

Cambridge University Press

0521810418 - Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'

T. L. Carter

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## PAUL AND THE POWER OF SIN

*Paul and the Power of Sin* seeks to ground Paul's language of sin in the socio-cultural context of his original letters. T.L. Carter draws on the work of social anthropologist Mary Douglas to conduct a cross-cultural analysis of the symbolism of the power of sin in the letters, examining thoroughly Douglas' 'Grid and Group' model and defending its use as a heuristic tool for New Testament scholars. He uses this model to examine the social location of Paul and the communities to which he wrote and offers a fresh insight into key passages from 1 Corinthians, Galatians and Romans. Carter concludes that an important part of Paul's purpose was to safeguard the position of law-free Gentile believers by redrawing social boundaries along eschatological rather than ethnic lines.

T.L. CARTER is Baptist Minister at Leamington Spa Baptist Church. He has also published in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*.

Cambridge University Press

0521810418 - Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'

T. L. Carter

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

SOCIETY FOR NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

*MONOGRAPH SERIES*

General editor: Richard Bauckham

**115**

PAUL AND THE POWER OF SIN

Cambridge University Press

0521810418 - Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'

T. L. Carter

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

# Paul and the Power of Sin

## *Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'*

**T.L. CARTER**



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

0521810418 - Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'

T. L. Carter

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© T.L. Carter 2002

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*Typeface* Times 10/12 pt.    *System* L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X 2<sub>ε</sub> [TB]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

Carter, T.L. (Timothy Leonard), 1963–

Paul and the power of sin : redefining 'beyond the pale' / by T.L. Carter.

p.      cm. – (Society for New Testament Studies monograph series ; 115)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 81041 8

1. Bible, N.T. Epistles of Paul – Socio-rhetorical criticism. 2. Sin – Biblical teaching.  
3. Gentiles in the New Testament. I. Title. II. Monograph series (Society for New  
Testament Studies) ; 115.

BS2655.S54 C37 2002

241'.3'092–dc21 2001037393

ISBN 0 521 81041 8 hardback

Cambridge University Press

0521810418 - Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'

T. L. Carter

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*For my mother*

Cambridge University Press

0521810418 - Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'

T. L. Carter

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*'Sin is a power in our life:  
let us fairly understand that it can only be met by  
another power.'*

HENRY DRUMMOND

Cambridge University Press

0521810418 - Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'

T. L. Carter

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CONTENTS

<i>List of figures</i>	page x
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xiii
1 Introduction	1
2 'Grid and group'	19
3 Physical and social boundaries in Corinth	45
4 Exclusive boundaries in Galatia	78
5 Small bounded groups in Rome	124
6 Inclusive boundaries in Rome	146
7 Conclusion	204
<i>Bibliography</i>	210
<i>Index of selected subjects</i>	227
<i>Index to ancient references</i>	231

## FIGURES

1	The Grid/Group matrix	<i>page 20</i>
2	Grid and Group (1970)	21
3	Customised Grid and Group	44
4	The present boundaries in Galatia	87
5	Christianity as a Jewish sect	87
6	Paul's exclusive eschatological boundary	88
7	Paul's inclusive eschatological boundaries	202



Cambridge University Press

0521810418 - Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'

T. L. Carter

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## PREFACE

'Beyond the pale' is a well-known English phrase, generally applied to anything beyond the boundaries of acceptability. Christian theology in the west has often emphasised the doctrine of original sin, according to which every individual is inherently sinful and 'beyond the pale', acceptable to God only on the basis of the atoning death of his son, Jesus Christ. In his struggle against Pelagianism, Augustine sought to ground the doctrine of original sin in the writings of the apostle Paul, who portrayed sin as an active agent enslaving all humanity in its power and condemning the world to death. Accordingly the apostle is often credited with – or blamed for – a radically pessimistic assessment of the basic sinfulness of human nature.

This book endeavours to set aside Augustine's agenda and understand the apostle in the light of his own socio-cultural context. A cross-cultural model, developed by social anthropologist Mary Douglas, is employed to analyse Paul's letters and, as a result, a different picture emerges. It is argued that Paul developed the symbolism of the power of sin as a way of safeguarding the position of law-free Gentile believers within the small, bounded social groups that made up the early church. He sought to remove the ethnic boundary that separated Jew from Gentile and replace it with a new, eschatological boundary between the righteous and the sinful. In effect, Paul was seeking to redefine his readers' perception of who is and is not 'beyond the pale'. He does this by depicting sin as a power that threatens to infiltrate the boundaries surrounding the social body of the church and the physical bodies of believers. Sin becomes an active force which needs to be kept at bay, 'beyond the pale', outside those boundaries. These different meanings of the phrase 'beyond the pale' give rise to the title of this book: *Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'*.

This study is a revised version of my D.Phil. thesis, which was successfully submitted to Oxford University in 1998. The lion's share of my gratitude must go to Robert Morgan, whose rigorous supervision over

Cambridge University Press

0521810418 - Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'

T. L. Carter

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*xii Preface*

many years eventually ensured that my thesis did not fall short of the required standard. I am grateful, too, to my examiners, John Ashton and Philip Esler, for their comments, as well as to John Barclay and Chris Rowland for their encouragement on the way. Members of the *Seminar on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* also helped me to sharpen my thinking on Romans 3:10–18.

Professor Mary Douglas was kind enough to spend some time discussing my use of her 'Grid and Group' model. Despite her reservations about applying the model to New Testament communities, she has been most supportive and helpful and her comments led me to make a serious reassessment of my approach. Readers of this book will see how often her work has been plundered by New Testament scholars; I am grateful to her for allowing me to add my name to the long list of those who have adapted her work to serve their own ends. If the final result of this study is deemed unsatisfactory, then the responsibility for that rests solely on my shoulders.

Thanks, too, are due to the Baptist Union of Great Britain, who drew on their Scholarship Fund to support me during my three years at Regent's Park College in Oxford. The Sir Richard Stapley Educational Trust and the Richard Newitt Fund also provided valuable financial assistance.

On leaving Oxford, I took up a pastorate at Leamington Spa Baptist Church, and I should like to record my gratitude to the members of that church for their generosity in allowing me, over a period of six years, to devote a significant proportion of my time to my studies. I suspect that there are few churches where such a thing would have been possible!

Last, but not least, I owe a debt of love to my wife, Sue, and to our children, Jackie, Sylvia and Robert. The thesis often took time which could have been spent with them, but it has been their support that made the writing of it seem worthwhile.

Cambridge University Press

0521810418 - Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'

T. L. Carter

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
EKK	Evangelisch-Katholisch Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>EvTh</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTSupp	Supplements to <i>Novum Testamentum</i>
PL	Patrologia Latina
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Religious Studies Review</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTS	Society for New Testament Studies
<i>ThQ</i>	<i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i>
<i>ThRev</i>	<i>Theological Review</i>
<i>TLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary

Cambridge University Press

0521810418 - Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'

T. L. Carter

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*xiv Abbreviations*

WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>