

Social Identity and Paul's Opponents in 2 Corinthians: A Review and Reorientation of the Quest for Identity

Steven S. H. Chang*

I. . Introduction

The identity of Paul's opponents has drawn much attention in the last century as a key historical-critical issue for interpreting 2 Corinthians.¹⁾ Jerry Sumney noted the lack of consensus in that interpreters "disagree about the identity of the opponents of every Pauline letter."²⁾ He attributed the failure to a neglect of attention to method, and so his goal in his 1990 publication on the subject was to outline a sound method for identifying Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians, which can then be applied

* Professor of New Testament, Torch Trinity Graduate University in Seoul, S. Korea.

- 1) The other major issue in 2 Corinthians studies has been the integrity of the canonical letter. There are two trends. The first is toward seeing canonical 2 Corinthians as two letters: chs. 1-9 and chs. 10-13, and the second is toward unity of canonical 2 Corinthians. For a review of the discussion and representatives of both views, see M. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 3-49 (two letter view) and M. J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 8-51 (unity view). My view agrees with Harris and is assumed in this article.
- 2) J. L. Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents: The Question of Method in 2 Corinthians*, JSNTSS 40 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 9. This Sheffield edition was republished under the same title by Bloomsbury in 2015.

to other Pauline letters.³⁾ In the end, he adopts a “minimalist approach” that “presupposes as little as possible about the specific situation so that [the] identification of the opponents rests on the primary text, not on presuppositions.”⁴⁾ While Sumney’s effort has been noted,⁵⁾ the refocus on method has not led to a consensus concerning the identity of Paul’s opponents.

In the discussion of the identity of Paul’s opponents, what is mostly lacking is a consideration of the social context of the opposition and Paul’s response before the larger community of the Corinthian church. This oversight is puzzling since social-context studies have yielded many acknowledged insights into the conflict at Corinth, especially in the study of 1 Corinthians.⁶⁾ What is more, the social-context study of Paul’s leadership in 1 Corinthians has largely carried on without a close look at Paul’s view of apostolic leadership in 2 Corinthians, forged against a group of rivals. Thus, this article seeks to consider Paul’s opponents from a social scientific perspective. First, the study begins with a review of scholarship on the identity of Paul’s opponents in 2 Corinthians. Second, the article considers

3) Sumney later published a wider study on Paul’s opponents in other letters, in addition to 2 Corinthians. See J. L. Sumney, *‘Servants of Satan’, ‘False Brothers’ and Other Opponents of Paul* (JSNTSup 188; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

4) Sumney, *Identifying Paul’s Opponents*, 187.

5) E.g., B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 343-345, recites Sumney’s method and adds a few of his own.

6) K. Y. Lim, “2 Corinthians,” J. B. Tucker and A. Kuecker, eds., *T&T Clark Social Identity Commentary on the New Testament* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 329, laments the impoverished state of social-scientific approaches to 2 Corinthians: “Studies incorporating social-scientific approaches and social identity formation theory have been shedding new light in understanding some of the problems in the Corinthian church. ... However, most of these studies on social identity are largely confined to 1 Corinthians. It is unfortunate that 2 Corinthians remains a neglected area.”

the rise of social-context studies and social identity theory as helpful tools in the discussion of the opponents' identity and the conflict at Corinth. Finally, this study outlines a brief reevaluation of the opponents from the social identity perspective.

2. On the Identity of Paul's Opponents in 2 Corinthians

As a summary of the research on the identity of Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians, we might begin with Sumney's study that appraises four views at the end of the twentieth century. The first and most traditional view is that Paul's opponents were Judaizers, related to Jerusalem and pushing Jewish identity and practices, like the agitators of Galatians. Proponents of this view, according to Sumney, include F. C. Baur, D. Oostendorp, C. K. Barrett, J. Gunther, and G. Lüdemann. A second view, championed by W. Schmithals, is that Paul's opponents were Jewish-Christian Gnostics who were more concerned about knowledge of the "true human essence" as a basis for redemption. The third view, as put forward by D. Georgi and G. Friedrich, argues that the opponents were Hellenistic-Jewish propagandists who were deeply influenced by "divine man" (θεῖος ἀνὴρ) syncretism, applied to Moses and his descendants as Hellenistic divine men. A fourth view, attributed to E. Käsemann and adopted by Sumney himself, sees the conflict between Paul and his opponents as centering on the Spirit and so the opponents were Pneumatics closely associated with the Jerusalem apostles for Käsemann but not so much for Sumney.

Margaret Thrall discusses the opponents under three headings.⁷⁾ To Sumney's "Judaizers" view, she would add A.

7) M. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 2, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 926-945.

Plummer, E. Käsemann, and P. Barnett. Contrary to Sumney, however, she thinks that Käsemann's view centers more on the authorization of Jerusalem than on the Spirit.⁸⁾ Under the heading, "Opponents as possessing special 'spiritual' status," Thrall treats W. Lütgert's "spirit-people," who promote a "different Spirit" (2 Cor 11:4) and are also Gnostics (Schmithals), with G. Friedrich's view, and D. Georgi's "divine man" view at length. Under the final group, "Opponents as combining Judaizing and 'spiritual' characteristics," she discusses the views of C. K. Barrett and J. Murphy-O'Connor which combine "Judaizing and 'spiritual' characteristics," the former suggesting the opponents started as Judaizing Christians but adopted Hellenistic "spirit-people" characteristics while the latter suggesting the "spirit-people" related to Apollos in Corinth welcomed the Judaizers from Antioch and joined forces. While recognizing the diversity of characteristics as reflected in the exegetical data of 2 Corinthians, Thrall herself identifies Paul's opponents as "fundamentally part of the Petrine mission to the Jews" but with an early form of missionary zeal connected to Matthew's Gospel.

