SLAVERY

Slavery is holding a person in servitude by violence, natal alienation and personal dishonor as the chattel of another. Slavery is neither simply the loss of freedom, nor the same as coerced labor nor equatable with loss of civil rights. Classical slavery means slavery in at least two different contexts: Greece (specifically fifth- and fourth-century b.c. Athens) and Rome (mainly of the middle republic to the end of the Principate, 200 b.c. to a.d. 235).

1. Problems of Definition and Comparison
2. The Usefulness and Limits of the Primary Sources
3. The Sources, Number and Position of Slaves
4. Manumission

1. Problems of Definition and Comparison.

Currently no general theory allows a single definition of slavery for all cultures and times. Earlier studies took the objectivity of slavery for granted as a categorical and transcultural concept. Recent decades have seen both important advances and fierce scholarly debate, making this more controversial a subject than any other in the study of ancient literature and society.

One definition affirms Roman legal distinctions as crucial to understanding slavery as one form of dependent labor, but not the only form (Finley). Unlike peasants, helots, clients, peons or serfs, slaves are chattel that can be bought and sold. Roman jurists held that slavery was an institution of the law of nations by which, contrary to nature, a person is subjected to the power (*dominium*) of another. Slavery is remarkably the only case in the extant corpus of Roman law in which the law of nations and the law of nature are in conflict. Although Roman law, in contrast to Aristotle, considered slavery to be against nature, this did not mean that it was considered morally wrong; the jurists clearly presumed slavery to be legitimate, proper and morally right.

An alternative definition avoids this law-oriented approach and describes slavery as a dynamic process of alienation and dishonor termed *social death* (Patterson). Social death means denying a person all dignity (as understood in that particular culture) and ties of birth in both ascending or descending generations (*see* Honor and Shame). Although they are not biologically dead, slaves in effect are socially dead to the free population.

Slavery in the Greek world of classical Athens differed markedly from slavery in Roman times. For example, Athenian freedmen were denied citizenship and thus, unlike their Roman counterparts, were excluded from political life, ineligible for all magistracies, forbidden to own land and excluded from acquiring mortgage loans; their children remained noncitzens. The term “Greco-Roman slavery” thus proves problematic. Evidence from the Greek period cannot be used as background for the Roman period of the NT authors. Additionally, ancient slavery, unlike modern, was not based on race. Racism and slavery do not necessarily go together, and neither of the two phenomena serves as the exclusive explanation for the other’s existence. Comparative material from slavery in the antebellum United States South must be used with control.

2. The Usefulness and Limits of the Primary Sources.

The first task in any historical inquiry is to determine the nature of the available primary source material, and for slavery the problem is formidable. Virtually all evidence comes from the slaveholders, not the slaves themselves. Considering the ubiquity and significance of slaves in ancient daily life, there is surprisingly little discussion of them by ancient authors. Because ancient historiography concerned itself with politics, wars and great personalities, such narratives frustrate efforts to reconstruct the lives of slaves. Much of the historical material on slaves is anecdotal and mentioned only in passing, since ancient authors considered writing about the lives of individual slaves beneath the dignity of a historian. One of the longest surviving passages by a Latin historian describing an episode concerning slaves is only two pages in length; and Tacitus includes it in his narrative only to make a rhetorical point about an attempt by the populace to influence polity (Tacitus *Ann.* 14.42–5).

Some archaeological evidence provides limited insight into the physical conditions of slave life. For example, the structural remains of excavated Roman houses reveal that the Romans did not ordinarily build separate, freestanding slave quarters; slaves typically lived in rooms within the master’s walls. Other archaeological evidence includes unearthed objects relating to slavery, such as the Roman whip (*flagellum*) whose thongs had pieces of metal attached to them in order to make deep wounds into the flesh. The evidence proves the torture of ancient slaves to have been far more severe than the punishments sanctioned by the law in the slave society of Brazil, the most brutal of the modern world.

Moral exhortation literature offers additional evidence, but it has been misused in NT scholarship. One of the most sustained discussions of slavery by an ancient moralist is Seneca’s *Epistle* 47, in which he delineates the elements of the model master-slave relationship according to Stoicism. Seneca condemns “harsh” punishment of slaves as injurious to the master’s character but sees no problem with more moderate, regular disciplining of one’s slaves. Such calls to kindness toward slaves were not criticisms of the institution but of its abuse by arrogant masters not abiding by Stoic ideals. These statements calling for humane treatment of slaves—analogous to modern calls against cruelty toward animals—were articulated to strengthen the institution, not to abolish it. Despite claims by some NT scholars, ancient slavery was not more humane than modern slavery (*see DPL* and *DLNTD*, Slave, Slavery).

