

## Trouble with Insiders: The Social Profile of the Ἄπιστοι in Paul's Corinthian Correspondence

The fundamental issue animating Paul's correspondence with the Corinthian assembly is the definition of authentic Christian identity. As is the case with definitions of identity, Paul's dealings with Corinth confront questions of social and theological boundaries.<sup>1</sup> Who is in, and who is out? Who is genuine, and who is false? In the case of the man cohabiting with his father's wife (1 Cor 5:1-5), Paul's verdict is uncompromising: Deliver such a man to Satan! Although that man may still claim the title ἀδελφός and some may still regard him as such, he is in fact a fornicator (πόρνος) (5:11), and so a leaven that must be cleansed (5:6-8). In other matters of social division, the situation in Corinth is far less straightforward. The concern is often not simply to name insiders and outsiders but rather to distinguish between types of insiders, assorted degrees of deviancy, and fitting responses to untidy social circumstances. As Paul himself points out, "*There must be divisions among you (αἰρέσεις ἐν ὑμῖν)* so that those who are genuine among you (οἱ δόκιμοι...ἐν ὑμῖν) should be recognized" (1 Cor 11:19).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As John M.G. Barclay notes, "One may read the whole of 1 Corinthians as an attempt by Paul to define the boundaries of the Christian community in Corinth, and an integral part of that effort involves Paul labelling as deviant those he considers should be excluded from the church" ("Deviance and Apostasy: Some Applications of Deviance Theory to First-Century Judaism and Christianity," in *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* [WUNT 275; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 123-39, here 136).

<sup>2</sup> Barclay describes 1 Cor 11:19 as "a proto-sociological statement if ever there was one! Paul recognizes that the creation of distinction between the 'genuine' (*dokimoi*) and the 'spurious' (*adokimoi*, cf. 1 Cor. 9:27) serves to give the Christian community definition and identity" ("Deviance and Apostasy," 136-37).

At the outset of 1 Corinthians Paul exhibits a wide-ranging and idiosyncratic social dialect.<sup>3</sup> He addresses his readers as “saints” (ἅγιοι), “brothers” (ἀδελφοί), “called” (κλητοί), “mature” (τέλειοι), and “spiritual” (πνευματικοί), but he also chastises them for the fact that there remain among them “fleshly people” (σάρκινοι) and “infants” (νήπιοι) who perpetuate inner-ecclesial divisions and require rudimentary instruction (3:1-4).<sup>4</sup> These latter individuals clearly remain deficient in Paul’s eyes and problematic for the community as a whole, but they are not figured by Paul along the lines of the “natural person” (ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος), who is incapable of receiving the things of the Spirit of God (2:14). They are not, in other words, “outsiders,” but they are also not the right kind of “insiders.” The social divisions in Corinth are simply too complex to erect in every circumstance an insider/outsider boundary without nuance. To return to the divisions (αἰρέσεις) described in 11:19: When Paul acknowledges the inevitability of schism within the church, he is not departing from his earlier lament about factionalism in the Corinthian assembly (1:10-13; 3:3-5). He is instead acknowledging that the Corinthian congregation, like any flock of two or more, is far from socially simplistic. Here Paul the ecclesial idealist yields to Paul the pastoral realist.

### **The Ἄπιστοι among the Corinthian Believers**

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<sup>3</sup> See esp. Barclay, “Πνευματικός in the Social Dialect of Pauline Christianity,” in *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews*, 205-15.

<sup>4</sup> The key study on Christian self-designations is Paul Trebilco, *Self-designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). See also Trebilco’s “Creativity at the Boundary: Features of the Linguistic and Conceptual Construction of Outsiders in the Pauline Corpus,” *NTS* 60 (2014): 185-201, esp. 187-94, which focuses explicitly on the ἄπιστοι in Corinth.

Further complicating any sketch of social dynamics in the Corinthian assembly is a category of individuals who had an influential social profile within the community while yet beyond (or precariously *on*) the borders of it: the ἄπιστοι. Conventionally translated “unbelievers,”<sup>5</sup> the ἄπιστοι are usually taken to comprise an undefined class of “outsiders”—or “all those who are not ‘in’.”<sup>6</sup> The ἄπιστοι are thus viewed as the undifferentiated mass of humanity who are unworthy to be called ἀδελφός. Setting aside for the moment the problems in this understanding of the Greek word ἄπιστος (and its opposite: πιστός), the actual evidence in 1 and 2 Corinthians suggests that the designation ἄπιστοι was a technical term in the community’s sociolect for a group of individuals who maintained intimate social ties with the believers and were even counted as “insiders” in certain senses.<sup>7</sup>

The term ἄπιστος appears fourteen times in the Corinthian correspondence and nowhere else in the undisputed letters.<sup>8</sup> Its prominence as a social designation within the Corinthian community is occasionally noted but rarely followed by additional comment. John Coolidge Hurd, for instance, characterizes Paul’s exclusive use of the term in the Corinthian letters as “an interesting fact” and then notes that in 1 Corinthians Paul apparently had an

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<sup>5</sup> So ASV, CEB, ESV, KJV, NAS, NIV, NRSV/RSV, etc. Exceptions to 1 Cor 6:6, the first reference in the letter, are the Wycliffe Bible (“unfaithful men”) from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century and the Geneva Bible (“infidels”) from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century under the influence of the Vulgate’s *infideles*.

<sup>6</sup> Trebilco, *Self-designations and Group Identity*, 83.

<sup>7</sup> Caroline Johnson Hodge is one scholar who has rightly raised objections to the translation of ἄπιστος as “unbeliever” in the Corinthian letters (“Married to an Unbeliever: Households, Hierarchies, and Holiness in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16,” *HTR* 103 [2010]: 1-25, here 2 n. 5).

<sup>8</sup> The term is also found in 1 Tim 5:8 and Titus 1:15.

“unusual interest in the unbeliever.”<sup>9</sup> Hurd does not then pursue this unusual interest or probe the possibility that the ἄπιστοι had a more definable social profile. Besides the conspicuous accumulation of this particular designation in relation to this particular community is the fact that it is consistently applied by Paul to a class of individuals whose personal interactions with the Corinthian believers repeatedly prove problematic. This involves cases of legal disputes (1 Cor 6:6), marriage relations (1 Cor 7:12-15), shared meals (1 Cor 10:27), communal worship (1 Cor 14:22-24), and certain forms of ritual partnership (2 Cor 6:14-15). The corresponding πιστός is likewise prominent in 1 and 2 Corinthians, appearing seven times and otherwise only twice in the seven undisputed letters (see Gal 3:9; 1 Thess 5:24).<sup>10</sup> Given the prominence of the ἄπιστος/πιστός word group in relation to this particular Pauline community, it is worth exploring the possibility it acquired a specialized sense, and one that would be important for discerning otherwise undetectable social resonances.

As Wayne Meeks points out in his analysis of early Christian speech, “Every close-knit group develops its own argot, and the use of that argot in speech among members knits them more closely still.”<sup>11</sup> A common trait of any sociolect is the specialized use of particular words. As John Barclay explains, “the characteristic linguistic innovation in early Christianity was not the coining of neologisms, but the special frequency and emphasis with which Christians deployed perfectly acceptable terms which were used otherwise quite rarely, or rather differently, outside the circle of believers.”<sup>12</sup> Barclay explores how the adjective

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<sup>9</sup> John Coolidge Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (SPCK: London, 1965), 221.

<sup>10</sup> See 1 Cor 1:9; 4:2; 4:17; 7:25; 10:13; 2 Cor 1:18; 6:15. It appears frequently in the disputed letters of Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, and the Pastoral Epistles.

<sup>11</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 93.