Murray Harris begins his review of opponents research with J. Gunther's 1973 summary of some thirteen theories.⁹⁾ To Gunther's list, Harris adds the theories of E. Ellis, "conservative Hebrew pneumatics from Jerusalem," C. Forbes, "Jewish-Christian nationalists representing the Judaizing wing of Palestinian Christianity, P. Marshall, "educated Hellenists who were 'hybrists'," H. C. Kee, "Hellenistic Jews propagating 'spiritual gnosticism'," J. Sumney, "pneumatics who required and emphasized manifestations of the Spirit in apostles," and B. Witherington, "pneumatic Jewish Christians with an interest

8) Thrall, *Second Epistle*, 928-931.

9) Harris, *Second Epistle*, 77-80. See the helpful list of Gunther's identification on pp. 79-80.

in *sophia*.”¹⁰⁾ Harris himself understands the rivals as Palestinian Judaizers from the outside who have joined forces with Corinthian “proto-gnostics” from within the church.¹¹⁾

Other major commentators may be added to the list of views. Ralph Martin holds that the opponents are Jewish apostles from Jerusalem, related in some way to the “pillars” (Gal 2:9), who made Paul’s apostolic status and mission sphere points of contention.¹²⁾ Victor Furnish suggests that the opponents were Hellenistic-Jewish Christian missionaries like Paul himself, who were more influenced by Greco-Roman characteristics and not Judaizers. Colin Kruse believes that the opponents are Jewish Christians either who were influenced by Hellenistic ideas in their view of apostleship or who were from the Jerusalem church but accommodated too much to the values of the Corinthian context.¹³⁾ Scott Hafemann does not identify the opponents but focuses on the opponents’ theology of “overrealized glory” in an experience of the Spirit more powerful than what Paul was able to exhibit.¹⁴⁾

The above survey of research on the identity of Paul’s opponents in 2 Corinthians is striking for several reasons. First, the lack of consensus is apparent, not only in the identity characterizations of the opponents but also in what the points of contention were between them and Paul. With each specific characterization, it seems, there is a related theological issue at stake. Second, the variety of the identity characteristics suggests

10) Harris, *Second Epistle*, 80.

11) Harris, *Second Epistle*, 80-86. A similar view is espoused by W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. H. C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 285-286.

12) R. P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 2d ed., WBC 40 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 336-342.

13) C. Kruse, *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, rev. ed., TNTC 8 (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 62-63.

14) S. J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 34.

not only a complexity of the identity (syncretism?) but also an obscurity of which issues were at the core of the conflict. The more complex the identity of the opponents, the more obscure the theological issues of contention become. Third, in the variety of identity descriptions, there is a marked absence of social characteristics, even though many of the identity descriptions are socially significant. In other words, the social aspects of each identity characteristic are not considered, or at least not as significant to the points of contention.

Furnish begins to appreciate the social factors in the conflict when he cites the views of Gerd Theissen and Peter Marshall.¹⁵⁾ Theissen not only recognizes that the differences between Paul and his opponents were social as well as theological, but also highlights the social issue of Paul's financial independence from the Corinthians as a main point of contention.¹⁶⁾ Marshall's view that Paul's opponents were "hybrids" has not garnered much attention, but what is persuasive is his social description of Paul's conflict with his opponents as a deliberate rejection of social conventions on Paul's part as opposed to an embrace of those conventions by his opponents.¹⁷⁾ Furnish concludes that the look at social factors "helps to explain the concern—throughout 2 Cor—to show how suffering and weakness bear witness to the gospel and are the true signs of apostleship."¹⁸⁾

The most notable contribution to the discussion in recent decades comes from the study of Sophists at Corinth. Bruce Winter proposes that Paul's competition with his rivals was sophistic and that his boasting in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 opposed

15) V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 53-54.

16) G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 40-54.

17) P. Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians*, WUNT 2.23 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 331-336.

18) Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 53.

the sophistic convention of comparison.¹⁹⁾ Witherington seems to go in that direction when he admits, "It is plausible that the Corinthians, and probably the false apostles as well, had been strongly affected by the rising tide of the Sophistic movement."²⁰⁾ And George Guthrie likewise agrees when he concludes, "Among the positions on offer, it seems that the best case has been made for the opponents as Jewish-Christian ministers working under strong influences of the Sophist tradition."²¹⁾ With this view, social characteristics have become more important to the discussion.

The battle line between Paul and his opponents in 2 Corinthians were thought to be ideological and theological, and this appears to drive the need for a particular historical identity.²²⁾ However, the problem with this approach is that, as Mark Seifrid suggests, "Paul's explicit statements concerning his opponents [in 2 Corinthians] reveal nothing of a developed theology on their part."²³⁾ The sheer variety of identity proposals may suggest that we must look for non-theological factors and issues in the conflict, and draw the battle line along social issues instead, as some commentators have recognized. For example, Witherington comments, "Social and practical matters are more to the fore than theological and ethical matters at the close of 2 Corinthians."²⁴⁾ Sidestepping the question of particular

19) B. W. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian responses to a Julio-Claudian movement*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 234-237.

20) Witherington III, *Conflict and Community*, 348.

21) G. H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 45.

22) So, e.g., Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 33, suggests, "It is apparent that the identity and theology of Paul's opponents played a strategic role in the writings of 2 Corinthians."

23) M. A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), xxix.

