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#### Recommended Citation

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*CTS Faculty Publications and Creative Activity*. 30.

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“But We Became Infants Among You”: The Case for ΝΕΠΙΟΙ in 1 Thess 2:7

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*New Testament Studies* 47.1 (2001) forthcoming

The debate over the proper reading of 1 Thess 2:7 ranks as one of the better known issues in textual criticism: Did Paul write “we were *gentle* (ἡπιόλι) among you” or “we were *infants* (νήπιόλι) among you”? In the nineteen centuries since this question first occupied the attention of the earliest church fathers, biblical scholarship has swung back and forth between the two possible readings.<sup>1</sup> Today the pendulum is clearly swinging in support of the reading “gentle.” Not only is this reading adopted in the vast majority of commentaries published during the second half of the twentieth century,<sup>2</sup> it is also found in virtually all the standard English translations dating to this period.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this almost universal acceptance of the reading ἡπιόλι, a careful review of the manuscript evidence and a proper evaluation of the arguments pro and con reveal that

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<sup>1</sup> See Charles Crawford, “The ‘Tiny’ Problem of 1 Thessalonians,” *Bib* 54 (1973) 69-71, for a brief overview of how this textual variant has been handled in the patristic, medieval, reformation and modern periods.

<sup>2</sup> So, e.g., B. Rigaux, *Les Epîtres aux Thessaloniens* (Paris: Gabalda, 1956); E. Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: Black, 1972); F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco: Word, 1982); T. Holtz, *Der erster Brief an die Thessalonicher* (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1986); F. Laub, *1. und 2. Thessalonicherbrief* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1985); I. H. Marshall, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1983); W. Marxsen, *Der erste Brief an die Thessalonicher* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1979); L. Morris, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); C. A. Wanamaker, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); E. J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995); M. W. Holmes, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); A. J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 2000) forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> So AV, RV, RSV, NRSV, NEB, NIV, NASB, NAB, NJB, REB, Phillips. The only exception apparently is the Contemporary English Version (American Bible Society, 1995) which reads: “We chose to be like children...” The upcoming revision of the NIV will adopt the reading νήπιόλι and translate 1 Thess 2:7 as follows: “But we were like young children among you” (I want to thank Gordon Fee, who serves as a member of the Revision Committee for the NIV, for making me aware of this future change).

νήπιοι is by far the superior reading. The first section of this paper examines briefly the external evidence. This analysis need not be lengthy, since even those opposed to the reading “infants” acknowledge its stronger external attestation. The second and more substantive section of the paper turns to the internal evidence and evaluates four arguments commonly used to justify the choice of “gentle” over the weightier reading of “infants.” The third and final section of this paper looks at the function this superior reading has in the larger clause of 1 Thess 2:5-7b to which it belongs.

## I. EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

What is immediately striking about the external evidence is how strongly it supports the reading “infants.” In terms of date, the oldest Greek witnesses all have νήπιοι: P<sup>65</sup>, a fragment containing most of the first two chapters of 1 Thessalonians, dates to the third century; Sinaiticus (Σ\*) and Vaticanus (B) both belong to the fourth century; and Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus (C\*), Claromontanus (D\*) and Washingtonensis (I) are fifth century. The existence of the reading “infants” by an early date is further supported by the versions (Old Latin, one Sahidic manuscript, and the entirety of the Bohairic witnesses) and the church fathers (Clement, Origen, Ambrosiaster). By contrast, the oldest attested reading of ἡπιοι is in Alexandrinus (A) which dates to the fifth century—some two hundred years after the oldest witness to the reading νήπιοι. Furthermore, in terms of text-type and geographic distribution, the reading “infants” occurs in the majority of Alexandrian and Western texts, and is supported by the earliest evidence in both the West (Old Latin) and the East (Clement; P<sup>65</sup>).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the major Greek editions of the New Testament—the Nestle-Aland and the Greek New Testament published by the United

Bible Society—have both shifted in recent decades toward a greater support of the reading “infants.” The 26<sup>th</sup> edition of the Nestle-Aland text replaced ἤπιλοι used in the previous edition with νήπιλοι. And the 4<sup>th</sup> revised edition of the Greek New Testament has upgraded νήπιλοι from a previous rating of “C” (i.e., a reading where “there is considerable degree of doubt”) to a new rating of “B” (i.e., a reading where “the text is almost certain”).

Even those who adopt the reading “gentle” readily admit that the external evidence supports the alternate reading “infants” and that it does so in a rather decisive manner. Bruce Metzger, for example, concedes: “The weight and diversity of external evidence are clearly in favor of νήπιλοι, which is supported by the earliest form of the Alexandrian text (P<sup>65</sup> [third century], ⋈\*, and B), the Western text (D\* and Old Latin), as well as a wide variety of Versions and Fathers.”<sup>4</sup> The full force of the external evidence, therefore, should not be overlooked or minimized. As Gordon Fee, a proponent of the reading “infants,” notes: “In fact, the evidence for ἤπιλοι is so much weaker than for νήπιλοι that under ordinary circumstances no one would accept the former reading as original.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament. Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) 231. Other scholars make a similar concession: see J. Delobel, “One Letter Too Many in Paul’s First Letter? A Study of (ν)ηπιλοι in 1 Thess 2:7,” *Louvain Studies* 20 (1995) 127; Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 100; Helmut Koester, “The Text of 1 Thessalonians,” *The Living Text. Essays in Honor of Ernest W. Saunders* (ed. D. E. Groh and R. Jewett; New York: University Press of America, 1985) 225; R. F. Collins, “Recent Scholarship on the First Letter to the Thessalonians,” *Studies on the First Letter to the Thessalonians* (Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium 66; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1984) 7.

<sup>5</sup> G. D. Fee, “On Text and Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians,” *SBL 1992 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. H. Lovering; SBL Seminar Papers 31; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) 176.

The weight of the external evidence becomes even more significant when one remembers the priority that this kind of data should have over internal evidence.<sup>6</sup> It is, of course, true that some text critics question the priority and even the validity of external evidence, arguing instead for an approach based solely on internal evidence.<sup>7</sup> It is also true that the external evidence is less objective than it is commonly made out to be, especially in the area of classifying manuscripts according to text-type. Nevertheless, it is still the case that a broad-based consensus exists among text-critics in the priority of the external evidence—evidence that forces even those opposed to *νήπιου* to concede that “infants” is “clearly” the stronger reading.<sup>8</sup> The burden of proof, therefore, rests on those who reject the compelling testimony of the external evidence. Those who adopt the weaker reading *ἦπιου* need to come up with especially strong internal evidence to justify not following the significantly weightier manuscript support for the reading *νήπιου*.