<sup>12</sup> Barclay, “Πνευματικός in the Social Dialect of Pauline Christianity,” 207.

πνευματικός functioned this way in 1 Corinthians, where fifteen of the twenty-four Pauline uses of that word occur. For Barclay, such lexical accumulation suggests “the term has become an important item in the social idiom of this particular network.”<sup>13</sup> But, as Barclay shows, the term was much more than just a *Lieblingswort* in the community’s collective vocabulary. Rather, by introducing a new category for dividing the world, the term provided “an important linguistic tool by which to interpret social reality, a tool which is fully comprehensible only within its own patterns of discourse.”<sup>14</sup> The equally conspicuous lexical data for ἄπιστος in the Corinthian letters, when coupled with the fact that (1) it is used by Paul exclusively in relation to Corinth, and (2) it is applied repeatedly to individuals with intimate social ties to the believers, is prima facie evidence that this social designation attained, like πνευματικός, special meaning in the community’s social idiom, and perhaps also some localized sense. And as with the use of πνευματικός in the Corinthian sociolect, determining a specialized sense for ἄπιστος requires attention be paid to the patterns of discourse in which the word participates and to the complexities that attend the social divisions it creates. In other words, it is necessary to ask: In what sorts of social circumstances does the repeated use of this designation intervene, and what sort of social world does it instantiate?

To be clear: In arguing that this social designation must be comprehended within the community’s sociolect, I am not suggesting it is necessarily a label the Corinthians created internally, nor that all within the community would have been pleased with it, or in agreement with those to whom Paul appends it. This is where the conflict between Paul’s rhetoric and the Corinthian social reality lies. I suspect the ἄπιστος label is one Paul himself has developed in relation to the ἐκκλησία, even imposed upon it, in order to shape his readers

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<sup>13</sup> Barclay, “Πνευματικός in the Social Dialect of Pauline Christianity,” 210.

<sup>14</sup> Barclay, “Πνευματικός in the Social Dialect of Pauline Christianity,” 210.

into the social formation he would have them be. But whatever the case, my claim is that the specific profile of an ἄπιστος person—and, indeed, the specific people so labelled—is something the Corinthians would have detected natively, even if subsequent readers of Paul’s letters have not.

In what follows I develop a social profile for the ἄπιστοι in which they emerge as a well-known grouping within the Corinth ecclesial network with intimate and even supportive ties to it—and ties that are sustained by both believers and ἄπιστοι even in the face of severe social risks for both groupings. The ἄπιστοι thus remain in marriages with believers despite the challenges accompanying domestic disharmony, particularly in cases of domestic piety (1 Cor 7); they socialize with believers in ritually sensitive contexts, again tempting circumstances for public shame (1 Cor 10); they participate in the community’s worship life with enough frequency that Pauls calls upon the believers to be more mindful as to how they might best win their conversion (1 Cor 14); they had even been called upon to intervene in intra-ecclesial legal affairs (though Paul contends they should not) (1 Cor 6). In sum, although the ἄπιστοι are unquestionably “outsiders” in terms of exclusive loyalty to Christ, they are also unquestionably “insiders” in the most socially serious ways.

### **Ἄπιστος: The Lexical Data**

The place to begin is with the lexical data for the ἄπιστος/πιστός word group. Despite the preference of modern translations, there is simply no lexical precedent for translating ἄπιστος as “unbeliever” in the sense of categorical outsider. Even Paul Trebilco, the most sophisticated analyst of this word group and proponent of the conventional translation, concedes, “Pauline usage where ‘the unbelievers’ is a label for *all outsiders*... is quite distinct. As far as we know then, οἱ ἄπιστοι is not used in a Jewish or Greco-Roman context

in the way that Paul uses it, that is, as a designation for all outsiders in general.”<sup>15</sup> Trebilco defends his own reading of the ἄπιστοι as generic “unbelievers” primarily on the contrast with “the believers” (οἱ πιστεύοντες) in 1 Cor 14:22.<sup>16</sup> The juxtaposition of οἱ ἄπιστοι and οἱ πιστεύοντες here is indeed significant, but so is its asymmetry. Paul does not contrast those who believe (οἱ πιστεύοντες) with those who do not believe (οἱ μὴ πιστεύοντες or οἱ ἀπιστοῦντες).<sup>17</sup> Paul instead contrasts the participle (οἱ πιστεύοντες) with the adjective (οἱ ἄπιστοι). While Trebilco reads this as proof Paul’s use of ἄπιστοι “is comprehensive and includes all outsiders,”<sup>18</sup> the imparity in the juxtaposition may instead correspond to the fact that the ἄπιστοι here are something more like what the word usually means.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the likelihood Paul’s use of the designation had a specific social referent within its ordinary lexical range is supported not only by Paul’s exclusive use of ἄπιστος in relation to Corinth but also by the fact that in the fifteen other times Paul uses οἱ πιστεύοντες as a substantival

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<sup>15</sup> Trebilco, “Creativity at the Boundary,” 188.

<sup>16</sup> Trebilco, “Creativity at the Boundary,” 187.

<sup>17</sup> See οἱ μὴ πιστεύοντες in John 6:64 and Acts 9:26. Cf. οἱ μὴ πιστεύσαντες in 2 Thess 2:12.

For ἀπιστέω, see esp. Rom 3:3; 2 Tim 2:13.

<sup>18</sup> Trebilco, “Creativity at the Boundary,” 187.

<sup>19</sup> Trebilco is following John Taylor, “Paul’s Understanding of Faith,” (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2004). As Taylor concludes, “It does not appear that ἄπιστος was used to indicate religious, philosophical or ethnic outsiders before its appearance in 1 Corinthians.... It seems most likely that Pauline use of οἱ πιστεύοντες, designating those who have received the gospel as believers, generated its own logical opposite” (cited in Trebilco, *Self-designations and Group Identity*, 83). I simply point out that οἱ ἄπιστοι, in its ordinary sense, is not necessarily the logical opposite of οἱ πιστεύοντες. Nothing requires us to read Paul as using ἄπιστος in ways in which it had otherwise never been used.

participle it is never contrasted with οἱ ἄπιστοι. Paul employs a host of “outsider” designations in his other letters to stand in contrast to οἱ πιστεύοντες, but οἱ ἄπιστοι is never one of them. As Trebilco himself observes, “There were a number of occasions when Paul could have called outsiders οἱ ἄπιστοι...but he does not.”<sup>20</sup> Rather than appeal forthwith to “a new and innovative use of language,”<sup>21</sup> it is worth considering the possibility of a specialized application within the word’s ordinary semantic range.

To return to the πιστός word group: In Jewish, Christian, and pagan literature surrounding the New Testament, the adjective πιστός describes a person (or god) who is “trustworthy, faithful, dependable, inspiring trust/faith” (BDAG, s.v. πιστός) or “genuine” (LSJ, s.v. πιστός).<sup>22</sup> So by contrast an ἄπιστος person is someone who is viewed either passively as “not to be trusted,” “unreliable,” or actively as “mistrustful,” “suspicious,” “disobedient,” or “disloyal” (LSJ, s.v. ἄπιστος). To render ἄπιστος as “unbeliever”—and thereby to understand such an individual as a nonspecific outsider in terms of “belief”—is simply not in keeping with the semantic data. It is also not in keeping with Paul’s use of πιστός in 1 and 2 Corinthians, which is, as would be expected, repeatedly applied in its standard sense of “loyalty” or “fidelity.”<sup>23</sup> Hence when Paul characterizes God as πιστός, he is acclaiming God’s ongoing “faithfulness” to sustain those who are called (1 Cor 1:8-9), not to let Christians be tempted beyond what they can bear (1 Cor 10:13), and never to waver in

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<sup>20</sup> Trebilco, “Creativity at the Boundary,” 189.