24) Witherington III, *Conflict and Community*, 348.

identity altogether, David Garland underlines their main social characteristic as “boasting rivals.”²⁵⁾ Indeed decades ago, E. A. Judge highlighted “boasting” as a common “professional practice” which Paul intentionally challenged in his Corinthian ministry.²⁶⁾ However, few have thought of the conflict in 2 Corinthians as primarily social and analyzed the social factors in the identity of the opponents.

Attention to the social dimension of Paul’s conflict with the opponents brings to the surface several points. First, the specific identity of the opponents with other well-known historical types may be unnecessary to understand the nature of the conflict at Corinth. In other words, the conflict was social and so theology (e.g., about law and circumcision) was not at issue for the main part. Second, the connection between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians becomes clearer when we understand that Paul’s leadership and how the Corinthians misunderstood it were behind the conflicts in both letters. Thus, what Paul writes about in the division over leadership in 1 Corinthians is directly relevant to the more personal dispute between Paul and the opponents in 2 Corinthians. In both cases, Paul’s response is to give the Corinthians a better theological understanding of Christian leadership in light of the gospel of Christ crucified. Third, the main battle line between Paul and his congregation, but also between Paul and his opponents, may be thought of as social identity. In other words, Paul and his opponents were both contending for the social identity formation of the Corinthian community. To understand this last point,

25) D. E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), e.g., 273, repeated throughout.

26) E. A. Judge, “Paul’s Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice,” *ABR* 16 (1968), 37-50. Republished in David M. Scholer, ed., *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 57-71.

we must consider social identity as a social-scientific concept for understanding the conflict at Corinth.

3. Social Identity and Paul's Conflict with His Opponents

Ethnic identity as an issue in the Pauline Epistles was brought to the fore by the “new perspective on Paul.”²⁷⁾ And studies that consider ethnic identity as a major area of dispute continue to be relevant amidst global ethnic tensions today.²⁸⁾ In a 2006 monograph, William Campbell addresses the question of how Paul's Christian identity supersedes both the Israel and Gentile identities without dissolving them.²⁹⁾ His study suggests that in the process of identity construction, Paul envisions “multiple identities in Christ” such as Jewish and Gentile, distinct and not fused or hybrid, that might be described as “sub-identities in a nested hierarchy of identity of which being in Christ is

27) J. D. G. Dunn famously proposed that the battle between Paul and the Jewish opponents of Galatians and Romans was about law-keeping and circumcision as a matter of ethnic boundary markers and not about salvation through works (the old Lutheran perspective).

28) A thought-provoking debate on ethnic identity was started by D. Horrell in a 2016 article, “Ethnicization, Marriage and Early Christian Identity: Critical Reflections on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Peter 3 and Modern New Testament Scholarship,” *NTS* 62 (2016), 439-460, who argued that New Testament scholarship continues to be “shaped by a sense of Western European racial, ethnic or cultural superiority” when a false dichotomy between “ethnic” Israel and “universal” non-ethnic Christianity is maintained. See the response by S. Mason and P. F. Esler, “Judean and Christ-Follower Identities: Grounds for a Distinction,” *NTS* 63 (2017), 493-515 and the counterresponse by Horrell, “Judean Ethnicity and Christ-Following Voluntarism? A Reply to Steve Mason and Philip Esler,” *NTS* 65 (2019), 1-20.

29) W. S. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, LNTS (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

the primary.”³⁰⁾ Campbell’s proposal not only incorporates the social factors in Paul’s communities but also the process of identity formation. According to sociologist Richard Jenkins, “social identity” describes the universal process of identification both of individuals and of groups through interactions of similarity and difference.³¹⁾ The process considers not only who we are (internal self-identification) but also how others understand who we are (external identification by others). Identity formation is a ubiquitous human “doing” that involves discourses, narratives, representations, and rhetoric to produce and affirm one’s or the group’s identity. New Testament scholars have employed social identity as a fruitful tool for understanding various issues in the Corinthian correspondence.³²⁾

Building on Campbell’s study, J. Brian Tucker contends that the main issue of identity formation in Corinth was the competition with a “Roman social identity” that was highly influenced by Roman imperial ideology and social values such as honor, patronage, kinship, and wisdom.³³⁾ Paul’s aim in 1 Corinthians 1-4 is to transform the Corinthians’ Roman social identity to a salient “in Christ” social identity. Tucker draws insights from Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Categorization Theory (SCT) as developed by sociologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner, respectively, which break down intergroup and intragroup behavior in constructing and maintaining identity.³⁴⁾ Philip Esler, one of the first proponents of SIT in New Testament studies, explains Tajfel’s three

30) Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, 157.

31) R. Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014).

32) See J. B. Tucker and C. A. Baker, eds. *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016) for an introduction to social identity as applied to the New Testament.

33) J. B. Tucker, *You Belong to Christ: Paul and the Formation of Social Identity in 1 Corinthians 1-4* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2010), 89-120.

34) Tucker, *You Belong to Christ*, 36-60

components of group social identity: 1) a cognitive component—knowing that one belongs to a group; 2) an evaluative component—one's belonging has either positive or negative value connotations; 3) an emotional component—accompanying emotions towards one's group or the other group.³⁵⁾ In addition, Turner's SCT addresses two problems in Tajfel's SIT: 1) "it had little to say about the cognitive aspects of social identity salience"; 2) "it focused on *intergroup* rather than *intragroup* processes."³⁶⁾ Tucker's study is noteworthy for fully incorporating the insights of SIT/SCT in the analysis of 1 Corinthians 1-4 and the conflict at Corinth.

