The *Polytheist* Identity of the 'Weak,' And Paul's Strategy to 'Gain' Them: A New Reading of 1 Corinthians 8:1—11:1

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When it comes to identifying those Paul describes as ἀσθενής in 1 Corinthians 8—usually translated "weak"— there are many interpretations on offer. But when it comes to the question of their identity as Christ-believers, there is only one.[1] That they are Christ-believers is apparently so obvious that interpreters often proceed without discussion. However, I propose that the consensus is likely mistaken, that the ἀσθενής are "polytheists" who do not believe in the message of good in Jesus Christ that Paul proclaims, and in which his recipients believe. From Paul's perspective, the Corinthians need to recognize that the ἀσθενής are also ἀδελφοί (brothers/sisters) on behalf of whom Christ died. They should thus be sincerely concerned with the harmful impact that their proposed eating of idol food as if merely ordinary food would have upon these "unbelievers."

I will employ the translation "impaired" to refer to the ἀσθενής.[2] Impaired highlights that they are being objectified by Paul (if not already by his audience as well) to be *unable* to function in the way that he expects of those with properly working sensibilities, lacking the proper sense of what is true about the divine. For Paul writes that the συνείδησις, that is, the "consciousness," "awareness," "sensibilities," or "sense

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[1] The terms "Christian" and "Christianity" are anachronistic for discussion of Paul, who did not employ them, and also not helpful, because they suggest a developed institutional identity independent of Judaism. The term "polytheist" is adopted to denote those who are neither Jews nor Christ-believers, even though some Greco-Roman philosophers might not be helpfully described as polytheists either, but continued reference to them as "non-Christ-believing-non-Jews," or something similar, is cumbersome. "Greeks" is misleading, since most Jews and Christ-believers are likely also Greeks in Corinth, and a similar problem applies to using Romans; "idolaters" could be confusing, because many interpreters understand the Corinthians to be Christ-believers who are still in some sense idolaters; "pagan" is anachronistic, although it could have also been adopted, with similar caveats.

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[2] Cf. Stanley K. Stowers, "Paul on the Use and Abuse of Reason," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (ed. David L. Balch, et al.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 253-86, for discussion of the sense of "sick," including in philosophical discourse.

of what is right" of these ones is impaired. This aspect of their state of being makes less sense for the modifier "weak."[3] If the impaired eat idol food, it is their "sensibilities," rather than themselves, which will become "soiled" (8:7) and "wounded" (v. 12).[4] The impaired ones are described as those without "the knowledge" Paul's addressees share, namely, that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that God is one (vv. 1, 4, 7), or the different roles of God the Father and Jesus Christ (v. 6). It is the impaired ones' sense of what is right that is ironically "strengthened" to continue to perceive things incorrectly (v. 10), to continue without the knowledge that could keep them from destroying themselves (vv. 7, 11).

In contrast to the impaired ones, Paul addresses those in Corinth with γνῶσις ("knowledge") that idols are meaningless, and that there is no God but the One (8:4), as well as the roles of God the Father and Jesus Christ (v. 6), whom I will refer to as "the knowledgeable."

Paul's terms for these people or groups do not precisely express oppositional categories. The ones with "knowledge" or "wisdom" (specifically, about idols and gods being meaningless) are contrasted with those without this knowledge or wisdom (αλλ᾽ οὐκ ἐν πᾶσιν ἡ γνῶσις), the ignorant, one might say, although Paul does not use

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[3] These examples reflect translation equivalents regularly offered for συνείδησις; see Maurer, *TDNT* 7.897-918; Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Settings* (AGJU 10; Leiden: Brill, 1971), 402-46; Richard A. Horsley, "Consciousness and Freedom among the Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 8--10," *CBQ* 40 (1978): 581-89; Paul W. Gooch, "'Conscience' in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10," *NTS* 33 (1987): 244-54; Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (CRINT; Assen and Minneapolis: Van Gorcum and Fortress, 1990), 208-15; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids and Carlisle: Eerdmans and Paternoster, 2000), 640-44, offers a recent overview of research history. The translation of συνείδησις is generally now distinguished from modern notions of "conscience" as in a moral compass, and it is noted that the knowledgeable are not urged to act according to their conscience. The point here is that the impaired have a sense of what is right that Paul calls the knowledgeable ones, with their own different sense of what is right, to consider.

[4] Note the subtle change of language between v. 7 and v. 10. In v. 10 it is not the συνείδησις but the person who is described to be ἀσθενοῦς, based on agreement with the masculine participle, while in v. 7, where the issue of defiling/soiling [μολύνεται] arises, and v. 12, where the issue is wounding [τύπτοντες], it is the συνείδησις that is described as ἀσθενὴς. Grammatically observed, but to different conclusions, see Jewett, *Anthropological Terms,* 422-24; Alex T. Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy* (JSNTSup 176; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 132-33.

precisely that term for them. Instead, once he has explained in v. 7 that for those who lack knowledge it is their "sense of what is right" (συνείδησις) that is ἀσθενὴς, he continues to refer to them as the impaired ones. The opposite of the identifications "weak" or "impaired ones" would logically be to "the strong" or "healthy ones," and indeed many interpreters refer to the ones with knowledge as the strong. But apart from referring to them having "power [ἐξουσία]" (actually to "that power of yours [ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν αὕτη]," which carries a sarcastically dismissive tone),[5] Paul does not use "strong" or "powerful" to refer to their state. Thus to refer to the weak versus the strong implies a different contrast than the one Paul articulates. The contrast he draws has the *knowledgeable* on one side, the *impaired* on the other. That uneven comparison is useful to keep in view. And while he addresses his instructions to the knowledgeable, it is less clear that he addresses the impaired, that they are even part of the encoded or the actual audience Paul envisages will hear the letter read; rather, he writes *about* the impaired, and the impact of the behavior of the knowledgeable upon them.[6] In addition, Paul seems to employ "knowledgeable ones" with an ironic edge, even to be sarcastic, since they do not exhibit appropriate knowledge of what Paul esteems to be the most important concepts and values, like love over rights, which he spells out to them. His parent-like ironic response to the questions they apparently raised to him about eating idol food implied if not outright stated disagreement. It reflects his perception, at least his posture, that they think they know more than Paul does about the matters at hand.

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[5] Joop Smit, *'About the Idol Offerings': Rhetoric, Social Context, and Theology of Paul's Discourse in First Corinthians 8:1--11:1* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 27; Leuven and Sterling, Va.: Peeters, 2000), 88-89.

[6] Jewett, *Anthropological Terms*, 426-27, among others, argues that 10:25 refers to the impaired. But John C. Brunt, "Love, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility: The Contribution of 1 Cor. 8--10 to an Understanding of Paul's Ethical Thinking," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1981 Seminar Papers* (ed. Kent Harold Richards; Scholars Press, 1981), 29 n. 12, observes that Paul can instead "be telling those with knowledge that they do not need to worry or ask questions in the meat market context." That is the case, all the more, if the knowledgeable do not eat idol food, but have enquired about whether they can. If the impaired are simply the polytheist idolaters of Corinth, then they will be impacted by the consequences of the behavior of the knowledgeable if the knowledgeable heed Paul's letter, as well as if they do not. But Paul's language does not require that the impaired are being addressed, or even among the knowledgeable when they meet to hear this letter read. The constant third person references to them suggest that they are not.

To call them knowledgeable in the midst of an instruction that signals what they fail to perceive, cuts with an ironic edge calculated to put them in their place.

Probable objections to the idea that Paul's message in these chapters primarily addresses issues across a Christ-believing/polytheist line instead of inter-Christian factionalism, and to the notion that Paul would write of polytheist idolaters as "brothers/sisters" of the Corinthians addressed, will be discussed after the prevailing views, and a new proposal based upon the issues arising in the text itself, have been presented.

The Prevailing Views for the Identity of the Impaired

The "impaired" are generally perceived to be Christ-believers insecure about the implications of their newly found faith.[7] They are unable to eat food dedicated to idols as if religiously meaningless, having been "until now accustomed to eating idol food as if [sanctified] to idols [τῇ συνηθείᾳ ἕως ἄρτι τοῦ εἰδώλου ὡς εἰδωλόθυτον ἐσθίουσιν]" (8:7). If they were to see the knowledgeable ones "reclining at an idol's temple," they might "be strengthened to eat food sacrificed to idols" (8:10), against their own sense of what is right, which has not yet adjusted to Christ-believing ideals.[8]

Whether described as coming to Christ-faith as Greek or Roman polytheists, or as Jews, the impaired have supposedly retained some measure of their former sensibilities that inhibits them from experiencing fully the ideal of freedom in Christ. In the case of former Greek or Roman idolaters, they retain the sense that participating in the rites

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[7] Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Freedom or the Ghetto: 1 Cor viii, 1-13; x, 23--xi, 1," *Revue biblique* 85 (1978): 561-62, writes clearly what most uphold, variously stated: "The Strong assumed that the subjective world of all believers was the same simply because all subscribed to the same objective truth. Their abstract logic did not allow for the time-lag between intellectual acceptance of truth and its emotional assimilation. For some this interval was very short, but not for all…. Some had not shaken off the emotional attitude towards idols that had dominated their previous existence. In hidden corners of their hearts they still thought of them as possessing power and were afraid to come anywhere near their orbit"; 568: "Their instinctive revulsion against eating idol-meat was understandable insofar as they had not succeeded in fully interiorizing the fact that idols were nothing"; 569: "The instinctive reaction of the Weak could be overcome only as a by-product of their growth towards Christian maturity"; 573: "Through fear the Weak would have forced the community into a self-imposed ghetto."