NT New Testament

DPL Dictionary of Paul and His Letters
DLNTD Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments

3. The Sources, Number and Position of Slaves.

The main sources of ancient slaves were warfare, piracy, brigandage, the international slave trade, kidnapping, infant exposure, natural reproduction of the existing slave population and the punishment of criminals to the mines or gladiatorial combat. Above all else, warfare remained throughout classical antiquity an important supplier of slaves. In his campaigns in Gaul between 58 and 51 b.c. alone, Julius Caesar is reported to have shipped back to Italy nearly one million Gallic prisoners of war. Slaves by the tens of thousands poured into the markets of Sicily and peninsular Italy as early as the First Punic War (264–241 b.c.), a direct result of the annual pattern of warfare and military expansion of Rome's borders during the late republic. Despite the inadequacy of evidence, some scholars estimate that in urban areas of Roman imperial society slaves made up one-third of the population, but others place the figure lower, within the range of 16.6 to 20 percent. We do not know for sure.

In contrast to previous scholarship, Roman historians now dispute the theory that natural reproduction, in the NT era, replaced warfare as the primary source of Rome's slaves. Although continuous expansion ceased by the time of the empire, wars and other conflicts did not. This finding challenges an idea popular among some NT scholars that under the empire slaves were treated kindly because they were raised in homes and not taken by violence in battle. Slave populations, however, rarely reproduce enough to replace themselves. Furthermore, while the slave population of the antebellum South did reproduce itself after the official closure of the Atlantic slave trade in 1809 (government census documents indicate that by 1860 slaves made up 33 percent of the Southern population), no American historian claims that having homegrown slaves caused masters to treat them kindly.

Unlike their counterparts in modern slave societies of the New World, Roman slaves were not segregated from freeborns in work or types of job performed, with the notable exception of mining operations. A few manumitted slaves enjoyed social mobility. The Latin poet Horace, for example, was the son of a freedman. Some held positions of considerable power not only over fellow slaves but also over freeborns. Imperial slaves and freedmen (belonging to the Roman emperor) were considered the most powerful of all. They were the *familia Caesaris,* the "emperor's household" (note Phil 4:22) and were assigned administrative positions. The apostle Paul met one of them, Felix, the imperial freedman of the emperor Claudius, who served as Roman procurator of Judea (Acts 24:22–27; *see* Roman Administration; Roman Governors of Palestine).

In modern slavery, slave illiteracy was often required by law; in ancient slavery, an educated slave was prized. In cities throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, slaves were trained and served as physicians, architects, craftspeople, shopkeepers, cooks, barbers, artists, thespians, magicians, prophets (e.g., Acts 16:16–24), teachers, professional poets and philosophers. Some slaves could accumulate considerable wealth from their occupations.

However, most slaves were of quite modest means and worked as ordinary laborers or specialized domestics. Larger Roman households even had slaves whose sole job was to fold fancy dinner napkins. Because slaves could be found in all economic levels of society, they had no cohesion as a group and lacked anything akin to class consciousness. This analysis challenges Marxist interpretations that lump slaves into a single economic class and identify a so-called slave mode of production.

4. Manumission.

Manumission was an act that liberated a slave; the former slave was then termed a freedman or freedwoman. It was a legal procedure, not an attempt to effect political change, and so differs dramatically from emancipation, synonymous with the abolition of slavery.

It is often stated that manumission was regular in the Roman world and that this practice is unusual in the world history of slavery. Compared with classical Greece and the antebellum South this claim is true but only with strong qualification. A common misunderstanding among some NT scholars is that manumission was automatic after six years of servitude or when the slave turned thirty years of age. The only literary evidence for this claim is Cicero (*Eighth Philippic* 32), who writes that after six years a slave could expect to be freed. But Cicero's report is more rhetoric than social description. He does not mention six years because it is a statistical minimum or average; these are the six years from Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon in January 49 to February 43, during which the Roman state was politically enslaved. Any Roman senator would understand and accept Cicero's argument even if it would never occur to him to manumit his own slaves after six years. Cicero himself did not manumit his own slave Tiro until 53 b.c., Tiro's fiftieth birthday.