Other studies in 1 Corinthians have dealt with social identity as the problem in Corinth. Tucker published a second monograph on social identity in 1 Corinthians, but this time focusing on social identity in the contexts of baptism and the Lord's Supper, which appear to tackle the larger question of how Christian identity was formed in relation to other ethnic, legal, and gender identities.³⁷⁾ Employing rhetorical analysis with SIT, Sin-Pan Ho studies Paul's rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 5:1-11:1 as a means to create a "counter-cultural" social identity.³⁸⁾ Mark Finney considers social identity in the conflict reflected in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 where the Corinthian practice of the Lord's Supper was tainted by the preeminent Roman value of honor.³⁹⁾ The

35) P. F. Esler, "An Outline of Social Identity Theory," J. B. Tucker and C. A. Baker, ed., *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 17.

36) Esler, "An Outline of Social Identity Theory," 22.

37) J. B. Tucker, *Remain in Your Calling: Paul the Continuation of Social Identities in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011).

38) S. D. Ho, *Paul and the Creation of a Counter-Cultural Community: A Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Cor. 5.1-11.1 in Light of the Social Lives of the Corinthians* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

39) M. Finney, "Social Identity and Conflict in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 11.17-34 in Context," J. B. Tucker and C. A. Baker, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook to Social*

very ecclesial unity that the Lord's Supper was aiming for was overshadowed by the factionalism and division so prevalent in 1 Corinthians 1-4. In these social-identity studies of 1 Corinthians, what becomes clear is that at various points in the letter, the struggle for social identity is not only readily detectible but that it is an enduring problem. Hence, the struggle for social identity formation likely did not end with the writing of 1 Corinthians but continued to be a problem in Corinth.

In a substantial but accessible monograph published in 2017, Kar Yong Lim analyzes the use of metaphors in the formation of social identity in both 1 and 2 Corinthians.⁴⁰⁾ Treating four types of metaphors, sibling (brothers and sisters), familial (father, parent), temple, and body, Lim concludes that “these metaphors point to a powerful symbolic construction of social identity...”⁴¹⁾ Lim argues convincingly that Paul's use of metaphors is calculated to counter the social forces that took the Corinthians away from their “in Christ” identity. Three contributions of Lim's study are noteworthy. First, Lim's study covers the whole of the Corinthian correspondence and so begins to appreciate the continuity of the (social) problems in Corinth from 1 to 2 Corinthians. Second, Lim's connection between social identity and Paul's use of metaphor is helpful and opens the door to consider other means by which Paul might seek to shape social identity. Third, Lim's consideration of the temporal aspect of social identity formation adds conceptual depth to the application of social identity theory to the study of the conflict in Corinth. Overall, Lim's monograph is a well-balanced analysis of the

Identity in the New Testament (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 273-288.

Also, M. Finney, *Honour and Conflict in the Ancient World: 1 Corinthians in Its Graeco-Roman Social Setting*, LNTS 460 (London: T&T Clark, 2012).

40) K. Y. Lim, *Metaphors and Social Identity Formation in Paul's Letters to the Corinthians* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2017).

41) Lim, *Metaphors and Social Identity Formation*, 292.

Corinthian letters, their social context, their historical development, and their theological message.

In a published doctoral thesis, Henry Nguyen argues that Christian identity formation was a major issue in 2 Corinthians.⁴²⁾ Through a study of the concept of *persona* or *πρόσωπον*, both in the Greco-Roman world (through Epictetus and Valerius Maximus) and in 2 Corinthians, Nguyen has shown that Paul and the Corinthians had competing values of identity. He argues that since *πρόσωπον* has the particular meaning of “social identity” and 2 Corinthians has the most occurrences of *πρόσωπον*, Paul is especially engaged in Christian identity formation in the letter and battling conventional values of *persona* adopted by the Corinthians. Paul himself was evaluated by the Corinthians’ stress on conventional *persona*, which were outward and superficial. Rather Paul highlights the *εἰκών* and *πρόσωπον* of Christ as a new and subversive Christ-like *persona* that has both internal and external aspects.⁴³⁾ Important for our current study of Paul’s opponents, Nguyen sees the battle as mainly about *persona*, that his opponents were “pretentiously displaying their own view of Christian identity, which reflects the conventional values of *persona* in first-century Corinth.”⁴⁴⁾ Paul’s response, in view of the Corinthians who had similar conventional values, was to exhibit his own Christ-like *persona* by displaying his sufferings and weaknesses.

In considering Paul’s conflict with the Corinthians and his opponents in 2 Corinthians, Philip Esler offers a suggestive study of 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 using insights from SIT.⁴⁵⁾ Esler

42) V. H. T. Nguyen, *Christian Identity in Corinth: A Comparative Study of 2 Corinthians, Epictetus and Valerius Maximus*, WUNT 2.243 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

43) Nguyen, *Christian Identity in Corinth*, 152-214, esp. 171-173, 176-185.

44) Nguyen, *Christian Identity in Corinth*, 200.

45) P. F. Esler, “Paul’s Explanation of Christ-Movement Identity in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1: A Social Identity Approach.” *BTB* 51.2 (2021), 101-118.

analyzes the well-known dualisms in the passage and interprets them as classic SIT ingroup-outgroup competition for identity. Paul presents “a high appraisal of ingroup belonging and identity in relation to the three dimensions described by Henri Tajfel”:⁴⁶⁾ cognitive, emotional, and evaluative dimensions. The ἄπιστοι are the outgroup, negatively stereotyped throughout the passage, while the πιστοί are the ingroup, positively presented to induce a sense of social identity. The ethnic identity of Judean (Jewish) or non-Judean is subordinated to the social identity of Christ-followers who accept Paul’s gospel. Esler suggests that the problem in 2 Corinthian is a rivalry of social identity.⁴⁷⁾ The opponents’ ethnic and ideological identities may not be as relevant to the conflict in 2 Corinthians as the battle for social identity formation.