<sup>21</sup> Trebilco, “Creativity at the Boundary,” 190.

<sup>22</sup> The word can of course be used for things hard to believe or for people characterized by disbelief (John 20:27; Acts 26:8), but this is not what it means in the context of the Corinthian letters.

<sup>23</sup> So Trebilco: “Paul generally uses πιστός with the meaning ‘reliable’ or ‘faithful’” (*Self-designations and Group Identity*, 86).



his word (2 Cor 1:18). So also, a πιστός person is a “faithful” administrator (1 Cor 4:2), or the “faithful” Timothy sent by Paul to remind the Corinthians of Paul’s ways in Christ (1 Cor 4:17), or Paul himself, who is “trustworthy” in giving his opinion on marriage matters without explicit traditions from the Lord (1 Cor 7:25).

The use of ἄπιστος within the Corinthian church, like the use of πιστός, need not depart from established semantic conventions. The case to be made is that Paul reserves this designation for a special class of affiliates, even sympathizers, of the Corinthian ἐκκλησία. These individuals are in significant ways internal to the community’s life, yet they resist exclusive loyalty to Christ-devotion, even if perhaps attracted to it. The social profile of the ἄπιστοι in Corinth is thus one of deviant insiders who sustain thick social bonds with the community but, because they fail to extract themselves from pagan ritual life, they remain outside the “temple of God” (1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16). Although they are still welcome in worship, they are not counted as siblings in the ecclesial family.

To develop this profile of the ἄπιστοι it is necessary to track their emergence throughout the Corinthian letters while attending closely to the social implications of their interaction with the community. I begin with the instance in which the precise nature of their relation with believers is most evident.

### **The Ἄπιστοι and Mixed Marriages: 1 Corinthians 7:12-16**

Paul’s ruling on relationships between the ἄπιστοι and the Corinthian believers in 1 Cor 7 is uncomplicated: As long as the ἄπιστος partner willingly agrees to cohabit (συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν),<sup>24</sup> the two are united in a marriage that need not be dissolved (vv. 12-13). Paul’s full

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<sup>24</sup> The verb συνευδοκέω suggests not resigned toleration but active consent and approval by both parties. Cf. Rom 1:32; Luke 11:48; Acts 8:1; 22:20. Wolfgang Schrage, *Der Erste Brief*

reasoning on this matter is less lucidly expressed. Uncertainty begins with the “real life” identity of a given ἄπιστος person and her or his history with the Corinthian assembly and Christ-devotion.<sup>25</sup> Given the fact that the ἄπιστος person in 1 Cor 10:27-28 is associated with idol food, it can be assumed that the ἄπιστοι envisioned in ch. 7 also remain ensconced in such activities. But what could possibly account for such a person tolerating the Christ-devotion of a believing spouse given the disruptions to domestic life such devotion would entail?

It is important to stress that for a spouse to desist from ordinary ritual life in Roman Corinth would have been no small matter. As Barclay explains, “the disdain with which believers learned to speak of their past ‘idolatry’...could cause deep social offense. Gentile converts here broke with their ancestral customs and fractured the familiar habits which united their households.”<sup>26</sup> Ritual life was just *life* in the Roman world. For one spouse to defect from household piety, especially a subordinate female spouse, would have destabilized the functioning of the home and risked social disgrace. Since the loyalty of an entire household to the newly acquired deity of the master of a οἶκος/*domus* would have been the expectation of a *paterfamilias* in Roman Corinth,<sup>27</sup> how then are we to account for the active

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*an die Korinther [1Kor 6,12-11,16]* (EKK VII/2; Solothurn: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1995), 104.

<sup>25</sup> Although it is possible the issue in these verses is marital infidelity, this is unlikely given the use of ἄπιστος elsewhere in the letter.

<sup>26</sup> Barclay, “Pauline Churches, Jewish Communities and the Roman Empire,” in *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> See Caroline Johnson Hodge, “Married to an Unbeliever.” For the broader Roman concept of the household, see Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property, and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 71-154. The responsibility of the

consent of the ἄπιστοι in such disruptive marital arrangements? The answer lies in the social embeddedness of the ἄπιστοι within the ecclesial network and also in a shared sympathy for Christ-devotion.

The key exegetical gain in this understanding of the ἄπιστοι within the context of ch. 7 is that it helps account for the twofold implausibility of such a marital arrangement: (1) the implausibility of a *converted head of household not imposing* Christ-devotion on all his subordinates, thereby reorienting the entirety of domestic space and cleansing all forms of pagan religiosity; and (2) the implausibility of a *pagan head of household tolerating* the domestically rebellious Christ-devotion of a subordinate spouse.<sup>28</sup>

As for the latter implausibility, Plutarch's comments on a woman's place in domestic religion in his *Advice to the Bride and Groom* highlight the oddity of a pagan head of household tolerating the religious noncompliance of a spouse:

A married woman should therefore worship and recognize the gods whom her husband holds dear, and these alone. The door must be closed to strange cults and foreign superstitions. No god takes pleasure in cult performed furtively and in secret by a woman.<sup>29</sup>

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head of household to convert (ἵνα τὸν οἶκόν σου... ἐπιστρέψῃς) all members of the οἶκος is nicely illustrated in Shepherd of Hermas, *Vis.* 1.3.

<sup>28</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 284-86. So Johnson Hodge notes, "Paul's advice here (to stay with the unbelieving spouse) glosses over a variety of complicated issues that a mixed household might produce, especially for the believing wives" ("Married to and Unbeliever," 5). Cf. Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther [1Kor 6,12-11,16]*, 104.

<sup>29</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia* I.140D. This translation is from *Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom and A Consolation to His Wife: English translations, Commentary, Interpretive*

The fact that Plutarch gives this admonition betrays the reality that women did in fact abandon a husband's piety by attaching themselves to foreign deities.<sup>30</sup> And perhaps some had in Corinth, devoting themselves to Christ. But if this did occur, and a *paterfamilias* deigned to allow it, severe challenges and even dangers would have ensued. The home was highly visible to neighbors and passersby, and a wife's refusal to participate in the day-to-day ritual life of the *paterfamilias* would have been to the eyes of onlookers "a slap at her husband's authority over her."<sup>31</sup> There was nothing like a public/private dichotomy in Roman society. As Andrew Wallace-Hadrill explains, in Roman culture "the home was a locus of public life. A public figure went home not so much in order to shield himself from the public gaze, as to present himself to it in the best light."<sup>32</sup> The home in Roman society was "deliberately designed for the performance of social rituals" and, hence, "the basic structures [of the Roman house] are determined by the (to us) astonishingly public nature of domestic life, and how little weight contemporary western preoccupations of privacy and family life carry."<sup>33</sup> A wife's domestic insubordination and newfound attraction to an executed foreign

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*Essays, and Bibliography* (ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy; New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Justin's account of the female convert and her unconverted husband in *Second Apology* 2.1-6.

<sup>31</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 284. For further elaboration of the complications embedded in such a relationship, see Johnson Hodge, "Married to an Unbeliever," 4-9.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Social Structure of the Roman House," *PBSR* 56 (1988): 43-97, here 46. For more on the visibility of Roman homes and the performative dimension of domestic life, see Kate Cooper, "Closely Watched Households: Visibility, Exposure and Private Power in the Roman *Domus*," *Past & Present* 197 (2007): 3-33.

