italian cities (e.g., Pompeii), which were perhaps the homes of some of the veterans or freemen and freewomen who settled in Corinth.”

<sup>15</sup> A. D. Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation: An Investigation of 1 Cor. 1-4 in Light of Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (dissertation, Oxford, 1983), 213, says that “More Greek than Rome, more Roman than Athens, if any city of the first century world deserved the hyphenated designation ‘Greco-Roman’ it must have been Corinth.”

<sup>16</sup> M. R. Storm, *Excommunication in the Life and Theology of the Primitive Christian Communities* (Michigan: U. M. I., 1992), 79-80. For more details, J. H. Kent, *Corinth: Results of Excavations Conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at*

The new settlers of the city of Corinth were drawn from various parts of the Empire and they consisted of the following: (1) veterans of Caesar's armies, (2) freemen and freewomen from Rome, and (3) Romanized Greeks, and (4) urban traders and labourers.<sup>17</sup> There were also some Greeks who had inhabited the ruins and immigrants including Jews and Syrians from the East.<sup>18</sup> The city of Corinth thus was an "amalgamation of Roman, Greek, and Oriental life."<sup>19</sup>

Since Corinth became the seat of the region's proconsul and the capital of the senatorial province of Achaia by decree of Augustus in 20 B. C.,<sup>20</sup> it was a politically important centre in the province of Achaia. As a Roman colony the government of Corinth was organised in terms of a

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*Athens*. VIII:iii: *The Inscriptions 1926-1950* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1966), 17-20; Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 11-19. For instance, Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 5, says that "Of inscriptions from the period to be dated from Augustus to Nero, Greek inscriptions amount to only three, while inscriptions in Latin amount to 73. The (Pauline) period of Claudius yields zero in Greek and 27 (19 certain) in Latin, while that of Nero (later Paul) yields one Greek and eleven Latin." For more details, see Kent, *Corinth*, 17-20.

<sup>17</sup> Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 3; Witherington, *Conflict*, 6. Witherington, *Conflict*, 6, says that one can assume that "over half the settlers in Corinth were freedmen and freedwomen. On the rising status and increasing wealth of freed slaves during the first century A. D.: One of the main factors in the rise to prominence of freed slaves was the establishment of the Imperial cult, in which freedmen were allowed to be officials. Some evidence suggests that over eighty-five percent of the officials in the cult of Augustus were freedmen."

<sup>18</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 7. Witherington, *Conflict*, 7, states that some Greeks who inhabited the ruins "became resident aliens - *incolae* - and their descents were counted as citizens (*cives*). The *incolae* were not allowed to hold office, though apparently some of them could vote."

<sup>19</sup> G. L. Munn, "The Historical Background of First Corinthians," *Southwest Journal of Theology* 3 (1960), 8-9.

<sup>20</sup> Caesar Augustus created two kinds of Roman provinces: "provinces of Caesar," or imperial province and "provinces of the people," senatorial provinces, governed by a proconsul. Cf. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, xxx; Storm, *Excommunication*, 76.

“tripartite basis of an assembly of citizen voters, a city council, and annual magistrates” and this organization “reflected in miniature Roman government of the earlier Republican era.”<sup>21</sup>

There were also “four annual officials – two *duoviri* (joint mayors with judicial powers), an *aedile* (a sort of chief constable) and a *quaestor* (treasurer).”<sup>22</sup> Actually the officials’ positions were taken by the wealthy in the city because they were “expected to spend considerable money for various public expenses.”<sup>23</sup> The Roman governor of Achaia stayed in the city of Corinth.<sup>24</sup>

Roman Corinth was a cosmopolitan city and was also a trading centre because of Corinth’s excellent position with regard to “the narrow isthmus separating the Aegean Sea from the Gulf of Corinth, and thus the Ionian Sea, and connecting the two major parts of Greece.”<sup>25</sup> Many

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<sup>21</sup> Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 3. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 3, adds: “Colonists had the right to own property and to initiate civil lawsuits ... The local civil senate had wide powers which enabled them to fund and to promote public building, roads, and other facilities. The chief magistrates of the colony were the two *duoviri iure dicundo*, elected annually by the *comitia tributa*. They also served as chief justices for civil cases, although imperial Provincial governors had jurisdiction in criminal cases.”

<sup>22</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 79. According to Storm, *Excommunication*, 79, “these officials were not elected by the citizens but by the council. Though they were unpaid, they were highly esteemed in the city.”

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* W. Rees, “Corinth in St. Paul’s Time,” *Scripture* 2 (October 1947), 107-108, states that a general practice of wealthy citizens was “to offer impressive presents to the city and consequently be awarded an official position.” One prominent example is the Erastus inscription which reads “Erastus in return for his aedileship laid (this pavement) at his own expense.” See Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 37. Erastus may have been a member of the Corinthian Christian community (cf. Rom. 16:23). Cf. De Silva, *Introduction*, 557.

<sup>24</sup> W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 47.

<sup>25</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 9.

foreigners came together in order to trade their goods and to get employment. Since Corinth was a major trade and manufacturing centre, the migrants flowed into Corinth to get a job.<sup>26</sup> It became well known for “high tin bronze, called Corinthian bronze” and “the objects made from this bronze.”<sup>27</sup>

As in any cosmopolitan city in the first century Greco-Roman world, there were “many gods and many lords” (1 Cor. 8:15) at Corinth. The Romans adopted Greek gods such as Aphrodite, Apollo, Demeter, Kore, Poseidon and Asklepios into their own religious cults.<sup>28</sup> These gods/goddesses stood “behind earthly rulers and authority” and “each divinity was held to watch over the city.”<sup>29</sup>

The most significant temple and cult in Corinth was that of Aphrodite who was called “the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility” and “of seafaring.”<sup>30</sup> It is believed that the cult of Aphrodite was connected with sacred prostitution.<sup>31</sup> The cult of Aphrodite was “dedicated to the

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<sup>26</sup> The city offered jobs such as entertainers, lawyers, labourers, dockers, warehousemen, leather workers, tentmakers, wagon repairers, pottery manufacturers, bankers, ship repairers, foremen, salespersons and prostitutes. See Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> According to K. Quast, *Reading the Corinthian Correspondence: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 21, in the second century A. D., the historian Pausanias in his *Description of Greece* mentions at least 26 sacred places such as temples, courtyards and freestanding altars at Corinth. Cf. Witherington, *Conflict*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> De Silva, *Introduction*, 558. For the cult of deities in Corinth, see De Silva, *Introduction*, 558-60; Witherington, *Conflict*, 12-19.

<sup>30</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> D. Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church* (Leicester: I. V. P., 1985), 11, says that “The 1,000 priestesses of the temple, who were sacred, came down into the city when evening fell and plied their trade in the streets.” However Witherington, *Conflict*, 13, states that “it is not at all clear that the practice of *sacred*



glorification of sex.”<sup>32</sup>

Another important cult was that of Asklepios who was the god of health, emotional and mental as well as physical well being.<sup>33</sup> Three important elements in the cult of Asklepios were “a temple, an *abatón* (place for sleeping to receive dream-visions), and a bath house for purifications.”<sup>34</sup> The temple of Asklepios had private dining facilities for dinner meetings and “invitations would be issued to the guests to ‘dine at the god’s table.’”<sup>35</sup>

There was also a temple for Apollo, the god of music, pottery and prophecy. The cult of Apollo and the oracle at Delphi were closely connected.<sup>36</sup> The cult of Hera Argaea, the goddess of marriage and “sexual life of women,” was associated with “sacred marriage” as well as with “the ordinary sort of human marriage.”<sup>37</sup>

There were also temples of Tyche, the god of fate, and of Demeter and Kore. Especially in the temple of Demeter and Kore, priestesses

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prostitution was revived on the same scale in Roman Corinth.” The italics indicate Witherington’s emphasis. For more details, see Witherington, *Conflict*, 13-14, especially footnote 34.

<sup>32</sup> J. C. Pollock, *The Apostle Paul* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1969), 120.

<sup>33</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 15. According to Greek mythology, Asklepios is a son of the god Apollo and a human mother.

<sup>34</sup> De Silva, *Introduction*, 559. Cf. Witherington, *Conflict*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> De Silva, *Introduction*, 559. While Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 163, links it with the behaviour of some Corinthian Christians who were invited to eat idol’s food (1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:27f.), De Silva, *Introduction*, 559-60, connects it with participating in any idolatrous festival.

<sup>36</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 16. De Silva, *Introduction*, 558, assumes that the activity of the cult of Apollo “shed some light on the issue of women speaking in the church (1 Cor. 14:34-35).” Cf. Witherington, *Conflict*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 15-16. De Silva, *Introduction*, 559, suggests that the cult of Hera “would have been a point of resonance for the believers when Paul spoke of presenting Corinthians as ‘a pure virgin’ to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2-3)”.

were young girls and they wore a “distinctive ceremonial hat,” and “religious justification of sexual play”<sup>38</sup> occurred.

The sexual practices of the cult in the temples at Corinth reveal “the immoral reputation of old Corinth.”<sup>39</sup> It is said that the old reputation of adultery at Corinth was not gone out of “its way to redeem the past.”<sup>40</sup>

The imperial cult was represented in these temples and also at Isthmian games.<sup>41</sup> The Isthmian games were held every four years and both men and women participated in the games.<sup>42</sup> There were “oratorical and musical contests”<sup>43</sup> at the games as well. Many religious pilgrims visited Corinth to see the famous temples and Isthmian Games.

Evidence concerning when or how the Jewish community was established at Corinth has not yet been found,<sup>44</sup> but Judaism definitely

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<sup>38</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 17-18.

<sup>39</sup> Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 2. Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 2, continues: “The words derived from the name Corinth seem to have been used in the Old Comedy with the meanings *to practise fornication, whoremonger*, and the like.” The italics indicate Barrett’s emphasis. L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 16, says that “‘to Corinthianize’ was polite Greek for ‘go to the evil.’”

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Corinth was well-known for her control of the Isthmian Games. To manage the games, the Corinthians elected an official. See Witherington, *Conflict*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> According to Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 16, it is verified that three daughters of Hermesianax, Tryphosa, Hedeia and Dionysia, won the 200 meter race several times.

<sup>43</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 12.

<sup>44</sup> We can get a clue from Josephus’ remark that Jewish mercenaries served in the army of Alexander the Great. See Josephus, *Apion*, 1.200-204. It is also estimated that the city of Corinth had a significant population of Jews, like other major cities in the Diaspora. Moreover, the fact that the Jewish couple Aquila and Priscilla came to Corinth is clear evidence that there was a considerable Jewish community at Corinth.

played a role in the religious environment of the city (cf. Acts 18:4; 12-17). Jews lived in the city and there was a Jewish synagogue in the city, as was the case in other major cities (cf. Acts. 18:8, 17).<sup>45</sup> Moreover, a fragment of a broken marble inscription has verified that there was a synagogue in Corinth.<sup>46</sup> The Jewish community at Corinth was so big and powerful that they could “influence the city’s tribunal to hear a case against Paul.”<sup>47</sup>

By Paul’s time the city of Corinth had become a “pluralistic melting pot of cultures, philosophies, life styles and religions” and it was probably “little better and little worse”<sup>48</sup> than any other major city and commercial centre in the Empire.

## 1. 2 The church at Corinth

As I indicated in Part II. 1. 2, there are two sources for information concerning the evangelizing and founding of the churches of Paul: 1) the letters of the apostle Paul himself and 2) the narratives of Luke in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Snyder, *First Corinthians*, 2-3. It can be translated as “Synagogue of the Hebrews” and it was a portion of the lintel of the door.

<sup>47</sup> Quast, *Corinthian Correspondence*, 22.

<sup>48</sup> Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> For more details, see Best, *Thessalonians*, 5-7; K. P. Donfried, “1 Thessalonians, Acts and the Early Paul,” 1-8, in *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, edited by Raymond F. Collins (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 32; Green, *Thessalonians*, 47-54; Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 113-18; C. A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 6-16.

The majority of the New Testament scholars give priority to the letters of Paul and they believe that the Acts of the Apostles should be regarded as less useful as a source of information for exact chronological accuracy.<sup>50</sup> The Acts of the Apostles, however, can still be a valuable source for Paul's preaching of the gospel and founding of the church in the city of Corinth. Therefore I will provide a description of the founding the Christian community at Corinth based on the Pauline letters and the Acts of the Apostles together.

After Paul preached the gospel and made some converts in Athens, he left the city and came to Corinth by land (Acts 18:1). He came to Corinth "in weakness and fear, and with much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3 NIV).<sup>51</sup> He met a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who had recently come to the city from Italy. Aquila was a native of Pontus and they had left Rome because "Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome" (Acts 18:3). Though it is not certain that they were Christians,<sup>52</sup> Paul

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<sup>50</sup> The main reason for doubting Luke's accuracy is that in Acts Luke adjusts many traditions to correspond with his overall theological purpose, just as he does in his first volume, the Gospel of Luke. For more details, see E. A. Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: A & C Black, 1986), 5-7; K. P. Donfried, "1 Thessalonians, Acts and the Early Paul," in *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, edited by Raymond F. Collins (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 5-10.

<sup>51</sup> The reason that he was very scared when he came to Corinth is not clear. Prior, *Message of 1 Corinthians*, 13-14, indicates that Paul was weak because not only of Corinth's commercial, cultural and spiritual environments but also because of his experience in Athens and deprivation of the partnership of Silas and Timothy (cf. Acts 18:5). Indeed in the context of his statement of 1 Corinthians 2, it seems that Paul was scared because of the result of preaching the gospel in Athens (cf. Acts 17:32-34; 18:9-10).

<sup>52</sup> Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 23, assumes that they had "Christian faith earlier in Rome," while De Silva, *Introduction*, 560, guesses that they were converted in Corinth.

stayed with them and worked together with them, because they were of the same business, the tent making/leather Industry.<sup>53</sup> Probably Paul worked with them in the week (cf. 1 Cor. 4:11-12) and "he argued in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4). The core of his message was that the sacrificed Jesus on the cross was the Messiah (Acts 18:5).

After some time Paul and his company, Silas and Timothy, met with resistance from the Jews in Corinth; they opposed him and rejected his message.<sup>54</sup> Thereupon Paul turned to Gentiles in the city. He stopped preaching the gospel in the synagogue and he and his colleagues moved to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, and preached the gospel to Gentiles.<sup>55</sup> There Paul converted Crispus, a prominent synagogue official and his whole household, and then "many of the

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To my mind, we should accept that they became Christians after they had met Paul. When they left Corinth and stayed in Ephesus, they met Apollos and expounded "to him the way of God more accurately" (cf. Acts 18:24-26).

<sup>53</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 263-64, says "Paul slept below amid the tool-strewn workbenches and rolls of leather and canvas. The workshop was perfect for initial contacts, particularly with women. While Paul worked on a cloak, or sandal or belt, he had the opportunity for conversation which quickly became instruction (cf. 1 Thess 2:9), and further encounters were easily justified by the need for new pieces or other repairs."

<sup>54</sup> It is necessary to note that, though the Jews in Corinth opposed Paul's gospel and message, their action was different from that of the Jews in Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:5-9). While Paul fled from Thessalonica to Berea immediately, in Corinth Paul moved to the house next door to the synagogue (Acts 18:7) and he stayed there a year and six months, "teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11).

<sup>55</sup> Quast, *Corinthian Correspondence*, 23, thinks this person to be Gaius, "one of Paul's first baptismal candidates (1 Cor. 1:24) and host of the church in his home (Rom. 16:23)." Concerning the location of Justus' house as preaching place, K. Lake, *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul* (London: Rivington's, 1927), 104, says that "It must be admitted that he chose a position which was not likely to avoid trouble, though it had the advantage of being easily found by the God-fearer who had previously frequented the synagogue."

Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). According to 1 Corinthians, Crispus was one of the few believers that Paul baptized personally (1 Cor. 1:14, 16).<sup>56</sup>

One night during his stay in Corinth Paul received the word of God in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10) and he stayed there for eighteen months "teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11).

His success evoked the jealousy of the Jews and, when Gallio came to Corinth as the proconsul of Achaia,<sup>57</sup> the Jews with one accord rose "against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat" (Acts 18:12 KJV). They charged that Paul persuaded "people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law" (Acts 18:13 NRSV).

However, proconsul Gallio did not give attention to their accusation and turned them out from the judgement seat because he realized that the complaint of the Jews was not a matter of serious crime or wrong doing, but that of their own law (cf. Acts 18:14-15). In spite of the accusation of the Jews, Paul thus did not suffer and continued to preach

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<sup>56</sup> Though Crispus was a common name in Paul's time, it seems that the names in Acts and 1 Corinthians refer to the same person. Cf. De Silva, *Introduction*, 560.

<sup>57</sup> The Delphic letter of Claudius refers to the proconsul Lucius Junius Gallio and scholars agree that the date of the letter of Claudius is spring of 51 A. D. Scholars are debating at what time Gallio took up his position as proconsul of Achaia at Corinth: 1) July 50 A. D.; 2) July 51 A. D. While Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 18-19, proposes 50 A. D., R. F. Collins, *Studies on the First Letter to the Thessalonians* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1984), 23-24, prefers 51 A. D. Because Roman officials would be chosen before the first of April and normally started working from the first of July, Gallio probably took up his position in July 51 A. D. and went back to Rome before he finished his term because of a fever. Cf. De Silva, *Introduction*, 560; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 29-30.

the gospel and plant and bring up the Corinthian Christians and build the church firmly during his stay there (cf. Acts 18:11, 18). Though he came to Corinth with weakness and fear; he could leave “having experienced the secret of all Christian ministry – that God’s power is made perfect in weakness.”<sup>58</sup>

Though it seems as if the Corinthian Christians were primarily Gentiles,<sup>59</sup> there were considerable Jewish numbers as well<sup>60</sup> (cf. Acts 18:4, 8; 1 Cor. 1:22-24; 9:20-22). The most prominent example of a Jewish convert was “the ruler of the Synagogue” and “all his household” (Acts 18:8). Surprisingly his conversion resulted in the fact that “many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized” (Acts 18:8 NRSV). The majority of these converts probably were Gentiles who adhered to the law of Moses in the synagogue (cf. Acts 18:4).

The matter of the social status of the converts at Corinth has been

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<sup>58</sup> Prior, *Message of 1 Corinthians*, 16.

<sup>59</sup> Paul exhorts the Corinthian Christians on matters of eating idol’s food (1 Cor. 8) and participating in the table of demons (1 Cor. 10). It could be interpreted as general instruction for both Jew and Gentile Christians, but it could also concern Gentile Christians at Corinth. Cf. Witherington, *Conflict*, 24.

<sup>60</sup> In the synagogue at Corinth there were both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles (cf. Acts 18:4). Witherington, *Conflict*, 24-25, indicates the evidence for the presence of Jews as follows: “Paul refers to circumcised believers in Corinth (1 Cor. 7:18); he may also allude to a mixed audience in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:22-24; 9:20-22); he appeals to the Mosaic law (1 Cor. 9:8-10; 14:34; 2 Cor. 3:4ff.); he quotes the OT (e.g., 2 Cor. 6:2; 9:9; 10:17) in such a way as to assume that his audience will know and reflect on the larger contexts of some of these quotations; his reference to the exodus generation in 1 Cor. 10:1-13 seems to assume that some of his audience will be conversant with specifically Jewish ways of interpreting and applying Scripture.”

debated extensively among scholars.<sup>61</sup> Because A. Deissmann claimed that Christians “came ... from the lower class (Matt. 11:25-26; 1 Cor. 1:26-31)”<sup>62</sup> the majority of the scholars accepted that the Corinthian converts belonged to the lower classes. Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 and his work at Corinth (Acts 18:3) are the main grounds for this. Paul describes the social condition of the church as follows in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28:

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are.

E. A. Judge, however, insists that the Corinthian congregation consisted of diverse social groupings.<sup>63</sup> According to Chow,<sup>64</sup> Judge objected to “the use of anachronistic models borrowed from modern-day theories of social classes” and preferred to depend on “Paul’s

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<sup>61</sup> See J. K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 13-26; A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927); W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 51-73; G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982); Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 23-29; Witherington, *Conflict*, 22-29.

<sup>62</sup> Deissmann, *Light*, 144.

<sup>63</sup> E. A. Judge, *The Social Pattern of Christian Groups in the First Century: Some Prolegomena to the Study of New Testament Ideas of Social Obligation* (London: Tyndale, 1960), 30-38.

<sup>64</sup> Chow, *Patronage*, 17, 19.



relationship to the patronage system of the Roman Empire.” Judge believes that the Corinthian Christians “were dominated by a socially pretentious section of the population.”<sup>65</sup>

Theissen insists that Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 represents “sociological information concerning the Corinthians church as well as “theological concepts.”<sup>66</sup> He identifies three social categories in the Corinthian congregation: 1) educational; 2) political and social power or influence; 3) social status of one’s family.<sup>67</sup> He concludes that, though the majority members of the church were from the lower class, the members who are mentioned in the New Testament such as Erastus, Sosthenes, Phoebe, Crispus, belonged to the higher social class.<sup>68</sup>

In summary, we do not have accurate information about the social origins of the Corinthian converts. However the majority of the converts seem to have belonged to the lower class, with a small group belonging to the higher class of the Roman society.