[8] The majority view is that the impaired have eaten idol food and suffered pangs of guilt thereafter. That is critical, e.g., to the reading of Ibid., 555-56.

and food associated with idols constitutes religious—i.e., idolatrous—behavior, and thus sense that it is right to avoid it now that they are Christ-believers.[9] In the case of Jews who have come to faith in Christ, the problem is supposed to be that they mistakenly retain the Torah-based notion that they must avoid anything associated with idolatry,[10] including food.[11]

Some interpreters suggest that the label ἀσθενής is an indication of their low socio-economic standing.[12] They are unaccustomed to eating sanctified meat

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[9] This view can be traced back at least to Chrysostom, who nevertheless maintained that a Christian should not participate in these rites or eat this food, but not because of the infirmity that arises from fear of idols; see Homily XX on First Corinthians (Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. First Series. Vol. XII. Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 111, 114-15.

[10] Paradoxically, in Scripture idols are trivialized as not gods and meaningless and yet proscribed as demonic and dangerous for those in covenant with the One God (e.g., compare Deut 32:21 with vv. 16-17; Isa 8:19 and 19:3 with chapters 40 and 44; cf. Wis 13—16; see also Ps 106:36-39; *1 Enoch* 19; *Jubilees* 11.4-6); other gods and lords are implicitly recognized to exist, albeit to be lower than Israel's God, and they are not to be honored by Israelites (Exod 15:11; 20:2-6; 22:28; Deut 4:19; 29:26; 32:8-9; Ps 82:1; Micah 4:5; James 2:19); images of other gods are to be destroyed in the Land (Exod 23:24; Deut 7:5).

[11] There are many reasons to believe that Israelites were prohibited from food and other items involved in the rites of other nations, although most of the evidence is more general, referring to the prohibition of actual participation in the rites, as is the case to which Paul refers in chapter 10, from Exodus 32 and Numbers 25; see also 4 Macc. 5:1-4, although probably later than Paul. In addition to these and other passages mentioned in the above note, see Exod 24:11; Deut 14:22-26; Ps 106:28; 1 Sam 9:13; 1 Kgs 1:25; Hos 8:13. The rabbis proscribed eating idol food, although making subtle distinctions, such as the difference between interaction with idolaters and their goods, and between goods that had been used in idolatrous rites and those intended for such use, which have some similarities to the kind of distinctions that arise in Paul's discussion of eating marketplace food not known to be idolatrous, or at someone's invitation, in 10:25-31: *m.Aboda Zara* 1.4-5; 2.3; 3.4; 4.3-6; 5.1; see Tomson, *Paul,* 151-77, 208-20; Cheung, *Idol Food,* 39-81, 152-64, 300-1; Smit, *'About the Idol Offerings,'* 52-58, 65; Magnus Zetterholm, "Purity and Anger: Gentiles and Idolatry in Antioch," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* (2005): 15; David Jacob Rudolph, "A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23" (Ph.D. Dissertation: Selwyn College, University of Cambridge, 2006), 97-104.

[12] Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (trans. John H. Schütz; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 121-43; this suggestion has proven to be popular in subsequent commentaries: Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 186-202; Thiselton, *Corinthians,* 607-61. See also Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 50-

independent of religious festivals, when free "meat" was made available to them, whereas the "strong," who had economic means, were used to eating sacrificial "meat" as a part of normal Greco-Roman social and business life. Being better educated, the knowledgeable were also able to reason more clearly, to understand the logical consequences of believing that there is no God but One, that food offered to idols was not actually sacred, and could be eaten as a matter of religious indifference. Yet it is not clear that all of the knowledgeable were elites. If even any of them were not, it would undermine defining the groups along that axis. There is also evidence that non-elites did eat meat, if often less desirable cuts and parts, and regularly enough, for example, at corner cook-shops (*popinae* and *ganeae*) and *tabernae*.[13] Moreover, the food at issue is not defined strictly to be meat, but idol food (εἰδωλόθυτον), which everyone in Greco-Roman society commonly ate (or drank, in the case of wine).[14]

65; Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* (WUNT 2.23; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 284-85, 290; Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 70-76, for Cynic/Stoic implications.

[13] Justin J. Meggitt, "Meat Consumption and Social Conflict in Corinth," *JTS* 45 (1994): 137-41; Craig Steven de Vos, *Church and Community Conflicts: The Relationships of the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Philippian Churches with Their Wider Civic Communities* (SBLDS 168; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1999), 223.

[14] That Paul mentions he would not even eat any "meats [κρέα]" if it would cause harm to his brother (v. 13) is not to be denied, but that point is made to emphasize how much further Paul would go than what he is asking of his audience, and does not mean the idol food in question is specifically meat (see Peter David Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8—10 in its Context* [SCJ 5; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993], 53-55, 149-50). One should not overlook that he also mentions βρῶμα in v. 13: "if *food* would cause the brother to stumble…." It may well suggest that Paul would not eat anything that could be even mistaken to be idol food, which might apply to much of the meat in Corinth outside of that processed by a Jewish community (but not all, or Paul's statement of exception would be meaningless). But idol foodstuffs consist of many other materials than meat, and idolatry was practiced by every segment of society, not just those wealthy enough to afford meat. Nevertheless, the point stands that the poor may not often eat meat beyond civic or private association rituals which provided such expensive fare; what is at question is whether it would not also be the case that some of those with "knowledge" in Corinth are among the poor, and thus economic level would not serve as the logical basis for defining the difference between the impaired ones and the knowledgeable ones. Cf. Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Studies of the New Testament and its World; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998); Steven J. Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New Consensus," *JSNT* 26.3 (2004): 323-61. For interaction between Meggitt and Theissen as well as Dale Martin, see their essays in *JSNT* 84 (2001): 51-94. See also Steven J. Friesen, "Prospects for a Demography of the Pauline Mission: Corinth among the

A few interpreters argue that there actually was no one or group in Corinth fitting the description of the impaired; rather, the sensibilities being expressed are those of Paul himself, for various reasons.[15] This is an interesting alternative; however, it does not sit well with several issues to be discussed, including that Paul, like most Jews, certainly anyone who had been a Pharisee, does not exemplify the profile: he was not one who was accustomed to eating idol food as sacred food. This also likely rules out that those whose sensibilities are at issue, the impaired, were Jews, or had been Jews, for the impaired were by habit idolaters.

According to the prevailing views, those who "know" that eating idol food is acceptable, being merely profane (ordinary) food, uphold this ideal to apply to *all* Christ-believers. Thus, the "*knowledgeable*" *Christ-believers* are understood to believe that the "*impaired*" *Christ-believers* should not object to the eating of idol food, and are generally believed to hold the impaired ones in contempt for doing so. In a slightly different direction, some interpreters maintain that the knowledgeable advocate that the impaired should be challenged and trained to overcome their mistaken notion that there is some significance to the eating of idol food, and thereby persuaded to abandon their reluctance to eat it.[16]

Churches," in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (ed. Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen; Harvard Theological Studies 53; Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 351-70; Ray Pickett, "Conflicts at Corinth," in *Christian Origins* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; A People's History of Christianity: Vol. 1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 113-37.

[15] John Coolidge Hurd, Jr., *The Origins of 1 Corinthians* (New York: Seabury Press, 1965), 123-25, 147-48, argues that Paul is here creating a hypothetical case, that the knowledgeable were not eating in temples as v. 10 suggests, and that there are no weak ones, although the term can be imagined to apply to recent converts who had been idolaters, so that the case presented makes sense to them. Gooch, *Dangerous Food,* 65-72, 83-84, 97, 108, develops this idea also, but notes that it is problematic, since one would assume that upon entering this faith group they would learn that "there is no God but one."

[16] Clarence E. Glad, *Paul and Philodemus: Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 81; Leiden and New York: Brill, 1995), 278-87, develops the latter viewpoint; see also Wendell Lee Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: the Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (SBL Dissertation Series 68; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 75, 98, 104, who notes variations on this theme among several earlier authors (J. Weiss, Lietzmann, Jewett); Khiok-Khng Yeo, "The Rhetorical Hermeneutic of 1 Corinthians 8 and Chinese Ancestor Worship," *BibInt* 2.3 (1994): 298. A slightly different approach that draws on Theissen's socio-economic distinction for identifying the knowledgeable and

The judgments of the knowledgeable are generally understood—apart from mitigating circumstances, such as he describes in the case at hand—to reflect Paul's own convictions about indifference to eating idol food.[17] Because of the immediate concern with the sensibilities of the impaired in Corinth, Paul is portrayed to be momentarily willing to forgo upholding the ideal of indifference to idol food, so that their "awareness of what is right will not be soiled [μολύνεται]" (v. 7), and so that "the sense of what is right [συνείδησις]" of the impaired will not lead him or her to be "strengthened [οἰκοδομηθήσεται] to eat food sacrificed to idols" (v. 10), "causing him/her to cause self-ruin [ἀπόλλυται]" (v. 11).

The Impaired as Christ-believers

The consensus view that the impaired ones are specifically *Christ-believers* appears to be based on several factors. Although often not discussed, the primary reason is probably that Paul refers to the impaired ones as ἀδελφοί (brothers/sisters) of his "knowledgeable" audience, who have the ability to trip up and thus harm the impaired if they continue to eat idol food in their presence.[18] Also, Paul refers to Christ having died on behalf of the impaired brothers/sisters, so that sinning against them is sinning against Christ (8:11-12).[19] Moreover, many understand the impaired to be vulnerable to the influence of the knowledgeable in a way that implies that the impaired would thus be led to act against their own sense of what is right, to "destroy him or herself" [ἀπόλλυται]" (8:11), because they have not yet completely broken free of their former

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impaired is offered by John Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1* (WUNT 2.151; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 216.

[17] Cf. Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korinthbrief* (MeyerK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), 212; Murphy-O'Connor, "Freedom or the Ghetto," 556-58; C. K. Barrett, ed., *Essays on Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 50-56 ["Things Sacrificed to Idols"]; Theissen, *Pauline Christianity*, 138-40 ["Strong and Weak"]. This remains the case even among many who recognize that some of Paul's statements are likely recitations of Corinthian positions, or slogans, and may not express his own views.