Manumission in the Roman context, however, should not be exaggerated. The vast majority of slaves and especially those in agriculture were never freed. Romans saw manumission as the regular reward for their deserving urban slaves. It suited the master's interests and reinforced the institution and ideology of slavery. It is against this background that one must interpret Paul's exhortation to slaves in 1 Corinthians 7:21. By saying that believing slaves at Corinth may take opportunities for freedom, Paul makes room in this theology for the institutionalized exercise of urban manumission.

See also Family and Household; Roman Social Classes; Social Values and Structures.

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SOCIAL BANDITS. *See* Revolutionary Movements, Jewish.

SOCIAL CLASSES, ROMAN. *See* Roman Social Classes.

SOCIAL MOBILITY. *See* Roman Social Classes.

SOCIAL VALUES AND STRUCTURES

The phenomenon we think of as early Christianity was shaped by and in turn helped to shape the values and structures of the societies and cultures in which it took root and grew. This article aims to identify and explain a representative selection of values and structures, awareness of which makes possible a clearer understanding of what it was like to be a Christian in the first century. Since the range of possible examples is vast and the study of what has become known as the social world of early Christianity has grown apace in the past few decades (Hanson; Elliott 1995; Malina 1996), the selection here will focus on values and structures pertinent especially to the interpretation of 1 Corinthians. More than any other NT text, this letter reveals the extraordinarily complex mixture of Greek, Roman, Jewish and Christian elements that helped constitute early Christian existence.

1. Values
2. Structures

1. Values.

1.1. Holiness. One of the fundamental values lying behind what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians is the idea of holiness as basic to the formation of a godly community. This idea was available to him from his biblical and Jewish moral tradition (cf. Ex 19:5–6; Deut 7:6–11) and was given distinctive interpretation in contemporary groups like the Pharisees (to whom Paul had belonged) and the Qumran covenanters. One well-known text from Qumran, for example, expresses clearly the priestly idea of holiness practiced by the sect and shared in certain respects by Paul:

> When these are in Israel, the Council of the Community shall be established in truth. It shall be an Everlasting Plantation, a House of Holiness for Israel, an Assembly of Supreme Holiness for Aaron. They shall be witnesses to the truth at the Judgement, and shall be the elect of Goodwill who shall atone for the Land and pay to the wicked their reward. It shall be that tried wall, that *precious cornerstone,* whose foundations shall neither rock nor sway in their place (Isa.xxviii, 16). It shall be a Most Holy Dwelling for Aaron, with everlasting knowledge of the Covenant of justice, and shall offer up sweet fragrance. It shall be a House of Perfection and Truth in Israel that they may establish a Covenant according to thy everlasting precepts. And they shall be an agreeable offering, atoning for the Land and determining the judgement of wickedness, and there shall be no more iniquity. (*Rule of the Community* 8:4–10; translation in Vermes, *DSSE,* 85)

In an effort to give the Corinthian Christians a stronger sense of their identity as a distinct people, members of God's new eschatological creation, Paul also draws heavily on holiness language: "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified [*hēgiasmenois*] in Christ Jesus, called to be saints [*hagiois*]" (1 Cor 1:2 RSV). This is the language of holiness understood as separation and obedience, but whereas in the Bible it refers primarily to the separation of Israel from "the nations" (the Gentiles), and in the *Rule of the Community* to the separation of the righteous from the unrighteous within Israel as well as beyond it, in Paul it refers to the election and identity of a new people made up of those previously separated, Jews and Gentiles (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Gal 3:27–8; Eph 2:11–22). This ideal of holiness has a dual focus. It means that internal relations are to be governed by disciplined obedience to the will of God as revealed in Scripture and taught by the apostle. With regard to "those outside"—and without going "out of the world" (1 Cor 5:10) as the

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KTAH Key Themes in Ancient History
ed. edition; editor(s), edited by
SASI Slavery and Abolition Special Issue
HUT Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
ZNW Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
BJS Brown Judaic Studies
rev. revised (edition)
MAPS *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society*
n.s. new series

cf. *confer*, compare
DSSE The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, G. Vermes

Qumran covenanters had done—it also means that believers are to live in ways that bear witness to the rule of God over all things.