## II. INTERNAL EVIDENCE

There are four arguments of unequal importance which are commonly used to defend the choice of “gentle” over “infants.” The first two of these arguments deal with “transcriptional probabilities”—what the copyists were likely to have done. The last two deal with “intrinsic probabilities”—what the author, Paul, was likely to have done. An evaluation of each of these four arguments reveals that they do not provide, neither

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<sup>6</sup> So, e.g., Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 212; Kurt and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids/Leiden: Eerdmans/Brill, 1989<sup>2</sup>) 280.

<sup>7</sup> This approach is often identified as “thoroughgoing eclecticism” and is most evident in the work of G. D. Kilpatrick and that of his student J. K. Elliott. For an introduction to this textual approach, see J. K. Elliott, “Thoroughgoing Eclecticism in New Testament Textual Criticism,” *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research. Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (ed. B. D. Ehrman and M. W. Holmes; Studies and Documents 46; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 321-35.

<sup>8</sup> See the quote of Metzger cited above.

individually nor even collectively, the needed justification for rejecting the clear testimony of the external evidence.

**Argument #1:** νήπιλοι is the result of dittography

One argument, if it can even legitimately be called that,<sup>9</sup> frequently cited in support of ἥπιλοι is to claim that νήπιλοι is the result of dittography, the common error of scribes who copied a letter, word or phrase twice when the original manuscript had it only once. F. F. Bruce, for example, asserts: “The variant νήπιλοι, ‘infants,’ is well attested but is due probably to dittography of the final letter of ἐγενήθημεν.”<sup>10</sup>

This argument can be quickly dismissed, since, as many commentators recognize, the reading ἥπιλοι could be the result of haplography, the equally common error of scribes who copied a letter, word or phrase once when the original manuscript had it twice.<sup>11</sup> The significant point here is that dittography and haplography are both equally possible; there is no scribal tendency toward committing the one error more than the other. This means that it is illegitimate to appeal to either dittography or haplography in determining whether Paul wrote νήπιλοι or ἥπιλοι. The appeal to either one of these scribal errors is relevant only at a later stage in this debate as providing one possible explanation of how the secondary reading came about. But the decision as to which of the two readings is, in fact, secondary, must be determined on other grounds.

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<sup>9</sup> Fee (“On Text and Commentary,” 176) states of this first argument that it “is no textual argument at all, but is rather an explanation of how νήπιλοι might have arisen *if one makes the prior assumption* that ἥπιλοι is the original reading” (emphasis his).

<sup>10</sup> Bruce, *Thessalonians*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> There are three possible ways in which the error of either dittography or haplography could have occurred in 1 Thess 2:7: (1) an error of the ear, whereby the expressions ἐγενήθημεν ἥπιλοι and ἐγενήθημεν νήπιλοι would have sounded virtually identical; (2) an error of the eye, where these two readings written in *scriptio continua* style and in uncial script would have looked virtually identical (ΕΓΕΝΗΘΗΜΕΝΗΠΙΟΙ versus ΕΓΕΝΗΘΗΜΕΝΝΗΠΙΟΙ); and (3) an error of the eye, where the letter *nu* (ν) at the end of a line was often written as a superlinear stroke (ΕΓΕΝΗΘΗΜΕ□) and so would have

**Argument #2:** νήπιοι is a common term replacing the rare ἤπιοι

A second argument frequently used to justify the choice of “gentle” over the more strongly attested “infants” is to claim that scribes, either intentionally or by accident, replaced the rare term ἤπιοι with the more common word νήπιοι. Howard Marshall, for example, confidently states: “There can, however, be little doubt that the less-attested reading is correct; the rarer word was replaced by a more familiar one.”<sup>12</sup> Earl Richard similarly asserts that “the familiar Pauline ‘infant’ would have replaced the rare term ‘gentle’.”<sup>13</sup>

But is it really the case that the one term is “rare” while the other is “familiar”? Paul uses νήπιοι only ten other times in his letters (Rom 2:20; 1 Cor 3:1; 13:11 [5x]; Gal 4:1, 3; Eph 4:14), and even this relatively small total figure may be somewhat misleading, since five of these occurrences are found in one verse. This leads Stephen Fowl to observe: “If the point is made simply with Paul in mind one would have to say that neither word is very familiar.”<sup>14</sup> Nor is the word νήπιοι a common word in the rest of the New Testament, as it occurs elsewhere only four times (Matt 11:25; 21:16; Luke 10:21; Heb 5:13). Thus, while it is obviously true that νήπιοι occurs more often in Paul and in the rest of the New Testament than ἤπιοι (only in 2 Tim 2:24), it does not occur with a sufficiently greater frequency that a scribe would feel compelled to replace “infants” for “gentle.”

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possibly been overlooked by a scribe, especially with texts written on papyrus. See Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 231.

<sup>12</sup> Marshall, *Thessalonians* 70.

<sup>13</sup> Richard, *Thessalonians*, 82. See also, e.g., Rigaux, *Thessaloniens*, 418; W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of I and II Thessalonians* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1955) 64, n 48; Delobel, “One Letter Too Many,” 132; D. M. Martin, *I, 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) 78-9.

<sup>14</sup> S. Fowl, “A Metaphor in Distress. A Reading of ΝΗΠΙΟΙ in 1 Thessalonians 2.7,” *NTS* 36 (1990) 470.

A further weakness with this second argument is that it fails to recognize that the supposedly rare ἥπιτοι was a familiar enough word to scribes from its use in non-biblical writings.<sup>15</sup> Already some time ago, Abraham Malherbe pointed out that ἥπιος or “gentleness” was a well-known and desired virtue in the ancient world.<sup>16</sup> More recently, Timothy Sailors has used the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) to show that ἥπιος occurs 42 times in the first centuries BCE and CE compared to 274 occurrences of νήπιος in its nominal, adjectival and verbal forms for a ratio of about 1:7.<sup>17</sup> Sailors further notes that the frequency of ἥπιος actually increases rather dramatically during this time period so that by the second century CE the ratio shrinks to 1:5. And a search of the Duke Data Bank of Documentary Papyri (DDBDP) that I conducted yielded 65 matches with the adjective ἥπιος compared to 170 matches with the noun νήπιος for a ratio of just under 1:3.<sup>18</sup> There is ample evidence, therefore, that scribes would have been familiar enough with the word ἥπιος and that it is by no means a rare term compared with the word νήπιος. Consequently, the argument based on the relative obscurity of the adjective “gentle” is not sufficient evidence in of itself to decide in favor of one reading over the other nor is it compelling enough to override the weighty testimony of the external evidence.