[18] Gooch, *Dangerous Food*, 64, at least raises the possibility that those still intimate with idols are not Christ-believers only to dismiss it, because "Paul identifies these others as Christians: the consciousness of these who eat idol-food as idol-food is weak and is polluted by the act of eating (8:7); this weak one is a brother for whom Christ died (8:11)" (full discussion: 65-72).

[19] The second reason Gooch provides in the above note.

way of thinking about idols (8:7-13).[20] That is presumed to be because the impaired are not mature enough in their Christ-faith to think like the knowledgeable ones, who have perhaps been Christ-believers longer, or are of higher economic standing and education. They are thus better able to rationalize the issues, granting the knowledgeable some degree of moral authority.

Many interpretations of this section are also shaped by larger constructions of a tension between Pauline and Jewish Christianity, variously conceptualized, or between Jewish and Gentile Christians.[21] These naturally limit the options to be explored to identify the possible players and situations addressed in Corinthians; at the same time, decisions fundamental to those portrayals depend upon interpretive elements gathered from previous interpretations of Corinthians.

Finally, the impact of the traditional and still prevailing constructions of Paul and his theology play an important role in suggesting the options to be explored. Interpreters generally uphold that the Corinthians understand Paul to proclaim a Torah-free gospel, and to be Torah-free as a matter of principle, although he may practice Torah when it is expedient for him to do so to reach Jews—notions at the heart of "Paulinism." It is also generally agreed that Paul believes Christ-believing Jews should not observe Torah either, certainly not as an expression of covenantal faith, and that Christ-believing non-Jews should not observe Jewish cultural norms, such as those set out in the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15, or in the Noahide Commandments of

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[20] The first reason provided by Gooch in the above note. It is conceptualized somewhat differently by Paul Douglas Gardner, *The Gifts of God and the Authentication of a Christian: An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 8--11:1* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1994), 40-64, who understands the impaired to want to be like the knowledgeable. Drawing on the confidence of the knowledgeable, they imitated them. But they were insecure about taking this course, and carried along into idolatry. It logically follows that the impaired are at that point idolaters.

[21] Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings* (trans. Allan Menzies; Two volumes in one vol.; ed. Eduard Zeller; 2nd ed.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 137, 145-48, 268-320; Idem, "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz der petrinischen und paulinischen Christentums in der ältesten Kirche, Petrus in Rom.," *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 4.3 (1831): 70-94, 222-53, 291-329; differently, Michael D. Goulder, *Paul and the Competing Mission in Corinth* (Library of Pauline Studies; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), esp. 92-124, 152-64.

rabbinic Judaism.[22] Even if he may have appealed to these or something like them in his earlier letter, it did not and does not represent his own convictions.[23]

It is also commonly believed that Paul's argument here implies that he regards eating idol food independent of idolatrous rituals to be a matter of indifference, even that he ate it himself.[24] Hence, it is natural for Paul to be understood to be sympathetic to the propositional "knowledge" of the Christ-believers addressed, if not their lack of concern for how this might impact others, but also to be sensitive to the qualms of those ostensibly new to the idea of freedom to eat idol food as a matter of indifference. He too is understood to have experienced this transformation of attitude when moving from a Jewish to a Christ-believing based value system, and thus away from a Torah-defined life.

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[22] Murphy-O'Connor, "Freedom or the Ghetto," 558.

[23] Cf. Hurd, *Origins,* 240-70, 271-96, discusses an ambiguous relationship between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles over the Decree, and even that Paul had behaved "as one outside the law" during his first stay in Corinth (280), to which he returned "at a far more mature level" and based on a more "independent theological bases for ethical action" following the negative reaction to his first letter, which was based on a veiled agreement with the Decree (289, 94).

[24] The majority view; e.g., Barrett, ed., *Essays on Paul,* 50-56, upholds that Paul would not participate in idolatrous rituals (52), but he speaks for most interpreters of 1 Corinthians and of Paul in general when he observes: "in the matter of εἰδωλόθυτα (not to mention others) Paul was not a practicing Jew" (50). In contrast, several interpreters uphold that Paul did not and would not eat idol food, although most do not mean by this that Paul observes kashrut, or Torah per se: see Tomson, *Paul,* 185, 195-96, 201-3, 206-8, 219-20, 275-76, 280; Gooch, *Dangerous Food,* 94-95 (although he does not uphold Paul to observe kashrut conventions; 96 n. 60, 127, 129, 131-32, 135, 296-97); James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 701-6 (but he does not observe kashrut or observe Torah as a matter of faith: passim, e.g., when discussing the Antioch Incident); Cheung, *Idol Food,* 76-81, 108-9, 136-41, 296-305 (he also distinguishes kashrut, which Paul did not practice, 78-79); Smit, *'About the Idol Offerings,'* 3, 56-57, 154-65; E. Coye Still III, "Paul's Aims Regarding ΕΙΔΩΛΟΘΥΤΑ: A New Proposal for Interpreting 1 Corinthians 8:1--11:1," *Novum Testamentum* 44.4 (2002): 333-43, although not dealing with the topic of whether Paul would eat idol food, argues that he does not permit it at all for the Corinthians; Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols,* 222-23 (but on 226: "he [Paul] does not observe the Law"); David E. Garland, "The Dispute Over Food Sacrificed to Idols (1 Cor 8:1--11:1)," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30.2 (2003): 173-97, also emphasizes the complete proscription of idol food, but Paul "rejected Jewish food laws that erected barriers between Jews and Gentiles…. Idol food is a different matter entirely" (182, 184). Rudolph, "A Jew to the Jews," like myself, upholds that Paul did not eat idol food, or permit it to be eaten knowingly, and consistently observed kashrut too.

Paul's approach to the topic of idol food, based on the prevailing view that both the knowledgeable and the impaired are Christ-believers, and thus should ideally practice freedom in Christ to eat anything,[25] is generally combined with his supposed strategy to adopt the behavior of those to whom he seeks to relate, which allegedly involves compromising Torah as a matter of policy (9:19-23).[26] Hence, it is those who know that eating idol food is a matter of indifference who are labeled by interpreters to be "strong," in concert with Paul's own projected ideals. The other ones, those Christ-believers whose supposed lack of maturity leaves them uncomfortable with this Pauline propositional truth, are labeled "weak."[27] This view, interestingly, implies that the

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[25] Widely attested; see e.g., Weiss, *Der erste Korinthbrief,* 211-18 (esp. 212-13), 227-31; Barrett, ed., *Essays on Paul,* 50, 54-56; Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 97-100. Willis, *Idol Meat,* 116, challenges the idea that Paul is affirming the Corinthian slogans of 8:1, 4-6, as if giving priority to freedom, but tempered with love as required.

[26] This is especially evident with interpretations that describe the impaired to be Jewish Christ-believers who are not yet secure enough in their faith to eat idol food, or who are engaged in a Jewish Christian mission in opposition to Paul, but it can also be detected when the impaired are described as non-Jews: Weiss, *Der erste Korinthbrief,* 264; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Black's New Testament Commentary; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1968), 194-95, describes the "weak" in 8:7 to be non-Jewish Christ-believers who are "foolish," being "scrupulous where scrupulosity rests on pure error" about not eating idol food, and on 215, the "weak" in 9:22 are "Christians not yet fully emancipated from legalism."

[27] Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 240, represents a good example of the basic point I seek to challenge, commenting on 10:25: "So far as the essential point of principle is concerned he [Paul] is at one with the strong Christians… neither food nor abstention from it will commend us to God. He makes a clean break with Judaism, where conscience demanded of the devout Jew the most searching inquiry before he might eat. Paul had in fact ceased to be a practicing Jew." Similar comments are made with reference to chapter 8 and on 9:19-23. Barrett draws a monolithic portrait of Jewish observance that is mistaken (see above note discussing the nuanced views of the rabbis on idol food).

Willis, *Idol Meat,* 119-20, for a list of other arguments along similar lines, which he challenges, since Paul does not offer instruction to the impaired, and does not side with the knowledgeable; rather, Paul disagrees with the knowledgeable about their being no such thing as idols in the world, and does not favor eating idol food, although Willis believes that Paul regards food to be neutral. I would argue slightly differently, that food is theoretically neutral, since purity is not inherent, but imputed, and since Paul respects Torah as the word of God, idol food is imputed to be that which those belonging to the One God cannot eat. That is also in keeping with rabbinic teaching discussed in an earlier note.

Church Fathers were "weak," because they upheld that no Christians were to eat idol food, based in part on their understanding that this passage prohibited it.[28]

A New Proposal: The Impaired as non-Christ-believing <u>*Polytheists*</u>

In spite of several reasons to identify the impaired ones to be Christ-believers, which have been discussed, the consensus view is nevertheless far from certain, and I do not think that it is probable. I am neither convinced that from Paul's perspective the impaired ones are insecure in their faith, specifically, that they are troubled by eating idol food,[29] nor that he fears they will revert to idolatry if the knowledgeable behave against their sensibilities.[30] Rather, I propose that the impaired are *polytheist idolaters* with whom the Christ-believers in Corinth interact, even those to whom they are proclaiming the gospel message. The impaired are not *resistant* to eating idol food; rather, *the impaired have always eaten idol food as an act of religious significance*.[31] After all, is it not more logical to suppose that Christ-believers "know" the truth about idols now, by definition, being Christ-*believers*? In what sense have they become Christ-believers if not by confessing the truth of the One, thus turning from the truth they had supposed before about idols and other gods and lords?[32]

I thus suggest that the impaired are not insecure in their faith, they do not share faith in Christ with the knowledgeable. They are not troubled by eating idol food, that is

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[28] In addition to the proscriptions in Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Rev 2:14, 19-20; *Didache* 6.1-2; Ign. *Magn*. 8—10; Justin, *Dial*. 35; Tertullian, *Apol*. 9.13-14; see the discussions in Tomson, *Paul,* 177-86; Gooch, *Dangerous Food,* 122-27, 131-33; Cheung, *Idol Food,* 165-295.