This ethic of holiness helps to explain the way Paul's teaching proceeds at certain points by establishing boundaries that separate the holy from the unholy. The basic presupposition is the holiness of the temple (as at Qumran), where temple is extended metaphorically to stand for the community of God's people: "Do you not know that you are God's temple [*naos*] and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy [*hagios*], and that temple you are" (1 Cor 3:16–17 RSV). Thus, because immorality (*porneia*) in the life of the church has a contagious, polluting effect, the polluting agent has to be expelled. Indeed, his brothers and sisters in Christ are prohibited even from eating with him (1 Cor 5:1–12). The same ethic also explains Paul's opposition to church members' recourse to the civil courts to settle internal disputes (1 Cor 6:1–11). For Paul it is a contradiction in terms, a mixture of what should not be mixed. How can "the saints" (*hoi hagioi*)—those who will judge not only "the world" but also angels (1 Cor 6:2–3) and who have been "washed," "sanctified" and "justified" (1 Cor 6:11)—take their mundane disagreements before "the unrighteous," those who are not sanctified and who will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Then there is Paul's teaching on mixed marriages. Contrary to what we might expect and to what may have been the practice of some in the church, the believing partner should not separate from the unbeliever: "For the unbelieving husband is consecrated [*hēgiastai*] through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated [*hēgiastai*] through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean [*akatharta*], but as it is they are holy [*hagia*]" (1 Cor 7:14 RSV). Striking here is the way one kind of holiness rule is transcended by another on the implied grounds that the contagious power of holiness can be more powerful than the contagious power of unholiness. The believing spouse sanctifies both the unbelieving spouse and their children.

1.2. Power. The nature of the conflict reflected in 1 Corinthians will remain opaque to us without an understanding also of the ordering, display and practice of power in Judaism and the Greco-Roman world. That power (*dynamis*) is an issue is clear: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God . . . to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:18, 24 RSV). Against what interpretations of power and their attendant practices is Paul testifying here and elsewhere in this letter? This is a vital issue that has attracted significant scholarly attention (Holmberg; Meeks, 111–39; Marshall).

One interpretation of power that is relevant has to do with the pervasive way in which people in Greco-Roman society were valued according to certain socially recognized criteria of worth. These criteria included birth, social class, ethnic origins, gender, education, wealth, rank, physical or intellectual prowess, occupation, ritual status, rhetorical prowess, patronage and personal achievements on behalf of the common good (Garnsey and Saller, 107–25). In a hierarchical society in which formal power was distributed unevenly and restricted primarily to the aristocracy, there was a high degree of sensitivity to the social estimation of one's public worth, prestige or honor, and this sensitivity was replicated at lower levels of society. Paul's own ironic comment assumes precisely this state of affairs: "For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth" (1 Cor 1:26 RSV). His letter shows that this church in the Roman colony of Corinth reflected the social competitiveness and sensitivity to status that permeated Roman society, and it did so in a quite acute and complex way by virtue of the fact that it brought together into a new society people who would normally have been social rivals or even socially segregated from each other.

This helps to explain the strong tendency toward factionalism in Corinth against which Paul has to fight so strenuously (1 Cor 1:10–31). M. M. Mitchell has shown that the dominant concern that unites 1 Corinthians is the threat of disunity in the church due to factionalism and its manifestations. This means, among other things, that what look like theological quarrels may also be quarrels between rivals for power. Thus, for example, the parties whose formation is reported in 1 Corinthians 1:11–16 are likely to have been divided by patronage rivalry at least as much as by doctrine; the wisdom referred to is likely to be about the social prestige associated with rhetorical prowess as much as about metaphysical speculation; the boasting about (what Paul regards as) immorality in the community (1 Cor 5:6) probably has to do with the high social status of the offender at least as much as with practices arising out of incipient Gnosticism of one kind or another; the conflict between the strong and the weak over eating meat probably has as much to do with differences of wealth, status and social mobility as with fears about idolatry and apostasy (1 Cor 8:1–13); and so on (Theissen).

In terms of methodology, what this means more generally is that analysis of the theological debates in 1 Corinthians will be deficient if it fails to take into account likely concomitant sociological factors, especially those to do with power. To put it another way, theology in Corinth is not a set of arcane, disembodied ideas, remote from politics and society. Rather, it is (at least in Pauline terms) reflection on the transformation of human power relations by the inbreaking power of God revealed in the cross of Christ.

1.3. Honor and Shame. Closely related to the interpretation and exercise of power in the social world of early Christianity are the pivotal values of honor and shame (Moxnes). Honor has been defined as "the value of a person in his or her own eyes (that is, one's claim to worth) plus that person's value in the eyes of his or her social group. Honor is a claim to worth along with the social acknowledgement of worth" (Malina 1983, 27). Generally speaking, honor takes two forms. Ascribed honor is social recognition arising from who one is by virtue of factors such as birth, wealth, class and social status. Acquired honor is social recognition on the basis of what one has done, especially one's achievements in the ongoing competition for status and reputation so characteristic of Greco-Roman society. Honor, whether ascribed or achieved, is the greatest social value in antiquity, valued more highly even than life itself. This is because a person's identity and worth arise in a social context. As C. Osiek (27) sums it up: "Without a good reputation life has no meaning."