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<sup>65</sup> Judge, *Social Pattern*, 60.

<sup>66</sup> Theissen, *Social Setting*, 70.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 72.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 94-95.

## Chapter 2 The integrity of the Epistles to the Corinthians

Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century scholars accepted that the two Epistles to the Corinthians were written by Paul himself and that they were two complete letters.<sup>1</sup> However, after J. S. Semler<sup>2</sup> argued that 2 Corinthians was combined from two different sources, many scholars started to focus on the integrity of the Epistles to the Corinthians. In particular, they tried to reconstruct the communication between Paul and the Corinthian congregation, and thus many theories have been developed.<sup>3</sup>

While some scholars proposed “partition theories”<sup>4</sup> for 1 Corinthians, the majority concentrate on theories regarding the composition of 2 Corinthians from two or more separate letters. Therefore I will examine some theories on 1 Corinthians briefly and then I will investigate the compositional theories on 2 Corinthians.

First of all, I will reconstruct the communication between Paul and the Corinthian church and then I will focus on the integrity debate in

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<sup>1</sup> M. R. Storm, *Excommunication in the Life and Theology of the Primitive Christian Communities* (Michigan: U. M. I., 1992), 67.

<sup>2</sup> M. E. Tharll, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 3. Cf. E. M. Humphrey, “2 Corinthians,” in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament. A Book-by-Book Survey*, edited by K. J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 108-10.

<sup>3</sup> M. J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids/Keynes: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 2005), 1-10; P. E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), xxi-xxxiv; C. Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 17-25; A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1915), xxiii-xxxvi; Storm, *Excommunication*, 64-75; G. F. Snyder, *First Corinthians: A Faith Community Commentary* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1992), 8-14; A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 38-48.

<sup>4</sup> Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 37.

terms of 2 Corinthians.

## 2. 1 Communications between Paul and the Corinthians

After Paul stayed for some time in Syrian Antioch, he “set out from there and travelled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23 NIV). Thereafter he went to Ephesus, where he met some of John’s disciples and baptized them (Acts 18:1-7). Then he moved to the synagogue and “spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God” (Acts 18:8 NIV). When some stubbornly refused to accept his preaching and spoke “evil of the Way before the congregation” (Acts 18:9), he moved to the hall of Tyrannus and argued and taught the Asian Christians for two years (Acts 19:9-10). During this period in Ephesus, Paul worked wonders and his ministry was a great success (Acts 18:11-20). Most scholars<sup>5</sup> think that the communication between Paul and the Corinthians congregation probably took place during his stay in Ephesus.

Against the background of the debate on Paul’s communication with the Corinthian Christians, I reconstruct it as follows:<sup>6</sup>

1) Paul’s “previous” letter – In 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, Paul mentions the previous letter in which he exhorted them “not to associated with

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<sup>5</sup> Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 19-20; Storm, *Excommunication*, 65.

<sup>6</sup> See Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 20-25; Snyder, *First Corinthians*, 8-14; Storm, *Excommunication*, 65-66.

immoral men.”<sup>7</sup>

2) Visitors from Corinth – Paul received visitors from the Corinthian church. Probably they were from Chloe’s household (1 Cor. 1:11-12) or Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:15-18). They brought information regarding various serious problems occurring in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 1:11; 5:1).

3) The Corinthians’ letter to Paul – The Corinthian Christians sent a letter to Paul in order to seek his advice (1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12).<sup>8</sup>

4) The letter of 1 Corinthians – Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians not only to respond to the reports by the visitors and to respond to the questions of the Corinthians but also “to head off some emerging criticisms of his own person and ministry” and to give some instructions about the “contribution for the saints (a collection that was being taken up among the Gentile congregations to assist poor Christians in Jerusalem), and to advise the Corinthians of his intended visit.”<sup>9</sup>

5) Timothy’s visit to Corinth – Paul sent Timothy to the Corinthian

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<sup>7</sup> Though some scholars, such as J. Weiss and W. Schmithals, assume that 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 was a part of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian congregation, there is no definite evidence for this. See the next section. Cf. Snyder, *First Corinthians*, 10; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 39-40.

<sup>8</sup> Snyder, *First Corinthians*, 11, says that in 1 Corinthians “the Greek phrase *peri de*, usually translated in 1 Corinthians as ‘now’ or ‘now concerning,’ refers to questions put by the Corinthians.” Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 20, assuming tension between Paul and the Corinthian Christians, says that “A close reading of 1 Corinthians reveals that the acute tension in the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians which is reflected in 2 Corinthians 10-13 was already beginning to mount during the early stages of Paul’s Ephesus ministry.” For more details, see Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 20-21.

<sup>9</sup> Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 21.

church (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11), though there is no accurate information concerning when and why he was there.<sup>10</sup>

6) Paul's brief visit to Corinth – After Timothy came back to Paul from Corinth,<sup>11</sup> Paul changed his first plan according to which he wished to visit the Corinthian Christians “after passing through Macedonia” and to stay with them or “even spend the winter” (cf. 1 Cor. 16:5-7).

Paul alludes to a “painful visit” (2 Cor. 2:1) because it did not “settle the problem, and he may have suffered severe insults from someone who was leading a group opposed to him”<sup>12</sup> (2 Cor. 2:1-11. Cf. 2 Cor. 13:2). This painful experience made him change his plans of returning to Corinth after journeying through Macedonia and instead he returned directly to Ephesus (cf. 2 Cor. 1:23).

7) Paul's “severe” letter – After Paul had returned to Ephesus, he wrote another letter to the Corinthian Christians. He wrote this letter with “much affliction and anguish of heart” and “many tears” (cf. 2 Cor. 2:4). Scholars disagree concerning this severe letter of Paul's.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Maybe Timothy was sent in order to either carry Paul's letter to the Corinthian church or to correct the wrong teachings in the Corinthian church and to bring the report of the Corinthian congregation to Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11). See K. Quast, *Reading the Corinthian Correspondence: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 25, especially figure 2-2.

<sup>11</sup> When Timothy came back Ephesus from Corinth, he probably brought a report on the confused state of the Corinthian congregation. This caused Paul to make a plan to visit Corinth urgently in order to settle the problems in the church.

<sup>12</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 66. Concerning Paul's brief visit to Corinth, Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 22, says that “when Paul arrived in Corinth from Ephesus he found himself the object of a hurtful attack (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12) made by an individual, while no attempt was made by the congregation as a whole to support Paul (2 Cor. 2:3).”

<sup>13</sup> Scholars can be divided into three main groups: 1) The severe letter is no longer extant – Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 7-8; 2) The severe letter that Paul referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:4 is 1 Corinthians – Hughes, *Second Corinthians*, xxi-xxx; 3) The severe letter has survived and it is either 2 Corinthians 10-13 or at least a part of 2

This severe letter to the Corinthian congregation appealed to them to “take action against the one who had caused Paul such hurt” and to “demonstrate their innocence in the matter and their affection for Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 2:3-4; 7:8, 12).”<sup>14</sup>

Though it is not obvious who carried the severe letter to the Corinthian congregation, it seems that it was Titus (cf. 2 Cor. 7:5-7). Paul was in “great anxiety” because “he wondered how the church would respond to it.”<sup>15</sup>

After Paul and Titus had made a plan to meet in Troas, Titus headed to Corinth and Paul left Ephesus and went to Troas. In Troas, Paul recognised that a door for the gospel had been opened wide, but he left Troas because he “did not find my brother Titus there” and his mind “could not rest” (cf. 2 Cor. 2:12-13), and went on to Macedonia “hoping to intercept him on his way through that province to Troas.”<sup>16</sup>

8) Titus’ arrival in Macedonia and Paul’s joyful letter – It is not obvious what happened during Titus’ visit to the Corinthian congregation because there is no clear information on it. However, his ministry was successful and he brought a good report to Paul in Macedonia (2 Cor. 7:6-7). As Paul recommends him as his co-worker (2 Cor. 8:16-24) Titus accomplished Paul’s request and made the Corinthian Christians

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Corinthians 10-13 – Plummer, *Second Corinthians*, xxvi; Snyder, *First Corinthians*, 13.  
For more details, see Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 27-29.

<sup>14</sup> Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 66.

<sup>16</sup> Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 22.

willing to reconcile with Paul.<sup>17</sup>

After Paul had received the glad news of the Corinthian Christians from Titus, he wrote a joyful letter to the Corinthians in Macedonia. This is called 2 Corinthians.<sup>18</sup> Many scholars have raised the question of the integrity of 2 Corinthians because of the extraordinarily difference in tone between 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 2 Corinthians 10-13.<sup>19</sup>

There is no definite information on the period between Paul's joyful letter to the Corinthians and his departure from Macedonia.<sup>20</sup> Paul probably sent Titus to the Corinthian church again in order to communicate his joy and to confirm certain business before he arrived in Corinth (2 Cor. 8:17-24). Some<sup>21</sup> assume that after a length of time Titus brought back the terrible reports on the state of the Corinthian church and that Paul then wrote his final letter to the Corinthian Christians.

According to the Acts of the Apostles 20-21, Paul left Macedonia and travelled to Greece, probably to Corinth, and then stayed there for three months (Acts 20:1-3). After that he went to Macedonia, and sailed to Troas (Acts 20:3, 6). Then he journeyed to Miletus by sea and met with

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<sup>17</sup> Snyder, *First Corinthians*, 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> While some scholars such as Hughes, *Second Corinthians*, xxviii-xxx, think that this letter is all of 2 Corinthians, some such as Storm, *Excommunication*, 70-74, think that it is a part of 2 Corinthians, i.e. 2 Corinthians 1-9. For more details, see Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 29-33.

<sup>19</sup> Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 24, thinks that 2 Corinthians 10-13 was written after Titus brought the terrible reports of the Corinthian church in Macedonia.

<sup>20</sup> Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 23-25; Storm, *Excommunication*, 66.

<sup>21</sup> Though Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 24, insists that Paul's joyful letter is 2 Corinthians 1-9 and Paul's final letter 2 Corinthians 10-13, it has been opposed by others.

the Ephesians elders (Acts 20:15, 17-18). After Paul had given some instructions to them (Acts 20:18-35), he returned to Caesarea and then finally went up to Jerusalem (Acts 21:8, 15).

## 2. 2 Composite theories of the Epistles to the Corinthians<sup>22</sup>

There are many theories concerning the possible partition of the epistles to the Corinthians. I will not discuss the matter fully, because the debate is still under way, and it is not my major point in this thesis. Therefore I will only present a brief overview and then I will focus in the next part on the relationship between 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13.

In his work, A. Halmel<sup>23</sup> identified three different letters in 2 Corinthians:

- 1) Letter A: 1:1-2; 1:8-2:13; 7:5-8:24; 13:13;
- 2) Letter B: 10:1-13:10;
- 3) Letter C: 1:3-7; 2:14-7:4; 9:1-15; 13:11-12.

J. Weiss<sup>24</sup> posited that 1 Corinthians consisted of three different parts and that 2 Corinthians actually included four different letters:

- 1) Letter 1-A: 1 Corinthians 10:1-23; 6:12-20; 10:23-30; 11:2-24  
(with 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1);
- 2) Letter 1-B: 1 Corinthians 1:1-6:11; 7:1-9:23; 13:1-13;

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<sup>22</sup> Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 1-21; Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 25-33; Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 36-41; Storm, *Excommunication*, 64-75.

<sup>23</sup> A. Halmel, *Der zweite Korintherbrief des Apostels Paulus. Geschichte und literarkritische Untersuchungen* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1904).

<sup>24</sup> J. Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910/1977), xl-xlii; *Earliest Christianity* (2 vols., Eng. Trans., New York: Harper, 1959), 1:323-41.



- 3) Letter 1-C: 1 Corinthians 12:1-16:24;
- 4) Letter 2-A: The "previous letter" referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9  
(included in 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1)
- 5) Letter 2-B: 2 Corinthians 8:1-24
- 6) Letter 2-C: 2 Corinthians 2:14-6:13; 7:2-4; 10:1-13:13
- 7) Letter 2-D: 2 Corinthians 1:1-2:13; 7:5-16; 9:1-15.

According to G. Bornkamm,<sup>25</sup> 2 Corinthians consists of five separate letters:

- 1) Letter A (letter of defence): 2 Corinthians 2:14-6:13; 7:2-4;
- 2) Letter B (letter of tears): 2 Corinthians 10:1-13:10;
- 3) Letter C (letter of reconciliation): 2 Corinthians 1:1-2:13; 7:5-16;
- 4) Letter D (letter of commendation for Titus): 2 Corinthians 8:1-24;
- 5) Letter E (letter of arrangement for the collection): 2 Corinthians 9:1-15.

W. Schmithals<sup>26</sup> believes that there are thirteen different letters which were written by Paul to the Corinthian Christians:

- 1) Letter A: 1 Corinthians 11:2, 17-34;

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<sup>25</sup> G. Bornkamm, *The New Testament: A Guide to Its Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 100-103; "The History of the Origin of the So-Called Second Letter to the Corinthians," *NTS* 8 (1962), 258-64.

<sup>26</sup> W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letter to the Corinthians*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 245-53; "Die Korintherbriefe als Briefsammlung," 263-88. According to Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 10, Schmithals posited "only six different letters to Corinth, with sections of 2 Corinthians appearing in five of these" in 1955, but thereafter "isolated parts of 2 Corinthians in six of nine letters written to Corinth" in 1973.

- 2) Letter B: 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:22; 6:12-20;
- 3) Letter C: 1 Corinthians 6:1-11; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1;
- 4) Letter D: 1 Corinthians 15:1-58; 16:13-24;
- 5) Letter E (letter of response): 1 Corinthians 11:3-16; 7:1-8:13;  
9:19-22; 10:23-11:1; 12:1-31a; 14:1b-40; 12:31b-13:13;  
16:1-12;
- 6) Letter F: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3:23; 4:14-21;
- 7) Letter G: 1 Corinthians 5:1-13;
- 8) Letter H: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; 9:1b-18; 2 Corinthians 6:3-13; 7:2-  
4a;
- 9) Letter I: 2 Corinthians 4:2-14;
- 10) Letter J: 1 Corinthians 4:7-13; 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:18; 4:16-6:2;  
Romans 13:12b-14;
- 11) Letter K (letter of tears): 2 Corinthians 10:1-13:13;
- 12) Letter L (collection letter): 2 Corinthians 8:1-24a;
- 13) Letter N (joyful letter): 2 Corinthians 1:1-2:13; 7:5-7, 4b, 8-16;  
9:1-15; Romans 5:1b-10.

Most recently M. C. de Boer<sup>27</sup> suggested that Paul took up his pen twice because he received news on the Corinthian church from two sources at two different occasions. In other words, he got news from Chloe's people, Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, who visited him, and this happened before he had finished his letter to the Corinthians.

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<sup>27</sup> Cited from Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 38. Cf. M. C. de Boer, "The Composition of 1 Corinthians," 229-45.

Though the scholars' research concerning the partition theory of the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians is interesting and original, there is no clear evidence for their hypotheses. Moreover these hypotheses cause one to disregard the composite features of the Epistles to the Corinthians because of a particular theme and/or an atmosphere.

### 2. 3 The relationship between 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13

It has been recognized that the tones of 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 2 Corinthians 10-13 are distinctively different. 2 Corinthians 1-9 reveal Paul's joy about Titus' successful visit and the change in the attitude of the Corinthian believers (cf. 2 Cor. 2:1-3; 7:5-16); Paul's tone in chapters 1-9 is thus mild and "yearning for reconciliation."<sup>28</sup> It seems that, although some false teachers had attacked Paul, the Corinthians church had settled the problems and that Paul therefore appeals to them to "forgive and comfort" the erring member (2 Cor. 2:7). Scholars call this part a "joyful letter" or "letter of relief."<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, the tone of 2 Corinthians 10-13 is extraordinarily different to that of 2 Corinthians 1-9. According to chapters 10-13, some people probably attacked Paul's apostleship and Paul therefore had to defend himself (cf. 2 Cor. 11:5). Moreover, the problem of the erring members has not been settled and Paul was warning them about this (cf. 2 Cor. 13:2). One can thus say that Paul's tone in chapters 10-13 is filled with a "torrent of reproaches, sarcastic self-vindication, and stern

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<sup>28</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 68.

<sup>29</sup> Snyder, *First Corinthians*, 9; Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 23.

warnings.”<sup>30</sup>

As I indicated above, scholars focus on the integrity of the epistles to the Corinthians, especially on the relationship between 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13, as a result of J. S. Semler’s assumption.

This hypothesis has been popularised in German scholarship at first and thereafter J. H. Kennedy<sup>31</sup> spread it to English scholars. For example, K. Lake<sup>32</sup> defended this theory on account of two main points: 1) An absolute break between 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13; 2) Internal evidence indicating that 2 Corinthians 10-13 was not written with 2 Corinthians 1-9.<sup>33</sup>

A. Plummer<sup>34</sup> believes that it is difficult to accept that 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13 were written by Paul at the same time because inconsistencies between them are clearly present. He insists that 2 Corinthians 10-13 was written before 2 Corinthians 1-9 and that chapters 10-13 correspond to the “severe letter.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 68. A. Plummer, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: Charles Scribners’ Sons, 1915), xxxiii-xxxvi, lists some passages which show the contrast in the tone between 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13: 1) 1:24; 13:5, 2) 7:16; 12:20, 3) 8:7; 12:20-21, 4) 2:3; 10:2, 5) 7:11; 11:3, 6) 3:2; 13:10.

<sup>31</sup> J. H. Kennedy, *The Second and Third Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Methuen, 1906), xiv.

<sup>32</sup> K. Lake, *The Earlier Epistles of Paul* (London: Rivington’s, 1927), 155.

<sup>33</sup> Lake, *Earlier Epistles*, 155, thinks that 2 Corinthians 10-13 was written before 2 Corinthians 1-9 and that the “severe letter” mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:5-9 is 2 Corinthians 10-13. Storm, *Excommunication*, 69-70, insists that, whereas the integrity of 2 Corinthians relies on external evidence, the composite theory depends on internal evidence. W. H. Bates, “The Integrity of II Corinthians,” *NTS* 12 (October 1965), 62-63, mentions that the church fathers made quotation(s) from or reference(s) to 2 Corinthians without any allusion of composite letter of 2 Corinthians.

<sup>34</sup> Plummer, *Second Corinthians*, xxx-xxxii.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxii-xxxvi. Plummer, *Second Corinthians*, xxxi-xxxiii, lists some passages of 2 Corinthians 1-9 which seem to point out passages in chapters 10-13: 1) 10:1; 7:16;

To sum up, the arguments on the composite theory may be summarized as follows: 1) There is an extraordinary change of tone between the two parts; 2) There is an absolute break between them. Therefore it seems that 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13 were not written at the same time by Paul.

However, some scholars such as P. E. Hughes<sup>36</sup> have rejected the composite theory and supported the integrity of 2 Corinthians.

A. M. G. Stephenson<sup>37</sup> points out that, although there is a remarkable change of tone between 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13, there are some places of change of tone in 2 Corinthians 1-9 as well. Paul thus seems to change his tone to the readers within 2 Corinthians 1-9 as well.<sup>38</sup>

Hughes<sup>39</sup> criticizes the notion that some passages of 2 Corinthians 1-9 seem to refer back to 2 Corinthians 10-13 and that chapters 10-13 were written before chapter 1-9. He thinks that these passages cannot be used as a decisive proof of the composite theory, because, although some passages in 2 Corinthians 10-13 seem to refer back to chapters 1-9, some passages in 2 Corinthians 1-9 refer back to 1 Corinthians as well.

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2) 10:2; 8:22; 3) 10:6; 2:9; 4) 12:16; 4:2; 5) 12:17; 7:2; 6) 13:2; 1:23. He thinks that these passages in 2 Corinthians 1-9 show that 2 Corinthians 10-13 was an earlier letter (earlier than 2 Corinthians 1-9).

<sup>36</sup> Hughes, *Second Corinthians*, xxi-xxii.

<sup>37</sup> A. M. G. Stephenson, "A Defense of the Integrity of II Corinthians," in *The Authorship and Integrity of the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1964), 87-90.

<sup>38</sup> See 2 Cor. 2:17; 3:1-2; 4:1-2; 6:1-2, 11-13; 6:14-7:1; 7:2-4.

<sup>39</sup> Hughes, *Second Corinthians*, xxv-xxxiv.