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<sup>15</sup> Fee (“On Text and Commentary,” 177, n 36) notes that “ἥπιτοι is a common enough word, even if found only once in the NT.” Fowl (“A Metaphor in Distress,” 470) likewise observes that “if one looks in any standard lexicon, it will be clear that both words are well attested in Greek contemporary with the NT.”

<sup>16</sup> A. J. Malherbe, “‘Gentle as a Nurse’: The Cynic Background to 1 Thess. ii,” *NovT* 12 (1970) 203-217, see esp. 212-13.

<sup>17</sup> T. B. Sailors, “Wedding Textual and Literary-Rhetorical Criticism to Understand the Text of 1 Thessalonians 2.7,” *JSNT* 71 (2000) forthcoming.



**Argument #3:** νήπιοι is always used pejoratively by Paul

A third argument commonly cited as evidence against the reading νήπιοι focuses not on the frequency of this term but on its normal or expected use by Paul. It is claimed that the apostle always uses νήπιος in a negative or pejorative manner and so would not have used this term to refer to himself in 1 Thess 2:7. Joël Delobel, for example, briefly surveys the occurrences of νήπιος in the apostle's letters and notes that "Paul uses the image of 'babe' for the Christians in their early-Christian or even pre-Christian situation, i.e., with a somewhat unfavorable connotation."<sup>19</sup> This conviction that Paul uses νήπιος in an exclusively negative way in turn leads Delobel to conclude further that "the very positive and favorable meaning it would have in our passage would not be Pauline at all."<sup>20</sup>

This argument, however, is misleading and prejudicial. For although Paul employs the metaphor of infants most often in a pejorative manner, it is not the case that he always uses it in a negative sense nor always with the same degree of pejorativeness. This is best illustrated from its occurrences in 1 Corinthians—the letter where Paul most frequently makes use of the infant metaphor.<sup>21</sup> In 3:1 νήπιοι has a negative sense as the Corinthians are compared to infants who are not ready yet for solid food but can only be fed milk. In 13:11 the five references to infants are either neutral or just mildly negative as Paul uses this metaphor to describe the spiritual progression that naturally takes place as one moves from childhood to adulthood. In 14:20, however, the apostle uses the infant

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<sup>18</sup> The Duke Data Bank of Documentary Papyri (DDBDP) may be accessed on-line through the Perseus Project at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Texts/papyri.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Delobel, "One Letter Too Many," 128.

<sup>20</sup> Delobel, "One Letter Too Many," 129.

<sup>21</sup> See Fee, "On Text and Commentary," 177; also his *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 679, n 15.

metaphor—expressed this time with the verbal form *νηπιάζω*—with a positive sense, as he commands the Corinthians to “be infants with respect to evil.” Paul’s use of the infant metaphor is apparently fluid enough that it does not always require a pejorative sense but can be employed positively as well.

The possibility that Paul uses *νήπιλοι* in 2:7 with a positive sense receives further support from the use of this term by other biblical and non-biblical writers. In three of the remaining four occurrences of *νήπιλοι* in the NT, this term refers to the righteous to whom God has revealed his wisdom (Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21) and who bring to God perfect praise (Matt 21:16). The Gospel writers here are following the positive sense that *νήπιλοι* has in many Septuagint texts, especially the Psalms (18 [19]:7; 114 [116]: 6; 118 [119]: 130; Wis 10:21).<sup>22</sup> In Hosea 11:1 (LXX) *νήπιλος* expresses the childlike innocence of the nation Israel during its early days prior to falling into sin and idolatry under the influence of the Canaanites.<sup>23</sup>

Non-biblical writers also occasionally used the term *νήπιλος* in a positive manner. Dio Chrysostom, for example, uses the deep longing of infants to be reunited with their parents from whom they have been separated as a metaphor for humanity’s desire to be with and converse with the gods.<sup>24</sup> Several ancient writers describe the death of infants in wars and other hostilities in a way that emphasizes the innocence of these babies and the

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<sup>22</sup> This positive sense of *νήπιλος* in both the Septuagint and the Gospels has likely influenced *1 Clement* 57.7, where “infants” similarly refers to the righteous who have been wronged by evil men.

<sup>23</sup> G. Bertram, “*νήπιλος*,” *TDNT* 4.916.

<sup>24</sup> “For precisely as infant children when torn away from father or mother are filled with terrible longing and desire, and stretch out their hands to their absent parents often in their dreams, so also do men to the gods, rightly loving them for their beneficence and kinship, and being eager in every possible way to be with them and to hold converse with them” (*Oration* 12.61).

merciless character of those who kill such blameless creatures.<sup>25</sup> The notion of innocence connected with infants is also found in Philo, who speaks a number of times about “the soul of an infant child, which has no share in either virtue or vice.”<sup>26</sup> Even more explicit is Philo’s claim that “it is impossible for the greatest liar to invent a charge against them [infants], as they are wholly innocent.”<sup>27</sup> Sailors has examined all the occurrences of νήπιος in its various forms in the literature from the first centuries BCE and CE and claims that νήπιος has a neutral sense the vast majority of the time (75%), a negative sense (“childish, foolish”) over eighteen percent of the time, and a positive sense over six percent of the time.<sup>28</sup>

It is now clear that the argument that Paul *always* uses the word νήπιος in a negative or pejorative manner and so would not have used this term to refer to himself is misleading and thus flawed. The apostle uses the infant metaphor in a rather fluid manner by which it sometimes has a neutral sense, most often has a negative sense, and in at least one situation other than 1 Thess 2:7 has a clearly positive sense. Furthermore, the term νήπιος was used with a positive sense by both biblical and non-biblical writers. It thus remains entirely possible that Paul in 1 Thess 2:7 employed the infant metaphor in a positive manner and that such a usage by no means ought to be judged non-Pauline.

