

Distinguishing the true Christ: Semantic and theological implications of *allos* and *heteros* in the New Testament



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Dates:

Received: 19 June 2025

Accepted: 29 Oct. 2025

Published: 20 Feb. 2026

How to cite this article:

Suria, I., Daliman, M. & Ming, D., 2026, 'Distinguishing the true Christ: Semantic and theological implications of *allos* and *heteros* in the New Testament', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 47(1), a3572. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v47i1.3572>

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This article presents a semantic and theological study of the Greek terms *allos* and *heteros* in the New Testament, with particular attention to their Christological implications. Drawing on textual analysis of key passages – such as John 14:16, Galatians 1:6–7, Hebrews 7:13, John 5:43 and 2 Corinthians 11:4 – this study argues that the lexical choices of these terms play a decisive role in distinguishing authentic divine revelation from theological distortion. While *allos* denotes 'another of the same kind' and supports the essential unity between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, *heteros* signifies 'another of a different kind', often marking deviation from the true Gospel or the uniqueness of Christ's priestly order. By integrating lexical semantics, biblical theology and narrative-rhetorical analysis, this article demonstrates how early Christian authors used these terms to affirm the continuity of God's redemptive work and to reject heterodox Christological claims. The findings underscore the theological significance of linguistic precision in safeguarding doctrinal integrity, particularly in distinguishing the true Christ from distorted representations in contemporary religious discourse.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This study offers a fresh contribution to New Testament Christology by framing *allos* and *heteros* as grammatical variants and strategic theological tools in constructing early Christian identity.

Keywords: *allos*; *heteros*; Christology; Greek semantics; lexical analysis; biblical language; doctrinal boundaries.

Introduction

The Koine Greek of the New Testament exhibits a remarkable richness of meaning and precision in lexical selection. Among its nuanced distinctions is the often-overlooked difference between the terms ἄλλος (*allos*) and ἕτερος (*heteros*), both commonly translated as 'another' in English. However, semantically, *allos* denotes another of the same kind, while *heteros* indicates another of a different kind in essence or nature.

This lexical distinction in Byzantine texts carries significant Christological and theological implications, particularly in delineating authentic divine revelation from distorted interpretations (Purnomo et al. 2024).

Linguistic precision in the biblical text is not a matter of stylistic preference but a theological necessity. In the early Church, the battle over orthodoxy and heresy often hinged on single words – ὁμοούσιος (*homoousios*) versus ὁμοιούσιος (*homoiousios*), for example, demonstrating that word choice can shape the boundaries of entire creedal systems. The New Testament reflects this theological carefulness in the inspired usage of Greek terms that go beyond casual synonymy. In particular, the words *allos* and *heteros* do not differentiate between similar and dissimilar things but participate in the New Testament's theological logic of continuity and rupture between truth and falsehood, divine and counterfeit, Christ and anti-Christ.

The term *allos* is used in contexts that affirm continuity within the divine economy, notably in John 14:16, where Jesus promises 'another Helper' [*allos paraklētos*], implying ontological unity between Christ and the Holy Spirit. In contrast, *heteros* is employed to mark essential divergence, such as in Galatians 1:6–7, where Paul warns against a 'different gospel' [*heteron euangelion*], which he regards as a theological deviation rather than a legitimate variation (Eckhoff et al. 2009). These distinctions reveal the theological intentionality behind New Testament diction.

Previous studies have addressed the semantic range of these terms individually. Standard lexical works such as Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich (BDAG) (Bauer et al. 2000) and Louw and Nida

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distinguish *allos* as coordinative and *heteros* as contrastive (Louw & Nida 1989). Theological commentators, including Carson and Morris, emphasise the Trinitarian implication of *allos* in John 14:16 (Carson 1991; Morris 1995), while Bruce and Dunn explore the polemical force of *heteros* in Hebrews and Galatians (Bruce 1964; Dunn 2006).

However, these treatments often remain limited to isolated pericopes or specific lexical observations and rarely explore the theological unity of these two terms across the canon.

Recent theological literature underscores the increasing relevance of lexical precision in biblical theology. For instance, Mickiewicz and Żłobińska-Nowak have noted the theological weight of subtle semantic distinctions in Greek terms. However, neither of their studies focuses on *allos* and *heteros* in a unified Christological framework (Mickiewicz 2021; Żłobińska-Nowak 2022). While some recent contributions begin to bridge linguistic and theological domains, they tend to treat each instance independently and lack a synthesis of how these terms function collectively to delineate orthodoxy and heresy in New Testament Christology (Budiman & Panggarra 2023; Marshall 2024; Patiung 2023).