4. Reevaluating the Opponents through Social Identity

The developments outlined above call for a renewed evaluation of Paul’s opponents in 2 Corinthians and so this study will conclude with a social characterization of the identity of Paul’s opponents and his conflict with them from a social identity perspective.

Firstly, it is interesting to consider the “social identity” of Paul’s opponents in the way that Judge used the term in 1980.⁴⁸⁾

46) Esler, “Christ-Movement Identity in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1,” 102.

47) Esler’s full commentary on 2 Corinthians likely unpacks this rivalry but unfortunately, the volume was not available to me during the writing of this article. See P. F. Esler, *2 Corinthians: A Social Identity Commentary*, T&T Clark Social Identity Commentaries on the New Testament (London: T&T Clark, 2021).

48) E. A. Judge, “The Social Identity of the First Christians: A Question of Method in Religious History,” *JRH* 11:2 (1980), 201-217. Republished in David M.

That is, what is the social level or status of the opponents? In the study of the Corinthian church, many argue that there is a fair cross section of social levels of Roman Corinth represented in the church community.⁴⁹⁾ Influenced by some members of higher social status, the Corinthian members are divided because they evaluate leaders like Paul and Apollos in terms of Roman civic and patronage competition.⁵⁰⁾ The concern for commendation and outward appearance (2 Cor 11:12), the dispute over finances (2 Cor 11:7-9; 12:14-18), the boasting in influence (2 Cor 11:13-16), and even the shows of spiritual experiences (2 Cor 12:2-4) are indications of this social competition. The social status of Paul's opponents must be considered in the same social context. If the external opponents joined forces with internal leaders, the connection between them may be the respectable social status of the opponents and the appeal of their glorious boasting for those of higher status in the church. As many note the similarities between Paul and his opponents, we would suggest that like Paul the opponents are Hellenistic Jews of respectable status, perhaps Roman citizens like Paul and Silas (Acts 16:37), and connected with the Jerusalem

Scholer, ed., *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 117-135.

49) For an up-to-date review of the discussion, see E. Adams and D. E. Horrell, eds., *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004).

50) In addition to the works of Judge, Theissen, Marshall, Clarke, Finney, Nguyen, and Lim cited in this article, see also A. D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6*, 2d ed. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006); J. K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth*, JSNTSS 75 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); T. B. Savage, *Power through Weakness: Paul's understanding of the Christian ministry in 2 Corinthians*, SNTSMS 86 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); R. Pickett, *The Cross in Corinth: The Social Significance of the Death of Jesus*, JSNTSS 143 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

church as Silas was (Acts 15:22). Paul's social status exhibits dissonance as his social characteristics are both honorable (Pharisaic Jew, Roman and Tarsian Citizen) and lowly (manual labor),⁵¹⁾ and the Corinthians certainly have problems with his manual labor and refusal of financial support. If the opponents do not work, nor refuse finances, and claim superiority on those bases, then the Corinthians would see the opponents as socially comparable if not higher than Paul. Otherwise, their practice of boasting makes little sense.

Secondly, Paul's primary problem with the opponents is their boasting *κατὰ σάρκα*, "by human standards" (2 Cor 5:16; 10:2-3; 11:18) to gain social credibility and influence over the Corinthian church. In this characterization of the conflict, the rivals in 2 Corinthians share the same social values as some Corinthian members who boast about their leaders in 1 Corinthians.⁵²⁾ Thus, the social world of Roman Corinth where honor and external (Sophistic) appearances are supreme values explains the continuity of Paul's insistence on "Christ crucified" (1 Cor 2:2; 2 Cor 13:4) and on "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (Jer 9:23-24 in 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17) in both letters. Like some church members of higher social status who boast and seek glory "by human standards" (1 Cor 1:26), the opponents of 2 Corinthians also seek human glory before a receptive Corinthian congregation. The urgency of Paul's criticism of his opponents in 2 Corinthians is because their negative reinforcement threatens to undo his efforts in 1 Corinthians

51) Ronald Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1980), suggested long ago that Paul's manual labor demonstrates precisely the opposite of low social status. Because Paul was of high social status, his manual labor was a means to lower himself so as to be "all things to all people" (1 Cor 9:22).

52) A. D. Clarke, *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 186.

to reshape Corinthian social values according to the gospel of Christ crucified. The social problems of leadership in 1 Corinthians are not fully addressed and mitigated until Paul's discourses on apostolic leadership in 2 Corinthians.

That boasting *κατὰ σάρκα* is the primary issue further explains well the lack of information about the opponents' theology. The main criticism of the traditional "Judaizers" view is that 2 Corinthians does not dwell on law and circumcision, nor on Abraham's faith as a corrective. Moreover, the focus on Moses in 2 Corinthians 3 is not on law or circumcision but on *δόξα*, the language of boasting and social comparison. That boasting is the problem does not necessitate a sharp difference in ethnicity, socio-religious background, or even ideological stance. Paul and his opponents, it has been noted, are quite similar. Both Paul and his opponents claim to be *ἀπόστολοι Χριστοῦ* (2 Cor 11:13) and *διάκονοι Χριστοῦ* (2 Cor 11:23). They were ethnically identical as *Ἑβραῖοί* (Hebrews), *Ἰσραηλῖται* (Israelites), and *σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ* (descendants of Abraham) (2 Cor 11:22). They are practically on the same footing which suggests that the points of contention are not theological or ethnic at the core.⁵³ Social boasting in itself is the problem, and Paul's ironic boasting about weaknesses and thorns shows the spiritual bankruptcy of the practice.