The correlate of honor is shame (*see* Honor and Shame). This can be understood negatively as loss of honor through a refusal or withholding of social recognition. But it can also be understood positively as a proper sensitivity toward one's own honor and the honor of one's significant others, such as one's spouse, household, friends, patrons and clients. This has a gender dimension as well. In relation to the role and status of women in a patriarchal society, shame is expressed in those patterns of deferential behavior and modesty that protect and enhance the honor of the household and the male household head (*see* Family and Household).

The importance of honor and shame in the social relations of antiquity helps to explain both what Paul says in 1 Corinthians and how he says it. For example, the competitive rivalry between factions in the church may now be understood as a quest for honor between household heads claiming the patronage of various apostolic leaders (1 Cor 1–4), something legitimate in terms of wider societal norms but in Paul's eyes contrary to the gospel of the crucified Christ that laid the foundation for transformed social values by making honorable (as a manifestation of the power of God) what was regarded normally as shameful (1 Cor 1:18–25). To put it another way, in Paul's view, the honor acquired through rivalry and boasting has been rendered shameful by the honor ascribed by God to the crucified Christ and to those apostles and others who boast only "in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:31; cf. 3:1–23).

As a corollary of this, members of the church are to see themselves and to see each other in new ways: as members of the "body of Christ" to each of whom is given "the manifestation of the Spirit" (1 Cor 12:7) and among whom differences of race, class, status and gender matter much less in view of their common identity given to them by the most powerful patron of all. That patron is God at work in Jesus the Lord bringing a new eschatological creation into being through the Spirit. In Paul's view, what is honorable now is not the power of fine speech but the power of preaching the gospel, not self-display through the exercise of spectacular spiritual gifts but the building up of the church through the practice of love, not the flaunting of one's newfound freedom but the paradoxical surrender of freedom for the sake of the weaker brother or sister. All this represents nothing less than a reconfiguration of honor and shame in terms of the understanding of power given by revelation in the gospel of the crucified and risen Christ.

1.4. Male and Female. An important dimension of the distribution of honor and shame has to do with the perception and organization of gender relations. In the Mediterranean world generally, social space was divided up in a number of ways, one of the most important of which was the differentiation of the public domain from the private along the lines provided by the perceived differences between male and female (Barton, 225–34). It is as if the physical bodies of men and women served as a kind of map not only of the moral ordering of the social body but also of its spatial ordering. The male represents public space and what is associated with it: leadership in politics, philosophy, rhetoric, litigation, business, warfare and the arena. The female represents the more circumscribed, private space of the household. This is where women have authority that they are to exercise on behalf of the male household head in ways intended to protect his honor. This gendered ordering of social space is given eloquent expression in the writings of the Hellenized Jew Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Paul:

> Marketplaces and council halls and law courts and gatherings and meetings where a large number of people are assembled and open-air life with full scope for discussion and action—all these are suitable to men both in war and peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life that never strays from the house, within which the middle door is taken by the maidens as their boundary and the outer door by those who have reached full womanhood. Organized communities are of two sorts, the greater, which we call cities, and the smaller, which we call households. Both of these have their governors; the government of the greater is assigned to men under the name of statesmanship [*politeia*], that of the less, known as household management [*oikonomia*], to women. (Philo *Spec. Leg.* 3.169–70)

In reality, the situation changed over time and was more varied from one region to another than Philo's conservative and stereotypical account suggests. There is plenty of literary and epigraphic evidence to show that women sought upward social mobility through marriage, were active in commerce and manufacture, owned their own estates, served as patrons of local religious cults and voluntary associations, participated in syncretistic religious cults that spread from Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean and even engaged in the pursuit of philosophy (Lefkowitz and Fant; Kraemer). Nevertheless, the fact remains that the overall weight of law, custom and practice was toward distinguishing public space as predominantly male from private (domestic) space as predominantly female, with a distribution of power in a vertical direction with the male household head on top.