<sup>33</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, "The Social Structure of the Roman House," 96.

deity would not have been without extraordinary risks of societal shame. From its furniture to its food, the ancient Roman home was a spiritually suffused space with reverence for the household gods integral to daily life.<sup>34</sup> For either spouse to abandon ritual life in the home would have been a widely observable and embarrassing disruption. For a wife to withdraw from the gods of her husband and to adopt a new and aberrant form of piety even more so.<sup>35</sup> If, however, the ἄπιστοι are Christian sympathizers with strong and pre-existing social ties to other believers, the acceptance of religious difference within the home becomes more understandable. A spouse unsympathetic to Christ-devotion would not be inclined tolerate the embarrassment and complications a mixed marriage would entail.

As implausible as an unconverted, unsympathetic head of household allowing the ritual noncompliance of a believing wife is a believing *paterfamilias* permitting a wife's refusal to adhere to his new Christian piety.<sup>36</sup> The conventional reading of the γυναῖκα

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<sup>34</sup> As Kathy Ehrensperger explains, "Most members of the Corinthian ἐκκλησία were accustomed to a context in which numerous deities and spiritual beings were seen as responsible for diverse aspects of daily life. Entrenched in their *habitus* was the perception that each and every aspect of life required the appropriate relationship to a specific deity or spiritual being. This permeated public life but *to an even greater and more significant extent kin group and household on an everyday basis*" ("Between Polis, Oikos, and Ekklesia: The Challenge of Negotiating the Spirit World [1 Cor 12:1-11]," in *The First Urban Churches 2: Roman Corinth* [ed. James R. Harrison, L. L. Welborn; Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series 8; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016]), 105-32, here 105, emphasis mine.

<sup>35</sup> As Margaret Y. MacDonald puts it, "the illicit religious activities of women were considered to be far more than annoying; they were an assault on the social order of the family" ("Early Christian Women Married to Unbelievers," *SR* 19 [1990]: 221-34, here 230).

<sup>36</sup> See MacDonald, "Early Christian Women Married to Unbelievers," 222.

ἄπιστον in 1 Cor 7:12 presupposes just this. Far more plausible is that Paul is addressing a specific class of individuals embedded within the social life of the Corinthian assembly who retain sympathies for Christ-devotion yet desist from exclusive adherence to it. Although the precise nature or degree of their sympathy to Christ-devotion is unknown, it was at least such that they would embrace the risks and disruptions of mixed marriages and other social engagements, and even join the believers in corporate gatherings.

But what of Paul's apparent endorsement of believers engaging in sex with ἄπιστοι? The problem here is that Paul must account for why the standing of the ἄπιστοι vis-à-vis believers in matters of sex is not like that of a prostitute (6:15-20). In Paul's nimble reasoning, he declares that sexual relations between believers and ἄπιστοι communicate *cleansing* to the ἄπιστοι rather than *contagion* to the believer—otherwise the children of such relations would be unclean; but as it is they are holy (7:14).<sup>37</sup> Paul may very well here be reapplying halakic principles of transferable sanctity, but if he is, he nowhere explains this Jewish logic to his readers.<sup>38</sup> Whatever the case may be, Paul is seriously grappling with two clashing social givens: the impure, “outsider” status of the ἄπιστοι in relation to the ecclesial body and their sanctioned, “insider” status in matters of marriage.<sup>39</sup> He concludes the former neither countermands nor contaminates the latter. But in other relational matters, it does.

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<sup>37</sup> For further consideration of this dynamic, see Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 218-19.

<sup>38</sup> See Benjamin D. Gordon, “On the Sanctity of Mixtures and Branches: Two Halakic Sayings in Romans 11:16-24,” *JBL* 135 (2016): 355-68, esp. 364; Yonder Moynihan Gillihan, “Jewish Laws on Illicit Marriage, the Defilement of Offspring, and the Holiness of the Temple: A New Halakic Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:14,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 711-44.

<sup>39</sup> It is also worth pointing out Paul's hope for evangelistic success. See Joachim Jeremias, “Die missionarische Aufgabe in der Mischehe (1. Kor. 7,16),” in *Neutestamentliche Studien*

### **The ἄπιστοι and Social Relations: 1 Corinthians 10:27-29**

The social proximity of the ἄπιστοι and the Corinthian believers again occasions a matter of practical concern. Paul writes, “If one of the ἄπιστοι invites you to dinner (εἴ τις καλεῖ ὑμᾶς τῶν ἀπίστων)<sup>40</sup> and you want to attend, eat everything placed before you, not adjudicating on account of conscience” (10:27). Paul does not object to believers accepting invitations to dine with the ἄπιστοι.<sup>41</sup> He even assures believers that they need not have misgivings about any sacrificial food (ιερόθυτος) placed before them (see the arguments in vv. 23a, c; 25-26; cf. 8:1-6).<sup>42</sup> But, although such food is innocuous in principle, this is not a license to ignore the

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*für Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. Walther Eltester (BZNW 21; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1954), 255-60.

<sup>40</sup> The use of τις here is at least worth noting; a definite person could stand behind it. For the use of τις “with suggestion of non-specificity in a context where an entity is specified to some extent,” see BDAG s.v. τις 1a2; or “in reference to a definite person, whom one wishes to avoid naming,” see LSJ s.v. τις II.3.

<sup>41</sup> Paul has already indicated that he has no problem with the believers associating in general with “immoral” people. The problem is when they allow immorality among their own ranks (1 Cor 5:9-13).

<sup>42</sup> This is probably an invitation to a host’s home. Some have interpreted it as an invitation to dine in temple precincts, perhaps a dining room attached to a sanctuary. This is not impossible, but it would perhaps make the informant’s remarks in v. 28 about the food being ιερόθυτος ridiculous. It is again worth pointing out that a purported division between “sacred” temple space and neutral or “non-sacred” domestic space is simply false. Domestic space is always sacredly charged. See David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul’s Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 145-50.

qualms of a fellow believer for whom such food may present challenges of conscience. If another believer with a vulnerable conscience is troubled by the presence of such food (v. 28), then neither believer should partake of it (v. 29a). Admittedly, the person raising the objection in vv. 28-29a is not explicitly identified as a fellow believer, and some have proposed that a pagan guest or even the host is in view.<sup>43</sup> But since the hypothetical informant takes the initiative to raise the issue with the Christian and since the informant's conscience is the one in question, a fellow believer with a "weak" conscience is more likely.<sup>44</sup>

The problem of idol food is a subject Paul already treated at length in 8:1-13. Paul returns again to that same issue in 10:27-29, but now specifically as it relates to the believers's dealings with the ἄπιστοι in social contexts. Paul's counsel is the same. Whether in temple precincts or a host's home, eat whatever is served unless it compromises the weaker conscience of a fellow believer.<sup>45</sup> The ethical imperative to protect a neighbor's conscience surpasses any dietary freedom afforded by theological principle.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Since Paul always elsewhere uses the term εἰδωλόθυτος, which has pejorative connotations, the use of ἱερόθυτος is sometimes taken as indicating a pagan informant. If, however, Paul is assuming the voice of a Gentile Christian, the use of the ἱερόθυτος is unproblematic. It was the term such a person had always used.

<sup>44</sup> So Archibald Robertson & Alfred Plummer: "That a heathen would do it out of malice, or amusement, or good-nature ('I dare say, you would rather not eat that'), is possible, but *his* conscience would hardly come into consideration" (*The First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* [ICC; 2d ed.; Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1914], 221). See also Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther* [1Kor 6,12-11,16], 469-70.