**Argument #4:** νήπιος creates the problem of a mixed metaphor

A fourth argument frequently used to reject νήπιος claims that this reading would create the problem of a mixed metaphor occurring within the same sentence: on the one hand, Paul states that he and his colleagues were like infants; on the other hand, he claims

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<sup>25</sup> See Diodorus Siculus, *Biblical History* 20.72.2; Philo, *Flaccus*, 68.2; Josephus, *Antiquities* 6.133.2; 6.136.6; 6.138.2; 6.260.4; 14.480.3; *War* 1.352.3; 2.307.2; 2.496.4; 4.82.2.

<sup>26</sup> *Allegorical Interpretation*, 2.53.3. See also 2.64.3; 3.210.5; *Every Good Man is Free* 160.3.

that they are like a nursing mother who cares for her own children. This resulting mixed metaphor has appeared to many to be so problematic that even the great textual critic, Bruce Metzger—someone not at all prone to hyperbolic statements—asserts: “Paul’s violent transition in the same sentence from a reference to himself as babe to the thought of his serving as a mother-nurse has seemed to most editors and commentators to be little short of absurdity.”<sup>29</sup>

The force of this argument, however, is mitigated by at least four factors. First, the reading νήπιοι and the resulting double metaphor of “infants” and “nursing mother” means that it is clearly the more difficult reading (*lectio difficilior*) and so, in keeping with a long cherished rule of textual criticism, ought to be preferred. It is the more difficult reading not only because of the resulting mixed metaphor but also because pious scribes might well have stumbled over such a lowly description of the apostle as an “infant” and so replaced it with the more laudatory “gentle.” The situation would be similar to that in Col 1:23 where the apostle’s description of himself as a “servant” (διάκονος) seemed to many copyists too lowly a designation for a person so eminent as Paul and thus either substituted or supplemented the original text to give him the more complimentary titles of “a preacher and an apostle” (κῆρυξ καὶ ἀπόστολος).<sup>30</sup> It is not at all surprising, therefore, that among those manuscripts that have been “corrected” by a later or second hand the direction of these corrections in every case except one has been

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<sup>27</sup> *Special Laws* 3.119.4.

<sup>28</sup> Sailors, “Wedding Textual and Literary-Rhetorical Theory,” 11.

<sup>29</sup> Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 231. Later in his discussion of this textual variant, Metzger again speaks of the “violence done to the sense when νήπιοι is read” (p 232).

<sup>30</sup> κῆρυξ καὶ ἀπόστολος: **κ**\* P m; κῆρυξ καὶ ἀπόστολος καὶ διάκονος: A sy<sup>hmg</sup> sa<sup>ms</sup>; διάκονος καὶ ἀπόστολος: 81 vg<sup>ms</sup>

from the more difficult “infants” to the smoother and more laudatory reading of “gentle” (so  $\aleph$  C D  $\Psi$  104; only the 12th century minuscule 326 has the reverse movement).<sup>31</sup>

The counter response to this, of course, is that the reading “infants” is too difficult: it is not merely the *lectio difficilior* but the *lectio impossibilis*.<sup>32</sup> Yet the perceived difficulty of the mixing the two metaphors of infants and a nursing mother is greatly alleviated by a second factor, namely, the proper punctuation of 2:7.<sup>33</sup> The key issue is the correct location of a full stop in this verse. The standard Greek editions (which follow the reading νήπιοι) and major translations (which follow the reading ἤπιοι) all place a full stop after the phrase “apostles of Christ” in 2:7a so that a new sentence begins with the words “But we were gentle among you” in 2:7b:

GNT<sup>4</sup>/NA<sup>27</sup>: ὁὔτε ζητοῦντες ἐξ ἀνθρώπων δόξαν,  
οὔτε ἀφ’ ὑμῶν οὔτε ἀπ’ ἄλλων,  
<sup>7a</sup>δυνάμενοι ἐν βάρει εἶναι ὡς Χριστοῦ ἀπόστολοι.  
<sup>7b</sup>ἀλλὰ ἐγενήθημεν νήπιοι ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν,  
<sup>7c</sup>ὡς ἐὰν τροφὸς θάλπη τὰ ἑαυτῆς,  
<sup>8</sup>οὔτως ὁμειρόμενοι ὑμῶν εὐδοκοῦμεν μεταδοῦναι ὑμῖν...

NRSV:           <sup>6</sup>nor did we seek praise from mortals,  
                          whether from you or from others,  
<sup>7a</sup>though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.  
<sup>7b</sup>But we were *gentle* among you,

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<sup>31</sup> B. R. Gaventa (“Apostles as Babes and Nurses in 1 Thessalonians 2:7,” *Faith and History: Essays in Honor of Paul W. Meyer* [ed. J. T. Carroll, C. H. Cosgrove, and E. E. Johnson; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991] 197): “It is easy to imagine why a scribe would find the mixed metaphor confusing and respond by altering νήπιοι to ἤπιοι. A deliberate or conscious change from ἤπιοι to νήπιοι is unthinkable.”

<sup>32</sup> So Delobel, “One Letter Too Many,” 131.

<sup>33</sup> See M. Dibelius, *An die Thessalonicher I* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1937) 8; W. Stegemann, “Anlass und Hintergrund der Abfassung von 1 Th 2,1-12,” *Theologische Brosamen für Lothar Steiger* (ed. G. Freund and E. Stegemann; Hiehlheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament und seiner Rezeption in der Alten Kirche 5; Heidelberg: Esprint, 1985) 405-6; N. Baumert, “Ὁμειρόμενοι in 1 Thess 2,8,” *Bib* 68 (1987) 561; Fee, “On Text and Commentary,” 177-8.

<sup>7c</sup>like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.

<sup>8</sup>So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you...

This punctuation means that, if the reading  $\nu\eta\pi\iota\omicron\upsilon\iota$  is adopted, Paul would indeed have two mixed metaphors in one sentence (“But we were *infants* among you, like a *nurse* tenderly caring for her own children”) and the objection to “Paul’s violent transition in the same sentence” would appear to be justified. There are, however, serious problems with punctuating the verse in this manner. For a number of grammatical considerations in 2:7-8, as well as a literary pattern in the larger structure of 2:1-8, demands that a full stop be placed after the phrase “but we became infants among you” in 2:7b so that the infant metaphor *concludes* the clause of 2:5-7b in contrast to the nursing mother metaphor which *introduces* the clause of 2:7c-8.