That boasting *κατὰ σάρκα* is the primary issue moreover clarifies the seemingly bipolar characteristics of the opponents, that they are simultaneously Jewish (Judean) with probable connections to Jerusalem, and Greco-Roman in their Sophistic

53) C. Hezser, "Paul's 'Fool's Speech' (2 Cor 11:16-32) in the Context of Ancient Jewish and Graeco-Roman Culture," ed. R. Bieringer, et al., *Second Corinthians in the Perspective of Late Second Temple Judaism*, CRINT 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 244, suggests, "Since Paul does not really distinguish himself from his adversaries theologically or with regard to (a lack of) Tora observance or practice, one may assume that in reality the differences between him and his Jewish competitors were not that great and a matter of self-presentation rather than substance."

appearance and manifestations of power. On one level, they are Hellenistic diaspora Jews who like Paul possess a complex mixture of identities which may function as a hybrid identity.⁵⁴⁾ But on the level of social influence, they are social opportunists who flexibly adopt multiple identities and social characteristics in order to influence and exploit their target audience. Jack Barensten describes the opponents' opportunism, "...as leaders they conformed themselves to the vision of Christian social identity that was already prevalent in Corinth; this provided a good normative fit with the Corinthians, and allowed them to gain a position of social influence and leadership in the community."⁵⁵⁾ In continuity with the evaluation of leaders in 1 Corinthians, the Jewish-Christian opponents adapt their leadership style to bring attention to their Sophistic appearance and ecstatic power-laden experiences which Paul himself possesses but expressly rejects.

Finally, the conflict between Paul and his opponents in 2 Corinthians is a competition for the social identity of the Corinthian community. In other words, 2 Corinthians reflects the process of identity formation through which Paul seeks to fortify ingroup identity cohesion by differentiating himself from his boasting rivals. Social identity emphasizes the importance of apostolic *persona* in the process of Christian group identity formation.⁵⁶⁾ That the opponents claim to be apostles means

54) Sociologists theorize about a "diasporized hybrid identity" among those who have left the homeland and yet maintain a strong tie to it. See Keri E. Iyall Smith, "Hybrid Identities: Theoretical Examinations," in Keri E. Iyall Smith and Patricia Leavy, eds., *Hybrid Identities: Theoretical and Empirical Examinations* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 3-12.

55) J. Barentsen, *Emerging Leadership in the Pauline Mission: A Social Identity Perspective on the Local Leadership Development in Corinth and Ephesus* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 130.

56) See above view of Nguyen, *Christian Identity in Corinth*. Interestingly, K. Kujanpää, "Paul and the Author of 1 Clement as Entrepreneurs of Identity in Corinthian

they are challenging the group identity of the Corinthian church with an alternative vision, not only of apostolic leadership but also of Christian identity. Paul finds this challenge to be most serious, which explains why he is so harsh, ironic, and emotional in 2 Corinthians, especially chapters 10-13.

In the identity formation process, all three components of Tajfel's social identity theory are amply visible. Reinforcing the cognitive component, Paul deals with a sense of belonging by transforming the shallow Παύλου or Χριστοῦ identity of the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:12; 3:4, 23; 2 Cor 10:7) into a salient ἐν Χριστῷ identity (2 Cor 5:17; 12:2).⁵⁷⁾ Only boasting ἐν κυρίῳ (2 Cor 10:17) is appropriate for those who belong to the ἐν Χριστῷ identity. Being (belonging) "in Christ" is a superordinate identity that brings unity to intragroup differences (between him and church members) but also stresses the intergroup differences with those outside (the rivals and their followers). Reflecting the emotional component, Paul uses personal and emotive language throughout 2 Corinthians. He characterizes his intermediate letter as a writing out of the "heart" and with "tears" to express the abundant "love" he has for the Corinthians (2 Cor 2:4). In the competition for letters of recommendation, he frames the Corinthians as a letter "written on our hearts" (2 Cor 3:2). Twice he asks the Corinthian members to "open wide your hearts" (2 Cor 6:13; 7:2) and twice he affirms the

Crises of Leadership." *JSNT* 44.3 (2022), 1-22, portrays both Paul and the writer of 1 Clement as "entrepreneurs of identity" who retell the narrative of Moses to shape the social identity of the Corinthian audience.

- 57) Lim, "2 Corinthians," 337-339, calls the new identity of Christ-followers as the "in-Christ-new-creation" identity from 2 Cor 5:16-21. See also K. Y. Lim, "If Anyone is in Christ, New Creation: The Old has Gone, the New has Come" (2 Corinthians 5:17): New Creation and Temporal Comparison in Social Identity Formation in 2 Corinthians," J. B. Tucker and C. A. Baker, *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 289-310.

love of the Corinthians (2 Cor 6:6; 8:7). And in the heat of competition, he expresses his “love” for the Corinthians in a tender way, “Because I do not love you? God knows I do!” (2 Cor 11:11) and “If I love you more, am I to be loved less?” (2 Cor 12:15).