Against this background, a number of passages in 1 Corinthians can be seen in a new light. It is not surprising that Paul should give instruction on matters to do with male-female sexual relations (1 Cor 5–6) and rules governing Christian marriage (1 Cor 7). Given the connection in antiquity between the right ordering of the city-state (*polis*) and the right ordering of the household (*oikos*), and given Paul's determination to establish the community of Christians at Corinth as a kind of alternative *polis,* it was essential that an orderly and Christian pattern of social relations be laid down. If disorderly sexual and marital relations were a symptom of the factionalism of the church, as seems to have been the case, then the imposition of sexual discipline and marriage rules was an obvious way to build up the unity of the church.

Second, noticeable in the marriage rules is the way Paul addresses in reciprocal fashion both men and women, as in 1 Corinthians 7:3–4: "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife

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Spec. Leg. De Specialibus Legibus

does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does" (RSV; see also 1 Cor 7:10, 12–14, 16, 32–34). Given the overwhelmingly hierarchical ordering of male-female relations in the society of the time, this reciprocity is striking. As O. L. Yar-brough (116) puts it: "Compared with Jewish paraenesis and with most paraenetic traditions in the Greco-Roman world, Paul's careful balancing of advice to men and women is unusual." It seems legitimate to infer that not only is Paul concerned to establish a sustainable basis for order and unity in the church's life, but also that he does so in a way that incorporates distinctively Christian values, one of which is the full recognition of women alongside men as heirs of the kingdom of God.

2. Structures.

2.1. Households. In the discussion of gender (see 1.4 above), a beginning was made on a consideration of the household (Lat *familia;* Gk *oikos/ oikia*). The definition of household is complex (Garnsey and Saller, 126–47). It consisted of not only husband, wife and children but also slaves and freedmen and others living in the house (*see* Family and Household). An impressive statement about the important place of the household in the larger scheme of social relations comes in Cicero's *On Duties* 1.53–54:

> There are several levels of human society. Starting from that which is universal, the next is that of a common race, nation or language (which is what most of all holds men together). Further down comes membership of the same city; for citizens have many things in common—their town square, temples, covered walkways, roads, laws and constitution, law-courts and elections, customs and associations and the dealings and agreements that bind many people to many others. An even closer bond is that between relations: for it sets them apart from that limitless society of the human race into one that is narrow and closely-defined. Since it is a natural feature of all living beings that they have the desire to propagate, the first association is that of marriage itself; the next is that with one's children; then the household unit within which everything is shared; that is the element from which a city is made, so to speak the seedbed of the state. (Gardner and Wiedemann, 2)

The institution of the household was probably the most significant social influence on the pattern of the early Christian groups (Malherbe, 60–91; Stowers; Banks). That the churches (*ekklēsiai*) met in private houses is typified by the formulaic greeting in 1 Corinthians 16:19: "Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord" (RSV; cf. Rom 16:5; Philem 2; Col 4:15). We also know that homes as well as synagogues were important locations for preaching activity (Acts 20:20) and that conversion to Christianity often involved whole households, following the lead of the household head (Acts 16:15, 31–34; 18:8). Paul refers to the intermediary role played by members of Chloe's household (1 Cor 1:11) and, in a revealing aside, admits to having baptized "the household of Stephanas" (1 Cor 1:16; cf. 1Cor 16:15–16). So it is legitimate to infer that "the church in the house of . . ." was the basic cell of the Christian movement, the nucleus of which was a single, extended household (Meeks, 75).

The implications of this for understanding 1Corinthians are wide-ranging. First, given that "the whole church" (1 Cor 14:23) was made up of a number of separate house churches, it is likely that the rivalry and division threatening the church was a rivalry between relatively wealthy household heads who hosted churches in their houses. Second, the evident conflict and confusion over the role and authority of women (cf. 1 Cor 11:2–16; 14:33–36) and slaves (cf. 1 Cor 7:21–23; 12:12–13) may have arisen at least in part because the church in the house was a public gathering in private space and new, Christian values were impinging in unpredictable ways on members' self-understanding and role expectations. Third, the social level of the church as comparable with the social level of its constituent households—neither aristocratic nor a movement of slaves, but a broad mixture of people including a small number of relatively high status and a majority of low status—becomes clearer (cf. 1 Cor 1:26). Fourth, the fact that the meetings of the *ekklēsia* took place in a house gives us an indication of its size and internal dynamics. R. J. Banks estimates as follows: "The entertaining room in a moderately well-to-do household could hold around thirty people comfortably—perhaps half as many again in an emergency" (Banks, 35). A meeting of the "whole church" may have reached forty to forty-five people. The intensity of fellowship in such gatherings must have been strong, as also the potential for disorder: all of which, because of the household setting, was open to the critical or admiring view of outsiders (1 Cor 14:23–25).