That this is indeed the required punctuation becomes clear from the following grammatical considerations. First, when the conjunction  $\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$  (“but”) in Paul’s writings introduces a clause following a negative (as is found here in 2:7b), this clause serves as the second and concluding part of an  $\omicron\upsilon\ldots\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$  contrast—a structure typically identified as an antithetical clause (“not *x*, but *y*”). In fact, this  $\omicron\upsilon\ldots\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$  contrast occurs no less than five times in the opening eight verses of 1 Thessalonians 2: the first three major clauses of this chapter are all antithetical statements (vv 1-2; 3-4; 5-7b); a fourth  $\omicron\upsilon\ldots\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$  contrast occurs in verse 4 within the antithetical statement of verses 3-4; and a fifth occurrence can be found in verse 8 as part of the correlative clause of verses 7c-8. The  $\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$  in 2:7b, therefore, cannot introduce a new sentence but rather concludes the preceding negative phrases in 2:5-7a.

Second, a similar situation occurs with the  $\acute{\omicron}\varsigma\ldots\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$  combination found in 2:7c-8—a structure typically identified as a correlative clause (“as *x*, so *y*”). The grammar

dictates that ὧς introduces the correlative clause and οὕτως concludes it (note the similar structure in 2:4). Most translations violate this pattern by wrongly beginning a new clause in 2:8 and rendering the normally correlative οὕτως as an adverb denoting degree (e.g., NRSV: “so deeply”; NIV: “so much”)—a usage that has no exact parallel in Paul’s writings and conflicts with ordinary Greek usage.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, on the basis of the ὧς...οὕτως combination, as well as the οὐ...ἀλλά contrast, it is clear that a full stop is required after the phrase “but we became infants among you” in 2:7b.

The significance of identifying the proper punctuation of this verse is that it alleviates greatly the perceived problem of the mixed metaphors. It is now clear that the metaphors of infants and nursing mother are not part of the same sentence—a fact that seriously undermines the legitimacy of even referring to them as “mixed” metaphors. They are rather two distinct and separate metaphors, each with their own meaning and function in the larger argument of 2:1-12. The first metaphor of infants highlights the *innocence* of Paul’s conduct and motives during his original visit to Thessalonica and so serves as a fitting *conclusion* to the preceding three denials that the apostle and his co-workers “never came with a word of flattery...nor with a motive of greed...nor were demanding honor from people” (2:5-7a).<sup>35</sup> The second metaphor of a nursing mother highlights the *love* which Paul had for the Thessalonian believers during that past visit<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> This point has been made already by Fee, “On Text and Commentary,” 178.

<sup>35</sup> For a fuller discussion of how the infant metaphor functions to stress the innocence of Paul’s conduct and motives during his mission-founding visit in Thessalonica, see the third and final section of this essay: “The Function of νήπιου in 1 Thess 2:5-7b.”

<sup>36</sup> That love is the key aspect emphasized in the main clause of 2:7c-8 can be seen in the following four factors: (1) the use of the metaphor itself about which J. E. Frame notes: “The point of the new metaphor is love, the love of a mother-nurse for her own children” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians* [Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1912] 100-101); (2) the emotional warmth expressed in the rare participle ὁμειρόμενοι (“caring so much”); (3) the desire of Paul and his fellow missionaries to share with the believers in Thessalonica not just the gospel but “our own selves”; and (4) the concluding causal clause which explicitly states that these Christians “became beloved to us”.

and so serves as a fitting *introduction* to the following claim that “because we cared so much for you, we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you became beloved to us” (2:7c-8). Although both metaphors are part of the same apologetic concern that is at work throughout this passage,<sup>37</sup> they belong to different main clauses and express different points in the defense of Paul’s integrity during his mission-founding visit to Thessalonica.

There is yet a third factor that mitigates against the argument that the reading “infants” ought to be rejected on the grounds that this would create the problem of a mixed metaphor: the phenomenon of mixed or rapidly changing metaphors is found elsewhere in Paul’s letters.<sup>38</sup> The best example occurs in Gal 4:19 where, in a relative clause containing a mere eight words, the apostle first depicts himself as a pregnant mother giving birth to his Galatian converts and then shifts rather abruptly to the image of the Galatian converts themselves as being pregnant with Christ as a fetus in their wombs and needing a further gestation period for that fetus to be fully formed. Another example is 2 Cor 2:14 where Paul begins with the imagery of Titus and himself as captives being led in a military procession and then unexpectedly shifts to a different image in which the two of them are likened to the aroma of incense burned on an altar.

Yet one does not need to look outside of 1 Thessalonians or even outside the second chapter of this letter for evidence of Paul’s practice of rapidly shifting metaphors. Shortly after likening himself to a “nursing mother” (2:7c), the apostle compares himself to a “father” (2:11) and the Thessalonians to being his “children” (2:11). A few verses

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<sup>37</sup> For a defense of the older (and now widely rejected) view that Paul is, in fact, defending himself in this passage, see Jeffrey A. D. Weima, “An Apology for the Apologetic Function of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12,” *JSNT* 68 (1997) 73-99.



later Paul makes use of yet another family metaphor, describing his separation from the Thessalonian church as a state of being “orphaned” (2:17). Therefore, a sudden shift from the image of infants to that of a nursing mother is supported not only by Paul’s practice in his other letters but also by the frequent movement from one family metaphor to another in 1 Thessalonians 2.<sup>39</sup>

A fourth and final factor involves the presence of the orphan metaphor in 2:17. Many NT commentators claim that the verb ἀπορφανίζω was used to refer either to children who had been orphaned from their parents or, conversely, parents who had been orphaned from their children.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, these scholars believe that it is ambiguous in 1 Thess 2:17 whether the participle ἀπορφανισθέντες—a hapax legemonon in the NT—conveys the image of Paul and his coworkers as children who have been orphaned from the believers in Thessalonica or, conversely, it is the Thessalonian Christians who are children orphaned from Paul and his coworkers. Since the closest previous metaphor used by Paul to describe his relationship with the Thessalonians is that of the apostle as a “father” and the readers as his “children” (2:11; the notion of the Thessalonians as Paul’s children is also implied in the nursing mother metaphor of 2:7c), many choose the latter option.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (London/New York: Macmillan, 1904) 24-5; Gaventa, “Apostles as Babes and Nurses,” 197.

