

## Interruptions in 1 Corinthians

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1 Corinthians presents many opportunities for the stylistic investigation of Paul. Its second half (1 Cor 7-16) is organized by topic, each topic (even one line on Apollos' schedule, 1 Cor 16:12) being signaled by the itemization marker *perì dé*. It is easy to detect departures from a stated topic, but it does not follow that all are interpolations. There may be topics on which Paul has strong feelings, and is thus inclined to digress. The BIRD test of stylistic similarity might help at this point,<sup>1</sup> but the BIRD test itself needs to be calibrated against other evidence. This study is an exercise in calibration.

The part of 1 Cor chosen for the present inquiry contains these segments:

1 Cor 8	<b>New topic</b> ( <i>perì dé</i> ): Idol Food
1 Cor 9	Digression: Paul is not a burden on the community
1 Cor 10a (10:1-22)	Uncertain: Forbidding Idol Food ("shun worship of idols")
1 Cor 10b (10:23-11:2)	Idol Food ("... Now I praise you ...")
1 Cor 11a (11:3-16)	Interruption: Subordinate place of women
1 Cor 11b (11:17-34)	Resumption of 11:2 ("But in this I do not praise you")
1 Cor 12a (12:1-31a)	<b>New topic</b> ( <i>perì dé</i> ): Spiritual Gifts

Everything up to 12:1 should be on Idol Food. 1 Cor 9 might be a digression, the "food" topic triggering a defensive comment on Paul earning his food.<sup>2</sup> The "women" passage, 11a, cannot be so explained. Given its suspect occurrence at another point,<sup>3</sup> and the very smooth resumption of 10b at 11b, it is likely an insertion. 10a is on topic, but has been questioned as differing from Paul's position elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> We thus have: a plausible digression (9), an uncertain passage (10a, 10:1-22) and a probable interpolation (11a, 11:3-16). Given these content-based preliminary perceptions, what do the BIRD stylistic results look like, for this part of 1 Corinthians?

<sup>1</sup>The foundation study is Brooks **Chinese**. A difference (D) value of **0-5** or lower indicates a degree of similarity often associated with parts of a continuous narrative, or in cases where the writer of one passage has, so to speak, another passage "in mind" while writing.

<sup>2</sup>Plausible as a response to Didache 11:4-6, which specifies that a true Apostle will stay no more than a day or two, whereas Paul made extended visits to "his" churches.

<sup>3</sup>See also 1 Cor 14:30b-36.

<sup>4</sup>So Cope 1990, accepted by Walker **Interpolations** 232-236. 10a seems to forbid idol food, whereas Paul in the previous passage had regarded it as harmless. But see below.

1 Cor	8	9	10a	10b	11a	11b	12a
8	~	0.74	0.50	0.46	0.57	0.48	0.61
9	0.74	~	0.61	0.55	0.68	0.58	0.58
10a	0.50	0.61	~	0.42	0.54	0.54	0.43
10b	0.46	0.55	0.42	~	0.60	0.56	0.66
11a	0.57	0.68	0.54	0.60	~	0.81	0.57
11b	0.48	0.58	0.54	0.56	0.81	~	0.66
12a	0.61	0.58	0.43	0.66	0.57	0.66	~

First, 12a, the new topic, is not stylistically close to 11b; it is a new chapter. Then Paul does not run his topics together; each is its own story. In 1 Cor 8-11, the plausible digression in 9 and the probable interpolation in 11a are stylistically distinct. When in *digression* mode, Paul is more unlike his own previous style than the 11a interpolator, or Paul himself when he begins a new topic. As for 10a, if we drop 9 and 11a, we get:

1 Cor	8	10a	10b	11b	12a
8	~	0.50	0.46	0.48	0.61
10a	0.50	~	0.42	0.54	0.43
10b	0.46	0.42	~	0.56	0.66
11b	0.48	0.54	0.56	~	0.66
12a	0.61	0.43	0.66	0.66	~

where 10a is similar to its immediate context. Though resumption of the main topic in 11b is not closely continuous with 10b, it does “look back” to the theme as first introduced in 8. This supports Pauline authorship. 1 Cor 10:1-22 is then an excursus which slightly breaks the flow. It need not be seen as the intrusion of another view.<sup>5</sup>

**Stylistics**, by itself, is rarely determinative. An author may digress, or one author may successfully adopt another’s style. The first case might be wrongly read as an interpolation; the second, as a continuation. In the present example, stylistics offers independent evidence which may give us a sharper sense of the kind of writer Paul is.

*Works Cited*

E Bruce Brooks and A Taeko Brooks. Stylistic Difference in Chinese and Greek. Alpha v2 (2022) 23-38  
 Lamar Cope. First Corinthians 8-10. ATR Supplement 11 (1990)  
 William O Walker Jr. Interpolations in the Pauline Letters. Sheffield 2001

<sup>5</sup>Cope acknowledges that differences of wording in 10a might be due to a different focus (actual worship, and not mere food). Paul in 10a speaks as though there were other gods, in seeming contradiction to 8:4 (“no idol is anything in the world”), but Gal 4:9 (“how turn ye back to the weak and beggarly rudiments, whereunto ye desire to be in bonds over again”) shows that, in Paul’s view, worship of idols, *whether or not they exist*, is a sin against God.