2.2. Voluntary Associations. Alongside the household, another social pattern likely to have influenced the house churches (or at least people's perception of them) is that of the Greco-Roman voluntary association (Lat *collegium,* Judge, 40–48; Barton and Horsley; Wilken, 31–47; Kloppenborg and Wilson). Such associations took a variety of forms and were referred to in various ways depending on their purpose, location and constituency. There were trade guilds such as the guild of silversmiths at Ephesus (Acts 19:23–41) or the proposed society (*hetaeria*) of firemen at Nicomedia (Pliny *Ep.* 10.33, 34); funerary societies (*collegia tenuiorum*), which provided conviviality in life and decent burials in death; and cult groups (*thiasoi*, *eranoi*) for the worship of particular deities such as Isis or Bacchus.

For example, an inscription dated a.d. 136 about a burial society in the Italian city of Lanuvium records in detail the bylaws of the society showing how the society was organized and the character of its activities. Part of the bylaws reads as follows:

> It was voted unanimously that whoever desires to enter this society shall pay an initiation fee of 100 *sesterces* and an amphora of good wine, and shall pay monthly dues of 5 *asses.* It was voted further that if anyone has not paid his dues for six consecutive months and the common lot of mankind befalls him, his claim to burial shall not be considered, even if he has provided for it in his will. It was voted further that upon the decease of a paid-up member of our body there will be due

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Gk Greek

Ep. Epistulae

him from the treasury 300 sesterces, from which sum will be deducted a funeral fee of 50 sesterces to be distributed at the pyre [among those attending]; the obsequies, furthermore, will be performed on foot. . . . It was voted further that if any member desires to make any complaint or bring up any business, he is to bring it up at a business meeting, so that we may banquet in peace and good cheer on festive days. It was voted further that any member who moves from one place to another so as to cause a disturbance shall be fined 4 sesterces. Any member, moreover, who speaks abusively of another or causes an uproar shall be fined 12 sesterces. Any member who uses any abusive or insolent language to a *quinquennalis* at a banquet shall be fined 20 sesterces. It was voted further that on the festive days of his term of office each *quinquennalis* is to conduct worship with incense and wine and is to perform his other functions clothed in white, and that on the birthdays of Diana and Antinoüs he is to provide oil for the society in the public bath before they banquet. (Lewis and Reinhold, 274–75)

Against this background, it is fair to say that in at least some respects the Christian groups will have looked familiar to outsiders. Like the Christians, members of this burial society met regularly (monthly rather than, as with the Christians, weekly), ate food and drank wine together, honored one another by elections to office, addressed the problem of causes of disturbance in the meetings and joined together in activities of worship. Such associations, like the house churches in Corinth and elsewhere (cf. Acts 2:41–45), provided a social context for people from primarily the non-élite trades and crafts end of the social scale to participate in a common life larger than the household but smaller than the city-state. The Christians were distinctive, however, in the mixed social composition of their groups, the exclusiveness of their focus on devotion to Christ crucified and risen and the seriousness of their commitment to holiness.

2.3. Law Courts. Why does Paul proscribe civil litigation between Christians in the courts of Corinth (1 Cor 6:1–11)? His concern to maintain the holiness of the church by encouraging the development of a certain autonomy from the procedures and institutions of the world has been mentioned already. But this is not the only factor. First, there were strong precedents for establishing autonomous legal and disciplinary practices. In Judaism, there were courts that operated under the aegis of the synagogue. Paul himself was the object of synagogue disciplinary action on no fewer than five occasions (2 Cor 11:24; cf. Mt 10:17). Likewise, the sectarian community at Qumran had its own court for dealing with disputes and disciplinary procedures (Schiffman, 282–87). In the wider Greco-Roman world, there is evidence that clubs and voluntary associations also sought to keep their disciplinary problems in-house. One inscription from the Attic society of the Iobacchi, dated around a.d. 178, includes the following rules:

And if anyone come to blows, he who has been struck shall lodge a written statement with the priest or the vice-priest, and he shall without fail convene a general meeting, and the Iobacchi shall decide the question by vote under the presidency of the priest, and the penalty shall be exclusion for a period to be determined and a fine not exceeding twenty-five silver denarii. And the same punishment shall be imposed also on one who, having been struck, fails to seek redress with the priest or the arch-bacchus but has brought a charge before the public courts. (Todd, 89)

Precedents and analogies such as these make Paul's prohibition on going to the civil court more understandable by showing that it was customary in other groups and associations of the time to settle disputes intramurally.