F. F. Bruce<sup>40</sup> rejects the idea that 2 Corinthians 10-13 was written before 2 Corinthians 1-9 and that the "severe letter" mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:5-9 is 2 Corinthians 10-13, because 2 Corinthians 10-13 seems to have been written in anger rather than in sorrow (cf. 2 Cor. 2:1-4).<sup>41</sup> Moreover, according to him, Paul's reference to sending Titus and another brother in 2 Corinthians 12:18 most probably refers to the Titus' volunteering to go to the Corinthian Christians with the brother "who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel" in 2 Corinthian 8:16-18.<sup>42</sup>

In my opinion, although one should accept the integrity of 2 Corinthians, there must have been an interruption during its writing. In other words, Paul probably got unsettling reports from the Corinthian church before he finished writing chapters 1-9. He then wrote chapters 10-13 and sent 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13 as one letter to the Corinthian Christians.<sup>43</sup>

## 2. 4 Conclusion

In this section, I have investigated the integrity of the Epistles to the Corinthians. In particular, I focused on the relationship between 2

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<sup>40</sup> F. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians* (London/Grand Rapids: Marshall, Morgan & Scott/Eerdmans, 1971), 167-68.

<sup>41</sup> Plummer, *Second Corinthians*, xxx-xxxi. Cf. Lake, *Earlier Epistles*, 155.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-69. Hughes, *Second Corinthians*, 468, claims that the two references in 2 Corinthians 8 and 12 point to the same event. On the other hand, Storm, *Excommunication*, 73, thinks that the reference in 2 Corinthians 12 points to past events concerning Titus.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Storm, *Excommunication*, 72-74.

Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13.

The debate on the composition of 2 Corinthians is still under way and it is safe to say that it is impossible to reach a definite conclusion at this stage. I, however, stand on the side of those scholars who believe that 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13 were composed by Paul as one letter to the Corinthian Christians. Furthermore, although it is clear that there is a change of the tone and even a definite break between 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13, it does not necessarily mean that 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13 were written at different times and that one should accept the composite theory.

In conclusion, though the arguments on the composition of 2 Corinthians are multifarious, they are not decisive. Most of argument rest on the literary and internal evidence and on "the collective force of various weak arguments."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> G. L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 63.

### Chapter 3 The problem of πορνεία in the church of the Corinthians

In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul begins to address a specific case of immorality that occurred in the Corinthian church, in reaction to alarming reports that have reached him, presumably either through Chloe's household (1 Cor. 1:11) or Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17), who carried the letter of the Corinthian congregation to Paul. Apparently the Corinthian church did not mention this problem in their letter to Paul.

Paul's rebuke in 1 Corinthians 5:1 is worded as follows: "... that there is sexual immorality among you." Paul describes it as "of a kind that does not occur even among pagans." Which kind of sexual immorality occurred in the Corinthian church? And what is the meaning of "a man has his father's wife"?

In this chapter, I will investigate the nature of the sexual offence that occurred in the Corinthian church, as well as the disciplinary measures pronounced by Paul.

#### 3. 1 The nature of πορνεία

When Paul deals with the problem of sexual offence in 1 Corinthians, he employs the term πορνεία, which means "sexual immorality." In the Greek world this word referred to "prostitution" and among the ancient



Jews it covered “any kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.”<sup>1</sup> Some scholars<sup>2</sup> point out that Paul uses neither the Greek word for adultery nor the one for incest and thus accept that Paul does not describe the offence as adultery or incest. J. C. Hurd<sup>3</sup> even proposes the possibility of a “spiritual marriage.”

Most scholars, however, accept that the immoral act was incest. G. D. Fee<sup>4</sup> supports the interpretation of the offence as incest by the following two points: 1) The term “father’s wife” is derived directly from the LXX of Leviticus 18:7-8, where these offensive sins are forbidden, and 2) The verb “to have,” when used in sexual or marital contexts, is a euphemistic term for a continuing sexual relationship.

Therefore I conclude that the immoral offence that occurred in the Corinthian church was incest, “a man having his father’s wife” rather than his own mother, and the sexual relationship was not a single slip but a continuous act. It is possible that the man and the woman were married, but it is not certain. If the offender’s father were still living, “adultery was added to incest, and this considerably aggravated the case.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. F. Orr & J. A. Walther, *1 Corinthians* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 185.

<sup>2</sup> R. B. Brown, *1 Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1970), 318; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1971), 121.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York: SPCK, 1965), 278.

<sup>4</sup> G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 200.

<sup>5</sup> J. Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (London: The Epworth Press, 1973), 34. The situation of the man’s father is debated by scholars. Since Paul provides us with so little specific information about the situation of the man’s father, we cannot be certain about it. However, W. R. Bowie & P. Scherer, *Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 60, believe that this man’s father probably was dead. Cf. Héring, *First Corinthians*, 34; R. P. Martin, *1 Corinthians – Galatians* (London: Scripture Union, 1968), 14.

What was the nature, then, of the offence that occurred in the Corinthian church?

Firstly, the offence of this man directly violated God's covenantal norms in the Old Testament. The depiction echoes the Scriptural prohibition of such relationships: "Cursed be anyone who lies with his father's wife" (Deut. 27:20; cf. Lev. 18:8; 20:11).

Secondly, both Jewish and Greco-Roman law specifically forbade such a terrible sexual relationship. According to the Mishnah, the offender deserved to be stoned to death (*Sanhedrin* 7.4). Roman law also forbade such a sexual relationship, even after the death of the father.<sup>6</sup> Gaius and Cicero express extreme disgust at such a terrible relationship.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, the "Institutes of Gaius" (1:63) lists persons related to a man whom he was not free to marry.<sup>8</sup>

Thirdly, this sexual offence deserved severe punishment. According to Jewish law, the offence would incur the death penalty (cf. Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 9.1). Josephus also confirms this (19 *Ant.* 3.275-6). According to Roman law, this form of incest was a crime which during many periods

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<sup>6</sup> Brown, *1 Corinthians*, 319.

<sup>7</sup> *Institutes of Gaius* 1.63: "Neither can I marry her who has aforesaid been my mother-in-law or step-mother, or daughter-in-law or step-mother." Cf. Cicero, *Cluent.* 6, on the marriage of a woman with her son-in-law: "Oh! To think of the woman's sin, unbelievable, unheard of in all experience save for this single instance!" Cited from Fee, *First Corinthians*, footnote 24. Cf. P. Hartog, "'Not even among the pagans' (1 Cor 5:1): Paul and Seneca on incest," in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context. Studies in Honor of David E. Aune*, edited by John Potopoulos (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006), 51-64.

<sup>8</sup> According to Héring, *First Corinthians*, 34, 'Item amitam' (paternal aunt), 'et materteram' (maternal aunt), 'uxorem dueere non licet, item eam quae mihi quondam sorcus' (mother-in-law, i.e. wife's mother), 'aut nurus' (daughter-in-law), 'aut privigna' (step-daughter, i.e. wife's daughter), 'aut noverca' (second mother) fuit (*Institutiones*, 1.63, Teubner, 17-18).

carried the death penalty, and at all periods incurred severe chastisement at the least.<sup>9</sup>

Fourthly, the act of immorality was not only an incident of individual misconduct but was also associated with the whole congregation. Although the case of incest was related to one individual offender, it was a problem for the whole community. Many scholars agree that Paul's major concern throughout the text is the practice and acceptance of πορνεία in the Corinthian Christian community.<sup>10</sup> To my mind, the problem that manifested in the Corinthian church was not only the misconduct of an individual immoral man, but also the attitude of the Corinthian congregation in allowing the behaviour to continue in the church.

### 3. 2 Disciplinary measures pronounced by Paul

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 5:5 are severe and even mysterious. He says "You are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord."

Paul thus tells the Corinthian church to expel the offender. When should this take place? They were instructed to carry out discipline "when you are assembled." Some scholars think of a judicial act of some kind and the execution of a particular sentence, but to imagine an

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<sup>9</sup> J. D. M. Derrett, "'Handing over to Satan' An explanation of 1 Cor. 5:1-7," in *Studies in the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 172.

<sup>10</sup> P. Miner, "Christ and the Congregation: 1 Corinthians 5-6," *RevExp* 80 (1983), 343, points out that in 1 Cor. 5 only one verse deals with the offender himself but twelve verses with the Corinthian congregation. See also B. S. Rosner, "οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἐπειθήσατε: Corporate Responsibility in 1 Corinthians 5," *NTS* 38 (1992), 470-73 and L. V. Broek, "Discipline and Community: Another Look at 1 Cor. 5," *RefRev* 48(1994), 5-13.

ecclesiastical court would be anachronistic.<sup>11</sup> When Paul uses the words “When you are assembled,” it is certain that he had in mind that a meeting of the community should be held.<sup>12</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 5:5 Paul proclaims “You are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.” The following questions are immediately raised by this statement: What is implied by the man being consigned to Satan? What do the terms “the spirit” and “the flesh” signify? And what do “the destruction of the flesh” and the salvation of “the spirit” mean in this context?

It is particularly hard to determine the exact implication of Paul’s statement, “You are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.” Interpretations of the expression “hand over to Satan” suggested by scholars range from the believable to the somewhat fanciful.<sup>13</sup> In this

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<sup>11</sup> N. Watson, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth Press, 1992), 48. See Pfitzner, “Purified Community,” 41-42.

<sup>12</sup> It is suggested by some that the action of church discipline had a “cultic or even liturgical form.” See M. R. Storm, *Excommunication in the Life and Theology of the Primitive Christian Communities* (Michigan: U. M. I., 1992), 134. G. Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community: Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism, and within Primitive Christianity* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1972), 146, notes that the terminology in 1 Corinthians 5:5 is similar to the baptismal formulations in Romans 6:6-11, Colossians 2:12-15 and Galatians 5:16-24 which refer to the death of the old man and the life of the new man. H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 97, indicates that the announcement of 1 Corinthians 5:5 reveals not mere exclusion from the community but rather the action of a dynamic ritual in the assembly. See also I. Havener, “A Curse for Salvation - 1 Corinthians 5:1-5,” in *Sin, Salvation and the Spirit*, edited by D. Durken (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press), 334-44.

<sup>13</sup> B. Campbell, “Flesh and Spirit in 1 Cor. 5:5: An Exercise in Rhetorical Criticism in

section, I will investigate various hypotheses with regard to the meaning of the phrase “hand over to Satan” and show that the interpretation of “removal of one’s sinful nature” of the offender is the best option.

### 3. 2. 1 Delivery to a Roman official

Derrett<sup>14</sup> believes that “handing over to Satan” means delivering the man to the Roman civil authority for execution. The action of delivering a fellow Jew to the Gentiles was regarded as extremely abhorrent, but the judicial court of a Jewish community could order a Jew to be delivered to the gentiles.<sup>15</sup> Although in a different context, the most significant example is the handing over of Jesus to Pilate in the New Testament (Matt. 27:2ff.; Mark 15:1ff.).

According to this explanation, Satan represents the legal and social sanctions of secular society. These sanctions would be the administration of a particular penalty, because the offender in the Corinthian church violated the Roman law which prohibited such a relationship. However, such a handing over would not be applicable in

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the New Testament,” *JETS* 36 (1993), 331-32, presents the following seven interpretations: 1) The delivery to Satan will end in a wasting physical illness suffered by the sinner; 2) The expulsion will lead to the destruction of the transgressor’s sinful nature; 3) The sentence pronounced by Paul refers to physical death at Satan’s hand; 4) A delivery to the Roman civil magistrates; 5) A secret execution; 6) A self-atoning physical death and 7) A delivery to purgatory. Forkman, *Limits*, 144-45, mentions four interpretations and A. C. Thiselton, “The Meaning of Σάρξ in 1 Cor. 5:5: A Fresh Approach in the Light of Logical and Semantic Factors,” *SJT* 26 (1973), 204-28, mentions six interpretations of this phrase.

<sup>14</sup> Derrett, “Handing over,” 167-184.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 176. Derrett, “Handing over,” 176-77, provides as example the case that the Qumran sect, known as one of “the most pious groups” in Israel, also accepted that an offender could be “handed over to be put to death according to the laws of Gentiles.”

cases of capital punishment, such as an incestuous relationship.

Derrett<sup>16</sup> presents an argument to this objection but his argument does not persuade, since it is difficult to accept that the matter would be regarded by Paul as a civil action or even as a case of capital punishment, as he elsewhere rebukes the Corinthians as follows: "When any of you has a matter against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints?" (1 Cor. 6:1).

Derrett's suggestion is interesting and original, but most scholars do not accept it, because there is no proof that the Jews referred to "Roman officials, as 'the Satan.'"<sup>17</sup> Thiselton<sup>18</sup> also points out that, even if we find some kind of association between Satan and Roman society, it would be impossible to confirm that "the sanctions of Roman law would have operated in the way which is claimed" as conclusive evidence for this suggestion.

### 3. 2. 2 Death as atonement for sins

Drawing on Jewish traditions, Barrett<sup>19</sup> argues that Paul believed that

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<sup>16</sup> Derrett, "Handing Over," 179, says that "in civil affairs the community judges for and amongst themselves; they were autonomous on the principle admittedly operating in the Diaspora. They did not, it seems, have the power of the sword. The one who held the sword had it for the punishment of crime, both for the purification of the group and as a deterrent. Thus the church, as visualised by Paul, relied upon the penal powers of the state. This was the case, because there was no efficient police force or detective agency."

<sup>17</sup> Orr, *I Corinthians*, 186.

<sup>18</sup> Thiselton, "Meaning," 219.

<sup>19</sup> Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 126. V. G. Shillington, "Atonement Texture in 1

the death of the sinner would serve as the means of retribution and atonement for the offender's sins, and that, consequently, the man's spirit would be saved. According to him, this suggestion is supported by the fact that Rabbinic literature contains detailed speculations about the atoning effects of death.

In Judaism, death was occasionally regarded as the means of "atonement for sins."<sup>20</sup> However, the death penalty could serve to expiate the sin of the offender only when the offender had repented.

The Essenes had a notion similar to the one in Judaism. The Essene community believed that the suffering of an offender resulted in atonement, and that he thus could be received back into the community again.<sup>21</sup>

According to this interpretation, what Paul has in mind is that the offender would himself bring atonement for his crimes/sins so that he no longer needed to be punished for them when the day of the Lord would come. Some commentators<sup>22</sup> thus hold that physical suffering or illness was to precede the man's death so that he would have had an opportunity to repent. Derrett<sup>23</sup> presents the sufferings of the Sodomites

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Corinthians 5.5." *JSNT* 71 (1998), 29-50, argues that the best interpretation for the "textual context for 1 Cor. 5:5" is the "sin-bearing sacrifice figure" in Leviticus 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* For example, see Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 6. 2. This rule was even applied to criminals who were instructed to say, "May my death be an atonement for all my sins." See also Forkman, *Limits*, 145-46.

<sup>21</sup> Forkman, *Limits*, 145.

<sup>22</sup> Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 98. See S. D. MacArthur, "'Spirit' in the Pauline Usage: 1 Cor. 5:5," *Studia Biblica* 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1978), 251.

<sup>23</sup> Derrett, "Handing Over," 178-79.

(Matt. 11:20ff.; Luke 10:12ff.) and that of the robber crucified with Jesus (Luke 23:39-43) as examples for this interpretation.

However, in my opinion, Derrett's interpretation looks like a distortion of Jesus' wording. What Jesus had in mind in this context was not the atonement of the Sodomites through punishment, but rather to reproach the stubbornness of Chorazin and Capernaum, because he had performed most of his miracles in their cities, but "they did not repent." In the case of the two robbers crucified with Jesus, the problem with Derrett's point of view is how to explain the other robber's suffering and death. In the case of one of the robbers, Jesus assured him of salvation, not because of his own suffering and death for his sins, but because he confessed his faith.

Thus, this interpretation is not likely, since there is no reference whatsoever in the context to the possibility of the man's repentance. Furthermore, it is difficult to accept that Paul would have thought of anything except the death of Christ as effecting man's atonement; especially not the death of a sinner. To Paul, atonement for sin could not be achieved through the death of a human being; only through that of Christ.

### 3. 2. 3 Destruction of the physical body

Without question, the most widespread critical interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5:5, "You are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the



Lord," is what one may call the "curse/death" interpretation, that is, that "destruction of the flesh" means the destruction of the physical body or the physical suffering of the offender.

According to this view, Paul links the pronouncement of a curse upon the offender in question to the expectation that he will die as a result of the curse. The mysterious phrase, "hand over to Satan" then means to deliver the offender to sudden physical death or to disease which will lead to physical death at the hand of Satan.

According to this explanation, "the flesh" only signifies the offender's physical body.<sup>24</sup> Most interpreters who hold this notion agree that, if the expulsion of the offender from the church community would occur, it would be a part of the effect of the curse.<sup>25</sup>

Since Paul provides so little specific information about the process and expected results of "handing over to Satan," several variations of the "curse/ death" interpretation have developed:

1) Some scholars, such as Barrett,<sup>26</sup> envision the death of the offender, but do not connect the death with a curse; 2) Godet<sup>27</sup> leaves room for the repentance of the offender and suggests that Paul's

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<sup>24</sup> Baird, *Corinthian Church*, 65.

<sup>25</sup> See Forkman, *Limits*, 143-46; Havener, "Curse," 334-44. Forkman, *Limits*, 144, says "When the fornicator in Corinth was consigned to Satan, this means that he was subjected to the most powerful curse. That he with this curse was thrust out of the community seems obvious." However, some scholars, such as C. K. Barrett and F. F. Bruce, do not agree with this view.

<sup>26</sup> Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 126-27. See also F. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971), 54-55.

<sup>27</sup> Godet, *First Corinthians*, 257. MacArthur, "'Spirit'", 51, says "This may not be sudden death; it may be a slow death which involves physical suffering."

language does not indicate that he expected the sudden death of the offender, but that his expression rather indicates a “slow wasting, leaving time to the sinner for repentance.” Nevertheless, he does not suggest that the repentance of the offender would forestall the impending death; 3) Some, on the other hand, interpret the expression as referring to the sudden death of the offender:<sup>28</sup> After the solemn judgement of the Corinthian church was pronounced, the offender would encounter sudden physical death; 4) Havener<sup>29</sup> takes a sacramental view of the man’s death itself and argues that it led to salvation apart from repentance.

However, all the scholars who support the “curse/death” interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5:5 agree that “the flesh” means the physical body of the offender.

Now we should ask: “What sort of evidence do these scholars provide for this interpretation?” It is usually supported by the following evidence:

Firstly, the death penalty in the Old Testament supports the “curse/death” interpretation. It is argued that the Old Testament was the

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<sup>28</sup> See Bowie & Scherer, *Corinthians*, 49; G. B. Wilson, *1 Corinthians* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 79. Wilson connects the case in 1 Cor. 5 with the cases of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) and Elymas (Acts 13), but we cannot accept that Paul necessarily thought of the same result in his case.

<sup>29</sup> Havener, “Curse,” 340-41.

background for Paul's notion of church discipline.<sup>30</sup> Since he was a Jew and familiar with the Old Testament, it would be logical to assume that he would draw his notion of discipline from the Old Testament. Naturally, scholars thus interpret "the destruction of the flesh" as the physical death of the offender associated with the physical death penalty in the Old Testament.

In this regard Forkman<sup>31</sup> discusses the various terms for "curse" and lists the occurrences in the Old Testament. The surprising aspect is that some of these terms are used within curse/death situations. The most significant example in this regard is Deuteronomy 27:15-26 where a whole series of curses for various offences is listed, which are elsewhere said to require the death penalty.

The other examples are found in the Leviticus Code. It specifies the various sexual offences (Lev. 18:6-18; 20:10-21) and concludes: "Whoever shall do any of these abominations, the persons that do them shall be cut off from among their people" (Lev. 18:29). The cases of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron the priest (Lev. 10:1-2) and the man who violated the Sabbath in the wilderness (Num. 15:32-36) and Arcan (Jos. 7:1, 16-26) are notable examples for the physical death of an offender.

It is thus argued that if one takes into consideration the background

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<sup>30</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>31</sup> Forkman, *Limits*, 26-28. For example, "to be cut off" appears in Gen. 17:14; Ex. 12:15, 19; Num. 9:13; 19:13; the sense of "to be cut off from Israel" occurs in Ex. 26:33; Lev. 10:10; "to withdraw from" appears in juridical situations (1 Kings 8:31f.); the strongest word for 'to curse' appears in Gen. 4:11; 49:7; Josh. 9:22ff.; 1 Kings 16:34.

in the Old Testament, it cannot be doubted that in 1 Corinthians 5 Paul is thinking of the physical death of the offender.

Secondly, according to these scholars, examples of the “curse/death” phenomenon in the New Testament itself support this understanding. The most prominent cases are those of Ananias and his wife Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), Elymas in Paphos (Acts 13:8-11) and reference to the weak and those who died in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 11).

According to Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit by keeping back some of the proceeds from the sale of property while claiming to give everything. After Peter spoke to them, they experienced sudden physical death.