<sup>45</sup> The rhetorical question at the end of v. 29 and then leading to v. 30 is indeed "sehr schwierig" (Wolfgang Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther* [1Kor 6,12-11,16], 471). It



As for the profile of the ἄπιστοι here, their ongoing integration with the believers is again highlighted. They appear to maintain convivial ties with multiple members of the community, if not the entire community. A key aspect of their deviancy also emerges in their relation to sacrificial food,<sup>47</sup> which indicates an ongoing participation in pagan ritual life. Even so, it is not impossible to imagine that as resourceful and devout pagans they had attempted to integrate Christ-piety within their preexisting cultic framework. Perhaps Christ was simply for them another deity to be incorporated within something like the household *Lares* or *Penates*.<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting there is ample ancient evidence of pagan attraction to

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is probably best to see this as picking up Paul's reasoning from v. 27. What lies in between (vv. 28-29a) thus becomes parenthetical—but no less critical!

<sup>46</sup> For an excellent account of the “christological praxis” driving Paul's reasoning here, see David Horrell, “Theological Principle or Christological Praxis? Pauline Ethics in 1 Corinthians 8.1-11.1,” *JSNT* 67 (1997): 83-114.

<sup>47</sup> The use of the non-pejorative ἱερόθυτος in v. 28 is significant. This is neutrally viewed sacrificial food, not stigmatized idol-food (εἰδωλόθυτος).

<sup>48</sup> I say “something like” because it is extremely difficult to know what ritual practices or divine figures would have been common in Corinthian domestic life at this time. We can assume the city provided an à la carte cultural matrix, with mixtures of Roman, Greek, and additional “foreign” or eastern traditions. What we can say confidently is that the aggregate of evidence from the first-century Roman world points to the richness and pervasiveness of domestic religious life. For more on these matters, see Alexandra Sofroniew, *Household Gods: Private Devotion in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2015). In relation to Corinth in particular, see Ehrensperger, “Between Polis, Oikos, and Ekklesia,” 112-17.

Judaism apart from any concern for what we might call monotheism.<sup>49</sup> This was simply part and parcel of the religious eclecticism of the ancient Mediterranean world. Whatever the case may be in Corinth, the ἄπιστοι clearly retain their customary cultic rituals while also maintaining (indeed, risking) social ties with believers.

It is worth underscoring again the remarkable leniency the ἄπιστοι would potentially be required to extend to the believers in the case of shared meals. Given that the meal Paul is imagining is one taking place in a pagan home (or even in a temple if the occasion required [see 8:10]), the believer, in denying the very gods of the household,<sup>50</sup> would have been obliged to withdraw from any number of ritual acts—and even, if conscience required it, the meal itself. This is no minor social matter. In his detailed description of the numerous ritual customs that accompanied ordinary household meals—such as burning any morsel of food that fell to the ground on the household *Lar* as an act of expiation (*adolerique ad Larem piatio est*) (*Nat. Hist.* 28.28)—Pliny the Elder explains the importance of such acts: “These customs were established by those of old, who believed that gods are present on all occasions and at all times” (*Nat. Hist.* 28.27).<sup>51</sup> For the Christ-believer there were no such gods; no such customs to rehearse. Though idol food could be consumed without personal worry, a believer could not have joined the prayers, offerings, libations, hymns, and gestures that would have

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<sup>49</sup> Nero’s second wife Poppaea Sabina is one likely and well-known example of this. See Margaret H. Williams, “‘Θεοσεβῆς γὰρ ἦν’—The Jewish Tendencies of Poppaea Sabina,” *JTS* 39 (1988): 97-111.

<sup>50</sup> For the *Lares* as protectors of the household, see Ovid, *Fasti* 5.129-146.

<sup>51</sup> Trans. W.H.S. Jones, LCL 418. For further analysis of such rituals, see Peter Foss, “Watchful Lares: Roman Household Organization and the Rituals of Cooking and Dining,” in *Domestic Space in the Roman World* (ed. Ray Laurence and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill; Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement Series 22; Portsmouth, RI: JRA, 1997), 196-216.

also attended such gatherings. The believer must flatly reject the idol-worship offered by her host (10:14)—“for we know that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is no God but one” (8:4). But apparently, the social bonds were such that the ἄπιστοι continued to permit this highly visible anti-social and atheistic behavior even in their own homes.<sup>52</sup> This tolerance afforded to believers is not what one would expect from unsympathetic outsiders.

### **The Ἄπιστοι and Christian Worship: 1 Corinthians 14:20-25**

The assumption that the ἄπιστοι in Corinth are generic “unbelievers” meets further difficulties in the fact that they show up in ecclesial gatherings with enough regularity that Paul advises the congregants on how to behave when they are present so as to secure their salvation.<sup>53</sup> Paul also in this passage differentiates the well-known ἄπιστοι from what I do take to be a generic class of outsiders: the ἰδιῶται or common people (vv. 16, 23, 24; 2 Cor 11:6).<sup>54</sup> The distinction between ἄπιστοι and ἰδιῶται is worth respecting.<sup>55</sup> That Paul sets the ἄπιστοι apart

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<sup>52</sup> Ehrensperger also emphasizes that, “given the all-permeating nature of cult practices at all levels and in all and every context of life, to abstain from any such activity was an enormously challenging and possibly dangerous endeavor. It would have been challenging in that daily cult practices in the domestic realm had to be given up, including the security they provided. It would have been difficult in a context of multiple small shrines, niches, and altars dedicated to Lares and Penates or Greek domestic deities in every house. It is difficult to imagine how this requirement could have been fulfilled if an entire household had not joined the Christ-movement” (“Between Polis, Oikos, and Ekklesia,” 119-20).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 7:16.

<sup>54</sup> This is another social designation Paul uses exclusively in the Corinthian correspondence.

<sup>55</sup> The τις in the τις ἄπιστος ἢ ἰδιώτης in v. 24 may again have a specific ἄπιστος person in view, whereas ἰδιώτης does not. Cf. the τις...τῶν ἀπίστων in 10:27.

from ἰδιῶται (a social designation that *is* usually applied to generic individuals or common people not initiated as members) reinforces the possibility that the label ἄπιστοι obtained a special sense within the Corinthian community.<sup>56</sup>

Taken as a whole, 1 Cor 14:20-25 is an old exegetical enigma. The challenge is in relating the apparent claim in v. 22 that tongues are a sign for the ἄπιστοι, while prophecy is for believers (τοῖς πιστεύουσιν), with the scriptural citation in v. 21 and then the examples in vv. 23-25, which seem to indicate that what the ἄπιστοι really need is, in fact, not tongues but rather the intelligible speech of prophecy.

In v. 20 Paul again exhorts the Corinthians to be mature in their thinking, which is to say, mature in promoting intelligible speech instead of uninterpreted glossolalia. In v. 21 he appeals to a scriptural proof text (Isa 28:11-12) for clarifying one function of tongues.<sup>57</sup>

In the law it has been written, “In other tongues and with the lips of foreigners I shall speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me,” says the Lord.

ἐν τῷ νόμῳ γέγραπται ὅτι ἐν ἑτερογλώσσοις καὶ ἐν χεῖλεσιν ἑτέρων λαλήσω τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ καὶ οὐδ’ οὕτως εἰσακούσονται μου, λέγει κύριος.<sup>58</sup>

It is likely that the word “other-tongues” (ἑτερόγλωσσος) is what attracts Paul’s attention to this text from Isaiah.<sup>59</sup> This passage is part of an oracle against Ephraim and Judah. In 28:7 the prophet turns to the leaders of Judah, whom he chastises for their drunkenness and unwillingness to heed Isaiah’s counsel (vv. 7-10). Since these leaders would not listen to the

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<sup>56</sup> On the distinction of two classes here, see Johannes Weiss: “von den ἄπιστοι verschiedene Klasse von Menschen bezeichnet werden” (*Der Erste Korintherbrief* [MKNT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910], 329).