[29] Wendell Willis, "1 Corinthians 8--10: A Retrospective after Twenty-five Years," *Restoration Quarterly* 49.2 (2007): 11, observes: "Almost everyone sees the 'weak' as simply those who are troubled by the eating of sacrificial meat."

[30] Cheung, *Idol Food,* 128-29.

[31] Max Rauer, *Die 'Schwachen' in Korinth und Rom nach den Paulusbriefen* (Biblische Studien; Freiburg: Herder, 1923), 27-29, identifies the impaired to be Christ-believers, yet when arguing why they were not Christ-believing Jews, he recognizes that the impaired eat idol food as sacred to the idols and not common food because of their previous way of regarding it to be sacred to idols.

[32] Cf. 1 Thess 1:9-10. This does bring up the interesting issue of whether the impaired might include some who have sought to add Christ-faith to their pantheon; see my discussion below of option four, about how Paul might fear the self-destruction of the impaired could follow from failure to conform to his teaching about idol food. See discussion of his instructions in chapter 5 about Christ-believers who engage in idolatry, for why I do not believe they are included among the impaired.

what they do and have always done as a matter of course, "until now." Thus Paul's concern is not that the impaired will *revert* to idolatry, but that they will never turn away from it. If they witness that even Christ-believers, who otherwise deny their convictions, nevertheless still eat idol food, they will *continue* to sense that idolatry is right, leading to their self-destruction, when it should be the role of the knowledgeable to live in such a way as to prevent that outcome. Their "impaired" sense of what is right will ironically be "built up [οἰκοδομηθήσεται]," that is, they will be "edified" or "strengthened"[33] to continue the course on which they have spent their whole lives, instead of challenged by the fact that Christ-believers are willing to abandon even the pretense of worshipping their many gods and lords (v. 10). They are brothers and sisters for whom Christ died, but they would not being reached with that message if the Christ-believers live according to the rights they suppose themselves to have, regardless of the consequences for those who do not share their knowledge.

It is not necessary here to define which specific idolatrous rites are at issue in Corinth, such as those carried out at the many religious temples, in mysteries, associations, homes, and festivals, most of these in some way integrated into the expression of imperial cult.[34] What is significant is that the "impaired ones" are so labeled because they do not share in the "knowledge" of Christ-believers that there is no god but the One; hence, their "*sense of what is right*" is "*impaired*."[35]

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[33] Interpreters regularly note that Paul uses the word meaning "to build up" ironically, to signify tearing down by arrogantly behaving in a way that encourages the other to do something harmful to themselves. However, Paul's comment here need not mean that the impaired were not already doing the harmful thing at issue, which most interpreters understand to be implied. Building up need not signify the same thing as starting from scratch. The point is that they are strengthened in resolve to do it.

[34] For full discussions of the options, see e.g., Willis, *Idol Meat;* John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (JSNTSup 75; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); Gooch, *Dangerous Food;* Derek Newton, *Deity and Diet: The Dilemma of Sacrificial Food at Corinth* (JSNTSup 169; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols;* and the essays in Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen, eds., *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Harvard Theological Studies 53; Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[35] Willis, *Idol Meat,* 92, although upholding that the impaired are Christ-believers, makes an observation that fits my proposal that they were not: "Those who were 'weak' in συνείδησις were simply those who were 'not knowing' (8:7) the truth about idols and idol meat." See also Martin, *Corinthian Body,* 179-89.

In other words, Paul fears that if these "impaired" idolaters were to see the Christ-believers' eating idol food—which is notably introduced as a *hypothetical possibility* in 8:10[36]—their own sensibilities would be *confirmed* instead of challenged to be *misguided*. That outcome would be the opposite of what the knowledgeable Christ-believers, as former idolaters themselves, have apparently supposed to be the case. That case may be theoretical, that is, the knowledgeable may not be eating idol food, but they have enquired about the possibility of doing so. Paul explains why they cannot begin that course.[37]

Although Paul begins to explain why they cannot eat it on the basis of consideration of the negative impact on the impaired in chapter 8, in chapter 10:1-22 Paul betrays the ultimate Jewish convictions that are at work in his thinking, and to which he will seek to move his audience as the argument unfolds: there are such things as daemons involved in idol worship, and thus food that has been associated with idolatry cannot be eaten by those who eat at the table of the Lord.[38] Although secondary to strategically agreeing with the knowledgeable that "we know that there are no idols in the *kosmos*" (8:4), and concluding that "for us there is One God" (8:6), as well as diminishing their importance when stating "even if there are those being called gods" (8:5a), Paul nevertheless includes from the start of his argument the admission that "there are many gods and lords" (8:5b).[39] While the knowledgeable know these gods represented by statues made by humans do not measure up to the God to whom they have now turned, and apparently are asking about eating idol food for any number of other reasons, not least probably to demonstrate that conviction or to avoid negative social consequences for failing to do so, they *cannot* eat it. Paul will finally make clear: What is sacrificed to daemons and not to God *must not be eaten*! God is *jealous* and does not accept for his people to associate in any way with such things. Thus, like the

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[36] Similarly noted by Garland, "Dispute Over Food," 180.

[37] Karl-Gustav Sandelin, "Drawing the Line: Paul on Idol Food and Idolatry in 1 Cor 8:1--11:1," in *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen* (ed. David E. Aune, et al.; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 108-25, esp. 119. Whether the questions were posed to Paul in a challenging tone or not does not alter the point.

[38] For sources, consult notes 10 and 11 above.

[39] See also 2:8; 15:24-27, all of which admit the role of other gods and lords to articulate God's superiority (also Rom 8:38-39; 16:20; 2 Cor 4:4; Phil 2:10).

Israelites, the Corinthians, as members of the family of the One God must *flee from idolatry*; food that has been involved in idolatrous rites cannot be on their table (10:1-22).

What is the "ruin" Paul fears will result for the impaired if they witness Christ-believers eating idol food? Although the "ruin" or "destruction" (ἀπόλλυται) is self-inflicted by the impaired one in 8:11 ("he will cause himself to be ruined"), it is the knowledgeable who "strengthen" them to choose that course for themselves, who thus cause them to "stumble" in the direction of self-destruction, who "sin" against them, who "wound" their "sense of what is right" (vv. 9-13). At least several possibilities can be imagined to describe what Paul envisages:

1) Idolaters may fail to *understand* that Christ-faith makes exclusivistic claims for the One God and Christ over against the claims of any other gods, since it appears to incorporate eating of food offered to other gods.[40] Hence, the message of good in Christ is not being proclaimed as it should be, and cannot effect the changes Paul believes should result from proclamation of this news (cf. 14:22-25). The knowledge of the One that can save the impaired is being obstructed by the very ones who have themselves already benefited from understanding that message.

2) Idolaters may not take the message of Christ-faith *seriously*, that is, on the exclusivistic and superiority terms that it claims against other gods and lords, such as the worship of the One God alone, and the message of salvation in Christ.[41] Idolaters may conclude that even those who profess faith in Christ and the One God do not want to risk the wrath of the gods, or any of the other socio-economic, physical, and psychological consequences that polytheists might expect to result from neglect or abstention of various rites, or from opting out of the social networks within society that participation in these rites entails. That would likely lead to the a priori dismissal of the

[40] Deut 4:6-7, speaks of the nations who witness the Israelites observing Torah, which will therefore lead them to call Israel wise and understanding, and will recognize that there is no other God like theirs. Alternatively, often the prophets warn of the mocking of them and their God that failure to observe Torah will bring.

[41] Somewhat similarly, Tomson, *Paul,* 216, states that to eat idol food after it is announced, would "*de facto* renounce the belief that 'For us there is One God the Father'"; Cheung, *Idol Food,* 159, suggests: "If the Corinthians eat the food regardless, they will compromise their confession of the One God and abandon the basic Christian (and Jewish) critique of pagan gods."

claims of the message of good in Christ. The message of good is thus being compromised, corrupted by its messengers.

3) If idolaters did understand and take their exclusivistic claims seriously, and recognized that they claimed to have something superior to that which idolaters uphold to be true, then idolaters may regard those who profess it to *lack integrity*: they are hypocrites, arrogant troublemakers, or simply foolish.[42] There is little force to their confession of faith in God and Christ to be exclusive of and superior to other gods. For these Christ-believers fail to live up to the truths proclaimed when they still participate in idolatrous rites, and eat idol-related food they have otherwise renounced to be inferior. This is different than being regarded to be foolish because of believing in the message of a crucified lord, and behaving consistent with that confession in the face of resistance, which Paul expects and experiences for his faithfulness to the message. If idolaters conclude that Christ-believers are hypocrites, they will likely dismiss the message of good in Christ out of hand as lacking integrity.

4) The Christ-believers' faith might be perceived *to incorporate the worship of other gods alongside* faith in Christ. If any polytheists are interested in Christ-faith for themselves, they may conclude that they can add the One God and Christ to their pantheon, in keeping with the common practice in Greco-Roman culture of incorporating new gods. This would appear to be fully compatible with their polytheistic sensibilities, based on observing the behavior of those who proclaim this news.[43] Ironically, the "superstitions" of their idolatrous family members, friends,

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[42] Similarly, Garland, "Dispute Over Food," 196.