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul claims that, due to the Corinthians’ abuses at the Lord’s Supper, “many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.” The verb κοιμάω is a euphemism for physical death, as in 1 Corinthians 15:18. Therefore, to Paul the notion of physical death or suffering as punishment for sin was not foreign.

According to these scholars, all of these instances are evidence from the New Testament and confirm that the “curse/death” interpretation is an appropriate understanding for 1 Corinthians 5.

Thirdly, scholars point out that the Greek phrase has parallels in the Greek and the Jewish curse formulae.<sup>32</sup> After Deissmann found a Greek

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<sup>32</sup> See Appendix I.

papyrus containing the word παραδίδωμι in a context of the devotion of someone to a supernatural power, many scholars investigated the Greek magical papyri in this regard. It was shown that, in Greek magic, the term παραδίδωμι was a technical term for the handing over of offenders to the supernatural powers.<sup>33</sup>

The parallels to 1 Corinthians 5:5 which are frequently cited for this view come from Judaism and Qumran. In Rabbinic Judaism and in the Qumran community, documents such as *The Manual of Discipline*, *Birkat ha-minim* and *The Damascus Document* contain curse formulae that possibly indicated the death of the offender. Therefore, some scholars take these curse formulae, found in Greek magical papyri and the Judaism and Qumran community documents, as evidence for the “curse/death” interpretation.

Fourthly, some scholars focus on the terminology used in this expression. They point out that ὄλεθρος is a very strong word denoting utter ruin and that it is frequently used in the LXX in contexts where sudden death is obviously intended (Exod. 12:23; Josh. 3:10; 7:25; Jer. 2:30). In the New Testament, this term appears four times (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:9; 1 Tim. 6:9) and it is used “in the sense of final ruin and perdition within an eschatological setting.”<sup>34</sup> Also, two similar terms, ὀλοθρευτής and ὀλοθρεύω, refer to the physical death associated with the Exodus from Egypt and the wilderness wanderings (1 Cor. 10:10;

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<sup>33</sup> Collins, “Function,” 255-56.

<sup>34</sup> Havener, “Curse,” 338.

Heb. 11:28).

According to Godet,<sup>35</sup> the term ὄλεθος cannot denote “a beneficent work of the Holy Spirit.” This is the case because, when Paul expresses the moral notion of the destruction of sin, he uses different terms, namely καταργέω (Rom. 6:6), θανατώω (Rom. 8:13), σταυρώω (Gal. 5:24) and νεκρώω (Col. 3:5). Therefore, Godet argues, when Paul used ὄλεθος, he thought of the real physical loss of the immoral offender.

Another example of the terminology is the infinitive παραδοῦναι. In the case of Paul, the infinitive παραδοῦναι is frequently used to denote transfer to physical death or to the passion of Jesus which ended in physical death (1 Cor. 11:23; 13:3; Gal. 2:20; Rom. 4:25; 8:32).<sup>36</sup>

In the LXX of Job 2:6 the word used is also παραδίδωμι. The meaning of the term comes very close to that of Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:5. The result of the act is indicated as that Satan “inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his feet to the top of his head” (Job 2:7). Thus, under God’s permission, Job was handed over to Satan, and he suffered a physical infliction.

Fifthly, some scholars also give attention to the role of Satan. It is asked how Satan can undertake a matter contrary to his own concern.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Godet, *First Corinthians*, 256.

<sup>36</sup> Havener, “Curse,” 341. He claims that “The implication in these passages is that the death sentence is carried out by others who are hostile; certainly suicide is not indicated in 1 Cor. 13:3 or Rom. 8:32. This is an important observation, distinguishing these passages from 2 Cor. 4:11, where deliverance to death is understood not in a physical sense but in a religious sense, and where the implied agent of the death, if there is any at all, is not a hostile being.”

<sup>37</sup> Godet, *First Corinthians*, 254.

If “the flesh” does not mean the physical body, but ‘sinful nature’ and Satan removes earthly sinful desire, thus benefits the Christian, Satan does not only become part of something against his own interest, but also plays a role as God’s servant.<sup>38</sup>

However, this notion cannot be justified from Scripture. According to 2 Corinthians 12:7ff., Paul himself suffered from a physical malady which he interpreted as a “messenger of Satan,” clearly linking the experience of physical suffering with the work of Satan. Although “the messenger of Satan” achieved something positive from God’s point of view (2 Cor. 12:7), Paul did call him “a thorn in the flesh” manifested in the physical body.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, it is not a familiar notion in the New Testament that Satan is God’s servant.<sup>40</sup> On the contrary, Satan is usually pictured as God’s supreme enemy (Rom. 16:20; Eph. 2:2; 2 Thess. 2:9) and even called a murderer of man in consequence of the first sin (John 8:44), and “the one who has the power of death” (Heb. 2:14). Furthermore, Satan is often depicted as having the power to cause pain in the physical body (Job 2:7; Luke 13:16; 2 Cor. 12: 7) and as one who brings physical woes

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<sup>38</sup> MacAthur, “‘Spirit’”, 250, believes that if it refers to the destruction of fleshly lusts, the role of Satan would be strengthened rather than destroyed by sending him back to the world. S. J. Parry, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 88-89, also believes that sin will be a cumulative, not an exhaustive effect, through the hand of Satan. See also Godet, *First Corinthians*, 255.

<sup>39</sup> According to L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 88-89, the fact that “Paul’s own ‘thorn in the flesh’ was a ‘messenger of Satan’” may well be that “Paul envisages the solemn expulsion of this offender as resulting in physical consequences.”

<sup>40</sup> Forkman, *Limits*, 144.

(Acts 10: 38).

In 1 Timothy 1 it is said that, as result of “handing over to Satan,” Hymenaeus and Alexander were prevented from blaspheming. How is this possible? How is it possible that Satan, the encourager of blasphemy, can be associated with a remedy for it? This cannot be accepted.

Therefore, it is argued, it is best to accept that the role of Satan was to cause the offender suffering or death of the flesh, and that, when the offender in Corinth church was consigned to Satan, it meant that he was subjected to fleshly death/suffering.

Sixthly, some scholars also base their argument on Paul’s normal usage of *σάρξ*.<sup>41</sup> If one looks at Paul’s use of the term *σάρξ* in 1 Corinthians and his use of the term elsewhere, especially in Romans and Galatians, one can obtain some useful information.

In 1 Corinthians 6:16, 7:28, 15:39 (four times) and 50, *σάρξ* clearly means, or at least includes, “body” in a substantial physical or metaphorical sense. 1 Corinthians 1:26 and 10:18, however, use the Greek expression *κατὰ σάρκα* without a verb. In these two passages, *σάρξ* means the earthly, human sphere and it is used neither in a good nor in a bad sense, but in a neutral sense.

Paul sometimes uses the term *σάρξ* in his writings to refer to natural life as such without any moral reference (Rom. 2:28, 11:14; 2 Cor. 10:3-4; 12:7 ; Gal. 1:16; 2:20; 4:13, 23 etc.), as it is exposed both to disease

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<sup>41</sup> See Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 85-86 and Parry, *First Corinthians*, 254-56.



and death (1 Pet. 3:18; 4:1).

In 1 Corinthians 5:5 Paul uses the term *σάρξ* rather than *σῶμα*, although he used *σῶμα* in verse 3. According to Godet,<sup>42</sup> there are two reasons for this, namely, firstly, that *σῶμα* expresses the natural life in its totality, physical and psychical; and secondly, that the body in itself is not to be destroyed (1 Cor. 15).

All the evidence discussed above, gave rise to a widespread consensus that the “curse/death” interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5:5 is the correct explanation of what Paul expected to happen.

### 3. 2. 4 Removal of one’s sinful nature

Although the majority of scholars accept that in this passage *σάρξ* means the physical body of the individual offender, there is a more acceptable interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5:5 than the “curse/death” explanation, namely the “removal of one’s sinful nature” interpretation. According to this understanding, “destruction of the flesh” does not mean the sudden death or physical suffering of the offender but rather the removal of earthly desires or of one’s sensuous nature.

According to this interpretation, “handing this man over to Satan” refers to putting the offender outside the sphere of God’s protection within the church and leaving him exposed to Satanic forces of evil. At the same time, it was expected that such excommunication would cause

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<sup>42</sup> Godet, *First Corinthians*, 256–57.

him to repent and return to the fellowship of the church community. Therefore, "the flesh" to be destroyed was not the individual's physical body but his fleshly nature or earthly desire. By destroying his sinful nature or fleshly lust, the offender's spirit would be saved "on the day of the Lord."

Although the "removal of one's sinful nature" interpretation is not accepted by the majority, it continues to be preferred by many scholars.<sup>43</sup> In this section, I will demonstrate that this interpretation provides a more adequate understanding than the "curse/death" explanation. For this purpose, I will expose the inadequacies of the evidence provided for the "curse/death" interpretation in the order it was presented in the previous section, and then provide evidence for the "removal of one's sinful nature" interpretation as a better explanation.

Firstly, I referred to examples of the death penalty in the Old Testament, where people's sins were punished by sudden physical destruction. Apparently, Paul was familiar with these precedents. The fact that such deaths or physical penalties occurred in communal settings and that the purpose of such penalties was to sustain the community's purity and identity, could be regarded as adequate background for 1 Corinthians 5:5.

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<sup>43</sup> See Fee, *First Corinthians*, 210-14; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 84-86; Pfitzner, "Purified Community," 45-47; Robertson & Plummer, *First Corinthians*, 99-100; South, "Critique," 544-59 and Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 395-400.

However, the Old Testament offers examples both for supporting the notion of excommunication of the offenders as well as that of the physical death of the evildoers. According to the Leviticus Code, the death penalty is applied strictly and at the same time the death of the offender is indicated clearly (Lev. 18:6-29; 20:1-27; cf. Deut. 27:15-26), but in some passages in which the same phrase "be cut off from" is used, it is not clear that sudden physical death is intended (Num. 19:13, 20).<sup>44</sup>

More significant examples are provided by Ezra and Nehemiah. Those who committed offences against the nation were expelled from the community, but they did not suffer physical death (Ezra 10; Neh. 9). According to Ezra 10:8, any person who did not come to Jerusalem within three days for the assembly of repentance would be punished in two ways: all their property would be forfeited, and they would be separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

Therefore, although one could take the death penalty of the Old Testament as the backdrop for understanding 1 Corinthians 5:5; one is biased if one takes only examples in which the death penalty was used as support for one's interpretation.

Secondly, scholars who support the "curse/death" interpretation use examples supporting this from the New Testament itself. The notable

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<sup>44</sup> In these contexts, those who are unclean "shall be cut off from Israel" (v. 13) and "from assembly" (v. 20), but the death of the offenders is not indicated. Rather it seems like expulsion from the community. Forkman, *Limits*, 16-28, rightly points out that there were various types of penalties, from death to expulsion in the Old Testament.

cases in this regard are those of Ananias and his wife Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), Elymas in Paphos (Acts 13:8-11) and the weak and the dead in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 11). From these cases, it can be gathered that people were punished by death for spiritual offences and for offending against the gospel.

However, the parallels between 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 and Acts 5:1-11 are rather remote. First of all, there are no hints of a curse and of any action by the community. In Acts 5, Peter, although an apostle but acting in person, exposed the hypocritical conduct of Ananias and Sapphira, without proclaiming a curse on them. Furthermore, the church at Jerusalem as an assembly played no role. The case of Ananias and Sapphira was not one of church discipline but rather an example of "special divine punishment."<sup>45</sup> It is also important to take note that there is no reference to Satan and to the purpose of their deaths. In the context of Acts 5, Satan's role is not that of "an agent of the punishment," but rather that of "an instigator of the lie."<sup>46</sup> Although the purpose of "destruction of the flesh" is clearly indicated in 1 Corinthians 5:5, nothing is mentioned in Acts 5. Moreover, there is no reference to eschatology in Acts 5. Thus, the death of Ananias and Sapphira focuses on "punitive rather than redemptive" issues, serving as an example in this regard to the rest of the primitive church (Acts 5:11).<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, in the case of 1 Corinthians 11, there is no suggestion

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<sup>45</sup> Pfitzner, "Purified Community," 46.

<sup>46</sup> South, "Critique," 548.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

of any kind of activity of the church community or of any form of church discipline. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, prophetically announces that the actual fact that some of the Corinthians are sick and have even died, is caused by the abuses of Corinthian Christians with regard to the Lord's Supper.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to accept that what is referred to in 1 Corinthians 11 is not church discipline but divine punishment for spiritual offences.

Thirdly, many scholars give attention to the Greek and the Jewish curse formulae in order to support the "curse/death" understanding and connect "hand over to Satan" to parallels in this regard. Although there are similar terms in Job 2:7 and 1 Timothy 1:20, it is hard to find any close parallels between them.<sup>49</sup> Since the expression, "hand over to Satan" appears in Greek magic papyri and in the Jewish and Qumran documents, many scholars would prefer to appeal to the Greek and the Jewish curse formulae. However, there are some differences between 1 Corinthians 5 and the curse formulae found in Jewish and the Qumran community's documents as well as in the Greek magic papyri.

The greatest difference between Paul's instruction to the church in Corinth and the curse formulae has to do with the question of whether it can actually be considered as a curse formula or not.

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<sup>48</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 211-12.

<sup>49</sup> Although there is an echo between 1 Cor. 5 and Job 2, the situation is not closely parallel. See Hays, *First Corinthians*, 85 and South, "Critique," 551.

In the case of the curse formulae in both Greek and Jewish literature, there can be no doubt that one really has examples of a curse formula, without any indication of the offender's destiny in the future. However, one cannot so easily accept that 1 Corinthians 5:5 is a proclamation of a curse on the offender.<sup>50</sup> It definitely does not look as if the act is retributive; it is rather remedial because Paul says that "his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord." Perhaps Paul's words have two angles: 1) punitive for the offender's sin and community's alignment and 2) redemptive for his salvation and the church's purification.

J. E. Mignard<sup>51</sup> rightly points out,

The rites of devotion in both Jewish and Greek traditions were of such a savage nature, that it is inconceivable to imagine how Paul could have adopted or 'Christianized' them for the benefit of the Christian sinner and the Christian church.

Other differences between 1 Corinthians 5 and the curse formulae are that the curse formulae have no reference to communal circumstances or eschatological allusions.<sup>52</sup> None of the curse formula focuses on the community; only on the individual, and seeks revenge on the offender.

In the Qumran community and in Jewish Rabbinism some documents do contain several curse formulae referring to the death of the offender

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<sup>50</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 209, believes that it is not an "execration" formula."

<sup>51</sup> Cited in South, "Critique," 547.

<sup>52</sup> See Appendix I.

or of apostates, which would sustain the identity of the community within a communal situation.<sup>53</sup>

However, it is important to realise that these documents also contain the practice of various forms of expulsion from the community. In the synagogue ban, the measures for exclusion ranged from temporary expulsions to total and permanent expulsion.<sup>54</sup>

I thus conclude that the evidence provided for the curse formulae in the Greek papyri and the Jewish documents yields only very little support for the “curse/death” understanding.

Fourthly, scholars who accept the “curse/death” interpretation argue that the term ὄλεθρος denotes sudden death or physical death. As I indicated above, they claim that ὄλεθρος and similar terms, ὀλοθρευτής and ὀλοθρεύω, were used to denote utter ruin and sudden death or even physical death in the LXX and in the New Testament.

However, it should be noted that these terms were used in Scripture to denote eschatological destruction as well as sudden or physical death. South<sup>55</sup> provides useful examples for this. According to him, in the Prophets, ὄλεθρος and ὀλοθρεύω indicate an eschatological judgement in a

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<sup>53</sup> See Appendix I. Another difficult problem is the dating of the curse formulae. The Greek magical papyri provided by Deissmann and Conzelmann were written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A. D. This is a much later than that of Paul. Therefore, it is unlikely that Paul would have been influenced by the language and the concepts of other religious groups and would have adopted it for his instructions to the Corinthian church.

<sup>54</sup> Forkman, *Limits*, 87-108.

<sup>55</sup> South, “Critique,” 548-49.

general sense. For example, according to Jeremiah 5:6 and Ezekiel 6:14, the prophet is not to predict the physical or sudden death of the Jerusalemites but “the eschatological judgement of God” on Jerusalem or on the land Israel itself.

This is the same in the New Testament. See 1 Thessalonians 5:3; 1 Timothy 6:9. These passages show that ὄλεθρος does not carry the notion of utter ruin and sudden physical death, but rather refers to the “general sense of eschatological or spiritual destruction.”<sup>56</sup>

Fee<sup>57</sup> points out that it is not correct to argue that the term ὄλεθρος is the only aspect that supports the “curse/death” interpretation, since this seems to go counter to Paul’s own theology. Paul does not depict the death as “destruction of the flesh” in his writings. Fee<sup>58</sup> notes,

It stands in contrast to the saving of “the spirit”; and it is simply foreign to Paul’s usage for the “flesh/spirit” contrast to refer to the body as doomed to destruction but the “spirit” (inner, real person?) as destined for salvation.

Therefore, I conclude that, since the term ὄλεθρος and similar terms, ὄλοθρευτής and ὄλοθρεύω, are used to denote not only utter ruin and sudden death or physical death; but also eschatological judgement in Scripture, they cannot be used as decisive evidence for the “curse/death” explanation.

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 549.

<sup>57</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 211.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*



Fifthly, it should be explained how Satan can undertake a matter contrary his own interest, if one accepts the “removal of one’s sinful nature” interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5:5. If Paul uses “the flesh” in the sense of earthly lust, how is it possible that handing over the offender to Satan would bring the offender to the removal of his sinful nature?

According to Job 2, Job suffered physical agony at the hand of Satan although he was not a sinner. It was not a punishment for his sins but a test of his integrity. It resulted in the confirmation of Job’s integrity before God and enabled his spiritual/material betterment (Job 42:1-17). That is, although Satan did not want to act as an agent of God, a positive result was achieved for both God and Job.

In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul refers to a physical malady from which he suffers, which he regards as “a thorn in the flesh,” but also claims that “the messenger of Satan” helped him to learn humility and a deeper understanding of the power and grace of Christ (2 Cor. 12:8-10). In other words, although “the messenger of Satan” brought pain in the physical body of Paul, he accomplished an affirmative effect for both Paul and God.

In 1 Timothy 1 it is doubtful whether “handing over to Satan” means physical punishment.<sup>59</sup> However, it is very important that the intention of the announcement was not Hymenaeus and Alexander’s “final ruin and

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<sup>59</sup> According to South, “Critique,” 551, 1 Timothy 1:20 is “the only true verbal parallel to 1 Cor. 5:5 in New Testament and it clearly excludes the idea of the offenders’ death, because Hymenaeus and Alexander were not expected to die but to learn not to blaspheme and thus correct their behaviour.” Though the authenticity of 1 Timothy (broadly of the Pastoral Letters) is debated, it is clear that the same terminology is used in both 1 Cor. 5 and 1 Timothy 1. See Brown, *New Testament*, 662-68.

damnation” but had a “remedial purpose,”<sup>60</sup> that is, “that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:20).

Although Satan does not act contrary to his own concern (as pictured in Scripture), he works under God’s supervision and permission (Job 1:12; 2:6). If Paul got the verbal parallelism in 1 Corinthians 5 from Job, it is sure that he would have had Job 1:12 and 2:6 in mind, thinking of what happened to Job in the end. Concerning the case of Satan’s role in 1 Timothy 1, the same argument applies. Therefore, these arguments for Satan’s role do not support the “curse/death” understanding but rather the interpretation of it as the “removal of earthly desire” in 1 Corinthians 5:5.

Sixthly, Paul’s usage of σάρξ is often cited in support of the “curse/death” understanding. It is argued that, since, in some cases, the term σάρξ indicates “physical body” according to Paul’s usage, “destruction of the flesh” means destruction of the offender’s physical body.

However, the idea that “the flesh” and “the spirit” signify two parts of a person, the physical body and the essential soul, conflicts with Paul’s usage of the terms. This notion implies a “dualistic understanding of human nature.”<sup>61</sup> The term σάρξ is not understood as a part of the personality, but rather refers to the “whole person”<sup>62</sup> considered from a

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<sup>60</sup> V. A. Farrar & D. Thomas, *Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 167.

<sup>61</sup> Watson, *First Corinthians*, 49.

<sup>62</sup> J. A. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia:

different aspect. In Paul's writings, while *σάρξ* refers to the rebellious human nature opposed to God (Rom. 7:5, 18, 25; 8:3-8; 1 Cor. 3:3; Gal. 5:13, 19, 24), *πνεῦμα* means "the whole person as oriented towards God."<sup>63</sup>

Forkman<sup>64</sup> prefers the "curse/death" explanation, but he agrees that in Paul's letters *σάρξ/πνεῦμα* normally denotes "the contrast between human weakness and the divine power which is foreign to man." In Gal. 3:3, while 'spirit' denotes the "power which decides the life of the believer," "flesh" refers to the "human reliance on the works of the law"<sup>65</sup> (cf. Rom. 2:28ff.; Gal. 4:23, 29; 5:17; Phil. 3:3). *Σάρξ* thus refers to "the outward" (Rom. 2:28), "outward man" (2 Cor. 4:16), "the letter" (Rom. 2:27, 29; Col. 3:6) and is opposed to "the inward man" (Rom. 7:22) and "the spirit" (Rom. 2:29).