<sup>57</sup> Isa 28 is a text Paul returns to elsewhere (cf. Rom 9:33; 10:11).

<sup>58</sup> Differences between this citation, the extant Greek traditions, and the MT are substantial.

<sup>59</sup> This term is actually not found in any extant Greek traditions of Isaiah and so could have been Paul’s own gloss.

Lord through the message of Isaiah, the Lord will then address them through the alien speech of an invading Assyrian force (vv. 11-12).

In this context, the sign-function of incomprehensible tongues is to confirm judgment on individuals who refuse to mind God's message. The sign-function of tongues is disciplinary; it is reserved not for generic outsiders but for *unfaithful insiders* who incite divine judgment. Extended to the ἄπιστοι in v. 22, the sign-function of tongues is again to demonstrate that the ἄπιστοι, in the presence of the worshipping community, are similarly resistant to God's demands and so stand under judgment. Although they join the community in worship and may even express forms of Christ-piety, they remain disloyal insofar as they resist exclusive worship of God. So, what should the Corinthian believers do?

In vv. 23-25, Paul advances his case for curtailing glossolalia in communal worship by explaining that since prophecy, and not tongues, is the fitting sign for believers, it is prophecy that will lead the ἄπιστοι to repentance. Whereas tongues leave the unfaithful under judgement, prophecy holds out hope for their confession of allegiance to God. In other words, whereas tongues, as a sign of judgment, convert unfaithful insiders into outsiders, prophecy, as an instrument of edification, has the potential to turn infidelity into loyalty. The nature of the confession in v. 25 is also significant: "Truly God is among you" (ὄντως ὁ θεὸς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐστίν). This confession evokes scriptural passages such as 1 Kings 18:39 (ἀληθῶς κύριός ἐστιν ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸς ὁ θεός), Dan 2:47 (ἐπ' ἀληθείας ἐστίν ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν θεὸς τῶν θεῶν), and Zech 8:23 (ἀκηκόαμεν ὅτι ὁ θεὸς μεθ' ὑμῶν ἐστίν), all of which portray non-Israelites acknowledging the truth of Israel's God. What these passages together underscore is the identity of Israel's God as *exclusively* God and *exclusively* present with God's people. Such is again the emphasis in Isa 45:14, which is the scriptural text most similar to 1 Cor 14:25: "Truly God is with you, and there is no other, no God besides him" (אך בך אל ואין עוד אפס) (ἐν σοὶ ὁ θεός ἐστίν καὶ ἐροῦσιν οὐκ ἔστιν θεὸς πλὴν σου). If the ἄπιστοι are a group

of individuals in Corinth who are sympathetic to Christ-piety but refuse exclusive devotion to Christ, then this is just the sort of confession Paul would demand of them.<sup>60</sup>

### **The ἄπιστοι and Internal Litigation: 1 Corinthians 6:1-8**

The appearance of the ἄπιστοι in 1 Cor 6:6 is their first in the letter. The key contribution of this text to their identity is, however, the reference in v. 4 to “those who have no standing in the church” (τοὺς ἐξουθενημένους ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ) (NRSV). This is almost certainly a reference to the ἄπιστοι and, when read in relation to Paul’s other uses of the verb ἐξουθενέω (reject; despise; disregard; marginalize), it supplies crucial information about how they were viewed within the community. The dative phrase ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, which is always used locatively by Paul (“in the church”), also has implications for envisaging their social location.<sup>61</sup>

Who then are these individuals “who have no standing in the church” (v. 4) but have been tasked with arbitrating intra-ecclesial disputes? The solution is to be found in Paul’s use of the verb ἐξουθενέω elsewhere. In 1 Cor 1:28 he again applies the participial form of the verb, but to the Corinthians themselves (“God chose what is low in this world and disdained [τὰ ἐξουθενημένα]”). In 1 Cor 16:11 it is applied to Timothy, whom the Corinthians are instructed not to dismiss (μὴ τις οὖν αὐτὸν ἐξουθενήσῃ). In 2 Cor 10:10 Paul uses the verb to describe how he himself is viewed by some in Corinth (“his bodily presence is weak and his

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<sup>60</sup> The fittingness of this confession for the ἄπιστοι stands out all the more when placed alongside a christologically focused confession such as is found in Rom 10:9.

<sup>61</sup> The καθίζετε in v. 6, and the whole of the verse with it, can be read as (1) an indicative (“you are appointing...”), (2) an interrogative (“why are you appointing...?”), or (3) an imperative (“appoint...!”). Since Paul says this to their shame and chastises them for their failure in judgment in v. 5, the indicative or the interrogative are the best options.

message has been disparaged [καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος]). The sense of interpersonal dismissal or marginalization is also found in Gal 4:14 (“and you did not reject [οὐκ ἐξουθενήσατε] or disdain me, but received me as an angel of God”).<sup>62</sup> This is also the case in the two occurrences of the verb in Rom 14:3, 10, where it takes on a more precise sociological sense, and one particularly relevant to 1 Cor 6. Here Paul applies ἐξουθενέω to marginalized individuals within the assembly on grounds of dietary dispute.

Rom 14:3

Let not the one who eats marginalize the one not eating (ὁ ἐσθίων τὸν μὴ ἐσθιοντα μὴ ἐξουθενείτω), and let not the one not eating judge (μὴ κρινέτω) the one who eats, for God has accepted (προσελάβετο) him.

Rom 14:10

And you, why do you judge (τί κρίνεις) your brother? Or then you, why do you marginalize (τί ἐξουθενεῖς) your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.

The verb here thus again describes a form of social marginalization, and specifically one that the so-called “strong” impose upon the “weak,” but to the detriment of communal harmony and edification (14:19). How this marginalization was expressed is unclear. It is worth pointing out that whereas ἐξουθενέω indicates how the “strong” perceive the “weak” on these matters of eating, the verb κρίνω describes the feelings of the “weak” toward the “strong.” Whether or not there is a distinction at work in these two verbs is also unclear, though Paul’s infrequent use of the latter suggests there might be. Since the command to “receive” (προσλαμβάνω) the weak in 14:1 may refer to an expression of formal recognition or fellowship, this may be what the “strong” are denying the “weak.”<sup>63</sup> Whatever the case may

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<sup>62</sup> The verb occurs one other time in 1 Thess 5:20 (“Do not reject prophecy” [προφητείας μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτε]). This is the only instance which does not involve people.

<sup>63</sup> The verb προσλαμβάνω only appears in Paul in Rom 14:1, 3; 15:7; and Philm 17. At the very least it expresses a more intense form of welcoming.

be, what both verbs name is the perception of deviancy. The “strong” marginalize or reject the “weak” because they view their dietary abstention as aberrant behavior.

This use of ἐξουθενέω in relation to intra-communal definitions of deviancy should inform the usage in 1 Cor 6:4. “Those who have no standing in the church” are the ἄπιστοι who, while remaining “in the assembly” in terms of shared social space, are nonetheless not regarded as ἀδελφοί. As with Rom 14, the tangible expressions of this marginalization are not detailed beyond the recommendation that the ἄπιστοι not arbitrate internal ecclesial disputes. The main contrast with Rom 14, however, is that whereas the marginalization of others in matters of food is misguided, in 1 Cor 6 the denial of the ἄπιστοι of proper membership in the assembly is entirely appropriate.

This understanding of the ἄπιστοι as a group of individuals whose *social* marginalization does not translate into *physical* exclusion from ecclesial space finds corroboration in Paul’s other uses of the phrase ἐν [τῇ] ἐκκλησίᾳ. This expression occurs nine times in the Pauline corpus, seven of which are in 1 Corinthians. In every instance the phrase is used locatively.