<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting that the transition in metaphors from infants to nursing mother involves a rather natural or logical shift in thought. For the metaphor of infants triggers in Paul’s mind rather naturally the metaphor of those in the ancient world who were typically hired to nurse such infants: the wet-nurse.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., Best, *Thessalonians*, 124; P. Ellingworth and E. A. Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letters to the Thessalonians* (Stuttgart: United Bible Society, 1975) 47; Marshall, *Thessalonians*, 85; Holtz, *Thessalonicher*, 115; Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 120; Holmes, *Thessalonians*, 94.

<sup>41</sup> So, e.g., Marshall, *Thessalonians*, 85; Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 120. Richard (*Thessalonians*, 128-9) further justifies this decision by claiming that the verb ἀπορφανίζω came to have the more generalized sense of “deprived of” or “separated from” someone, and so could refer to parents who are deprived of their children. Richard also claims that this interpretation is a more logical reflection of the authority that Paul has over his converts in Thessalonica. Still others appeal to the use of the adjective ὀρφανός, which,

This conclusion, however, is contradicted by the use of the verb ἀπορφανίζω in the extant Greek literature.<sup>42</sup> This verb occurs infrequently, with only one attestation in classical Greek, two in Philo, one in the NT (1 Thess 2:17) and twenty-eight in the patristic literature. An analysis of these occurrences in their respective contexts gives a clear and consistent picture of how the verb ἀπορφανίζω was used: it never refers to parents who are orphaned from their children but consistently refers to children who are orphaned from their parents. There is, therefore, no ambiguity in the orphan metaphor of 2:17. By using the verbal form ἀπορφανισθέντες, Paul presents himself and his coworkers as children whose forced departure from Thessalonica has meant that they are orphaned from the believers in that city. Not only is this interpretation demanded by the use of the verb elsewhere in Greek literature, it also results in a more vivid metaphor by which Paul evokes his feelings of deep pain and anguish due to his being orphaned from his Thessalonian converts. As John Chrysostom already observed long ago:

He [Paul] did not say, ‘separated from you,’ nor ‘torn from you,’ nor ‘set apart from you,’ nor ‘left behind,’ but ‘orphaned from you.’ He sought for a word that might sufficiently show the pain of his soul. Though standing in the relation of a father to them all, he yet uses the language of orphan children who have prematurely lost their parent.<sup>43</sup>

The use of the orphan metaphor in 2:17 provides indirect evidence in support of the reading νήπιου in 2:7 in at least three ways. First, it shows that Paul made use of

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despite referring most often to children who have lost their parents, sometimes was used of parents bereft of children (see H. Seesemann, “ὀρφανός,” *TDNT* 5.487).

<sup>42</sup> I am indebted here to the study of J. B. Faulkenberry Miller, “Infants and Orphans in 1 Thessalonians: A Discussion of ἀπορφανίζω and the Text-Critical Problem in 1 Thess 2:7” (Unpublished paper delivered Nov 20, 1999 at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Boston, MA).

inverted metaphors in referring to himself: since the apostle switches from the metaphor of himself as a father in 2:11 to that of an orphaned child in 2:17, it is entirely feasible that he earlier in the passage switches from the metaphor of himself as an infant to that of a nursing mother. Second, the orphan metaphor indicates that Paul is confident enough of his relationship with the Thessalonians to portray himself in the non-authoritative position of an orphaned child and so suggests that he similarly would not be afraid to depict himself as a lowly infant.<sup>44</sup> Finally, while the orphan metaphor can stand on its own, it is more readily understood as an extension of a preceding depiction of the apostle as a child such as found in the infant metaphor of 2:7.<sup>45</sup>

In light of the four factors highlighted above, it is difficult to agree with Metzger's claim that the shift in 2:7 from infants to a nursing mother is a "violent transition" and one that is "little short of absurdity." Although the transition may be somewhat abrupt, the proper punctuation of the verse reveals that the two metaphors are part of separate sentences, each with their own distinct meaning and function in the larger argument of 2:1-12. Furthermore, a sudden shift from the image of infants to that of a nursing mother is entirely in keeping with Paul's practice elsewhere, especially with the frequent movement from one family metaphor to another in 1 Thessalonians 2. Finally,

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<sup>43</sup> *Epistulae ad Olympiadem* 8.12.37-41. A similar explanation of the verbal form ἀπορφανισθέντες is given by Chrysostom, *In Epistulam I ad Thessalonicenses* 62.408.45-52.

<sup>44</sup> In contrast to the Galatian letter where Paul's opponents are inside the church and raise questions about the apostle's authoritative *status*, Paul's opponents in 1 Thessalonians are outside the church (2:14 "your fellow citizens") and raise questions about the apostle's *integrity*. Thus, while Paul is greatly concerned in Galatians to assert his status as a divinely appointed apostle who has an authoritative position over his readers, Paul's positive relationship with the Thessalonian church does not require that he emphasize his apostolic authority. This explains, for example, why the opening salutation (1:1) lacks the reference to his apostleship typically found in the opening section of his other letters.

<sup>45</sup> Lightfoot (*Notes*, 36) writes of the orphan metaphor in 2:17: "Probably however here the best and most touching sense is to render as above [i.e., children deprived of their parents], carrying out the Apostle's metaphor of νήπιου ii. 7."

Paul's presentation of himself as an orphan in 2:17 serves in a variety of ways to support the apostle's use of the infant metaphor in 2:7.

### III. THE FUNCTION OF ΝΗΠΙΟΙ IN 1 THESS 2:5-7B

I have thus far surveyed the four arguments commonly used to reject νήπιοι and in each case have demonstrated how they fail to provide the needed justification for overturning the rather decisive testimony of the external evidence. It now remains necessary to show that the superior reading "infants" functions well in the larger clause of 1 Thess 2:5-7b to which it belongs.

The antithetical statement of 2:5-7b exhibits a greater degree of symmetry than is commonly recognized. This contrasting clause consists of a lengthy negative half that contains three denials<sup>46</sup> (balancing somewhat the three denials in the preceding antithetical statement of 2:3-4), each of which is followed by a brief aside or parenthetical comment which in some sense repudiates the implied charge lying behind each denial, and a positive half that contains a relatively brief affirmation:

<sup>5a</sup> οὔτε γάρ ποτε ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας ἐγενήθημεν  
καθὼς οἴδατε,

<sup>5b</sup> οὔτε ἐν προφάσει πλεονεξίας,  
θεὸς μάρτυς,

<sup>6</sup> οὔτε ζητοῦντες ἐξ ἀνθρώπων δόξαν, οὔτε ἀφ' ὑμῶν οὔτε ἀπ' ἄλλων,  
<sup>7a</sup> δυνάμενοι ἐν βάρει εἶναι ὡς Χριστοῦ ἀπόστολοι,

<sup>7b</sup> ἀλλὰ ἐγενήθημεν νήπιοι ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν.