[43] Somewhat similarly, Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (trans. James W. Leitch; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 178, observes: "the Christian would objectify the power of the gods, and thereby 'preach' faith in them"; and Willis, *Idol Meat,* 241, notes: "the pagan who observes a Christian eating ἱερόθυτον might either think Christianity was syncretistic, or the Christian really is uncommitted in faith." Garland, "Dispute Over Food," 196, who interprets the impaired in 8 and 10 to be Christ-believers, nevertheless observes the consequences concerning the unbeliever who identifies the food to be idol food in 10:27-29 in a way that is sympathetic to my argument throughout: if a Christ-believer knowingly eats idol food, "It would confirm, rather than challenge, the unbeliever's idolatrous convictions and would not lead the unbeliever away from the worship of false gods. If a Christian were to eat what a pagan acquaintance regards as an offering to a deity, it signals the Christian's tacit endorsement of idolatry"; Rudolph, "A Jew to the Jews," 91; see also Cheung, *Idol Food,* 159.

neighbors, fellow association members, and social and political contacts, will all be confirmed, not denied. They will be caused to stumble, taking the form of merely adding God and Christ to their idolatrous way of life. The already impaired are thus rendered unable to know that which the knowledgeable know, and are being destroyed by continuing to live in idolatry. From Paul's implied point of view, if the knowledgeable eat food that idolaters (i.e., the impaired ones) regard to be sacred, it will confirm that it is indeed sacred, and the idolaters will be ruined as a result.[44]

This option can be amplified by altering the language of Peter Borgen's argument for the consensus view: "Paul here seems to assume that the recent convert will interpret this [the knowledgeable eating idol food] positively and see it as permission to participate in polytheistic sacrificial meals. This may lead him to attempt a syncretistic fusion of Christianity and polytheistic worship. According to Paul the convert is in this way destroyed."[45] Mutatis mutandis, this could describe someone "impaired" who never desisted from polytheism, but sought to add Christ-faith, and indeed, it is possible that someone was regarded to be a member of the community by some other gospel than Paul's, which did not include turning from idols to Christ. But that seems unlikely, since Paul does not here confront the Corinthians about what the proclamation of the gospel entails, but draws upon a shared understanding of that knowledge. Moreover, as will be discussed, this fails to take into account the implications of Paul's instructions in chapter 5 about those *named* brothers and sisters who persist in idolatry: they are not to be accommodated, but challenged or dislodged. Rather, the alternative I wish to suggest to Borgen's description is this: If the impaired one is not a "recent convert" but a polytheistic idolater who is not a Christ-believer, would not this lead him or her to see Christ-believers eating idol food sanctioning continued participation in idolatry, without knowing that it should be otherwise? Might he or she not conclude that Christ-faith can be added to his or her current mix of beliefs—"lead[ing] him to attempt a syncretistic fusion of Christianity and polytheistic worship"? Would that not lead the non-Christ-believer to self-ruin in a way not unlike the supposed Christ-believer Borgen posits—all the more so?

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[44] *t.Aboda Zara* 6.4-6, discusses the rabbinic concern to avoid any behavior that could be seen by a polytheist and create the impression of idolatry; cf. Tomson, *Paul,* 162-63.

[45] Peder Borgen, "'Yes,' 'No,' 'How Far?': The Participation of Jews and Christians in Pagan Cults," in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 51.

In each of these scenarios, the impaired can be understood to be *strengthened* in their misguided sense of what is right, failing to perceive "the truth" about idolatry, and thus Paul may conclude that the *perpetuation* of their *impaired* state as a result of the wrong behavior by the knowledgeable will lead the impaired *to their ruin*. All of these outcomes, including various combinations of them, would represent alienation from the message of good in Christ that Paul believes can be avoided if the Christ-believers refrain from eating idol food on behalf of the sensibilities of idolaters. He does not want idolaters to be "scandalized" by behavior not befitting those confessing the faith. He wants them to know the One God through Christ-faith. He wants his audience to follow his own example, for he would not even eat "meat" if the eating of any kind of "food" would cause the stumbling of some over the message of Christ (8:13); moreover, he adapts his presentation of the message to "everyone" in order that he might "gain" even "some" to be "saved" (9:19-23).

I thus conclude, in direct contrast to the consensus views, that the impaired ate idol food without any qualms; that is what idolaters do. Moreover, the knowledgeable most likely did not eat idol food,[46] or dine at polytheist's temples,[47] just as Christ-believers would not be expected to do.[48] This point is accentuated all the more to the degree that we accept that these Christ-believers likely met as subgroups within the Jewish communities of Corinth.[49] Although these former polytheists wondered if it would be acceptable to eat it, most likely for a host of the socio-economic and

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[46] Similarly, Sandelin, "Drawing the Line," 118-19.

[47] Thus giving weight to Paul's example as an hypothetical construction to respond to their questions about whether they could do so. Note the conditional clause and subjunctive verb when Paul sets out the example: "for if [ἐὰν] someone was to see [ἴδῃ] you…" (8:10).

[48] But see Zetterholm, "Purity and Anger," 11-16. Although I agree that it is not the intrinsic nature of idol food that is at issue for Paul or for that matter the rabbis when discussing this topic (Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 199-200), the basic premises of Paul's argument here (and in Romans) suggests that he instructed from the start that any food known to have been involved in idolatrous rites was not to be eaten by those committing to Christ-faith. The implications of this policy have likely intensified after Paul left Corinth, leading to the questions that this discourse aims to answer.

[49] Cf. Richard A. Horsley, "Paul's Assembly in Corinth: An Alternative Society," in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (ed. Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen; Harvard Theological Studies 53; Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 371-95.

psychological reasons associated with remaining "in the world," in addition to the notion that it would demonstrate their faith proposition of indifference to idols, Paul herein sought to make it plain that they must not. It would perpetuate the impaired state of their idolatrous neighbors, rather than helping to bring them to faith in Christ, and it involved a relationship with evil forces that should be avoided at all costs (10:16-22). Paul reminds them what happened to Israelites who indulged in similarly mistaken logic (10:5-22, drawing on Num 25).

Paul's original audience knew what we cannot know; namely, whether there were any Christ-believers behaving in the way in which the impaired are described, or whether his descriptions and concerns naturally matched those of their polytheist families, friends, and neighbors. Are there any other clues either within or outside of chapters 8—10 that might support the notion proposed herein, that it was polytheistic brothers and sisters' sensibilities and outcomes in Corinth with whom Paul was concerned?

Paul's Concern About Polytheists in 8:1—11:1, and Throughout the Letter

That there were divisions among the Christ-believers in Corinth is not to be denied (cf. 1:11-12; 3:3-4; 6:6-8; 11:18-19).[50] Paul is apparently responding to issues reported to him (1:11; 5:1), or more likely, that the recipients raised in correspondence to him (7:1; 8:1), which probably arose in response to his earlier letter, lost to us (cf. 5:9-11).[51] But it is not clear whether Paul was specifically responding to a division between or among the addressees over idol food in 8:1—11:1,[52] or instead addressing questions raised, or

[50] William Baird, "'One Against the Other': Intra-Church Conflict in 1 Corinthians," in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul & John In Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 116-36; Margaret Mary Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

[51] Hurd, *Origins,* 47-94, passim.

[52] I accept that this section was written as a composite: Ibid., 43-94, 114-49, who also raises questions about the prevailing assumption that there are two parties quarreling in the Corinthian church about this matter, albeit to a different conclusion, that the quarrel is between Paul and Corinthians, which I also find to be convincing. But I maintain that the impaired are real people, although not members of the community of God (*ekklesia*). They are the topic around which the issues (conflicts?) turn concerning how

implications arising from the attitudes they expressed, perhaps in the way certain questions were posed, about how Christ-believers should behave "in the world." A concern with factionalism in this letter does not exclude a concern with how Christ-believers should think and live in view of their role among their polytheist families, friends, neighbors, and larger world. Learning to eliminate factionalism amongst themselves is an important aspect of how they are to stand out from the world, as in, but not of it. They are those who celebrate the dawning of the age to come in the midst of the present age in a spirit of oneness, who must uphold that ethos on behalf of the service of their brother/sister of the world.

Paul draws a contrast between those who believe in many gods and lords and "us," who believe in the One God, and in Christ Jesus (8:6). While in 8:1 Paul apparently agrees that "we realize that everyone has knowledge" about things sacrificed to idols, that is, "we realize that there is no such thing as an idol in the world" (v. 4), at the same time Paul undermines this ostensible agreement: "however, there is not in everyone this knowledge" (8:7). Are not the "we" and "us" Christ-believers, versus the "them" who believe in idols, who do not realize that God is One, or believe in Jesus Christ?[53] It cannot be proven that the impaired "for whom Christ died" in 8:11 is intended to describe polytheist idolaters, or that to sin against polytheists is "to sin against Christ" (v. 12), but how can it be dismissed as if not within the conceptual range of such a statement? Did Christ not die for the unbeliever? Would not living in such a way as to prevent polytheists turning to Christ be considered by Paul to be sinning against Christ? Are not polytheists also "brothers/sisters" of God's creation for whom Paul's addressees should be unselfishly concerned?

It is hard to imagine that the addressees did not perceive that Christ died for those who do not yet believe in him, or that they could read his comments in 15:3 to mean that it was only the sins of Christ-believers for which he died, or upon receipt of the comments later in 2 Cor 5:14-15, that the "all" for whom he died was only all Christ-believers. And although I do not wish to claim that the Corinthians anticipated Romans,

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Christ-believers should live in the world among idolaters, and bear witness to their faith; cf. Smit, *'About the Idol Offerings,'* 29-46.

[53] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 379, maintains that the impaired are Christ-believing former idolaters, nevertheless he observes that "yet for *them* (i.e., the pagans) there are many 'gods' and many 'lords.'"

certainly Paul made the case in that letter that Christ died for those who did not yet believe in him. Not only that, but he describes the unbelievers of the world to be ἀσθενής, before Christ died for them. Paul writes:

> For while we were *still weak* [ἀσθενῶν], at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that *while we still were sinners Christ died for us*. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if *while we were enemies*, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. (Rom 5:6-10 NRSV; emphasis added)

Throughout 1 Corinthians Paul addresses matters arising from the polytheist communal context of the recipients (especially in chapters 7—11, 14).[54] Note, for example, that 5:9-13 sets out the difference between being in the world and behaving like the world, and his references to Gentiles (ἔθνεσιν) and the outsider (τοὺς ἔξω) function more like later usage of "polytheist" or "pagan." In 6:1-11, Paul contrasts their identity as well as treatment of each other to that of the "unrighteous" (ἄδικοι) and "unbelievers" (ἀπίστων). 7:12-16 involves a discussion of marriage to an "unbeliever," including how their partner is thereby "sanctified," and the hope that he or she will be thereby "saved." In 9:19-23, in the midst of this discussion of idol food in chapters 8 to 10, Paul states explicitly that he does everything he does for the sake of the gospel in order "to gain" and "to save some."[55] He concludes chapter 10 with a seamlessly constructed concern to seek to avoid offending not only the Christ-believing ἐκκλησία

[54] Victor Paul Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge, U.K. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 16: "In one way or another, the issues taken up in the second section, 5.1—11.1, all derive from the church's struggle to *be* the church in a world to which it does not finally belong."