1 Cor 4:17

Therefore I sent to you Timothy...to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere **in every church** (ἐν πάσῃ ἐκκλησίᾳ).

1 Cor 11:18

For first of all I hear that when you come together **in the church** (ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ), there are schisms among you...

1 Cor 12:28

And God has appointed **in the church** (ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ) first apostles...

1 Cor 14:19

But **in church** (ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ) I would rather speak five words with my understanding...

1 Cor 14:28

But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silence **in church** (ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ)...

1 Cor 14:35



For it is shameful for a woman to speak **in church** (ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ).

Eph 3:21

...to him be glory **in the church** (ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ) and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever.

Col 4:16

...and when this letter has been read among you, have it read also **in the church of the Laodiceans** (ἐν τῇ Λαοδικέων ἐκκλησίᾳ).

Though they are barred from full membership, the fact that the ἄπιστοι can be described as “those who have no standing *in the church*” demonstrates the degree to which they maintain a form of insider status. This is also evident from 1 Cor 14:22-24. What Paul finds shameful in 6:4-6 is, therefore, not the fact that some members of the Corinthian assembly associate socially with the ἄπιστοι or even participate with them in worship. The problem is that they have submitted themselves to the judgment of the ἄπιστοι in intra-ecclesial affairs when they should be competent to judge themselves, if judge they must (see vv. 7-8).

### **The Ἄπιστοι and Partnership with Idolatry: 2 Corinthians 4:4; 6:14-15**

The appearance of the ἄπιστοι in 2 Corinthians again supports their profile as individuals closely related to the Corinthian assembly, even “insiders” in some sense, though they remain embroiled in idolatrous activity. The potential threat they pose to the community also comes to the fore. If 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 is an interpolation, then its contribution to the profile of the ἄπιστοι in Corinth is less certain. But whether an interpolation or not, the passage remains significant because the ἄπιστοι here are frequently read as disloyal Christians or even rivals to Paul’s mission. Michael Goulder, for instance, has argued that the ἄπιστοι in this passage are not generic pagans or “unbelievers” but rather “faithless Christians.”<sup>64</sup> He bases his argument on the ordinary sense of πιστός/ἄπιστος and on the fact that Paul elsewhere clearly

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Goulder, “2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 as an Integral Part of 2 Corinthians,” *NovT* 36 (1994): 47-57, here 47. Goulder also describes them as “immoral/non-Pauline Christians” (54).

permits Christian interaction with pagan idolaters (see esp. 1 Cor 5:9-13). Several scholars in more recent years have connected the ἄπιστοι in this passage with Paul's opponents in Corinth, particularly as they emerge in chs. 10-13.<sup>65</sup> On this reading of 6:14-16, Paul is depicting those ψευδαπόστολοι as worse than idolaters. They are equivalent to Beliar himself (v. 15). On any reading, the ἄπιστοι described in 2 Cor 6 are close enough in their relations with the Corinthian "faithful" to tempt them into partnerships that involve idolatry.<sup>66</sup> The nature of these partnerships (ἑτεροζυγοῦντες)<sup>67</sup> is not defined, but it must differ from the other forms of social interaction between believers and outsiders that Paul permits, such as marriage relations, wherein believers overcome the impurity of the ἄπιστοι rather than being polluted by it (1 Cor 7:14). At the very least, we can say that what is envisioned in 2 Cor 6

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<sup>65</sup> See esp. the inventory of scholarship provided by David Starling, "The ἄπιστοι of 2 Cor 6:14: Beyond the Impasse," *NovT* 55 (2013): 45-60, see 50 n. 25. Prominent and early representatives of this position include J.-F. Collange, *Enigmes de la Deuxième Épître de Paul aux Corinthiens: Étude exégétique de 2 Cor. 2:14-7:4* (SNTMS 18; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 282-306; D. Rensberger, "2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1—A Fresh Examination," *SBT* 8 (1978): 25-49. More recently, Volker Rabens reads the passage as "a double entendre referring first to demarcation from idolatrous people outside the church (= unbelievers), and second to demarcation from false apostles (= 'unbelievers')" ("Inclusion of and Demarcation from 'Outsiders': Mission and Ethics in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians," in *Sensitivity towards Outsiders: Exploring the Dynamic Relationship between Mission and Ethics in the New Testament and Early Christianity* [ed. Jakobus (Kobus) Kok, et al.; WUNT II/364; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014], 290-323, here 298).

<sup>66</sup> Gordon D. Fee has also emphasized the importance of idolatry in this passage ("II Corinthians vi. 14-vii. 1 and Food Offered to Idols," *NTS* 23 [1977]: 140-61).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Lev 19:19.

some specific formal relationship with the ἄπιστοι that faithful believers currently do not and should not maintain.<sup>68</sup> Given the climactic rhetorical question in v. 16—“What concord has the temple of God with idols?”—the partnership envisioned by the verb ἑτεροζυγέω presumably involves something along the lines of “covenant-like relationships with pagans which in turn violate the church’s existing covenant with God.”<sup>69</sup>

If the ἄπιστοι here are as elsewhere, then the contrast between πιστός and ἄπιστος in 6:15 is between the person who remains loyal to the “living God” (v. 16) and then the disloyal sympathizer who still persists in idolatrous devotion.<sup>70</sup> A loyal versus disloyal contrast is precisely how one would normally understand the πιστός versus ἄπιστος contrast. The problem Paul is addressing here is then not partnership with generic outsiders but with a problematic class of deviant affiliates of the Corinthian community who are corrupted by idolatrous influences and seek to recruit the believers into these practices. As Regina

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<sup>68</sup> So Thomas Schmeller: “Das Verbot, sich mit Ungläubigen einzulassen, ist sprachlich so formuliert, als werde vor einer Änderung des bisherigen getrennten Zustands gewarnt, den γίνεσθε mit Partizip Präsens impliziert den Beginn eines neuen Zustands” (*Der Zweite Brief an die Korinther [2Kor 1,1-7,4]* [EKK VIII/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener; Ostfildern: Patmos, 2010], 373).

<sup>69</sup> Rabens, “Inclusion of and Demarcation from ‘Outsiders,’” 305.

<sup>70</sup> Whatever forms of “yoking” Paul would deem inappropriate, the focus in this passage is on idolatry and association with demonic forces. Again, see the argument of Fee, “II Corinthians vi. 14-vii. 1.” Cf. also the remarks of Margaret E. Thrall, who notes that the final rhetorical question concerning idolatry in v. 16 is “the only one to contain a specific reference to the kind of moral danger which association with unbelievers might bring with it. There can be no compromise with idolatry” (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Volume 1* [ICC; London: T&T Clark, 1994], 475).

Plunkett-Dowling concludes, the problem Paul is addressing in 6:14-7:1 is one of “internal pollution” which constitutes “disloyalty to Paul, and by extension, to God.”<sup>71</sup> The ἄπιστοι in this passage must then be current or former congregants “who have proved, or will prove, live candidates for defection from Paul’s gospel.”<sup>72</sup>

The reference to the ἄπιστοι in 4:4 has also been read along the lines I am proposing. Goulder describes the ἄπιστοι in this verse as “Christians who are perishing,” that is, “faithless” individuals associated with Christ yet whose minds are now being blinded by the God of this age.<sup>73</sup> The key point is that the ἄπιστοι are singled out as a special class of individuals, and not humanity as a whole, for whom misperception is attributed to Satanic agency. This is quite similar to the additional “Pauline” use of ἄπιστος in Titus 1:15-16—“To the pure all things are pure, but to the defiled and disloyal (μεμιασμένοι καὶ ἀπίστοι) nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are defiled (μεμίανται αὐτῶν καὶ ὁ νοῦς καὶ ἡ συνείδησις). They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds; they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed.” Like the ἄπιστοι in Titus 1:15, the ἄπιστοι in 2 Cor 4:4 may very well boast of knowledge of God but, according to Paul, their inability to submit to Paul’s gospel is, in fact, the consequence of satanic intervention.