J. D. G. Dunn<sup>66</sup> attempts to classify the Pauline usage of *σάρξ*. According to him, when *σάρξ* is used in contrast with *πνεῦμα*, it represents the most negative view, meaning "defective, disqualifying or destructive," as well as "mortal."<sup>67</sup>

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The Westminster Press, 1951), 17. He adds that in technical Greek, *σάρξ* referred to the soft, muscular parts.

<sup>63</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, *1 Corinthians*, 42.

<sup>64</sup> Forkman, *Limits*, 145.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 62-70. The notion of *σάρξ* is classified as follows: 1) The neutral usage (Rom. 11:14; 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:29, 31); 2) The Hebraic thought of weakness (Rom. 6:19); 3) The usage of inadequacy (Gal. 1:16; Phil. 1:22-23; Philem. 16; 2 Cor. 12:7-9); 4) The moral connotation (Rom. 3:20; 8:3, 8; Gal. 2:16); 5) The sphere of sin's operations (Rom. 7:5, 18, 25); 6) The usage in antithesis to "spirit" (Rom. 2:28-29; 8:6, Gal 5:16-17) and 7) A source of corruption and hostility to God (Rom. 8:7; 13:14; Gal. 5:24; 6:8).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Therefore, in 1 Corinthians 5 the terms “the flesh” and “the spirit” do not denote “the physical body” and “the essential soul,” but are used in a “theological or qualitative sense.”<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the notion that the physical body should be destroyed so that the essential soul could be saved was foreign to Paul’s thought.<sup>69</sup>

I thus conclude that, although in some cases in Pauline usage *σάρξ* refers to the physical body, in general it denotes rebellious human nature as opposed to God. Therefore, what is to be destroyed is not the physical body of the offender, but rather “the particular aspects or qualities,” “the self-glorifying or self-satisfaction,” “fleshly stance of self-sufficiency” of the offender.<sup>70</sup> It is not impossible to imagine Paul expecting that the community’s sentence and excommunication of the offender from the church would lead to the removal of fleshly sinful desires of the offender.

Seventhly, I now focus on the intention of Paul’s statement, “hand him over to Satan.” When Paul refers to “the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord,” what did Paul expect as the concrete result of this handing over to Satan?

According to the “curse/death” interpretation, it is very difficult to

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<sup>68</sup> Pfitzner, “Purified Community,” 46.

<sup>69</sup> Forkman, *Limits*, 145. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 217, says that Scriptures know nothing of the final salvation of a sinner’s spirit apart from his body.

<sup>70</sup> Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 395–95. See also Thiselton, “Meaning,” 204–28.

explain Paul's ultimate purpose. The supporters of the "curse/death" interpretation focus their attention on the phrase εἰς ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός and think that it indicates Paul's primary intention, but they do not give much attention to the next phrase ἵνα τὸ πνεῦμα σωθῆ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ κυρίου – as if it does not contribute anything to the context.<sup>71</sup> However, in 1 Corinthians 5:5 the emphasis lies syntactically on the final purpose clause ἵνα τὸ πνεῦμα σωθῆ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ κυρίου. The ultimate intention of Paul's statement is not on the phrase "for the destruction of the flesh" but on the final sentence, "that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord." Fee<sup>72</sup> notes,

As a matter of grammar, however, the expressed *purpose* of the action, which alone qualifies the verb "to hand over," is the final matter only, his salvation. The preposition *eis* ("for") sometimes expresses purpose, but it may also express anticipated result, which seems far more likely here. What the grammar suggests, then, is that the "destruction of his flesh" is the anticipated result of the man's being put back out into Satan's domain, while the express purpose of the action is his redemption.

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<sup>71</sup> Some of them offer simple or even fanciful explanations which do not satisfy. For example, Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 98, merely describes it as "an enigmatic statement" and indicates no preference for any interpretation. Forkman, *Limits*, 144, only says, "In some way the curse stands in the service of the blessing..." Collins, "Function," 259, proposes that "the spirit" to be saved is not that of the individual offender, but "the Holy Spirit of God and Christ which dwells in the community." See South, "Critique," 556-58.

<sup>72</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 209. The italics indicate Fee's emphasis. Lenski, *Corinthians*, 216, believes that εἰς denotes the proximate purpose and ἵνα indicates the final purpose. He adds that this points out that if there is even a remote possibility that the sinner can yet be saved, the attempt to save him must be made.

In terms of Pauline theology it is also very hard to accept that εἰς ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός would serve as the ultimate purpose. That one who commits some offence within the Christian community should be punished by means of physical death in the present age, is totally non-Pauline.<sup>73</sup>

Although the man noted in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 is probably not the same man as in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul says that “This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person” (v. 6) and “you should forgive and console him” (v. 7).<sup>74</sup> Therefore, it is more likely that Paul actually perceived church discipline as leading somehow to the repentance and restoration of the sinner to the community.

Therefore, it is better to interpret Paul’s intention with the offender in the light of what he declares in Galatians 5:24, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires,” and this would be achieved by the excommunication of the offender. Although this offers no guarantee for the repentance and the salvation of the man who committed incest, without any benefit from the Christian community, he would be exposed and challenged in the realm of Satan and forced to reevaluate his lifestyle and behaviour.<sup>75</sup> This action would

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<sup>73</sup> South, “Critique,” 556.

<sup>74</sup> This indicates how Paul thinks that the Christian church community should treat offenders who previously had to experience some form of punishment (cf. Gal. 6:1; 2 Thess. 3:14-15).

<sup>75</sup> B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 158-59, believes that this action would be effective in the Greco-Roman culture in which

also purify the Corinthian church because it “stands in judgement against his deviant behaviour.”<sup>76</sup>

Many scholars focus on the parallels to Paul’s language, and give no attention to the context itself. However, South<sup>77</sup> correctly says that Paul’s intention is found within the context and vv. 2, 7 and 13 sufficiently explain what Paul had in mind with “hand over to Satan.” That is, Paul’s intention was not sudden physical death but expulsion from the community and v. 5 is used as a “vivid metaphor for the effect of expulsion” from church community.<sup>78</sup>

We should also ask who is the subject in the practice of the church discipline in 1 Corinthians 5. Havener<sup>79</sup> believes that “ecclesiastical discipline” in 1 Corinthians 5 was “carried out in an utterly undemocratic, highly authoritarian manner.” In other words, Paul had already decided on the judgement of the offender and the church only had to enforce Paul’s decision. It would appear that Paul did not share church discipline with the Corinthian church, but that he only emphasised his apostolic authority and role in the Corinthian church. Therefore, one could think that the congregation’s function was merely to ratify Paul’s decision.

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something such as this which was often thought of as a fate worse than death. If the man wanted to remain a Christian, Paul expected that this action would lead to repentance and restoration and ultimately to final salvation of both body and spirit of the offender.

<sup>76</sup> South, “Critique,” 559.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 553-56.

<sup>78</sup> Hays, *First Corinthians*, 85.

<sup>79</sup> Havener, “Curse,” 334.

However, it is important to take note that Paul appeals to the whole church for a decision with regard to the offender. Although he does not hesitate to declare his own decision with regard to the offender, this does not mean that he tried to force it upon the church.<sup>80</sup> Paul was obviously using his personal influence with the congregation; the judgement, however, was left ultimately to the Corinthian church.

Therefore, the whole church had the responsibility for the decision; neither only the apostle nor church officials such as the practice was in the synagogue where exclusion was voted on by the elders. In this ecclesiastical discipline, "the apostles and the church work together, and Christ's authority is promised to their joint action."<sup>81</sup>

I conclude, therefore, that the subject of the church discipline in 1 Corinthians 5 was neither only the apostle nor the community, but a threefold cooperative action between Paul the apostle, the Corinthian community and the present Lord.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 124.

<sup>81</sup> E. Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 192.

<sup>82</sup> See Käsemann, *Questions*, 71.



## Chapter 4 A theological approach to the problem of πορνεία in the church of the Corinthians

As I indicated in Part I, a theological approach focuses on theological issue(s), theological meaning(s) and belief (or beliefs) in the text. In particular, when scholars following a theological approach interpret the problem of πορνεία, they concentrate on the theological background of the particular immoral offence, what kind of theological issue caused the problem, and what kind of theological perspective surfaces in the study of church discipline.

As I indicated in the previous chapter, the nature of πορνεία was neither one of a “spiritual marriage” as J. C. Hurd<sup>1</sup> proposes, nor an occasional slip. Rather, it was an immoral act of incest – as most scholars<sup>2</sup> propose. Furthermore, it was a continuing sexual relationship with “his father’s wife” (1 Cor. 5:1; cf. Lev. 18:8; 20:11; Deut. 27:20). Moreover, the immoral conduct that manifested in the Corinthian church should not only be restricted to the particular incident of individual misconduct; it also included the attitude of the Corinthian congregation in allowing such behaviour to continue in the church.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York: SPCK, 1965), 278. R. B. Brown, *1 Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1970), 318, says that “Paul uses neither the Greek word for adultery nor incest.” Also C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1971), 121, says that Paul indicates neither “the offence adultery” nor “incest.”

<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971), 53–54; G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 200.

<sup>3</sup> P. Miner, “Christ and the Congregation: 1 Corinthians 5–6,” *RevExp* 80 (1983), 343, points out that in 1 Cor. 5 only one verse deals with the sexual offender himself but twelve verses with the Corinthian congregation. See also B. S. Rosner, “οὐχὶ μᾶλλον

In this chapter, I will investigate the attitude of the Corinthians to the immoral offence in terms of a theological approach to the problem of πορνεία in the church of the Corinthians.

#### 4. 1 The Corinthians' attitude to the act of immorality

It is clear that Paul believed that the Corinthian church should have already disciplined the offender. They, however, had not done it. Instead they not only accepted the offender in the church as a brother, but also became "puffed up" (1 Cor. 5:2 KJV). In 1 Corinthians 5:2 Paul thus asks "Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?" (NRSV)

Paul was shocked at the immoral conduct itself; the boastful attitude of the Corinthian Christians to the immoral man's conduct was even more appalling to him.<sup>4</sup> Thus he demanded that the erring member had to be disciplined by the Corinthian congregation.

What was Paul referring to when he said that the Corinthian Christians were "puffed up" and "boasting" (5:2, 6 KJV, NRSV)?

Some scholars, like Baird,<sup>5</sup> suggest that Paul does not refer to the fact that the Corinthian Christians were arrogant as a result of the act of

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ἐπενθήσατε: Corporate Responsibility in I Corinthians 5." *NTS* 38 (1992), 470-73; L. V. Broek, "Discipline and Community: Another Look at 1 Cor. 5," *RefRev* 48 (1994), 5-13.

<sup>4</sup> W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1971), 49.

<sup>5</sup> W. Baird, *The Corinthian Church: A Biblical Approach to Urban Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 23.

immorality but rather in spite of the sexual offence. Thiselton<sup>6</sup> also indicates that most scholars explain “the complacency as being despite the offender’s illicit relationship.”

B. W. Winter,<sup>7</sup> however, believes that “the perfect periphrasis” employed in 1 Corinthians 5:2 indicates that the Corinthian Christians were boastful about the immoral behaviour of the congregation’s member and that Paul claims that their arrogant attitude was “completely inappropriate,” because he asks them “Should you not rather have mourned?” (1 Cor. 5:2 NRSV). Earlier on, Paul had already rebuked the Corinthian church for the same attitude, which he depicted as “puffed up,” with relation to Paul himself and Apollos, employing the same verb in the present tense (1 Cor. 4:6 KJV). G. Harris<sup>8</sup> also believes that Paul reproaches the Corinthian congregation because of being be “puffed up” and “boasting,” and that the context of the passage indicates that “the arrogant, boastful attitude was closely related to the case of incest.” B. Witherington<sup>9</sup> also believes that the Corinthian church “*as a whole*” had

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<sup>6</sup> A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 389-90.

<sup>7</sup> B. W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 53. See also B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 152.

<sup>8</sup> G. Harris, “The Beginning of Church Discipline: 1 Corinthians 5,” *NTS* 37 (1991), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 152. The italics indicate Witherington’s emphasis. This does not mean all the members of the congregation were proud of the immoral conduct. Rather it is likely that some believers embraced the incestuous conduct. Cf. Harris, “Beginning,” 6-7.

an arrogant attitude about the immoral relationship of the offender in their congregation.

In view of the results so far achieved, I conclude that, although the Corinthian church should have disciplined the offender, they accepted him as a brother and that, although they had to mourn for this vicious offence, they rather had a boastful attitude about the offence rather than in spite of it.

Why did they have such a boastful attitude? For what reason were they arrogant? Pickett<sup>10</sup> believes the fact that they were “boasting” indicates they may have affirmed it on theological grounds. Which theological background made the Corinthian church boastful? In the next section, I will investigate the theological reason why the Corinthian Christians may have manifested such a boastful attitude to the act of immorality occurring in the community.

#### 4. 2 A theological approach to the problem of the immorality in the church of the Corinthians

When Paul stayed at Corinth, he probably taught the Corinthian Christians not only the gospel, but also the Old Testament<sup>11</sup> (cf. 1 Cor.

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<sup>10</sup> R. Pickett, *The Cross in Corinth: The Social Significance of the Death of Christ* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 109.

<sup>11</sup> During Paul's stay of 18 months in Corinth, it is likely that he taught the Old Testament. J. P. Heil, *The Rhetorical Role of Scripture in 1 Corinthians* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 8-10, says that “Most of the Christian traditions to which Paul refers his audience in 1 Corinthians have an OT basis (8:6, 11b; 10:16; 11:23-25; 12:3, 13; 15:3-5; 16:22)” and assumes that at least Paul would have taught them a “rudimentary Christological interpretation of the OT.”

10:1-11). Though the contents of Paul's "previous letter" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9 cannot be identified, it is clear that the letter included the command "not to associate with sexually immoral people" (1 Cor. 5:9 NIV). It is estimated that Paul had recognized the immoral atmosphere of the city of Corinth and had therefore taught the Corinthian Christians the moral instruction of the Old Testament when he stayed there, thus giving them instructions in this regard, including instructions such as "do not associate with sexually immoral people" (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9 NIV).

In spite of this, the immoral conduct occurred in the church of the Corinthians. Moreover, the Corinthian Christians not only accepted the offender as a brother, but also manifested an arrogant attitude to the immoral conduct.

Why did the Corinthian Christians accept the offender as a brother in spite of being taught the instruction on immorality from the Old Testament by Paul and in spite of receiving Paul's letter? Why did they manifest a boastful attitude to the offence of immorality occurring in the community whereas they should have mourned for the sexual offence in the congregation (1 Cor. 5:2)?

In my view, the theological background behind the problem of the immoral conduct gave rise to this situation. In this chapter, I will therefore investigate the theological background to the problem of the immoral conduct and the Corinthian congregation's attitude to the immoral conduct.

#### 4. 2. 1 Judaism

The suggestion that Judaism functioned as the background for the problems in the Corinthian church has occurred to some scholars, though most scholars have rejected this view.<sup>12</sup>

In Judaism, conversion was regarded as a re-creation and as dissolving "all bonds of relationship."<sup>13</sup> Proselytes to Judaism were regarded as new-born creatures (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). They thus received new names like new-born children and all their former old relationships were dissolved.<sup>14</sup> After becoming a proselyte, one's father was no longer regarded as one's father or one's mother as one's mother. The proselyte had begun a new life and had started new relationships. Moreover, it is observed by some that one of the rabbis taught that "a proselyte might lawfully marry any of his nearest kindred."<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the Corinthians viewed themselves in terms of this Jewish view according to which all the conditions of human life were altered when one became a proselyte. The old relationships were entirely abolished. This hypothesis may be supported by the claim that the

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<sup>12</sup> See Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 121; V. A. Farrar & D. Thomas, *Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 166; W. H. Mare, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 217; J. Ruef, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 39. Though C. Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 82, and Mare, *1 Corinthians*, 217, investigate this possibility, their conclusion is negative. See footnote 17 below.

<sup>13</sup> Mare, *1 Corinthians*, 217. Ruef, *Paul's First Letter*, 39, quotes Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, 57b f. which says that "A proselyte may marry his father's wife ... she is not his mother."

<sup>14</sup> Farrar & Thomas, *Corinthians*, 166. Cf. Ruef, *Paul's First Letter*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 82. Cf. Farrar & Thomas, *Corinthians*, 166. For more details, see J. Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 361-62.

offender and a Jewish portion of the Corinthian church acted on such a Jewish principle.

Although it is possible that such an idea may have partially circulated among the Jewish portion of the Corinthian congregation,<sup>16</sup> it cannot be accepted that this Jewish idea spread through and influenced the whole congregation. Hodge<sup>17</sup> thus rightly rejects this thesis for the following reasons: 1) Because of its implausibility, 2) its prevalence among the Jews was only after their reprobation as a people, and 3) the wiser class of the Jews themselves condemned it. If such sophisms had been absorbed partly into the Corinthian church, it would have been necessary for Paul in his letters to warn against such notions.

#### 4. 2. 2 Spiritual fanaticism

According to Paul's letter, the Corinthian Christians thought that they were spiritual and wise, and they felt as if they "had arrived." They believed that they had special wisdom (1 Cor. 1:18ff.) and spiritual powers (1 Cor. 14). They even regarded themselves as wise, as people with the status of kings (1 Cor. 4:8), and believed that they could not be judged by anyone (1 Cor. 2:15).

Since they misunderstood what it meant "to be spiritual," they distinguished between "their physical and spiritual lives" instead of

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<sup>16</sup> Mare, *1 Corinthians*, 217, believes that some Corinthian converts had known of this tolerance because they came from synagogue.

<sup>17</sup> Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 82.

avoiding erring and immoral actions.<sup>18</sup> They assumed that pagan rites (1 Cor. 8; 10) and sexual practices (1 Cor. 5) could not affect them. C. Vaughan and T. D. Lea<sup>19</sup> believe that the “arrogant self-sufficiency” of the Corinthians led them to tolerate the offender’s immoral conduct, and that their “boasting” may refer to a “spiritual confusion” that led them to view themselves as spiritual persons so that what they did with their bodies could not affect their spiritual status. The Corinthians’ boastful attitude thus implied that a “spiritual church” could not be degraded by the presence of a debased offender or a vicious sin in the Christians community.<sup>20</sup>

According to Pfitzner,<sup>21</sup> φουσιώ depicts the “spiritual enthusiasts” in the Corinthian church. They were boastful of the “possession of the Spirit, superior knowledge, freedom, and the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 8:1; 13:4).”<sup>22</sup> This group emphasised a spiritual elitism because they probably thought that they possessed spiritual wisdom or knowledge along with other spiritual gifts. This group was probably the “Christ party” (cf. 1 Cor. 1:12)<sup>23</sup> and they believed that Christ, through the

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<sup>18</sup> K. Quast, *Reading the Corinthian Correspondence* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 43.

<sup>19</sup> C. Vaughan & T. D. Lea, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 56.

<sup>20</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, “Church Discipline and the Epistles to the Corinthians,” in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 343.

<sup>21</sup> V. C. Pfitzner, “Purified Community – Purified Sinner: Expulsion from the Community according to Matt. 18:15–18 and 1 Cor. 5:1–5,” *AusBR* 30 (1982), 41.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> See M. E. Andrews, “The Party of Christ in Corinth,” *Anglican Theological Review* 19 (1937), 17–29. Andrews, “The Party of Christ,” 22–29, insists that in the Corinthian congregation the only group who opposed Paul was the Christ party and that they emphasised “charismatic gifts” such as gnosis and freedom from the law.



indwelling of the Holy Spirit, would lead them directly in their lives as Christians.<sup>24</sup> They thus represented a group of hyper-spiritual enthusiasts who had no need for any human leader for guidance. They possibly believed that acceptance of the Holy Spirit was evidence that “the New Age had fully arrived” and that this was “the age of grace, freedom and life instead of the law, slavery and death.”<sup>25</sup>

E. Käsemann<sup>26</sup> also insists that the spiritual enthusiasts believed that they would not experience a “future bodily resurrection” because they had already been resurrected in baptism. They probably thought that they were “above responsibility of any earthly ordinance because they were convinced that baptism had endowed them with a heavenly nature and the freedom of a truly spiritual man.”<sup>27</sup> C. J. Roetzel<sup>28</sup> adds:

They could live as if the judgement were in the past and as if there were nothing in the future to bring their works to the test (1 Cor. 3:10-17). Their direct union with the transcendent God could prompt unrestrained, highly individualistic expressions of worship and total disregard for the “unenlightened” members of the community (8:1-13). They could be indifferent to the very existence of the church itself (3:16-17). Factionalism which is endemic to such proud assertions and individualistic expressions, Paul knew, could easily destroy the church which he had

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<sup>24</sup> M. R. Storm, *Excommunication in the Life and Theology of the Primitive Christian Communities* (Michigan: U. M. I., 1992), 123.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-24.