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<sup>46</sup> The fact that the negative conjunction οὔτε occurs five times in 2:5-7b might lead to the conclusion that there are five denials in this antithetical statement. The final three of these five negatives, however, all deal with the one denial of Paul in 2:6 that he did not seek glory from people. Thus, it is preferable to speak of three denials and to view the fourth and fifth negatives as clarifying the third denial: "nor were we seeking glory from people, *neither* from you *nor* from others."

<sup>5a</sup>For we never came with a word of flattery,

—as you know—

<sup>5b</sup>nor with a motive of greed,

—God is our witness!—

<sup>6</sup>nor were we demanding honor from people, neither from you nor from others

—<sup>7a</sup>even though we could have insisted on our importance as apostles of Christ—

<sup>7b</sup>but we became infants among you.<sup>47</sup>

In the first denial of verse 5a, Paul claims that “we never came with a word of flattery.” Although the term *κολακεία* occurs only here in the NT, the meaning of this noun can be easily discerned from its use in the ancient world. Theophrastus, after defining flattery as “a shameful business, but profitable for the flatterers” (*Characters* 2.1), concludes his discussion by stating that “you will see the flatterer say and do all the things that he hopes will ingratiate him” (*Characters* 2.13). Aristotle claims that the person “whose goal is to make people happy in order to profit in money or in goods which can be bought is the flatterer” (*Nichomachean Ethics* 4.6.9). The term *κολακεία* frequently appears in catalogs of vices, such as in Philo who lists “flattery” alongside of “trickery,” “deceitfulness,” and “false-speaking” (*On the Sacrifice of Abel and Cain* 22). Plutarch condemns the use of flattery and contrasts it with *παρρησια*, “boldness of speech” (*Moralia* 48e-74e). Dio Chrysostom describes certain Cynics who deceive others through flattery rather than speaking with the boldness and frankness of the true philosopher (*Oration* 32).

These uses of *κολακεία* help determine in what sense Paul did not come to the Thessalonian Christians “with a word of flattery.” The apostle denies that his original

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<sup>47</sup> The translation here is mine.

preaching<sup>48</sup> to them involved deceptive language, empty praise or false promises to trick the hearers into accepting the gospel. The context of this first denial, where Paul has just claimed that he speaks “not as one who pleases people” (2:4) and where he will soon assert that he is “not demanding honor from people” (2:6), suggests that the apostle wants to distance himself from street-corner philosophers and wandering rhetoricians who typically used flattering speech to ingratiate themselves to the crowds.

Since the first denial deals with outward behavior, Paul can appeal in the first aside yet again (see 2:1, 2) to the personal knowledge that the readers have of his conduct: “as you know.” In other words, the Thessalonian believers have first-hand knowledge of how the apostle was different from other traveling speakers of his day who employed flattery to win followers and financial profits.

In the second denial of verse 5b, Paul claims that he and his coworkers did not come “with a motive of greed.” It is hardly surprising that the apostle mentions “greed” here, since the motive of avarice was frequently connected with “flattery.”<sup>49</sup> Although the noun *πλεονεξία* need not be limited to the desire for money,<sup>50</sup> the context of this verse makes it virtually certain that Paul is thinking specifically of financial greed, since wandering preachers of that day were typically accused of being interested solely in monetary gain. The very real possibility of such a charge being brought against Paul is evident from the fact that later in the apostle’s life, he refutes the charge of *πλεονεξία*

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<sup>48</sup> The noun *λόγος* in the phrase *ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας* has in view Paul’s mission-founding preaching (see 1:5).

<sup>49</sup> See the ancient sources cited in the preceding paragraphs.

<sup>50</sup> The noun is derived from the comparative “more” (*πλέον*) and the verb “to have” (*ἔχω*), and so can refer more broadly to the selfish desire to have anything that one does not have. Thus, for example, *πλεονεξία* can be associated with sexual immorality (1 Thess 4:6; Eph 4:19; 5:3; see also Rom 1:29).

against himself in connection with the relief offering he was collecting for the needy Christians in Judea (2 Cor 9:5; 12:17-18).

Since the second denial deals with an inward motive that is impossible for the Thessalonians to discern, Paul appeals in the second brief aside to the only one who can know and judge the integrity of his motives: “God is a witness!” The practice of appealing to God as a witness can be found in the OT (Job 16:19; Ps 89:37; Wis 1:6), although it is a common enough occurrence in Hellenistic writings as well. Paul, however, rarely invokes God as a witness in his letters, doing so elsewhere only three times (Rom 1:9; 2 Cor 1:23; Phil 1:8). The fact that he makes an unparalleled second appeal to God as a witness a few verses later (2:10), along with the preceding double claim in 2:4 that God has “examined” him, is striking and supports the claim that Paul is, in fact, defending himself in his passage.<sup>51</sup>

The unmistakable pattern in 2:5, where each of the two denials is followed by a brief aside that repudiates the implied charge lying behind the denial, makes clear the interrelationship of the subsequent clauses in verses 6 and 7. The third denial of verse 6 is followed by another aside in verse 7a, and verse 7b (which contains the infant metaphor) contrasts not the immediately preceding phrase in verse 7a but the larger clause of verses 5-7a, particularly the three denials which these verses contain.

In the third denial of verse 6, Paul repudiates any notion that his past ministry in Thessalonica was motivated by the selfish desire to gain human praise: “nor were we demanding honor from people, neither from you nor from others.” The word *δόξα* does not have here its usual NT sense of “glory” in a religious sense (see, e.g., 2:12), but the

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<sup>51</sup> See further Weima, “Apology,” 80-89.

common secular meaning of “fame, renown, honor”<sup>52</sup> (see, e.g., 2:20). The denial of demanding honor follows naturally after the denial of acting out of greed, since it is another insincere motive commonly ascribed to traveling speakers. In fact, the link between financial gain and human praise can be seen in Dio Chrysostom who identifies false philosophers as those who deliver orations for “their own profit and honor (δόξα).”<sup>53</sup> The participle ζητοῦντες normally conveys the sense of “seeking” or “desiring,” but sometimes has the stronger connotation of “demanding” or “requiring” something,<sup>54</sup> and such a rendering provides a better contrast with the third aside which immediately follows in 2:7a.<sup>55</sup> The thought of the third denial, therefore, is that Paul and his fellow missionaries did not demand honor from either the Thessalonian Christians (“neither from you”) or other believers (“nor from others”).