Reflecting the evaluative component, Paul fiercely engages in differentiation and ironic boasting. As Esler notes,⁵⁸⁾ the sharp contrast between the outgroup as ἄπιστοι and the ingroup as πιστοί with dualistic language in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 is evaluative differentiation. In 2 Corinthians 11-12, Paul differentiates his boasting from his rivals’ practice, both in content (weakness/foolish vs. powerful/wise) and purpose (God-glory vs. self-glory). The opponents who practice boasting κατὰ σάρκα (2 Cor 5:16; 10:2-3; 11:18) do not affirm the group identity of the Corinthian church but rather replace their superordinate identity with something shallower (Χριστοῦ identity) than the ἐν Χριστῷ identity. They are therefore proclaiming “another Jesus,” “a different spirit,” and “a different gospel” (2 Cor 11:4). Paul models in himself the ἐν Χριστῷ identity by “boasting in the Lord” which means for him boasting as a fool (2 Cor 11:16-23) and in his weaknesses (2 Cor 11:30; 12:7-10).

Because the problem is formation of identity κατὰ σάρκα (1 Cor 1:26) among the Corinthians, the boasting is not limited to some Corinthians of higher social status or a group of opportunistic rivals, but it is the practice of the σάρκινοι/σαρκικοί (1 Cor 3:1, 3; 2 Cor 1:12; 10:4) who represent the world and its system of values. Thus, the scope of the competition is cosmic, between those being saved and those perishing (2 Cor 2:15; 4:3). Paul’s subversion of human glory and honor is for the purpose of forming Christian identity around the glory of the gospel (2 Cor 4:1-6), the power of which is only revealed in the death of Jesus manifested in the suffering of the apostle

58) Esler, “Christ-Movement Identity in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.”

(2 Cor 4:7-12). By boasting in weakness, Paul displays this sufficient power of the gospel of grace (2 Cor 12:9). The social power that shapes the identity of the Corinthians cannot come from the flesh because there is no lasting power there. In this competition for social identity, Paul's leadership bears the marks of the ἐν Χριστῷ identity in that "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong...so that no one might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor 1:27-29).

5. Conclusion

In the quest for the identity of Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians and the related reconstruction of the conflict between Paul and the opponents, a social identity perspective explains many of the diverse and difficult characteristics which previous scholarship has struggled to account for. A social-scientific and social identity approach to 2 Corinthians has the potential to uncover new insights into the conflict with the opponents as well as to understand Paul's defense of his apostleship as critical to the social identity of the church. Thus, it is not the identity of the opponents but social identity as a description of the conflict between Paul and his opponents that is critical to interpreting 2 Corinthians. So perhaps the way forward in the discussion on the identification of Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians is to return to Sumney's "minimalist approach" and suggest that the conflict is simply about "boasting according to the flesh" as a social practice without a developed theological agenda. As usual, however, Paul applies a robust theology to the social problems at hand and "boasts in the Lord" because his aim is ultimately the "in Christ" social identity, shaped by faith in a crucified Lord in a world enthralled by human glory.

<주요어>

고린도후서, 반대자, 사회적 정체성, 갈등, 자랑

<Keywords>

2 Corinthians, Opponents, Social Identity, Conflict, Boasting

* Received March 30, 2022, Revised April 6, 2022, Accepted April 8, 2022

Bibliography

- Adams, Edward, and David E. Horrell, eds. *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004.
- Barentsen, Jack. *Emerging Leadership in the Pauline Mission: A Social Identity Perspective on the Local Leadership Development in Corinth and Ephesus*. Eugene: Pickwick, 2011.
- Bieringer, Reimund, et al., eds. *Second Corinthians in the Perspective of Late Second Temple Judaism*, CRINT 14, Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Campbell, William S., *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, LNTS 322, London: T&T Clark, 2006.
- Chow, John K., *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth*, JSNTSS 75, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992.
- Clarke, Andrew D., *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Clarke, Andrew D., *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6*, 2d ed. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006.
- Esler, Philip F., *2 Corinthians: A Social Identity Commentary*, T&T Clark Social Identity Commentaries on the New Testament, London: T&T Clark, 2021.
- Esler, Philip F., "An Outline of Social Identity Theory," In *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*, ed. J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker, 13-40, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016.
- Esler, Philip F., "Paul's Explanation of Christ-Movement Identity in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1: A Social Identity Approach," *BTB* 51:2 (2021), 101-118.
- Finney, Mark, *Honour and Conflict in the Ancient World: 1 Corinthians in*

- Its Graeco-Roman Social Setting*, LNTS 460, London: T&T Clark, 2012.
- Finney, Mark, "Social Identity and Conflict in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 11.17-34 in Context," In *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*, ed. J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker, 273-288, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016.
- Furnish, Victor Paul, *II Corinthians*, AB, New York: Doubleday, 1984.
- Garland, David E., *2 Corinthians*, NAC 29, Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999.
- Guthrie, George H., *2 Corinthians*, BECNT, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.
- Hafemann, Scott J., *2 Corinthians*, NIVAC, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- Harris, M. J., *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Hezser, Catherine, "Paul's 'Fool's Speech' (2 Cor 11:16-32) in the Context of Ancient Jewish and Graeco-Roman Culture," In *Second Corinthians in the Perspective of Late Second Temple Judaism*, ed. R. Bieringer, et al., 221-244, CRINT 14, Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Ho, Sin-pan Daniel, *Paul and the Creation of a Counter-Cultural Community: A Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Cor. 5.1-11.1 in Light of the Social Lives of the Corinthians*, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015.
- Hock, Ronald F., *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1980.
- Horrell, David E., "Ethnicization, Marriage and Early Christian Identity: Critical Reflections on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Peter 3 and Modern New Testament Scholarship," *NTS* 62 (2016), 439-460.
- Horrell, David E., "Judean Ethnicity and Christ-Following Voluntarism? A Reply to Steve Mason and Philip Esler," *NTS* 65 (2019), 1-20.