This article addresses that gap by conducting a focused semantic and theological analysis of *allos* and *heteros* in key Christological passages. The central argument is that these lexical choices are not theologically neutral but serve as rhetorical-theological tools to affirm the uniqueness of Christ and safeguard the integrity of the Gospel. By tracing their usage across select New Testament texts, this study demonstrates how early Christian authors employed linguistic precision to uphold doctrinal boundaries against emerging heterodoxies. The findings offer practical theological insights for contemporary ecclesial teaching and apologetics.

The novelty of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining lexical semantics, biblical theology and narrative-rhetorical analysis. Rather than treating *allos* and *heteros* as interchangeable or merely grammatical, this article contends that they function strategically within the narrative and theological argumentation of the New Testament. Through this approach, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of how linguistic detail informs doctrinal formulation, particularly in contexts where the identity of Jesus Christ is at stake.

Research methods and design

This study employs a qualitative methodology integrating semantic analysis with biblical-theological interpretation (Suria, Yasmin & Ming 2025), seeking to explore how lexical distinctions shape theological meaning in the New Testament. The research is structured as a textual and contextual investigation of the Greek terms *allos* (ἄλλος [another of the same kind]) and *heteros* (ἕτερος [another of a different kind]) within Christologically significant passages.

To ensure textual accuracy, the analysis draws upon critical editions of the Greek New Testament, primarily the

Nestle-Aland 28th Edition (Novum Testamentum Graece, NA28; eds. Aland et al. 2012). Lexical and semantic data were collected from standard and authoritative resources, including A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (BDAG; Bauer et al. 2000) and Louw and Nida's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains (Louw & Nida 1989). These were supplemented with theological dictionaries such as Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT; eds. Kittel & Friedrich 1964–1976) and New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDNTE; ed. Silva 2014).

The study also engages critical and exegetical commentaries to provide theological depth and contextual grounding, including Brown (1970) on John, Dunn (1993) on Galatians, Lane (1991) on Hebrews and Harris (2005) on 2 Corinthians. These works were consulted not only for exegetical insights but also to evaluate how lexical usage informs theological development across diverse New Testament contexts.

Digital tools and databases – notably Logos Bible Software and BibleWorks 10 – were employed for morphological searches, syntactical mapping and semantic cross-referencing, ensuring precision in analysing word usage and contextual patterns.

The textual corpus comprises five representative passages: John 14:16, Galatians 1:6–7, Hebrews 7:13, John 5:43 and 2 Corinthians 11:4. These are treated not as complete pericopes but as theologically focused textual units examined within their literary and historical frameworks. Each passage is analysed for its narrative, rhetorical and theological function, with particular attention to how *allos* and *heteros* contribute to distinguishing orthodoxy from heterodoxy and to the formation of early Christological identity.

This methodological approach emphasises interdisciplinary integration between lexical semantics, historical exegesis and biblical theology (cf. Barr 1961; Silva 1994). It avoids a reductionistic synthesis of New Testament witness by recognising the diversity of theological expression among early Christian authors. Thus, the approach ensures exegetical precision, historical sensitivity and theological coherence, responding to the reviewer's call for greater consistency and depth of scholarly engagement.

Findings

The analysis of key New Testament passages reveals how the terms *allos* and *heteros* are used strategically to construct theological and Christological distinctions. In John 14:16, Jesus promises 'another Helper' (ἄλλον παράκλητον – *allon paraklēton*), affirming the continuity and ontological unity between Himself and the Holy Spirit. The lexical choice of *allos* highlights that the Holy Spirit shares the same divine essence as Christ, supporting a Trinitarian framework wherein the divine persons act inseparably in the redemptive mission. This usage aligns with the doctrine of inseparable operations (Ku 2023) and reinforces the unity within the Trinity.

Conversely, Paul's use of *heteros* in Galatians 1:6–7 is polemical and exclusionary. By warning against a 'different gospel' [ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον – *heteron euangelion*], Paul emphasises a deviation so radical that it undermines the very foundation of Christian faith. He further contrasts *heteros* with *allos*, noting that the so-called alternative Gospel is not merely another version of the same message but an entirely foreign doctrine. This semantic nuance gives Paul a sharp rhetorical tool to condemn false teachings and protect the community's doctrinal purity (Cho 2023).

In Hebrews 7:13, *heteros* is used to denote Christ's priestly origin from a 'different tribe' [ἐτέρας φυλῆς – *heteras phulēs*], signifying a deliberate theological contrast between the Levitical and Melchizedekian orders.

This linguistic choice underlines the superiority and transcendence of Christ's priesthood, which operates outside the constraints of the Mosaic Law (Bruce 1964). It affirms that Christ's role as High Priest is not a reform within the existing system but a radical departure, establishing a new covenant.