<sup>26</sup> E. Käsemann, “An Apologia for Primitive Christian Eschatology,” in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, translated by W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press, 1964), 171.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> C. J. Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community. A Study of the Relationship between Eschatology and Ecclesiology in Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 112.

founded. It is perhaps this kind of spiritual enthusiasm and its attendant ills which evoked Paul's early correspondence to the Corinthians.

Thus one may conclude that although the Corinthian Christians viewed themselves as spiritual, their actions proved that they were full of boasting about "their own sinful pride, rather than filled with the Spirit."<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. 2. 3 Christian freedom

Some believe that Paul's own preaching at Corinth may have contributed to the problem in the congregation. G. Harris<sup>30</sup> notes that Paul's obscure stand concerning the law may have contributed to the Corinthians' conduct. Hurd<sup>31</sup> believes that the Corinthians' views on libertinism were the result of a delusion created by Paul's discussion in the passage of the theoretical conclusion of the maxim Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν.

Paul certainly spoke to the Corinthian Christians about freedom from the law in Jesus Christ. The impression is given that the congregation may even have been proud of their conduct rather than sorrowful, since they believed Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν to be a good interpretation of Christian freedom (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). In contrast to this, Paul's complex understanding of the law can be seen in 1 Corinthians 9:20 where he expresses freedom from the Mosaic law and yet in 1 Corinthians 9:8-9

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<sup>29</sup> Pfitzner, "Purified Community," 41.

<sup>30</sup> Harris, "Beginning," 11.

<sup>31</sup> Hurd, *Origin*, 277.

cites its authority in support of his right to financial support. It seems as if the Corinthians heard and adhered to only one side of Paul's position on the law.

B. Witherington<sup>32</sup> says

Paul's dilemma was to create a group with a clear sense of its moral and theological identity while at the same time incorporating a heterogeneous group of people: Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free. 1 and 2 Corinthians were written, at least in part, to clarify what the church's social relations with the world as it existed in Roman Corinth could and should be.

However, the Corinthian Christians considered their conduct as a ground for "arrogance of their newfound freedom and maturation"<sup>33</sup> and their tolerant attitude toward the offender seems to reflect the emergence of a new norm, against Paul's teaching.

The words Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν are widely agreed to represent a slogan of the Corinthians and may have been used by them specifically to vindicate the sexual relationship and their failure to exclude the offender.<sup>34</sup> The Corinthians' arrogant conduct may even indicate that

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<sup>32</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 29.

<sup>33</sup> B. Marrow, *Paul: His Letter and His Theology: An Introduction to Paul's Epistles* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 117.

<sup>34</sup> R. Kempthorne, "Incest and the Body of Christ," *NTS* 14 (1968), 569. R. B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 91, says that the Corinthian Christians were puffed up with regard to this problem of immorality, "celebrating the transgressor as a hero of Christian freedom."

they had praise for the man who had an immoral relationship in the name of Christian freedom in Christ.<sup>35</sup>

So Paul had to write to them in order to emphasise the view that he always held, namely that Christian freedom had to be tempered and qualified by a concern for the community (1 Cor. 10:23-33). According to Paul, the image of the paschal lamb denoted "Christ's sacrificial death through which comes the forgiveness of sins" and it indicated that "Christ has set the believer free *from* sin not *for* sin."<sup>36</sup>

#### 4. 2. 4 Realised eschatology

Some scholars<sup>37</sup> believe that that the problems of the Corinthian church were rooted in the realised eschatology. For example, Barrett<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> J. Murphy-O'Connor, "I Cor. V, 3-5," *RB* 84 (1977), 240, suggests that the phrase "in the name of the Lord Jesus" modifies the participle immediately preceding it, i.e., "the man who has done such a thing." We should then understand it as follows: "I have already pronounced judgment on the man who has done such a thing in the name of the Lord Jesus." Murphy-O'Connor, "I Cor. V, 3-5," adds that "The situation depicted in ch. 5 was seen by Paul as typical of the 'arrogance' (v. 2: cf. IV, 6, 18, 19; VIII, 1) and 'boasting' (V, 6: cf. III, 21; IV, 7) that characterized the Corinthian community. The specific act, however, was without parallel. ... This uniqueness, the Corinthians felt, redounded to the glory of the community (vv 2, 6). It was a concrete manifestation of their superiority with respect to all who were still in bondage to attitudes and conventions from which they had been freed. ... In their minds, therefore, the rejection of societal norms implicit in their acceptance of incest was justified by their commitment to Christ who gave them access to a higher wisdom."

<sup>36</sup> Pickett, *Cross*, 110. The italics indicate Pickett's emphasis. Cf. Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 91-92.

<sup>37</sup> C. K. Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 109; F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 49-50; H. Conzelmann, "On the Analysis of the Confessional Formula in I Corinthians 15:35," *Int*

indicates that the Corinthian Christians acted “as if the age to come were already consummated ... For them there is no ‘not yet’ to qualify the ‘already’ of realized eschatology.” For the Corinthian Christians “the idea of a New Age been inaugurated in the present but fully realized in the future would have been incomprehensible.”<sup>39</sup> According to them, the fact that the New Age had inaugurated in the present was proven by the fact that they had received the Holy Spirit and they were thus spiritual (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1ff.).

According to Thiselton,<sup>40</sup> the notion of an over-realised eschatology was Paul’s concern throughout his letter to the Corinthians. Paul’s question, Thiselton says, was not “whether realized eschatology contains truth,” but rather “whether it represented the *whole* truth.”<sup>41</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 1-4 Paul argues against the Corinthians’ false emphasis on power and wisdom (1:18-2:16; 3:18-20; 4:10) and spirituality (2:10-3:4). Instead, he emphasises that “the ultimate spirituality does not appear but is the result of gradual maturation;”<sup>42</sup> he

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20 (January 1966), 15-25; E. Käsemann, “An Apologia for Primitive Christian Eschatology,” 171; J. Weiss, *The History of Primitive Christianity*, vol. 1 (New York: Wilson-Erickson Inc., 1937), 334-36. Cf. E. E. Ellis, “Christ Crucified,” in *Reconciliation and Hope. New Testament Essays in Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L. L. Morris* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1974), 73-74.

<sup>38</sup> Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 109.

<sup>39</sup> Cited from Storm, *Excommunication*, 118. The original source is in E. Schweizer, “πνεῦμα,” in *TDNT*, vol. 6, 415-16, 420.

<sup>40</sup> A. C. Thiselton, “Realized Eschatology at Corinth,” *NTS* 24 (1971), 510-26.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 512. The italics indicate Thiselton’s emphasis.

<sup>42</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 126.

illustrated this by means of images of planting, watering, growing and building (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6, 10).

It is also observed by some that Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians 5:1-11:1 were focused on the Corinthians' "radical application of Paul's own eschatological dualism."<sup>43</sup> The Corinthian Christians probably thought that if they were spiritual, they were beyond the sphere of human law and Mosaic law. Slogans of the Corinthians such as Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν in 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23, and πάντες γινώσκοντες ἔχομεν in 1 Corinthians 8:1, seem to reflect the Corinthians' thought in this regard.

Thiselton<sup>44</sup> believes that the slogans Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν in 6:12 and 10:23 and πάντες γινώσκοντες ἔχομεν in 8:1 were the core of the matter and represented radical eschatological thought. The Corinthian Christians believed that "they possessed the fullness of the New Age and thus were no longer subject to the laws and moral conventions of society."<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, Thiselton<sup>46</sup> believes that over-realised eschatology was the primary theological problem behind not only the case of immorality in 5:1-5 but also behind the abuse of the Lord's Supper mentioned in 11:17-34; as well as behind the rejection of the resurrection of the body mentioned in 15:12-58. Thiselton<sup>47</sup> claims that

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<sup>43</sup> Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology," 515.

<sup>44</sup> Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology," 515, assumes that slogans such as these which the Corinthians used either came from "Paul's own words about freedom from law" or from the Corinthians radical reinterpretation of Paul's teachings; he thinks the latter is more probable.

<sup>45</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 132.

<sup>46</sup> Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology," 518-24.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 512. Cf. E. Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM Press,

“the eschatological approach pinpoints a single common factor which helps to explain an otherwise utterly diverse array of apparently independent problems at Corinth.”

According to him, the case of incest was the outstanding example of realised eschatology and “the self-styled ‘spiritual’ men at Corinth (not perhaps without some mixture of motives) wished to parade their new-found freedom as a bold testimony to their eschatological status.”<sup>48</sup> An over-realised eschatology gave rise to an enthusiastic view of the Spirit, resulting in the Corinthians being convinced that they could do anything: they were kings (1 Cor. 4:8), they were in the Holy Spirit, and they were superior to the other Christians around them.<sup>49</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 6, however, Paul directs the attention of the Corinthians to “the future judgment and inheritance (6:2-3, 9, 14),”<sup>50</sup> challenging them to strive to be what they are to become (5:7). Paul also condemns the abuse of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-33) and instructs the Corinthians that the resurrection of Christ is the first fruits of the general resurrection, which was not rooted in wisdom or experience but in the power of God (1 Cor. 15:12-58).

Paul thinks that although Christians became the New Israel, it must be remembered that Old Israel never accomplished their journey to the

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1969), 125-26.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 515-16.

<sup>49</sup> A. D. Nock, *St. Paul* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1938), 174.

<sup>50</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 126.

Promised Land, Canaan, because of their sins (cf. 1 Cor. 10).<sup>51</sup> Paul thus says "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he falls" (1 Cor. 10:12) to the Corinthian Christians as warning.

Though Paul preached an "eschatological event which has already happened," he also expected an "eschatological event which is about to happen."<sup>52</sup> In other words, though it cannot be denied that Paul thought that Christians lived in the eschatological age which Jesus Christ inaugurated, he also expected the final, ultimate eschatological age which Jesus Christ would accomplish.

#### 4. 3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have investigated the Corinthian congregation's attitude towards the offender and his sexual conduct as well as the theological background of the problem of the immoral conduct that occurred in the church of the Corinthians.

As I indicated above, Paul was shocked not only by the immorality itself but also by the Corinthian Christians' attitude towards the immorality. The Corinthians not only accepted the immoral offender as a brother but also manifested a boastful attitude. It seems as if the Corinthian Christians' action indicates that they affirmed it in terms of certain firm beliefs.

I investigated four main possible theological backgrounds, namely Judaism, spiritual fanaticism, Christian freedom and realised

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>52</sup> Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology," 519.



eschatology.

These possibilities could help one to understand the reason not only why the Corinthian Christians accepted the offender as a brother and displayed a boastful attitude towards the offence in the community but also why the Corinthian congregation could not practise church discipline on them.

In my opinion, although the notion in Judaism according to which conversion changed one's old status and relationships totally, is interesting, it cannot be accepted, because there is not any indication of this aspect in the letters of Paul to the Corinthians. If such notions had been accepted widely in the Corinthian congregation, it would have been necessary for Paul to warn against such sophisms in his letters.

The remaining three hypotheses, spiritual fanaticism, Christian freedom and a realised eschatology, seem more acceptable. However, it also seems as if they should not be separated totally, but that they were interwoven, based primarily on the notion of realised eschatology. In other words, because the Corinthian Christians believed that the New Age had been inaugurated and that the eschatological event had already occurred, they also believed that they were spiritual and that they had spiritual power and wisdom (1 Cor. 1:18ff.; 14), even regarding themselves as wise, as people with the status of kings (1 Cor. 4:8) who could not be judged by anyone (1 Cor. 2:15).

Moreover they believed that the old human norms and Mosaic law had lost their restriction for Christians because Christians' status was one of freedom from the law in Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 9:20-21) since they were living in the New Age.

Therefore the Corinthian Christians accepted the offender as a brother and displayed a boastful attitude with regard to the offence, because the immoral conduct seemed to reflect the emergence of a new norm expressing the freedom of Christian; their boastful conduct thus seems to manifest a ground for "arrogance of their newfound freedom and maturation"<sup>53</sup> in the New Age.

It has become clear that, because some of the Corinthian Christians believed that the New Age had already been inaugurated by Jesus Christ and that they were living in the New Age and in an age of freedom of the law, and accordingly acted immorally and showed a boastful attitude, Paul had to correct their wrong notions with regard to the freedom of Christians and eschatology, attempting to give them a sense of "eschatological dualism",<sup>54</sup> i.e. that though the New Age had been inaugurated already, the final eschatological day has not yet come.

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<sup>53</sup> Marrow, *Paul*, 117.

<sup>54</sup> Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology," 515.

## Chapter 5 A sociological approach to the problem of the immoral conduct in the church of the Corinthians

As I indicated in Part I, a sociological approach focuses on the social and cultural conditions that characterized the Biblical world rather than on the theological notions found in the Biblical texts.<sup>1</sup> In other words scholars opting for this approach focus on social and cultural features and the surrounding environment that are important for understanding a text rather than on issues such as the theological background of a particular kind of behaviour, what kind of theological issue caused the problem, and/or what kind of theological perspective surfaces in the study of church discipline.

In particular, when scholars following a sociological approach investigate the problem of the immoral conduct in the Corinthian church, they concentrate on the social and cultural elements and surroundings underlying the problem of the sexual offence in the church of the Corinthians. In this regard it is clear that the Corinthian believers were familiar with Hellenistic surroundings because they lived in the Hellenistic society and had been influenced by the Hellenistic culture and thought since birth.

As I indicated in Part III. 3, the nature of the immoral offence was not

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 103.

a “spiritual marriage”<sup>2</sup> but incest; not a single slip but a continuous act. This immoral conduct not only violated God’s covenantal norms in the Old Testament (cf. Lev. 18:8; 20:11; Deut 27:20) but also Greco-Roman law.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover the immoral act was not only an incident of individual misconduct but was also associated with the whole congregation at Corinth. Although it seems that the case of incest was related to one individual offender, it was a problem for the whole Christian community at Corinth.<sup>4</sup>

Though Paul exhorted the Corinthian Christians “do not be associated with immoral men” (1 Cor. 5:9) in his previous letter, they did not heed his instruction and accepted the immoral offender as a brother, displaying a boastful attitude.

I have already indicated the theological reasons that the members of the Corinthian congregation acted in such a way with regard to the immoral relationship of this man with his father’s wife and why they not only did not discipline him, but accepted him as a brother and displayed a

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<sup>2</sup> J. C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York: SPCK, 1965), 278.

<sup>3</sup> R. B. Brown, *1 Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1970), 319; J. Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (London: The Epworth Press, 1973), 34.

<sup>4</sup> P. Miner, “Christ and the Congregation: 1 Corinthians 5-6,” *RevExp* 80 (1983), 343, points out that in 1 Cor. 5 only one verse deals with the offender himself but twelve verses with the Corinthian congregation. See also B. S. Rosner, “οὐχι μᾶλλον ἐπενθήσατε: Corporate Responsibility in I Corinthians 5,” *NTS* 38 (1992), 470-73 and L. V. Broek, “Discipline and Community: Another Look at 1 Cor. 5,” *Re/Rev* 48 (1994), 5-13.

boastful attitude. As I indicated, the Corinthian Christians believed that they were living in the New Age and that the old human norms and Mosaic law had lost their restrictive power for Christians. Moreover they believed that the immoral offence reflected the emergence of a new norm of Christian freedom and their boastful conduct seems to manifest a freedom grounded in the New Age.

While a theological approach to the problem of the immoral conduct in the church of the Corinthians helps one to understand the reasons why a member of the church at Corinth acted immorally and why the Corinthian congregation accepted him as a brother and displayed a boastful attitude, this approach does not go a long way in providing a reason that the problem of the sexual offence specifically occurred in the Corinthians church. In other words, a theological approach overlooks the fact that the Corinthian converts lived in a particular social and cultural environment, i.e. a Hellenistic context.

From a sociological perspective, the following is important: When the Corinthian Christians converted to Christianity on hearing the gospel from Paul, they were new born Christians. In other words, although they had become Christians, they could not easily replace the customs and thoughts of the Hellenistic environment with those of Christianity. In a sense they lived in a transitional situation. Therefore it is best to accept that they blended notions from a Hellenistic environment with those of Christianity.

In this chapter, I will thus investigate the social and cultural environment underlying the problem of the immoral offence and the Corinthian Christians' attitude to the immoral offence that occurred in the church of the Corinthians.

### 5. 1 Hellenistic philosophy

Since F. C. Baur,<sup>5</sup> scholars have been disposed to look towards Hellenistic environmental sources for the problems of the Corinthian church.

Some scholars<sup>6</sup> claim that some of the problems of the church at Corinth were rooted in Gnosticism. The issue of the origin, nature and history of Gnosticism is too large a problem to be discussed adequately here. However, the gist of the matter may be described as follows: "While 1 Corinthians indicates that the problem in the Corinthian church involved Gnosis, this does not necessarily imply that fully developed Gnosticism as found in the second century"<sup>7</sup> already existed. Nevertheless, it is still likely that some problems of the Corinthian

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<sup>5</sup> F. C. Baur, "Die Christuspartei in der Korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des paulinischen und petrinischen Christentums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom" *Tübingen Zeitschrift für Theologie* 4 (1831), 61-206.

<sup>6</sup> See F. L. Fisher, *Paul and his Teachings* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974); R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1966); R. A. Horsley, "Gnosis in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 8.1-6," *NTS* 27 (1980), 32-51; G. W. MacRae, *Studies in the New Testament and Gnosticism* (Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987); W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971); R. M. Wilson, *Gnosticism in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968).

<sup>7</sup> M. R. Storm, *Excommunication in the Life and Theology of the Primitive Christian Communities* (Michigan: U. M. I., 1992), 115. F. L. Fisher, *Paul*, 143, proposes the term "proto-Gnosticism" or "incipient Gnosticism" in order to describe Gnostic character in the early time.

congregation were related to Gnostic notions and that they had infiltrated the Corinthian church.

In this regard, M. R. Storm<sup>8</sup> points out that some members of the Corinthian congregation apparently displayed their knowledge and wisdom (1 Cor. 8:1-2). Furthermore they regarded themselves superior to other Christians around them<sup>9</sup> and thought that they had reached spiritual perfection (1 Cor. 4:8-13). They were thus boastful of their possession of superior knowledge (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1, 7) and emphasised a spiritual elitism because they probably thought that they possessed spiritual wisdom or knowledge.

The words "wisdom" (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1) and "knowledge" (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1) that are used, seem to be two of the key terms indicating the problem in the Corinthian church. It may be inferred that the Corinthian Christians understood Christianity as Hellenistic wisdom and "church leaders as teachers of wisdom like the sophists"<sup>10</sup> or rhetors. Therefore, the arrogance of the Corinthian Christians had its root in their assertion that, compared with other Christians in the community, they were wiser.

H. E. Barefoot<sup>11</sup> observes that Paul makes a comparison between two wisdoms, the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God himself.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> A. D. Nock, *St. Paul* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1938), 174

<sup>10</sup> J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), 152-61.

<sup>11</sup> H. Barefoot, "Discipline in the Corinthian Letter," *RevExp* 57 (October 1960), 441. He

While the Corinthian Christians made a display of the possession of the wisdom of the world, Paul emphasises the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1-4).

Barefoot says,

In Corinth this wisdom of selfish pride expressed itself in an intellectual and spiritual snobbery which emanated from a group which had arrogated to itself the title, the *pneumatikoi* or 'spirituals.' These claimed a superiority to less gifted Christians -- superior gifts, superior wisdom, superior freedom -- which led them into contempt of their weaker brethren. It engendered a selfish pride and created a liberty which meant is nothing but license to lead flagrantly immoral lives.<sup>12</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 1-4, Paul emphasises the features of the wisdom of God himself and replaces the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God. For this purpose, he points out "the word of the cross" which "is folly to those who are perishing" (1 Cor. 1:18) and "Christ crucified" which "is a stumbling block and folly" to non-believers (1 Cor. 1:23) to the Corinthian Christians.

R. P. Martin<sup>13</sup> also believes that some Corinthian Christians had accepted Gnostic teaching which led to slack moral standards, particularly in terms of sexual matters. His suggestion can be backed by

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defines the wisdom of the world as "the predominance and the assertion of self."

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 442.

<sup>13</sup> R. P. Martin, *1 Corinthians - Galatians* (London: Scripture Union, 1968), 13.



1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23 which are a concrete illustration of the Corinthian belief that physical action did not have any moral significance.

Similarly, F. L. Fisher<sup>14</sup> proposes that although Gnosticism was not a system in New Testament times, its elements were common in the Greco-Roman world of that time. According to him, the problems in the Corinthian church are better explained in terms of the influence on Christian teaching by the surrounding culture, because the Corinthian Christians were recent converts from that culture.