[55] Although some argue that the impaired in this text are Christ-believers, they do not argue that Paul cannot be referring to winning polytheists to faith in Christ here; instead, they seek to extend the reach to include winning Christ-believers to Paul's way of thinking: cf. Wendell Willis, "An Apostolic Apologia? The Form and Function of 1 Corinthians 9," *JSNT* 24 (1985): 37; David Carson, "Pauline Inconsistency: Reflections on 1 Corinthians 9.19-23 and Galatians 2.11-14," *Churchman* 100 (1986): 14-15; Gardner, *Gifts of God,* 96-99, 104-5; Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Interpretation; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1997), 155.

(community), but also the Jews and Greeks (v. 32). The topic of women's hair in 11:2-16 arguably involves how they will be perceived by outsiders.[56] Paul wraps up his instruction about proper conduct at the Lord's supper with the powerful warning that those who undertake this rite improperly will be disciplined by the Lord: they are instructed to "judge" themselves in order that they "may not be condemned along with the cosmos" (11:27-32). Chapter 12 begins a discussion that extends through chapter 14 about how to conduct gifts and other behavior thus: "You know that when you were 'members of the nations [ἔθνη],' you let yourself be led away to dumb idols, however you were led" (v. 2). Paul expresses specific concern with the effect of the Christ-believer's "spiritual" behavior upon "unbelievers" in 14:16-17, 22-25. He argues: "Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers [πιστεύουσιν] but for unbelievers [ἀπίστοις], while prophecy is [a sign] not for unbelievers [ἀπίστοις] but for believers [πιστεύουσιν]. If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders [ἰδιῶται] or unbelievers [ἄπιστοι] enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind [μαίνεσθε]? But if all prophesy, an unbeliever [ἄπιστος] or outsider [ἰδιώτης] who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed [τὰ κρυπτὰ τῆς καρδίας αὐτοῦ φανερὰ γίνεται],[57] that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, 'God is really among you'" (14:22-25 NRSV). It is not difficult to see that Paul is not focused solely on intra-"Christian" matters in this letter: he wants his audience to learn how to live in order to "win" their polytheist families, friends, and neighbors to the confession of Jesus Christ.

Within the framework of 8:1—11:1, and allowing for the observation that there are dissimilarities between the cases described in chapters 8 and 10—the former about activity in a temple, and the latter seemingly about a home or other place that is not dedicated to cultic activity per se[58] -- a pertinent example arises in 10:27. Paul discusses

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[56] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 227-30.

[57] NRSV adds the referent "unbeliever's" here, but literally this is a pronoun, "causing to be made known the secrets of *their* heart."

[58] Smit, *'About the Idol Offerings,'* 61-65, clearly sets out the similarities and dissimilarities between 8:1-3, 7-13 and 10:23-30. Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols,* 241-43, for discussion of the options for the food at issue

the possible case of accepting an invitation to dinner from "one of the unbelievers [ἀπίστων]." In v. 28, Paul notes the possibility of a certain one—it is unclear whether the host or another guest—pointing out that the food served is "sacred food [ἱερόθυτόν]."[59] This terminology appraises the food from a non-Jewish and non-Christ-believing cultural point of view; in contrast, Paul uses "idol food [εἰδωλόθυτον]" everywhere else in this passage.[60] This strongly suggests that Paul is portraying this "someone" to have the perspective of a polytheist idolater. Nevertheless, many interpreters maintain that this "someone" is an impaired Christ-believer.

Commentators have been baffled by the idea that Paul would express concern here for the "sensibilities" of polytheists, in language like that used in chapter 8 when discussing the impaired. But that is just the point! These interpretations travel in a circle that excludes consideration of the possibility that Paul might have been concerned with impaired unbelievers as "brothers/sisters" in chapter 8. Among other results, this leads to drawing sharp distinctions between the referent in 10:27 and the person described in

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in 10:27—11:1, and passim, for investigation of the probable locations and dynamics of idol food eating in Corinth.

Contra proposals that require the references to idol food only be to food eaten in cultic contexts, or that limit Paul throughout this section to only be addressing the issue of eating food in cultic contexts, or that insist idol food in markets was no longer considered to be idolatrous and thus not objectionable to Paul: Gordon Fee, "Ἐιδωλόθυτα Once Again: An Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8--10," *Biblica* 61 (1980): 181-87; Ben Witherington, "Not So Idle Thoughts About *Eidolothuton*," *TynBul* 44.2 (1993): 237-54; Gardner, *Gifts of God*, 183-85. See the challenges mounted by Bruce N. Fisk, "Eating Meat Offered to Idols: Corinthian Behavior and Pauline Response in 1 Corinthians 8--10 (A Response to Gordon Fee)," *TrinJ* 10 NS (1989): 49-70; Cheung, *Idol Food*, 101-12, 319-22; E. Coye Still III, "The Meaning and Uses of ΕΙΔΩΛΟΘΥΤΟΝ in First Century Non-Pauline Literature and 1 Cor 8:1--11:1: Toward Resolution of the Debate," *TrinJ* 23 NS (2002): 225-34; see also Terry Griffith, "ΕΙΔΩΛΟΝ As 'Idol' in Non-Jewish and Non-Christian Greek," *JTS* 53 (2002): 95-101.

[59] It should be considered whether only some of the food was identified to be idol food, as a host or another guest today might indicate certain food or preparation issues of concern to a known vegan guest, or one with allergies, to steer them away from certain choices, but also toward others.

[60] Although non-Jews and non-Christ-believers did sometimes refer to these representations as εἴδωλον (idols or images), it was a common Jewish characterization that played negatively off a term connoting merely an appearance or copy rather than the real item it represented, and later it continued to be used in similar ways by Christ-believing groups (Griffith, "ΕΙΔΩΛΟΝ As 'Idol,'" 95-101; cf. F. Buchsel, *TDNT* 2.375-78).

vv. 28-29, and to other strained arguments.[61] But there does not seem to be any grammatical or contextual grounds for a change of the referent from a polytheist to a "Christ-believer" between these verses.[62]

The reasons that a non-Christ-believing host might inform a Christ-believer that the food had been sanctified could be many, including from helpful to malicious. For example, having offered the invitation, it could have been out of concern for the sensibilities of the Christ-believing guest, or *someone* rumored to be such, or merely to cover the possibility of such guests among the invitees. That might be based on what the polytheist host has learned to be the *possible* "superstitions" of Christ-believers, which are understood to be like those of which they might be aware among Jews, even if only aware in stereotypical or secondhand terms about their supposed beliefs.[63] Or, it could have been a way of testing a Christ-believer, for example, to find out if he or she would eat idol food and thus be exposed as a hypocrite.

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[61] E.g., Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 242; Gardner, *Gifts of God,* 96-105, 176-79; Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols,* 245. Willis, *Idol Meat,* 235-45, offers a particularly useful discussion.

[62] It is of interest to note that although many interpreters insist Paul always refers to Christ-believers when using ἀδελφοί (brothers/sisters), since he does not signal a change, the same standards are not always applied to his use of ἀσθενής (weak) in chapters 8 to 10, and all the more remarkably, between verses 27 and 28-29 in chapter 10. Also the case of 11:29-30 should not be overlooked, where being weak and sick and even asleep/dead are linked to eating and drinking without proper discernment of the body in a way that would seem to point to the knowledgeable rather than to the impaired, since it represents the more liberal who need to be more circumspect; is Paul still using ἀσθενής for the same referents? It is most likely that these terms do not represent only one possible meaning for Paul. Meaning is derived from within the changing contexts of usage. Later interpreters are disadvantaged, not knowing the context in Corinth in the ways that the addressees do.

[63] Interpreters do not generally seem to consider the potential for a benign or even concerned effort on behalf of a polytheist idolater toward the sensibilities of the Christ-believer; e.g., Gooch, *Dangerous Food,* 69, dismisses the option of non-Christ-believers in view because "there is no evidence whatever that non-Christians were objecting to Christians eating idol-food." Indeed, but that does not mean that this possible identification "may be rejected immediately," for "objecting" need not be at issue based on what Paul describes. Moreover, this may be a case representing just that evidence which Gooch considers missing, because it is being dismissed out of hand via circular reasoning. Also arguing for the likelihood of positive motives, see de Vos, *Community Conflicts,* 213. Fee, *Corinthians,* 483-85, suggests that a pagan is in view, and takes a somewhat similar line to the argument offered here, however he accounts for accommodating a pagan's consciousness very differently: because "it [idol food] is *not* a matter of Christian moral consciousness" (485).

In 10:23-31, Paul explains to the knowledgeable, after making it clear up until this point that they cannot eat any food known to be set apart to idols, that this does not mean that they are responsible to investigate whether food that is not known to be idol food (i.e, available outside of cultic situations) to be idol food, a concession to the practicalities of their lives in this Greco-Roman city. This exception does not pertain if someone informs them that it is idol food they are about to eat (v. 28). Similar rabbinic sensibilities are expressed in the sources listed in the discussion above. Paul's instruction also implies that the market has available for purchase non-idol-related-food; otherwise, everything there would be known to be idol food, and thus by definition proscribed, rendering Paul's point mute.