For yet a third time Paul follows his denial with an aside or parenthetical comment: “even though we could have insisted on our importance as apostles of Christ.” The key word in this third aside is the noun βάρος which literally means “weight, burden.” Here, however, the noun has an obviously figurative sense and this has resulted in two possible meanings: (1) “financial burden”, i.e., the responsibility that the church has to support financially the apostles in their work; or (2) “weight of authority or dignity,” i.e., the responsibility that the church has to respect and honor the apostles in their work.<sup>56</sup> Although evidence supporting the first meaning of financial support can be

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<sup>52</sup> BAGD, p 204.

<sup>53</sup> *Oration* 32.10-11.

<sup>54</sup> BAGD, p 339.

<sup>55</sup> So Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 98; see also Frame, *Thessalonians*, 98-9.

<sup>56</sup> This second meaning resembles our contemporary colloquialism which designates someone important as a “heavy” or a “heavy hitter” (Gaventa, *Thessalonians*, 26).



cited,<sup>57</sup> the literary pattern of a denial followed by an aside requires the second meaning of weight of authority or dignity. For the appropriate ground of the apostle's denial that he was "not demanding honor from people, neither from you nor from others" cannot be that Paul did not demand financial support but rather that he did not selfishly insist that honor (δόξα) be given to him by the congregation.<sup>58</sup> The fact that δόξα in the Septuagint translated the Hebrew root *kbd*, meaning "be weighty," strengthens the link between the denial that Paul sought "honor" (δόξα) from people and the parenthetical comment that he could have made use of his position of "weight" (βάρος), and so further supports the claim that βάρος here refers to the weight of authority or influence.<sup>59</sup>

After the lengthy negative half of the antithetical statement with its three denials and three accompanying asides (2:5-7a), Paul finally completes his thought with the corresponding positive half which, though brief, is remarkable for the metaphor it contains: "but we became infants among you" (2:7b). It is now clear that this metaphor is intended to contrast not the immediately preceding phrase in verse 7a but rather the whole clause of verses 5-7a, particularly the three denials that Paul "came with a word of flattery," "with a motive of greed," and "demanding honor." In contrast to these impure

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<sup>57</sup> The fact that βάρος and its cognates occur frequently in the Greek papyri with respect to financial charges (J. G. Strelan, "Burden-Bearing and the Law of Christ: A Re-examination of Galatians 6:2," *JBL* 94 [1975]: 266-76), as well as Paul's use of the cognate verb in 2:9 to refer to monetary support and his denial in 2:5 that he came "with a motive of greed," has led a few scholars to adopt the first meaning (e.g., Bruce, *Thessalonians*, 30-31; Morris, *Thessalonians*, 66-7).

<sup>58</sup> The majority of commentators opt for the second figurative meaning of βάρος as "weight of authority or dignity": so, e.g., BAGD, p 134.2; Frame, *Thessalonians*, 99; Best, *Thessalonians*, 100; Marshall, *Thessalonians*, 68-9; Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 99; Richard, *Thessalonians*, 82; E. Verhoef, *De brieven aan de Tessalonicenzen* (Kampen: Kok, 1998) 102.

<sup>59</sup> The alternative understanding of βάρος as referring to financial support leads Stephen Fowl to claim that Paul's use of νήπιοι here is a "metaphor in distress." Fowl's point is that infants are dependent and demanding on their caretakers to supply their daily needs and that this aspect of infants contradicts the point of self-sufficiency which Paul makes in 2:7a ("Metaphor in Distress," 469-73). This claimed problem disappears, however, once it is recognized that 2:7a deals not with the refusal to demand financial support but rather with the refusal to demand honor and authority. A further error with Fowl's analysis is that he

motives—motives typically associated with wandering philosopher-teachers of that day—Paul boldly asserts that he and his fellow missionaries “became infants among you.” In this context, the infant metaphor functions to highlight the innocence of the apostle and his coworkers. Little babies are not capable of using deceptive speech, having ulterior motives, and being concerned with receiving honor; in all these things they are innocent. This notion of *νήπιοι* is in keeping with other ancient writers who, as we have observed above, also at times emphasized the innocent character of infants.

The metaphor of infants and the notion of innocence associated with this metaphor, therefore, provides a powerful defense for the integrity of Paul and his fellow missionaries during their past visit to Thessalonica. The noun *νήπιοι* is not only the most strongly attested reading but also involves a striking metaphor that functions effectively in the overall argument of 2:5-7b.

#### CONCLUSION

The debate over the proper reading of 1 Thess 2:7 will, no doubt, continue to occupy the attention of both textual critics and NT scholars. Yet, this textual problem is much less ambiguous than it is frequently claimed or portrayed to be. The external evidence is decisively in favor of *νήπιοι*—a fact that even those opposed to this reading readily admit. And despite the various arguments based on the internal evidence that have been forwarded in support of *ἤπιοι*, none of them—neither individually nor collectively—provide the needed justification for overriding the clear testimony of the external evidence. There are compelling reasons, therefore, for allowing Paul to make the

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links 7a with the following infant metaphor of 7b instead of with the preceding clause of verse 6 as the literary pattern of a denial followed by an aside clearly demands.

claim of innocence that he made to the Thessalonians long ago: “But we became infants among you.”

## ABSTRACT

The debate over the proper reading of 1 Thess 2:7 is much less ambiguous than it is typically portrayed to be. The external evidence is decisively in favor of νήπιοι (“infants”)—a fact that even those opposed to this reading readily admit. An evaluation of the internal evidence and the four arguments commonly used to justify the choice of ἡπίοι (“gentle”) reveals that none of them provide the needed justification for overriding the clear testimony of the external evidence. Furthermore, the superior reading “infants” involves a striking metaphor that functions effectively in the overall argument of 1 Thess 2:5-7b. There are compelling reasons, therefore, for allowing Paul to make the claim of innocence that he made to the Thessalonians long ago: “But we became *infants* among you.”