I thus conclude that although Gnosticism as a system itself did not yet exist in the times of the Corinthian church, and although the Corinthian Christians could not have been influenced directly by Gnostic thought, it cannot be denied that they were continually influenced by Gnostic elements, common in the Hellenistic world of that time.

## 5. 2 Hellenistic religious cults

In Part. III. 1. 1, I indicated that the Hellenistic religious elements influenced the Corinthian congregation. In particular, some problems of the Corinthian congregation seem to have been caused by influence from Hellenistic religious cults in Corinth.

For example, it has been pointed out that the problem of idol's food (1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:27ff.) was connected with the cult of Asklepios which

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<sup>14</sup> Fisher, *Paul*, 145-46.

had private dining facilities for dinner meetings.<sup>15</sup> Some thus assume that the activity of the cult of Apollo “shed some light on the issue of women speaking in the church (1 Cor. 14:34-35).”<sup>16</sup>

In Paul’s time, there were “many gods and many lords” (1 Cor. 8:5) at Corinth, as was the case in other cosmopolitan cities in the first century Greco-Roman world. These gods/goddesses were not only worshipped as spiritual beings but were also believed to stand “behind earthly rulers and authority” and “each divinity was held to watch over the city.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore one can assume that the sexual activities with priestesses in the cults of the temples at Corinth were not merely viewed as sexual intercourse but as a manifestation of the sacred action whereby people were with their gods/goddesses.

For example, it is often observed that the cult of Aphrodite was connected with sacred prostitution and was “dedicated to the glorification of sex.”<sup>18</sup> It is also observed that the cult of Hera Argaea

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<sup>15</sup> D. A. de Silva, *An Introduction to the New Testament. Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove/Nottingham: IVP Academic/Apollos, 2004), 559-60; J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Saint Paul’s Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 163.

<sup>16</sup> De Silva, *Introduction*, 558. Cf. B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 16.

<sup>17</sup> De Silva, *Introduction*, 558. For the cult of deities in Corinth, see De Silva, *Introduction*, 558-60; B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 12-19. B. W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 17, indicates that Aphrodite was considered as “the Mother of the imperial family and patroness of Corinth.” Witherington, *Conflict*, 12, also indicates that prostitutes in cult of Aphrodite considered her “their patroness.”

<sup>18</sup> J. C. Pollock, *The Apostle Paul* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1969), 120. Cf. Part III. 1. footnote 31.

was associated with "sacred marriage"<sup>19</sup> and that in the temple of Demeter and Kore, young girls were priestesses and "religious justification of sexual play"<sup>20</sup> occurred. It is inferred that sexual relationships with a priestess of the temple were regarded as a dedicated and sacred action to gods/goddesses.

Therefore one can accept that these elements of Hellenistic religious cults might have influenced the conduct of the Corinthian Christians.

J. M. G. Barclay<sup>21</sup> investigated the social relations between Christians and non-Christians in Thessalonica and Corinth in order to explore divergences in Pauline Christianity. He detected "contrasting social relations with non-Christians"<sup>22</sup> between the Thessalonian church and the Corinthian church and claims:

The Thessalonian church received Paul's apocalyptic message with enthusiasm and found its dualistic symbolic structure confirmed in their experience of hostility from non-believers in Thessalonica. By contrast, the Corinthian Christians enjoyed friendly relations with non-Christians and were more at ease in society than Paul thought proper ... This style of faith, which imparted a sense of superiority without entailing hostility or exclusivity, correlates well with their peaceful social experience in Corinth. Sociological study of Paul's churches should investigate not just

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<sup>19</sup> Witherington, *Conflict*, 15-16.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>21</sup> J. M. G. Barclay, "Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity," *JSNT* 47 (1992), 49-74.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

social status but also social interaction and should cease generalizing about 'Pauline Christians.'

The Corinthian Christians' friendly relationship with non-Christians seems to have lead them to the cults of gods/goddesses continually and had an effect on their standard of life and thought (cf. 1 Cor. 8; 10). In other words, though they had become Christians and were aware of the moral standards of Christianity, they misinterpreted them in terms of Hellenistic religious cults.

### 5. 3 System of patronage

Some scholars<sup>23</sup> opting for a sociological approach accept that the background for the Corinthians' boastful attitude was not so much theological or eschatological views but rather sociological conditions, in particular, a sociologically based network in the community, namely the relationship between a patron and a client, the so called system of patronage.

According to them, the man accused of immorality had many material possessions and a high position in the congregation and in the Corinthian society, and, accordingly, the church of the Corinthians was not willing

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<sup>23</sup> J. K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); M. R. Storm, *Excommunication in the Life and Theology of the Primitive Christian Community* (Michigan: U. M. I., 1992). See also R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); A. Wallace-Hadrill, "Patronage in Roman Society: From Republic to Empire," in *Patronage in Ancient Society*, edited by A. Wallace-Hadrill (London/New York: Routledge, 1989), 63-87.

to discipline such a patron from the Christian community. In other words, the social status of the offender influenced the Corinthian Christians' conduct in the sense that they took no disciplinary measure with regard to the offender and displayed a boastful attitude.

I would thus like to point out some features of the social system of patronage in the Roman society.<sup>24</sup>

According to Green,<sup>25</sup> Roman society had a large number of social classes and the economic conditions differed quite extensively between these classes, with the result that the social network of patronage sustained "its social equilibrium" and had an important function "on almost every social level and even became an essential component of the Roman bureaucracy."

R. Russell<sup>26</sup> suggests that "the poor developed a relationship (friendship) with a benefactor or patron where they would receive support, money, or food in exchange for the obligation or reciprocate with an expression of gratitude." The core of the patron-client relationship thus was "the social convention which was called 'giving and receiving.'"<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Part II. 5. 3.

<sup>25</sup> G. L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 26-27. Cf. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 184-205.

<sup>26</sup> R. Russell, "The Idle in 2 Thess 3.6-12: An Eschatological or a Social Problem?" *NTS* 34 (1988), 112.

<sup>27</sup> P. Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), 157. For more details, see Marshall, *Enmity*, 157-64.

Though J. Moffatt<sup>28</sup> does not develop his thoughts in this regard, he does indicate that, according to 1 Corinthians 5, the Corinthian church did not discipline the offender because he was powerful or wealthy in the community.

G. Theissen<sup>29</sup> also assumes that the problems in the Corinthian church were caused by the conflict between church members from the upper social classes and those from lower classes.

Furthermore, Chow<sup>30</sup> suggests that the immoral man might have been one of the powerful patrons in the Corinthian church, although he accepts some theological explanation for understanding the Corinthians' boastful attitude. According to him, the Corinthian church did not discipline the immoral man, because the offender was too wealthy or important in the community. In other words, social status exerted a definite influence on the decision of the Corinthian church.

Storm<sup>31</sup> believes that the arrogance in 1 Corinthians 5 was rooted in social status as well as in disagreements in theology and that there was tension between the upper class and the lower class in the Corinthian church.

The debate amongst scholars about the socio-economic status of Paul's converts in Corinth continues. However, apparently the majority

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<sup>28</sup> J. Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Bros. Pub., 1938), 53.

<sup>29</sup> G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 73-98.

<sup>30</sup> Chow, *Patronage*, 113-66.

<sup>31</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 124.

of the members of the congregation came from the lower classes and a couple of influential members from the upper classes.<sup>32</sup> Paul had already pointed out the division that existed between the class of the wise, the powerful and the well-born, and the lower class of the foolish, the weak and the despised (1 Cor. 1:26-28). Therefore, it is not difficult to suppose a patron-client relationship in the Corinthian church.

Storm<sup>33</sup> suggests that the problem of factions in the Corinthian church was linked to the problem of the immoral offence and states:

Since Paul accused the church of arrogance toward the man's immorality, most likely the guilty man and his supporters were from this spiritually elite group that commanded considerable respect and power in the congregation. If true, and this writer believes that it is, the immoral man was not disciplined by the church because of the social status of him and his party. And those who opposed the sin, such as Stephanas, would not have had the support of the church to take action ... This larger problem is primarily connected with theological issues but also deeply rooted in the social fabric of the congregation, specifically the tension between the upper and lower classes.

Chow<sup>34</sup> investigates the relationship between the man and his

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<sup>32</sup> Theissen, *Social Setting*, 69. See Part III. 1. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Storm, *Excommunication*, 124. He thinks that the Christ party caused the most trouble in the Corinthian congregation and that the immoral man belonged to this party.

<sup>34</sup> Chow, *Patronage*, 132. While H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 96, suggests that it was cohabitation, C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1971), 122, suggests that it could be one of either "marriage or concubinage."

father's wife (probably stepmother) and assumes that it was a "long-term one," such as a marriage.

It has also been suggested that the woman was his stepmother and that she was not a member of the Corinthian congregation because Paul did not mention her.<sup>35</sup> Why did the man marry his stepmother? What kind of merit did he expect when he married his stepmother?

Though it has been suggested that the man married the stepmother because she was still young and had a sexual attraction,<sup>36</sup> this does not seem very persuasive.

E. Schlüssler-Fiorenza<sup>37</sup> suggests that the man's relationship with his father's wife could be connected with material interests such as "dowry, inheritance and so on." It can thus be said that "material benefits might have been involved in the union of a man and woman."<sup>38</sup>

In this regard Chow<sup>39</sup> cites the Augustan marriage laws according to which "bachelors were forbidden to receive inheritance or legacies" and concludes that the man's sexual behaviour was a manner to receive his

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<sup>35</sup> Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 121; R. B. Brown, "1 Corinthians," in *Acts-1 Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971), 318.

<sup>36</sup> Chow, *Patronage*, 134.

<sup>37</sup> E. Schlüssler-Fiorenza, *1 Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 1175.

<sup>38</sup> Chow, *Patronage*, 136. Chow, *Patronage*, 135-36, cites the following examples of marriages based on material concerns: "The first one concerned Lollia Paulina, a lady with immense wealth. She was first the nominal wife of Memmius Regulus, the popular governor of Achaia from AD 35-44, but later became the bride of Caligula. Part of the reason why Lollia Paulina was chosen by Caligula as his bride could have been because she was wealthy. Another case involved a freedman and a woman from a rich family. As a result of this marriage, the name of the freedman, Cleogenes, was included on an inscription of the Augustan age made to the family of Quintus Cornelius Secundus who probably built a meatmarket and a fishmarket at Corinth... Pliny states clearly that, when arranging for a marriage, for the sake of the children, he would consider seriously the financial factor."

<sup>39</sup> See Chow, *Patronage*, 136-39.



father's inheritance and/or to keep the dowry belonging to his father's wife through relationship of marriage.

J. F. Gardner<sup>40</sup> states:

In the senatorial class, the political aspects of such marriage alliances are too well attested to need comment; and both there and at lower levels of society a degree of endogamy could be a strategy, to restrict the dispersal of family property.

Therefore one can guess that the problem with the immoral man basically had to do with material possessions. The problem in 1 Corinthians 5 was "not a problem of the have-nots or of the slaves, but one of a rich man who was rich enough to have concerns about preserving or increasing wealth."<sup>41</sup>

It thus seems likely that the Corinthian Christians were familiar with the social network of patronage and that the Corinthians would perhaps not have disciplined such a patron because he was an influential and powerful rich patron in the Corinthian church and in Corinthian society.

#### 5. 4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have investigated the sociological background of the problem of the immoral relationship between a man and his father's wife that occurred in the church of the Corinthians. I

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<sup>40</sup> J. F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 35.

<sup>41</sup> Chow, *Patronage*, 139.

investigated three main possible sociological backgrounds, namely Hellenistic philosophy (such as Gnosticism), Hellenistic cults and the system of patronage.

Though any of these sociological backgrounds might have influenced the immoral conduct in the church of the Corinthians, it is rather difficult to prove that Gnostic elements caused the problem.

The best explanation seems to be provided by the social network of patronage which helps one to understand not only why the man married his father's wife, but also why the Corinthian Christians did not discipline the man but instead accepted him as a brother.

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

In Part III, I have investigated church discipline in the church of the Corinthians. The specific problems in the Corinthian congregation were the immoral conduct and the attitude of the Corinthian Christians to the offence.

A member of the Corinthian congregation had a sexual relationship with "his father's wife" (1 Cor. 5:1 NIV). It has been suggested that the woman was not the man's mother but his stepmother and that their relationship was not a once off action but continuous, such as a marriage.

The Corinthian church not only did not discipline him and condoned the offence but also accepted him as a brother and manifested an arrogant attitude towards the offence (1 Cor. 5:2).

It was argued that the offence that occurred in the Corinthian church was an incestuous relationship with the wife of the offender's father. Such a relationship was entirely forbidden, not only by Scripture and in the Christian church but also by Hellenistic and Roman law. This case of immorality was critical to God's church as well as to the individual Christian.

To Paul the more surprising fact was not that such immorality occurred in the Corinthian Christian community, but rather that the Corinthian Christians displayed a boastful attitude concerning the offence.

The meaning of the disciplinary words pronounced by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:5 is debated among scholars. Paul commands the

Corinthian Christians to hand the offender over to Satan “for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.”

Scholars propose four hypotheses in order to explain the meaning of Paul’s words: 1) Delivery to a Roman official; 2) Atonement death for sins; 3) Destruction of the physical body of the offender; 4) Removal of the sinful nature of the offender. I showed that the best explanation is the removal of the sinful nature of the offender.

To investigate the background of the immoral action and the Corinthian Christians’ attitude, I asked the following questions: Why did the man marry his stepmother? Why did the Corinthian Christians not discipline him and why did they display an arrogant attitude towards the offence?

In order to get an answer to these questions, I investigated it in terms of two approaches, a theological approach and a sociological approach.

In terms of a theological approach, the main reason for the Corinthian Christians’ conduct is explained by three hypotheses, namely spiritual fanaticism, Christian freedom and a realised eschatology, which are interweaved in terms of the realised eschatological notion.

Scholars following this approach believe that the Corinthian Christians believed that the New Age had been inaugurated, that the eschatological event had already occurred and that they belonged to the

New Age because they were spiritual and had received spiritual power and wisdom (1 Cor. 1:18ff.; 14). They also regarded themselves as wise, as people with the status of kings (1 Cor. 4:8) and believed that they could not be judged by anyone (1 Cor. 2:15). Moreover they thought that the old human norms and Mosaic law had lost their restriction for Christians because Christians' status was one of freedom from the law in Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 9:20-21) as they lived in the New Age. Therefore they accepted the immoral action of the man, regarded him as a brother and displayed an arrogant attitude. They thought that this kind of immoral action could not inflict harm on them because they were spiritual and had special wisdom (1 Cor. 1:18ff.) and spiritual powers (1 Cor. 14). They regarded themselves as spiritual persons, so what they did with their bodies did not affect their spiritual status.

On the contrary, a sociological approach disregards any theological reasons for the problem of the immoral conduct in the Corinthian church. According to a sociological approach, the immoral conduct in the Corinthian congregation was connected with the system of patronage: Though the action of the man in marrying his father's wife violated God's norms, the Corinthian Christians not only did not discipline him but also condoned his action because he was a very powerful and important patron in the Corinthian church and in society. It has been suggested that he married his stepmother in order to receive his father's inheritance and to keep the dowry belonging to his father's wife.

As I indicated in the previous chapters, scholars tend to focus selectively on their own approach and regard the other approach as in conflict with their own approach. Is it, however, necessary that these two approaches are in conflict with one another and that one has to exclude the other one? In my view, it is not necessary; one should rather reconcile the two approaches in order to get a more suitable answer.

To my mind, the relationship between a sociological approach and a theological approach should therefore not be seen as exclusive and conflicting, but rather as complementary and synthetic. This offers a more suitable and a better interpretation of the problem occurring and of the practice of church discipline in the church of the Corinthians.

## Appendix II The motives for and purposes of church discipline

Paul uses church discipline when the churches in Thessalonica and Corinth were faced with the problem of “the idle” and the sexual offence of immorality. Paul commands the Thessalonian Christians not to be associated with “the idle” (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6, 10) and the Corinthian Christians to expel the offender (cf. 1 Cor. 5:2, 5). Why does Paul insist on these disciplinary measures in 2 Thessalonians 3 and 1 Corinthians 5? Which motives and purposes are expressed in these forms of church discipline? In this appendix, I will research the motives for and purposes of church discipline offered by Paul.

### 1. Motives for church discipline

#### 1. 1 Holiness

The first motive is the holiness of the church. To Paul, one of the important images for the church is that of God’s holy temple (1 Cor. 3:16). Paul calls the Corinthians “the church of God that is in Corinth, those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Cor. 1:2 NRSV). This image suggests that God’s church has to be sustained by the holiness and purity of the Christian community. Thus the church members should not have a relationship with the erring members and the man who had his father’s wife had to be expelled in order to maintain the holiness and purity of the Christian church.

This motive can be traced back to the Old Testament. The Old Testament offers examples of the holiness motive sustaining the community's identity. In Leviticus, the thought "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" is very important (11:45; 19:2; 20:26). The Israelites had to be holy, because holy Yahweh dwelt among them (Num. 5:3; 35:34). In Numbers 5 the Israelites sent away the unclean persons from their camp, because holy Yahweh dwelt among them. Furthermore, Deuteronomy 23:1-8 lists those excluded from the assembly, and Ezra and Nehemiah used this passage for the expulsion of foreign wives from the community of Israel (Ezra 9:1-2; Neh. 13:1-3, 23-27).

Thus, it is not surprising to find the exclusion of the offender connected to the holiness motive in 1 Corinthians 5. The best explanation for the motive of holiness is found in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.<sup>1</sup> There Paul proclaims "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are."

The same principle seems to be applied in 1 Corinthians 5. The man who destroyed God's temple through an immoral action must be destroyed for the holiness of the Christian community. If the offender were to stay on in the community, his erring behaviour would defile and pollute the holiness of the church. Therefore, Paul directed the

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<sup>1</sup> B. S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-7* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 72-74. He believes that the holiness motif is most clearly perceived in 1 Corinthians 5 in the light of the development in the use of Deuteronomy 23.



Christians that the offender and the erring members should be disciplined and removed from the community.

This motive is further expressed by the imagery of the leaven which has to be cleansed out and the reference to “our Paschal Lamb” that has been sacrificed (1 Cor. 5:6-7).<sup>2</sup> Leaven was a symbol of impurity and it had to be removed from the community. Since “our Paschal Lamb” had been sacrificed, the church community was “a temple of the Holy Spirit within you” (1 Cor. 6:19-20; cf. Acts 20:28) and had to sustain her holiness. Therefore, the lack of discipline affected the holiness of the congregation. Since the Spirit of God dwelt in the church, every true congregation which was spiritually alive had to practise discipline against any notorious wickedness.

## 1. 2 The covenant

Another motive for church discipline is the covenant motive. The Christian church is the church of God that He obtained with the blood of his own Son Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28); the covenant community (1 Cor. 11:25). 1 Corinthians 5 provides striking evidence that Paul thinks of the Corinthian church, composed of the Gentile converts, as belonging to God’s covenant community.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the Christian communities bear the same moral responsibility given to Israel in Old Testament times.

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<sup>2</sup> M. Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 91.

<sup>3</sup> R. B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 80.

In Deuteronomy, expulsion formulae were consistently associated with the covenant motive (17:7, 12, 19:13; 22:22, 24; 24:7). People were expelled from the community because of a violation of the covenant of Israel's God (Deut. 17:2). Yahweh described Achan's sin to Joshua with the words "Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant that I imposed on them" (Jos. 7:11 NRSV). Deuteronomy teaches that Israel has certain obligations, because they were in a covenant relationship with the Lord.

The catalogue of vices in 1 Corinthians 5 represents an obvious point of contact with the covenant motive, because there are parallels between Deuteronomy and 1 Corinthians 5.<sup>4</sup> The representative list of sinners refers to covenantal norms which automatically exclude an offender when they are broken.<sup>5</sup> Prior<sup>6</sup> mentions that the sins to which the formula "drive out the wicked person from among you" (1 Cor. 5:13) are connected in Deuteronomy form "a remarkable parallel to the particular sins mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:11." It thus appears that the contents of the catalogue of vices in 1 Corinthians 5 can be explained in terms of

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<sup>4</sup> Scholars disagree on the origin of the list of vices in 1 Cor. 5. H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 100-101, insists that these catalogues have no model in the Old Testament and that, where they occur in Judaism, "Greek influence is at hand." Rosner, *Paul*, 82-83, points out that "the vice catalogue" is better interpreted in terms of Deuteronomic covenant identity and convenient obligations. In other words, terms used by Paul, appear in Deuteronomy 17:3, 7, 19:18-19; 21:20-21; 22:21 and 24:27. A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 410-13, 440-44 and P. S. Zaas, "Catalogues and Context: 1 Corinthians 5 and 6," *NTS* 34 (1988), 622-29.

<sup>5</sup> Rosner, *Paul*, 68-69.