The status of the ἄπιστοι in v. 4 as a subset of some larger grouping is seen in the “among whom” (ἐν οἷς) relative clause, which defines the ἄπιστοι as a subgroup within “those who are being destroyed” (ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλομένοις) from v. 3.<sup>74</sup> The ἄπιστοι are not the

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<sup>71</sup> Regina Plunkett-Dowling, “Reading and Restoration: Paul’s Use of Scripture in 2 Corinthians 1-9,” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2001), 155.

<sup>72</sup> Plunkett-Dowling, “Reading and Restoration,” 168.

<sup>73</sup> Goulder, “2 Cor. 6:14-7:1,” 57.

<sup>74</sup> The relative clause at the beginning of v. 4 is frequently deemed “awkward” (Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Volume 1*, 305) and as having “no logical sense” because it

whole mass of unbelieving humanity but a specific subcategory of it. As for the agent responsible for blinding the ἄπιστοι, “the God of this age” must be synonymous with Beliar (6:15). The blinding of the ἄπιστοι may also be the consequence of engagement with idolatry, a betrayal of loyalty to the living God (6:16). The association of idol worship and blindness is a common trope.<sup>75</sup> Especially close to the language of “blinded minds” in 2 Cor 4:4 is the depiction of idol-makers as simultaneously blind and uncomprehending in Isa 44:18 —“They do not know, nor do they comprehend; for their eyes are shut, so that they cannot see, and their minds as well, so that they cannot understand.” As Plunkett-Dowling explains, “in their defective condition, these perishing, blinded unbelievers share the typical defect of idolaters, the ones deprived of their senses when they turn away from the living God.”<sup>76</sup> This is also the type of language one is wont to use of those who have been instructed on how they ought to believe and act but don’t. There are then once again good reasons for associating the ἄπιστοι in 4:4 with idolatrous practices, as in 6:14-16. There are also good reasons for why Paul’s language here is so sharp. The risk the ἄπιστοι pose is so severe. And the risk is so severe precisely because of their social proximity.

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would seem to indicate “a smaller group of unbelievers” (306 n. 805). Cf. also Schmeller, *Die Zweite Brief an die Korinther*, 243. This presumed logical awkwardness stems from the assumption the ἄπιστοι are generic unbelievers. This is simply not necessary.

<sup>75</sup> See esp. Isa 44:9, 18. Cf. also the references in Plunkett-Dowling, “Reading and Restoration,” 89 n. 178.

<sup>76</sup> Plunkett-Dowling, “Reading and Restoration,” 104-3.

## Conclusion

Paul's struggle with the ἄπιστοι in Corinth is political. Since "idolatrous error is an error about the management of society (a political error),"<sup>77</sup> to name the deviancy of the ἄπιστοι is to fortify the societal integrity of the ἐκκλησία. But even though Paul places strict parameters on the types of relations believers ought not maintain with the ἄπιστοι in 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 (if it is authentic), the evidence from 1 Corinthians otherwise reveals a surprising permissiveness when it comes to social interaction between ἐκκλησία and ἄπιστοι. If it is the case that "Paul thinks the Corinthians are far too comfortable in their social integration, and he spends much of the letter erecting barriers where the Corinthians presently see none,"<sup>78</sup> then the ἄπιστοι represent a stark exception in Paul's broader social strategy, if not a surd in his social vision. Like irrational numbers, the ἄπιστοι repeatedly unsettle any neat social fractioning. Note again the contrasts: Whereas Paul is unbending on sex with prostitutes because of the "oneness" it entails (6:16-18), he permits ongoing sexual activity between ἄπιστοι and believers (7:12-15); he even inverts his argument about purity to accommodate it. Although in one breath he roundly condemns any flirtation with idolatry (10:14-22)—"you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (10:21)—he nonetheless authorizes believers to dine at the tables of ἄπιστοι and partake of their idol food (10:27). While the man cohabiting with his father's wife is to be delivered over to Satan by the gathered assembly with Paul's spirit present (5:1-13), the ἄπιστοι appear to frequent community worship with

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<sup>77</sup> Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (trans. Naomi Goldblum; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 163.

<sup>78</sup> Barclay, "Deviance and Apostasy," 137.

enough regularity that Paul encourages liturgical alterations to accommodate them (14:22-25).<sup>79</sup>

As Trebilco similarly notices, although by the label ἄπιστοι these individuals “are ‘defined out’ by a very strong boundary,” in actual fact Paul’s statements about them “are often surprisingly positive, demonstrating a prominent degree of openness to these outsiders who are so labelled.”<sup>80</sup> Paul thus “encourages social differentiation from these clearly labelled ‘outsiders’ but without a corresponding social distance.”<sup>81</sup> This is unquestionably the case. But unanswered is the question of why what is “said about the unbelievers...believes the negativity that seems to be inherent in the designation.”<sup>82</sup> Trebilco maintains that one of the primary issues Paul was facing were weak or unenforced boundaries for defining the believers as a group and, consequently, “the necessity for stronger group boundaries has led to the *use* of οἱ ἄπιστοι in 1 Corinthians. One way in which he creates this stronger boundary is through this label.”<sup>83</sup> Paul thus exercises “creativity at the boundary” through his “new and

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<sup>79</sup> As Trebilco observes, Paul applies “the same principle to the ‘unbeliever’—that of ‘other-regard’—that he applies elsewhere to the ‘weaker brother or sister’. An activity of the believer should be curbed if its impact on the unbeliever who is present is deleterious, just as the activity of the strong (believer) should be curbed if it has an adverse impact on the weaker believer. This is to accord a very significant status to the ἄπιστοι, and to apply the overarching principle of ‘the love of the brother or sister’ to ‘the love of the unbeliever’, even if Paul does not state it in these terms” (“Creativity at the Boundary,” 192-93).

<sup>80</sup> Trebilco, “Creativity at the Boundary,” 191.

<sup>81</sup> Trebilco, “Creativity at the Boundary,” 193.

<sup>82</sup> Trebilco, “Creativity at the Boundary,” 193.

<sup>83</sup> Trebilco, “Creativity at the Boundary,” 191.

innovative use of language,”<sup>84</sup> whereby the term ἄπιστοι takes on a sense it never otherwise had. But this appeal to linguistic novelty does not address the contradiction of Paul reinforcing social boundaries by labeling as ἄπιστοι a group of people who continue to problematize such boundaries by their very location within them. Trebilco is correct to identify Paul’s creativity here and its position *at the boundary*, but it is not the creativity of linguistic novelty. Paul’s creativity is instead expressed in the tactful social control he exhibits by defining “out” a class of individuals whose ongoing presence defines them as “in.”

Since F.C. Baur’s proposal regarding the oppositional parties in the Corinthian community and their Hegelian unfolding in early Christian history, political dynamics in the Corinthian church have remained at the forefront of research.<sup>85</sup> To this research I present the ἄπιστοι as additional pieces in the political jigsaw puzzle, pieces that require us to rethink the borders of the puzzle and the relative place and fit of all the pieces in it, particularly those pieces that don’t interlock as Paul wishes they would.

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<sup>84</sup> Trebilco, “Creativity at the Boundary,” 190.

<sup>85</sup> An excellent primer on this scholarship, which includes many classic essays, is the volume edited by Edward Adams and David G. Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).