The concerns Paul expresses on both sides of chapters 8—10, which urge the audience to evaluate their behavior in terms of its impact upon polytheists, correspond to Paul's message in this section, as argued herein, for why Christ-believers cannot eat idol food on behalf of the impaired. But one more ostensible obstacle remains to discuss.

Polytheists as "Brothers/Sisters on Behalf of Whom Christ Died"?

Standing in the way of my proposed identification of the "impaired," as well as my interpretation of other language in 1 Corinthians 8:1—11:1, is the fact that Paul refers to the impaired as ἀδελφός/οί.[64] The translators of the NRSV are certain enough that Paul means by ἀδελφός fellow-believers in Christ that the fact that Paul refers to them as ἀδελφός is masked in the text that English-only readers meet in 8:11: "So by your knowledge those weak *believers* for whom Christ died are destroyed," although literally

[64] Elsewhere, I have argued in other letters for instances where Paul uses this kinship language to refer to non-Christ-believers: in Romans 9:3, for non-Christ-believing Jews as "my brethren [ἀδελφῶν μου]"; throughout Romans 14 with reference to the ἀσθένεια, whom I understand to be non-Christ-believing Jews; and in Galatians 2:4, for the "pseudo-brothers [ψευδαδέλφους]" in Jerusalem, whom I understand to be fellow Judeans, but not Christ-believers; see Nanos, *Mystery of Romans,* 110-13; Idem, "Intruding 'Spies' and 'Pseudo-brethren': The Jewish Intra-Group Politics of Paul's Jerusalem Meeting (Gal 2:1-10)," in *Paul and His Opponents* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; Pauline Studies 2; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 65-68. Objections to my argument in the case of Romans have been made by Robert A. Gagnon, "Why the 'Weak' at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews," *CBQ* 62 (2000): 64-82, which I have answered in Mark D. Nanos, "A Rejoinder to Robert A. J. Gagnon's 'Why the "Weak" at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews,'" *Unpublished Paper* available at http://www.marknanos.com/Gagnon-rejoinder-6-20-03.pdf (2000): 1-37.

Paul writes: "for by what you know you are causing the impaired one to destroy him/herself, the brother/sister [ἀδελφὸς] on behalf of whom Christ died."[65]

Throughout 1 Corinthians Paul regularly refers to Christ-believers in the kinship terminology of brotherhood (ἀδελφός/οί), referring to people who are not related to each other by other familial ties, such as by birth or legal adoption. Before chapter 8 he refers to "our brother" Sosthenes (1:1), addresses and exhorts them as "brothers/sisters" (1:10, 11, 26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24, 29), and uses this language to differentiate between Christ-believers and others (5:11; 6:5-8; 7:12-15). This kinship language continues to be used in similar ways after chapter 8 as well: for specific Christ-believing fellow-workers: 16:11-12; (general: 16:20); in general address to the recipients of the letter: 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6, 20, 26, 39; 15:1, 31, 50, 58; 16:15; and to differentiate Christ-believers from others: 9:5 (note lit.: "*sister*-wife [ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα]," as well as "*brothers* of the Lord and Cephas"); 15:6.

Such usage of fictive kinship language is common in other Pauline as well as other NT texts,[66] just as it is common in the Tanakh[67] and other Second Temple literature,[68] and Greek and Roman literature too.[69] At the same time, many of these

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[65] Emphasis added; note that the KJV and NASV as well as RSV do not similarly substitute "believer" for "brother." Reidar Aasgaard, *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!: Christian Siblingship in Paul* (Early Christianity in Context: JSNTSupS 265; London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), in an extensive and useful study, does not even express awareness that this question could arise for this passage. He begins a discussion of sibling language in Paul's letters with the subheading, "Christian Siblingship in Paul," and early in the introduction has already concluded that Paul uses ἀδελφοί only for fellow-Christians, except in Rom 9:3, where it is specifically "used in a traditional way, of compatriots"; "it occurs here in a metaphorical-ethnic sense, not in a metaphorical-Christian" (4 n. 5).

[66] To note just Paul, for example, it is applied to fellow non-Christ-believing Jews by Christ-believing Jews: by Paul in Rom 9:3; and in speeches attributed to Jews in Acts 2:29; 3:17; 7:2; 13:15, 26, 38; 22:1; 23:1; 28:17.

[67] Exod 2:11; 32:27; Lev 19:17; Deut 3:18; 15:2-3, 11-12; 23:19; 24:7; Judges 20:13; 21:6; 2 Chron 19:10; Neh 5:1; Job 30:29; Ps 22:22; Prov 18:24; Isa 66:20; Jer 22:18; Zech 11:14. von Soden, *TDNT* 1.144-46, observes categorically: "There can be no doubt, however, that ἀδελφός is one of the religious titles of the people of Israel taken over by the Christian community" (145).

[68] Tobit 1:3, 10, 16; 5:10-14; 7:1-12; 10:6; 14:4; Judith 7:30; 8:14; 1 Macc. 5:16; 2 Macc 1:1; 1 Esdras 1:5-9; 4:61; 8:77. For the Qumran group, see 1 QS 1.9; 2.24-25; 5:25; 6.10, 22; CD 6.20; 7.1; 1 QSa 1.18. Philo, *That the Worse* 140, universalizes the lesson to be learned from Cain's denial of responsibility to his brother; *On the Virtues* 82: "Therefore Moses forbids a man to lend on usury to his brother, meaning by the term brother

sources use familial language to reach across group boundaries in ways not unlike it is being proposed that Paul should be read in this case.[70]

The concept of a household or family was broader than generally conceptualized today, more extended and fluid. It could include a broad array of family members, slaves, former slaves who are now freepersons as well as their families, and other employees.[71] There were also household-based associations,[72] and one should not discount the dynamics associated with patron-client relationships. The Hippocratic oath bound the medical student not only to his teacher as a son, but to the teacher's sons.[73] Fictive kinship labels were common not only in synagogue groups, but also among polytheist friends, political allies, fellow soldiers, members of religious groups, trade guilds, and voluntary associations, which are attested in surviving epigraphs and letters.[74] Members of the Great Mother cult regarded themselves to be family, and called each other mother and father as well as sister and brother, as did also participants in the Mithras cult, including reference to "holy brother" and "holy father," and fictive sibling language is attested for other cults.[75]

Fictive kinship is expressed in a more general sense within virtually any group, and in many overlapping, even disparate ways, including across different group boundaries. It is a constructed and thus dynamic concept based on the perception of

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not only him who is born of the same parents as one's self, but every one who is a fellow citizen or a fellow countryman"; *Q and A on Gen.* 1.65-77, universalizes from Cain's murder of Abel, his brother; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.122, to describe the brotherhood among the Essenes. See also *m.Sota 7.8.*

[69] Plato, *Menex*. 238e-239a, for compatriots; Xenophon, *An.* VII.2.25, for friends; Plotinus, *Enn.* II.9.18, for all things in the world; in many papyri and inscriptions for members of religious societies; von Soden, *TDNT* 1.146; Aasgaard, *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!,* 107-12.

[70] E.g., 1 Macc. 11:30; 12:10, 17, to refer to the bond between the Judeans and the Spartans; Philo, *Q and A on Gen.* 2.60, which universalizes brotherhood around "all we men are akin to one another, and are brothers, being connected with one another according to the relation of the highest kind of kindred; for we have received a lot, as being the children of one and the same mother, rational nature."

[71] See Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 30-33; Aasgaard, *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!,* 34-60.

[72] Harland, *Associations,* 30-33.

[73] *The Oath*, lines 5 to 15; cf. Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 40.

[74] Harland, *Associations,* 30-33, for examples; Aasgaard, *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!,* 107-12.

[75] Aasgaard, *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!,* 109-11.

shared history and characteristics that can either be understood to be inherent to a group of people, such as blood or seed or land (i.e., essentialist), or defined by a group around values which they perceive themselves to share in common and in contrast to other groups and their values (i.e., processual).[76] These two seemingly different concepts are actually both at work at the same time, for the claim to an inherent bond is itself the construction of identity, and both what is claimed and how it is emphasized can change. Kinship can also be used to signify non-human relationships.[77] Late in the first or early in the second century, Ignatius calls upon his addressees to pray for outsiders to the church, and to conduct themselves as "brothers/sisters [ἀδελφοί]" to them, which is expressed not by behaving like them, but by imitating how Christ lived humbly toward his neighbor, including choosing to be wronged rather than to wrong them (*Eph.* 10).[78] Although Chrysostom understood the impaired in 1 Corinthians 8—10 to be Christ-believers, he made an argument relevant to the point I am trying to make, that on socio-economic grounds the Christian in his own audience ought to regard as *brother* the fellow-laborer more than the elite or wealthy.[79]

The concept of a brotherhood of humankind is not a Christian innovation, or only attested earlier among Israelites. It was at work in Alexander the Great's concept of uniting the world under his rule,[80] and it was an important concept among

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[76] Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 81-95; Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs,* 20-22, 118-20, and passim, for many implications for the study of Paul.

[77] Cf. Philo, *Allegorical Int.* 1.8,"And appetite is the brother of imagination"; *That the Worse* 40; 66; *On the Posterity of Cain* 100; *On Drunkenness* 70-71; *On Flight* 90-91; *On Dreams* 109; *On the Contemplative Life* 7; *Q and A on Gen.* 2.12; *Q and A on Gen.* 2.60; *Q and A on Gen.* 3.43, 56.

[78] Ignatius also writes of looking not only to one's own concerns, but to those of "one's neighbors [τοὺς πέλας]," which is juxtaposed with discussing how true love is not marked only by the desire "that oneself be saved [σώζεσθαι], but all the brothers [τοὺς ἀδελφούς] as well" (*Mart. Pol.* 1.2; M. Holmes transl.).

[79] Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First Series. Vol. XII. Chrysostom: Corinthians,* 117 [Homily XX].