<sup>6</sup> D. Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church* (Leicester: I. V. P., 1985), 85.

the legislation of Deuteronomy. The fact that 1 Corinthians 5:13b is a citation from Deuteronomy 17:7 supports this.

Furthermore, to Paul every member of the Christian community was “washed ... sanctified ... justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7). This implies covenant responsibility towards every single member of that community, because they are one body in the Holy Spirit and have one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:3-6).

### 1.3 Corporate responsibility

The most startling aspect of Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 5 is that his directions are not directed to the individual sinner himself but solely to the Corinthian congregation as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Paul does not only condemn the immoral offender, but also the community as a whole for their complicity in the matter. Moreover, he directs the church discipline to be carried out when they are assembled (v. 4), because what the individual member does is not merely an individual matter but the responsibility of the whole community.<sup>8</sup>

The Old Testament provides widespread evidence for such a motive of corporate responsibility in relation to exclusion from the community.

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<sup>7</sup> P. Miner, “Christ and the Congregation: 1 Corinthians 5-6,” *RevExp* 80 (1983), 343.

<sup>8</sup> B. Campbell, B., “Flesh and Spirit in 1 Cor. 5:5: An Exercise in Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament,” *JETS* 36/3 (1993), 331-42; B. S. Rosner, “οὐχι μᾶλλον ἐπενθήσατε: Corporate Responsibility in 1 Corinthians 5,” *NTS* 38 (1992), 470-73.

The most prominent example is given in Joshua 7. Although Achan himself sinned against the Lord, the account of his sin is introduced by the words “the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things” and “the Lord’s anger burned against Israel” (Josh. 7:1 NIV).

In Nehemiah 13, Nehemiah rebukes the Sabbath breakers with the words: “You bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath” (v. 18). He warns that a few Israelites broke the Law but all Israel faced the wrath of God. Thus, in the Old Testament, the expulsion of the offender from the community is linked to the whole community. If they would fail to expel a sinning member from the community, the whole community would be held responsible.

In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul rebukes the arrogance of the Corinthians and calls upon them to show passionate grief. He uses the verb *πενθέω*.<sup>9</sup> The usage of *πενθέω* in the LXX supports the idea that in 1 Corinthians 5:2 Paul thinks that the Corinthians ought to “mourn” in the sense of confessing the sin of the offending brother as if it were their own. The word occurs four times in the LXX with reference to sin (Ezra 10:6; Neh. 1:4; Dan. 10:2).

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<sup>9</sup> In the New Testament the word *πενθέω* is used for mourning over the death of a loved one (Matt. 9:15; Mark 16:10) and for grief over a great loss (Rev. 18:11,15,19). Thus, many commentators, such as J. Hering, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (London: The Epworth Press, 1973), 35; L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 86-87; A. Robertson, & A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: Scribner's, 1978), 97 and Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 388, believe *πενθέω* in 5:2 refers to a mourning over the impending loss of the sinning brother, whose sin will lead to his physical death. However, this interpretation does not take into account that the other instance that this word is used by Paul (2 Cor. 12:21) it refers to godly sorrow.

Ezra 10 represents a close parallel to 1 Corinthians 5, where Ezra deals with the expulsion of the sinner. Just as Ezra mourned over the sins of the community, Paul directs the Corinthian church to mourn over their arrogant attitude as well as over the sin of the individual. As Ezra demanded that the sinners separate from their foreign wives or else should be separated from the congregation (Ezra 10:8), Paul demands the exclusion of the offender from the church community.

The motive of corporate responsibility is expressed by the imagery of the leaven which has to be cleansed out. The Corinthian church is to be “a new lump” (1 Cor. 5:7), not new lumps. The metaphor is applied not to one person, but “to the collective body of the community, as the new people of the covenant”<sup>10</sup> as the image of the “body of Christ” used by Paul (1 Cor. 12).

Paul’s view that the whole church community has moral responsibility for the conduct of a member and that the behaviour of an individual member affects the life of the community, serves as proof of the importance of corporate responsibility in 1 Corinthians 5.<sup>11</sup>

W. Baird<sup>12</sup> notes that the metaphor of bread and body are connected in 1 Corinthians 10:17, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

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<sup>10</sup> Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 99.

<sup>11</sup> Hays, *First Corinthians*, 82.

<sup>12</sup> Baird, *Corinthian Church*, 68.

## 2. The purposes of church discipline

### 2. 1 Individual's salvation

First of all, Paul's order is aimed at the offender's individual salvation. According to the "curse/death" interpretation, the offender's fate is of no consideration. However, according to the "removal of the sinful nature" interpretation, although the offender's salvation or repentance is not guaranteed, Paul hopes that church discipline will lead to the offender's repentance and to his salvation.<sup>13</sup> Paul refers clearly to his salvation by the words: "His spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord Jesus." This indicates that church discipline is to be practised not in a judgmental way but with a remedial purpose; not as retribution but rather for retrieval. This excommunication should be inflicted on the offender not retributively, but rather reformatively.<sup>14</sup>

This is confirmed by other parts in Paul's letters. 2 Corinthians 2 is probably not the same situation as the one depicted in 1 Corinthians 5, but it also shows how Paul thinks the church community should treat the offenders. Therefore, it is likely that Paul actually recognises that church discipline would somehow lead to the repentance and restoration of the sinner to the community. Galatians 6:1 and 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 also show Paul's attitude towards erring brothers. One can conclude that

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<sup>13</sup> B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 159. W. R. Bowie & P. Scherer, *Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 63, say that although Paul has not lost sight of the possible repentance of the offender and his restoration to the church, it is to be remembered that Paul's final purpose was to save the sinner. See Hays, *First Corinthians*, 86.

<sup>14</sup> V. A. Farrar & D. Thomas, *Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 170.

Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church are aimed at the individual's salvation.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. 2 Preservation of the community's identity

It is surprising that most scholars give attention only to the preservation of the identity of the community rather than the salvation of the individual with regards to church discipline. Those who commit sexual sin are not only harming themselves but also the community. Paul recognises that such immoral conduct not only influences the identity and purity of the community, but also imperils the life and witness of church. To Paul, the Corinthian church must expel the offender to preserve the identity and purity of the sanctified people of God (1 Cor. 1:2). One can conclude that Paul's other concern is the purity and integrity of the church as a corporate body of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Thiselton<sup>17</sup> points out that most scholars think that Paul's concern for the purity of the Christian community is reflected "in his language

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<sup>15</sup> V. C. Pfitzner, "Purified Community-Purified Sinner: Expulsion from the Community according to Matt. 18:15-18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-5," *AusBR* 30 (1982), 48, says that to Paul, the prime concern is the sinner's restoration. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1971), 127, believes that Paul's primary concern is "for the salvation of the erring member," but that he also gives a concern "for the purity of the church as a whole."

<sup>16</sup> D. B. Martin, *The Christians Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 168-69.

<sup>17</sup> Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 390. See A. Y. Collins, "The Function of 'Excommunication' in Paul," *HTR* 73 (1980), 259; G. Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community: Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect. within Rabbinic Judaism, and within Primitive Christianity* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1972), 149; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 80; Martin, *Christians Body*, 168-69. They believe that Paul's primary concern is not for the salvation of the individual offender but rather for the holiness and integrity of the church as a corporate body.

about the holiness of the church as God's temple, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17)." In fact, Paul's concern moves from the salvation of the individual to the purity of the church in 1 Corinthians 5:6ff. In 5:6 the Corinthian church is reminded that sin is contagious and can spread throughout the congregation just as "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." Paul's indignation is aimed more against the Corinthian church's arrogant attitude towards immorality and its failure to discipline the sinner than against the offender himself.

The Corinthian church has to be "a new lump" (1 Cor. 5:7) - a corporate unity. This concept is more fully developed in Corinthians 12 with the discussion of the church as the body of Christ. W. Baird<sup>18</sup> correctly notes that the metaphors of a loaf and body are linked together in 1 Corinthians 10:17b: "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." Failure to discipline the offender infects the whole community, but church discipline towards the erring members will preserve the identity and purity of the Christian community.

J. Calvin<sup>19</sup> refers to the issue of church discipline and says that the purpose of church discipline is that

[The] good be not corrupted by the constant company of the wicked, as commonly happens. For (such is our tendency to wander from the way) there is nothing easier than for us to be led away by bad examples.

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<sup>18</sup> W. Baird, *The Corinthian Church: A Biblical Approach to Urban Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 68.

<sup>19</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II, 1233.



The purpose of church discipline is related to the community in that it functions to safeguard the moral purity and identity of the Christians congregation.

Paul's concern in 1 Corinthians 5 does not stop with this function, but goes beyond this purpose. G. Harris<sup>20</sup> suggests that to Paul, the expulsion of the offender from the community has two functions, namely 1) to rid the congregation of impurity and 2) to strengthen the community. L. V. Broek<sup>21</sup> says that Paul's latent purpose is "to strengthen the community, to reinforce its understanding of how it should function."

The Christian community in the midst of this world has a responsibility toward it; it is to be "sincere" and "true" (1 Cor. 5:8) in every aspect of its life within the world. This is why Paul does not hesitate to call upon them with the words: "Drive out the wicked person from among you" (1 Cor. 5:13).

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<sup>20</sup> G. Harris, "The Beginning of Church Discipline: 1 Corinthians 5," *NTS* 37 (1991), 18. Harris refers to them as the "explicit function" and the "latent function." The latent function refers to the additional result that it might have had on the non-deviant members.

<sup>21</sup> L. V. Broek, "Discipline and Community: Another Look at 1 Cor. 5," *RefRev* 48 (1994), 8-9. Broek says that two outlooks of Paul's message are especially important, one more implicit and sociological in nature, and the other explicit and theological.

## Part IV Conclusion

The time has come to summarise some of the threads from the various parts of this study and to draw a conclusion. There is, however, no need to repeat in detail what has already been recapitulated in the conclusion of each part/chapter. Here, I would only like to give some further insights from this study.

Which insights can we take from this study concerning church discipline as practiced in the Thessalonian and Corinthian congregations? What was Paul's intention when he directed them to discipline the erring member(s) of the congregation?

Firstly, the problems that occurred in the churches of the Thessalonians and the Corinthians were not only rooted in their respective theological backgrounds, but also in their social and cultural backgrounds.<sup>1</sup>

Though it might seem as though the idle in Thessalonica appealed only to theological convictions, especially an eschatological hope that they were already living in the new age so that the curse of the labour imposed in Genesis 3 had been annulled, it was found in this study that

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<sup>1</sup> R. S. Ascough, "The Thessalonian Christian Community as a Professional Voluntary Association, *JBL* 119/2 (2000), 311, says that "Exegetes recognized that NT texts must be read in the light of the social situation to which each was addressed if they are to be properly understood."

their behaviour was also affected by the common practice of the system of patronage in Greek society.

With regard to the instance of sexual immorality that occurred in the church of the Corinthians, though it is often suggested that the background of the church's problem consisted only of theological grounds such as spiritual fanaticism, Christian freedom and realised eschatology, it was argued in this study that the problem was also rooted in sociological conditions such as the system of patronage and material concerns.

Secondly, it is possible that the views of the Thessalonian and Corinthian Christians in this regard were distorted by the surrounding culture and Hellenistic thought, because they were recent proselytes from Hellenistic orientation and were constantly influenced by Hellenistic elements, common in the Greco-Roman world of that time. They were influenced by the Greco-Roman social and cultural circumstances to such an extent that some of the members were separated from the gospel and reverted to previous worldly customs. This reversion of some members caused the distinction among the Corinthian Christians concerning spiritual status (cf. 5:2; 8:1-13) and also some trouble among the Thessalonian Christians (cf. 2 Thess. 3:11-14).

Thirdly, the church discipline that was practiced in the Thessalonian and Corinthian churches was beneficial for both the individual and the

church. Although church discipline could not guarantee the salvation of the individual, Paul hoped that it would lead to his repentance and salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Thess. 3:14).<sup>2</sup> The discipline that was practised by the churches was not judgmental, but remedial; not in a spirit of retaliation, but in a spirit of gentleness (Gal. 6:1).

For the church community, the action would get rid of impurity from the congregation, sustain the identity and purity of the church and strengthen the community. It would also be a witness to church life and a sign of its responsibility toward this world.

If church discipline was not practised in the churches of the Thessalonians and Corinthians, this conduct would not only inflict upon the identity and purity of the church community, but would also imperil the life and witness of the church to the world.

Fourthly, when managing problems in the church of our times, we have to consider not only a theological approach, but also a sociological approach as I have indicated in my study.

How can one communicate these insights to the church in the twenty-first century?

Firstly, church discipline is neither the affair of one nor of a few individuals, but of the whole congregation. Even though Paul as an

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<sup>2</sup> This indicates Paul's intention within the context and corresponds to Paul's belief and his theology. The expulsion of the offender by the Thessalonian and Corinthian churches would provide an opportunity to the offender for re-evaluation of his erring behaviour and for the purification of the church.

apostle announced his own decision to the erring member(s), he also encouraged the Thessalonian and Corinthian congregations as a whole to judge erring behaviour. Thus, the whole church has the responsibility for church discipline.<sup>3</sup> Because the church is the one body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12, 27), the congregation as one body has to be concerned about the weakness of one of its members (1 Cor. 12:26). Moreover, the presence of the Lord himself (cf. Matt. 18:20) and the voice of the Lord which speaks through the Holy Spirit should play a significant role.

Secondly, church discipline has to be exercised both for the sake of the individual and the church community. It is never exercised for the contentment of the people who exercise it, but rather for the benefit of the person who has sinned and for the sake of the church community. In other words, the ultimate purpose of church discipline is neither retributive nor judgmental but remedial and restorative.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, when discipline is administered in the church, the spirit in which it is done must not be seen as enmity, but as affection (cf. 2 Thess. 3:15). Church discipline is to be practised “in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal. 6:1).

A Christian community should carry out such discipline with regard to the offender before the sin pollutes the whole congregation. At the same

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<sup>3</sup> J. R. W. Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians. Preparing for the Coming King* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 194, also says that a “corporate decision and corporate action should be taken by the whole church membership.”

<sup>4</sup> Stott, *Thessalonians*, 194, says concerning the purpose of church discipline that it is not to “humiliate delinquents, still less destroy them,” but rather to have the chance to “repentance for the past and amendment of life in the future.”

time, it should be practised with genuine grief (1 Cor. 5:2) and in a “spirit of gentleness” (cf. Gal. 6:1), rather than in a spirit of “vindictive glee” over a person’s failure and of “self-righteousness.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> V. C. Pfitzner, “Purified Community–Purified Sinner: Expulsion from the Community according to Matt. 18:15–18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1–5,” *AusBR* 30 (1982), 48–49.

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## Abstract

In this study church discipline in the Pauline churches, especially in the churches of the Thessalonians and the Corinthians, was investigated. Traditionally, when New Testament scholars approach church discipline, they tend to concentrate on the nature of the theological issue or on the question of what kind of theological motive gave rise to the problem. Thus, they research the theological background of the particular offence, what kind of theological issue caused the problem, the background of the church discipline and/or what kind of theological perspective surfaces in the study of church discipline.

Some scholars, however, oppose such a "theological approach" and follow another approach, the so called a "sociological approach." They investigate the social and cultural nature of the Biblical text and its environmental backdrop. Disregarding a theological approach, they have contributed studies with a broadened understanding of the sociological character of primitive Christian communities and a focus on the social and cultural conditions that characterized the Biblical world.

In this study it is argued that it is not necessary that one approach should exclude the other. The relationship between a "sociological approach" and a "theological approach" should thus not be seen as exclusive and conflicting, but rather as complementary and synthetic. The guiding hypothesis of this study is thus that a combination of a

sociological and a theological approach is the best way to explain the problems in the Pauline congregations in Corinth and Thessalonica.

In Part II church discipline in the Thessalonian church is examined. The significant problem that occurred in the church of the Thessalonians was that some members of the congregation were idle and caused trouble to the believers and/or non-believers, interrupting other persons' business (2 Thess. 3:11; cf. 1 Tim. 5:13). I indicated that this problem embodied both theological and sociological issues: Theologically, there were (1) spiritual enthusiasm, (2) Paul's opponents, and (3) realised eschatology; sociologically there were (1) Hellenistic philosophy such as Epicureanism, (2) voluntary associations, and (3) the system of patronage.

In Part III church discipline in the Corinthian church was investigated. The notorious problem that occurred in the church of the Corinthians was that a member of the congregation "has his father's wife" (1 Cor. 5:1) and that the Corinthian church was proud of it (1 Cor. 5:2).

I indicated that this problem of immorality embodied both theological and sociological issues: Theologically, there were (1) Judaism, (2) spiritual fanaticism, (3) Christian freedom, and (4) realised eschatology; sociologically, there were (1) Hellenistic philosophy such as Gnosticism, (2) Hellenistic religious cults, and (3) the system of patronage.

This study concludes that the two approaches, a "sociological

approach” and a “theological approach,” should not be taken as exclusive or in conflict, but rather as complementary in order to reach a more suitable answer to the problem of the disorderly in the church of the Thessalonians and that of immorality in the church of the Corinthians.

## Opsomming

In hierdie studie word tug in die Pauliniese gemeentes, spesifiek in die gemeentes van Tessalonika en Korinte, ondersoek. Wanneer Nuwe-Testamentici tug ondersoek, neig hulle gewoonlik om te konsentreer op die aard van die teologiese saak of vraagstuk of teologiese motief wat die probleem veroorsaak het. Hulle ondersoek dus die teologiese agtergrond van die spesifieke oortreding, die aard van die teologiese saak wat die probleem veroorsaak het, die agtergrond vir kerklike tug en/of watter tipe teologiese perspektief in die ondersoek van die kerklike tug na vore kom.

Ander navorsers opponeer egter so 'n benadering en volg 'n ander benadering, die sogenaamde 'n "sosiologiese benadering." Hulle ondersoek die sosiale en kulturele aard van die Bybelteks en sosiale agtergrond daarvan. Hulle verwerp 'n "teologiese benadering" en lewer studies met 'n breër insig in die sosiologiese aard van die primitiewe Christelike gemeenskappe en 'n fokus op die sosiale en kulturele omstandighede wat die Bybelse wêreld gekenmerk het.

In hierdie studie word egter geargumenteer dat dit nie nodig is dat een benadering die ander uitsluit nie. Die verhouding tussen 'n "sosiologiese benadering" en 'n "teologiese benadering" moet dus nie as uitsluitend en botsend van aard gesien word nie, maar eerder as aanvullend en sinteties. Die leidende hipotese van hierdie studie is gevolglik dat die beste manier om die probleme in die Pauliniese gemeentes in Korinte en Tessalonika te verduidelik, 'n kombinasie van

die sosiologiese en teologiese benaderings is.

In Deel II word tug in die gemeente van Tessalonika ondersoek. Die probleem wat in dié gemeente ontstaan het, is dat sommige gemeentelide nie wou werk nie en probleme vir die gelowiges en/of ongelowiges veroorsaak het en ander mense gepla het (2 Tes. 3:11; vgl. 1 Tim 5:13). Ek het aangedui dat hierdie probleem beide teologiese en sosiologiese fasette gehad het. Teologies was daar (1) geestelike oortoetsiasme, (2) Paulus se opponente, en (3) gerealiseerde eskatologie; sosiologies was daar (1) Hellenistiese filosofie, byvoorbeeld Epikurisme, (2) vrywillige verenigings en (3) die patronaatsstelsel.

In Deel III is tug in die Korintiese gemeente ondersoek. Die berugte probleem in dié gemeente was die feit dat 'n gemeentelid "sy vrou se pa gehad het" (1 Kor. 5:1) en dat die gemeente daarop trots was (1 Kor. 5:2).

Ek het aangedui dat dié probleem beide teologiese en sosiologiese fasette gehad het: Teologies was daar (1) Judaïsme, (2) geestelike fanatisme, (3) Christelike vryheid en (4) gerealiseerde eskatologie; sosiologies was daar (1) Hellenistiese filosofie, byvoorbeeld Gnostiek, (2) Hellenistiese godsdienstige kultusse en (3) die patronaatsstelsel.

Hierdie studie konkludeer dat die twee benaderings, 'n sosiologiese en 'n teologiese benadering, nie as uitsluitend of botsend gesien moet word nie, maar eerder as aanvullend en sinteties van aard en dat die probleem van die onordelikes in die gemeente van die Tessalonisense en die probleem van immoraliteit in die gemeente van die

Korintiërs die beste op dié manier verduidelik kan word.

## Key terms

Church discipline

Theological approach

Sociological approach

Thessalonian congregation

Corinthians congregation

Authorship of 2 Thessalonians

Idle

*Porneia*

Patronage

## Sleutelbegrippe

Tug

Teologiese benadering

Sosiologiese benadering

Gemeente in Tessalonika

Gemeente in Korinte

Outeurskap van 2 Tessalonisense

Lui

*Porneia*

Patronaat