But more can be said, for it is likely that the way the civil courts operated was for Paul a strong deterrent, given his overwhelming desire not to exacerbate the factionalism in the church. In particular, B. W. Winter has shown that civil lawsuits were used widely as an instrument of enmity between rivals for power among the social élite and that the system as a whole was open to bribery and corruption. In the situation addressed by Paul, it appears that the power struggle between the members of the élite in the church was spilling over into disputes that where being settled in the courts. The effect was disastrous: "It should be remembered that if some had already successfully prosecuted fellow Christians, then the person who won the action would have been awarded financial compensation. This would have only aggravated the problem of strife within the Christian community as the contestants would then appear in church together. If the jury took sides, then would not the members of the church be tempted to do the same? Whether one lost or won, the effect could only be harmful to relationships in the congregation" (Winter, 115).

2.4. Patrons and Clients. Relevant to understanding the operations of the courts, voluntary associations, households and much else in Greco-Roman society is the patron-client relationship (cf. Elliott 1987; Garnsey and Saller, 148–59; *see* Patronage). From the emperor down, patron-client relations bound together in mutual obligation the empire, provinces, city-states and their respective organs and institutions. According to J. K. Chow (30–33), the patron-client relation has the following characteristics: it is an exchange relation in which the patron provides for the client in return for the client's support; it is asymmetrical, as a consequence of the greater access of the patron to scarce resources of a material or spiritual kind; it is usually a particular and informal relation in which resources are channeled to specific groups or individuals rather than bestowed universally; it is usually supralegal based on the subtleties of mutual understanding and custom; although it is a voluntary relation, it is binding and long-range, carrying with it a strong sense of interpersonal obligation; and it is a vertical relation that binds patron and client(-groups) together in a way that tends to exclude other patrons and discourage horizontal relations between clients. An ironic testimony from Paul's contemporary the Stoic philosopher Seneca is suggestive of the pervasiveness of patron-client relations and the obligation entailed:

Look at those whose prosperity men flock to behold; they are smothered by their blessings. To how many are riches a burden! From how many do eloquence and the daily straining to display their powers draw forth blood. . . . To how many does the throng of clients that crowd about them leave no freedom! In short, run through the list of all these men from the lowest to the highest—this man desires an advocate, this one answers the call, that one is on trial, that one defends him, that one gives

> sentence; no one asserts his claim to himself, everyone is wasted for the sake of another. Ask about the men whose names are known by heart, and you will see that these are the marks that distinguish them: A cultivates B and B cultivates C; no one is his own master. (*Brev. Vit.* 2.4, in Chow, 81)

If we look at 1 Corinthians against this background, new interpretative possibilities open up. For example, Paul's elaborate defense of his refusal of financial support may be an attempt to win back the support of wealthy patrons in the church whose patronage he has declined (1 Cor 9:3–27). Further, his anxiety about Apollos and Cephas (1 Cor 1:12; 3:3–4; 4:6–7) may be related to the same issue, for it appears that the benefaction he declined they accepted. Even worse, Paul had adopted the humiliating course of working with his hands to support himself (1 Cor 4:12; 9:6). The effect on Paul's authority in Corinth must have been dramatic. Paul's relations with the wealthy patrons of the church (probably those who styled themselves the strong), along with their clients and household members, were jeopardized and the unity of the church put at risk. It is likely that all the other problems Paul deals with in 1 Corinthians—going to court, slaves seeking manumission, offending the weaker brother by eating idol meat, the unequal distribution of food at the Lord's Supper, the collection for Jerusalem, and so on—were affected in one way or another by customary expectations about patrons and clients (cf. Theissen; Marshall; Chow). But this is not surprising. For Paul, the lordship of the crucified Christ and the imperative of serving Christ as his slave implied a reordering of social relations that put him at odds with the world around him.

See also Associations; Benefactor; Civic Cults; Family and Household; Gymnasia and Baths; Head Coverings; Honor and Shame; Hospitality; Patronage; Roman Social Classes; Slavery; Women in Greco-Roman World and Judaism.

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A Codex Alexandrinus
B Codex Vaticanus
C Codex Ephraemi Syri
Brev. Vit. De Brevitate Vitae
JSNTSup Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
WUNT Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
NovT Novum Testamentum
SBLDS SBL Dissertation Series

[1] Porter, S. E., & Evans, C. A. (2000). *Dictionary of New Testament background : A compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship* (electronic ed.). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.