[80] In an effort to explain the universalistic aspirations and policies of Alexander, the first-century c.e. Roman historian Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander* 10.3.11-14, portrays Alexander addressing his new Persian troops to understand themselves in his eyes to be "soldiers of our blood, not brought in from outside." Plutarch portrays Alexander envisioning a philosophical commonwealth united around the virtuous as kin, and the wicked as foreigners (*On the Fortune of Alexander* 329B-D).

philosophical groups, especially articulated by the Stoics and Cynics.[81] Although slightly later than Paul, Epictetus appealed to the brotherhood of humankind through the shared nature of all humans, including slaves, because all were offspring of Zeus, thus citizens of the universe and sons of god (*Diatr.* 1.9.4-6; 1.13.4). Elsewhere he describes the Cynics to revile all whom they meet because they regard them to be parents, children, brothers, and themselves to be servants of Zeus, father to all humans (*Diatr.* 3.22.81-82). Marcus Aurelius upheld that all humans were kin, including the sinner, who should cooperate with one another like various parts of one body, since all had within themselves an element of the divine (2.1; 7.22; 9.22-23).

But did Paul herein employ fictive kinship language for polytheist idolaters, or can he even be imagined to conceptualize them in such affectionate terms? Is that not just how he urges his audience to think and behave, and how he lives his whole life, on behalf of "the some" he can "gain" and "save"?[82] Are not the concerns he expresses in 10:24 made in the most general terms: "Let no one seek his own [interest], but that of the other [τοῦ ἑτέρου]"? Does Paul not wrap up his overall case against eating idol food in just these terms: in 11:1, to imitate his example of imitating Christ, and in 10:32-33, with the call to "become inoffensive to Jews and to Greeks and to the ekklesia of God," just as he does himself, in order to "save" "the many"?[83]

Paul's language in 5:9-12, especially verse 11, opens a window into his perspective on believers in Christ versus non-believers that is important to this discussion. Paul explains that when he instructed them in an earlier letter not "to be associated with immoral people [συναναμίγνυσθαι πόρνοις]" (v. 9), he did not mean all of the immoral people "of this world," such as "the greedy," "thieves," and "*idolaters* [εἰδωλολάτραις]," because that would necessitate departing from the world to be

[81] Aasgaard, *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!,* 108-9.

[82] 1 Cor 9:19-23; Chrysostom observes that Paul claims "all things whatsoever I do, I do for the salvation of my neighbor" (Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First Series. Vol. XII. Chrysostom: Corinthians,* 132 [Homily XXIII]).

[83] Chrysostom observes the logical connection here: "Not only, however, should the brethren receive no hurt from us, but to the utmost of our power not even those that are without….Since even Gentiles are hurt, when they see us reverting to such things: for they know not our mind nor that our soul hath come to be above all pollution of sense. And the Jews too, and the weaker brethren, will suffer the same" (Ibid., 146 [Homily XXV]).

accomplished (v. 10). He meant that they should not associate with someone "calling themselves brother or sister [ἀδελφὸς ὀνομαζόμενος],"[84] "if" he or she "is an immoral person, a greedy person, *an* <u>*idolater*</u>**,** a swindler, a drunkard, or a thief"; indeed, they are not to even eat with anyone [causing themselves to be called brother or sister] of that sort (v. 11). He continues in vv. 12-13, by way of ironic questions, to make the point that it is not his place to judge those "outside," which it is God's place to do, but it is however the audience's place to judge those "inside." He concludes with the imperative to remove from their midst the immoral man (v. 13), who was the topic of the preceding verses (5:1-8).

This usage of fictive kinship language distinguishes Christ-believers from others. But notice that there is a formality introduced in Paul's language to identify specifically those who choose "*to call themselves*" brother or sister, and he also uses inside/outside terminology to accentuate the point. It is relevant to observe that Paul's instruction does not suggest the kind of respect and tolerance toward a fellow-Christ-believer that the usual interpretations for the impaired in chapter 8 require. For the impaired ones continue to be idolaters if they eat food offered to idols, *since they continue* to believe that idols represent real gods, that food offered to them is sacred, which Paul refers to as their habit "*until now*." On the prevailing interpretations, they would be Christ-believers, but nevertheless *idolaters*.[85] That anomaly could arise, as discussed in point four above, for one seeking to add Christ-faith to their pantheon, based upon witnessing Christ-believers eating idol food, coupled with a proclamation of a gospel quite different than the one Paul proclaims, which involves turning away from idols as fundamental. It is to ensure that just such a case does not arise that he undertakes several arguments in this letter. While in theory it could have already occurred—the implications of his instructions in chapter 5 seem to preclude it to be the case addressed in chapters 8—10.

In view of Paul's instruction in chapter 5, if they have eaten with a bothered sensibility about doing so, or even refrained because they sensed that food offered to idols remained sacred to the god it represented, as usually described, then this should

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[84] Middle voice, accentuating the action of the one who chooses this kinship label.

[85] Hans Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I/II* (HNT 9; 5th ed.; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1969), 43, tellingly writes of an "Halbchristen."

suggest that *instead of being accommodated* (the knowledgeable might say, "pandered too"), Paul would call for them to be properly instructed *to change* their ways, *or else be removed* from the assembly. Yet Paul does not call for the "impaired ones" to be instructed to change or be thrown out of the assembly in chapters 8—10. He makes it clear that those who are "called brothers and sisters" *cannot* practice idolatry, whereas those who are idolaters but do not believe in Christ are to be treated under a different, more tolerant standard, such as that articulated in the text under consideration: they are to adjust to the sensibilities of the impaired. Paradoxically, that is the kind of accommodation one might expect to be promoted toward a natural-born brother or sister, or a spouse (cf. 7:10-16!), but it is quite different from the judgment Paul commands toward those identified to be Christ-believing brothers and sisters.

The accommodation Paul expresses in chapter 8 toward the impaired corresponds to the position he champions in chapter 5 toward polytheists, not toward fellow Christ-believers. Why does Paul not also instruct the impaired, if Christ-believers, to undertake the ideas and behavior that he otherwise instructs the Corinthians to express, in this case, to give up idolatry? Because they are not Christ-believers, they are not "named" ἀδελφοί in terms of shared faith in Christ. They are not members of "the community of God." At the same time, why does he not address the knowledgeable as if they are Christ-believing ἀδελφοί who would be guilty of idolatry if they ate idol food knowingly? Because the knowledgeable do not eat idol food. Although they have apparently enquired about the possibility, which likely arose for them on theoretical, logical grounds, because idols are now regarded by them to be neutral. And because they live within in an idolatrous culture, this issue arises for them on practical grounds too. How else are they to succeed in the world?

Conclusion

Paul's perspective reveals a sense of fictive kinship with all humankind—"on behalf of whom Christ died." Idolaters who do not yet profess faith in Christ are to be regarded as brothers and sisters too, fellow-members of the family of humans God created and seeks to restore in Christ. That is a dimension of their identity about which the knowledgeable needed to be set straight, in view of their resistance to his earlier

instruction proscribing idolatry for all Christ-believers.[86] They have apparently failed to properly calculate the destruction such "know-it-all" behavior will bring both upon themselves, and upon their polytheist neighbors, whom they are instead to learn (to know how) to love as they do themselves.

The impaired are to be treated differently than fellow Christ-believers, those "being named" brother and sister. Rather than being judged, polytheists are to be gained by behavior consistent with the confession of Christ-faith. That involves not eating any food know to be set apart to idols. It involves not insulting the "mistaken" beliefs of the impaired, but learning how to develop speech and behavior calculated to implicitly undermine them. The knowledgeable are to relate to the impaired on terms that will communicate the "knowledge" of Christ to them, which means they must not live in a way that can be mistaken to deny their confession of the One.

Paul outlines his own strategy for accomplishing this on behalf of those whom he seeks "to save," by way of example, in the midst of his instructions in these chapters, in 9:19-23. Paul sketches how he relates to various kinds of people according to their own premises in order to proclaim the gospel to each in terms to which they can relate. He does not behave like them, for example, he does not eat like them, but remains Torah-observant when he eats. But he adjusts his rhetorical behavior and posture to deliver the gospel to different people in different ways. For example, to the Jew he argues like a Jew, from Torah, to the lawless he argues like a lawless person would, apart from appeal to law, and to the impaired he argues like the impaired would argue. That is just how Luke portrays him to proceed in the Areopagos speech of Acts 17:16-31, where Paul discloses the Unknown God to which they have built a statue (idol) to be the Creator God (v. 23), that is, he begins his argument from within their own premises. But in the course of his argument he eventually reveals his own very different conviction about the appropriateness of building this or any image to represent the divine (v. 29), and challenges them to turn away from idols to the God who has raised Jesus Christ

[86] Furnish, *Corinthians,* 55, similarly observes: "what drives and shapes his mission to 'outsiders' is the conviction that no one stands beyond the circle of God's saving purpose, and that, in this sense, even unbelievers are 'insiders' to God's grace (see 9.19-23)."

from among the dead (vv. 30-31; cf. v. 18). Notably, Luke understands Paul to appeal to the brotherhood of all humankind based upon common origin in one man (vv. 26-31).[87]

In Romans, Paul, the Christ-believing Jew will teach non-Jews how to live in order to gain their Jewish brothers and sisters, those for whom Christ came first of all;[88] in 1 Corinthians we witness Paul teaching non-Jews how to gain their Greek (and Roman) polytheist brothers and sisters. Albeit informed by Paul's own Christ-faith based Jewish group perspective, both instructions appeal to the development of empathy across communal lines where sibling rivalry, or worse, so often prevails.

[87] Cf. Acts 2:5; 10:35; Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:45-49; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (3rd revised and enlarged ed.; Grand Rapids and Leicester, GB: Eerdmans and Apollos, 1990), 382-83.

[88] Nanos, *Mystery of Romans.*