- Iyall Smith, Keri E., "Hybrid Identities: Theoretical Examinations," In *Hybrid Identities: Theoretical and Empirical Examinations*, ed. Keri E. Iyall Smith and Patricia Leavy, 3-12, Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Iyall Smith, Keri E., and Patricia Leavy, eds. *Hybrid Identities: Theoretical and Empirical Examinations*, Studies in Critical Social Sciences 12, Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Jenkins, Richard, *Social Identity*, 4th Edition, New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Judge, E. A., "Paul's Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice," In *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge*, ed. David M. Scholer, 57-71, Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008.
- Kruse, Colin G., *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Revised Edition, TNTC 8, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015.
- Kujanpää, Katja, "Paul and the Author of 1 Clement as Entrepreneurs of Identity in Corinthian Crises of Leadership," *JSNT* 44:3 (2022), 1-22.
- Kümmel, Werner G., *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. H. C. Kee, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975.
- Lim, Kar Yong, "2 Corinthians," In *T&T Clark Social Identity Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. J. Brian Tucker and Aaron Kuecker, 327-354, London: T&T Clark, 2020.
- Lim, Kar Yong, "'If Anyone is in Christ, New Creation: The Old has Gone, the New has Come' (2 Corinthians 5.17): New Creation and Temporal Comparison in Social Identity Formation in 2 Corinthians," In *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*, ed. J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker, 289-310, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016.
- Lim, Kar Yong, *Metaphors and Social Identity Formation in Paul's Letters to the Corinthians*, Eugene: Pickwick, 2017.
- Mason, Steve, and Philip F. Esler, "Judean and Christ-Follower Identities:

- Ground for a Distinction,” *NTS* 63 (2017), 493-515.
- Marshall, Peter, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians*, WUNT 2.23, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987.
- Martin, Ralph P., *2 Corinthians*, 2d ed. WBC 40, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
- Nguyen, V. Henry T., *Christian Identity in Corinth: A Comparative Study of 2 Corinthians, Epictetus and Valerius Maximus*, WUNT 2.243, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.
- Pickett, Richard, *The Cross in Corinth: The Social Significance of the Death of Jesus*, JSNTSS 143, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997.
- Savage, Timothy B., *Power through Weakness: Paul's understanding of the Christian ministry in 2 Corinthians*, SNTSMS 86, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Seifrid, Mark A., *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.
- Sumney, Jerry L., *Identifying Paul's Opponents: The Question of Method in 2 Corinthians*, JSNTSup 40, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990.
- Sumney, Jerry L., 'Servants of Satan', 'False Brothers' and Other Opponents of Paul, JSNTSup 188, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.
- Theissen, Gerd, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995.
- Thrall, Margaret E., *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Volumes I & II, ICC, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994-2000.
- Tucker, J. Brian, "1 Corinthians," In *T&T Clark Social Identity Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. J. Brian Tucker and Aaron Kuecker, 293-326, London: T&T Clark, 2020.
- Tucker, J. Brian, *Remain in Your Calling: Paul the Continuation of Social Identities in 1 Corinthians*, Eugene: Pickwick, 2011.
- Tucker, J. Brian, *You Belong to Christ: Paul and the Formation of Social*

Identity in 1 Corinthians 1-4, Eugene: Pickwick, 2010.

Tucker, J. Brian, and Aaron Kuecker, eds. *T&T Clark Social Identity Commentary on the New Testament*, London: T&T Clark, 2020.

Tucker, J. Brian, and Coleman A. Baker, eds. *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016.

Winter, Bruce W., *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian responses to a Julio-Claudian movement*, 2d ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Witherington III, Ben, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

<초록>

고린도후서의 사회적 정체성과 바울의 반대자들

- 정체성 탐구에 대한 검토 및 재정립 -

장승혁

(햇볼트리니티대학원대학교)

고린도후서에서 바울의 반대자들의 정체는 오랫동안 바울과 그의 경쟁자들 사이의 갈등을 이해하는 데 있어 중요한 역사비평적 문제였다. 이 문제에 있어 합의의 부족은 사회적 요인과 사회적 정체성 (social identity)을 분석의 개념적 도구로 통합하는 새로운 접근을 불러온다. 사회적 정체성 접근법의 최근 경향은 기존 학계가 이해할 수 있었던 것보다 반대자들과 갈등의 다양한 특징들을 더 많이 설명할 수 있는 잠재력을 가지고 있다. 사회적 정체성을 통해 분석하면, 고린도후서에서 바울은 로마 고린도에서 흔히 볼 수 있는 사회적인 자랑의 유치한 관행을 바로잡을 뿐이다. 그러나 그의 목표는 더 깊고 훨씬 더 중대했다. 그것은 바울의 “주 안에서 자랑”하는 것과 반대자들의 “육신을 따라 자랑”을 구별함으로써 고린도인들의 “그리스도 안에서” 사회적 정체성을 형성하기 위함이었다.

<Abstract>

**Social Identity and Paul's Opponents
in 2 Corinthians:
A Review and Reorientation of the Quest for Identity**

Steven S. H. Chang
(Torch Trinity Graduate University)

The identity of Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians has long been a key historical-critical issue for understanding the conflict between Paul and his rivals. The lack of consensus invites a fresh approach that incorporates social factors and social identity as a conceptual tool of analysis. Recent trends in social identity approaches have the potential to explain more of the diverse characteristics of the opponents and the conflict than previous scholarship was able to make sense of. Analyzed through social identity, Paul in 2 Corinthians is simply correcting the shallow practice of social boasting common in Roman Corinth. And yet, his aim was deeper and far more consequential. It was to shape the Corinthians' "in Christ" social identity by differentiating his "boasting in the Lord" with his opponents' "boasting according to the flesh."