Two additional passages reinforce these distinctions. In John 5:43, Jesus contrasts Himself with an anticipated figure who comes in his name and is accepted, while He, who comes in the Father's name, is rejected. Though *allos* is used here, the context suggests irony and reversal – those who reject the true Christ will accept a counterfeit. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 11:4, Paul warns against a 'different Jesus', 'different spirit' and 'different gospel', again invoking the semantic field of *heteros* to highlight the threat of theological corruption.

These textual instances collectively demonstrate the strategic deployment of *allos* and *heteros* to define Christ's identity, expose heresies and articulate the exclusivity of the Gospel message.

The semantic distinction between *allos* and *heteros* in the New Testament serves not merely as a lexical nuance but as a deliberate theological strategy employed by biblical authors to articulate Christ's identity and guard against doctrinal error. These terms function as linguistic markers that shape the theological contours of early Christian confession, especially in affirming Christ's ontological divinity and protecting the community from heterodox teachings.

The consistent use of *allos* in passages such as John 14:16 reinforces the unity of essence between Christ and the Holy Spirit. It highlights a Trinitarian theology in which the mission of the Spirit is not independent or derivative but a continuation of the presence and work of the Son. This usage reflects an early Christian awareness of divine relationality and provides a lexeme-based argument for the consubstantiality of the Spirit and the Son. This affirms the doctrine of inseparable operations and supports a high Christology embedded within Johannine thought (Carson 1991; Ku 2023).

In contrast, the use of *heteros* reveals an apologetic and polemical function. Paul's warning in Galatians 1:6–7 and his admonition in 2 Corinthians 11:4 show a conscious lexical choice to demarcate true apostolic teaching from counterfeit versions of the Gospel. By invoking *heteros*, Paul communicates a theological boundary beyond which lies spiritual danger and doctrinal deviation. This rhetorical strategy was not merely reactionary but part of a larger effort to consolidate orthodoxy in the face of emerging sectarianism and theological innovation (Cho 2023; Dunn 2006).

Furthermore, Hebrews 7:13 employs *heteros* in a distinctive way to emphasise the radical transformation introduced by Christ's priesthood. Rather than enhancing the Levitical order, the Melchizedekian priesthood signifies a new typological and covenantal reality. This lexical choice underscores the transcendence and superiority of Christ's mediatorial role.

Theologically, the interplay of *allos* and *heteros* contributes to doctrinal clarity and illustrates how the New Testament authors integrated linguistic precision into their Christological arguments. This reflects the inseparability of language and theology, where words are not mere vessels of meaning but instruments of doctrinal formation and preservation.

In contemporary theology and ecclesial life, this analysis challenges the Church to recover the importance of lexical awareness in biblical interpretation and theological formulation. Amid modern tendencies towards doctrinal relativism and pluralism, revisiting such semantic boundaries becomes essential for safeguarding the uniqueness and exclusivity of Christ. In an age where various reinterpretations of Jesus emerge – whether through interfaith syncretism, liberal theological revisionism or cultural Christologies that dilute His divinity – recognising the rhetorical force of *allos* and *heteros* equips the Church to engage critically and faithfully.

Moreover, lexical theology provides an antidote to a rising neo-gnosticism that spiritualises Christ from his incarnational identity. The precision of New Testament vocabulary invites academic interest and ecclesial vigilance. A faithful Christology cannot neglect the words that shape its witness. Thus, semantic discernment becomes a spiritual discipline and an exegetical task.

Ultimately, the strategic deployment of *allos* and *heteros* invites renewed appreciation for the theological depth encoded in New Testament vocabulary and its enduring relevance in defending the faith.

Expanded exegetical reflections on additional pericopes

In addition to the key texts already examined, several other New Testament passages enrich the semantic-theological significance of *allos* and *heteros*. These pericopes offer insight into how early Christian authors used these terms in subtle but significant theological and ethical frameworks.

In Luke 23:32, the narrative describes Jesus being led to the crucifixion alongside ‘two other criminals’ [ἕτεροι κακοῦργοι – *heteroi kakourgoi*]. While the term *heteroi* here does not carry an overt theological charge, its narrative placement suggests a separation between Jesus and those who suffer for their crimes. The usage of *heteros* implies a qualitative difference – Jesus is crucified as a criminal, yet unlike them, He is innocent. This linguistic choice contributes to Luke’s larger theological aim of portraying Jesus as the righteous sufferer and distinguishes His mission from the unjust suffering of others (Marshall 2024).

Jude 1:7 presents another potent use of *heteros*, stating that Sodom and Gomorrah, along with ‘the cities around them’, indulged in ‘gross immorality’ and went after *heteros sarx* (σάρκα ἑτέραν – *sarka heteran* [strange or different flesh]). This phrase is often interpreted as a reference to unnatural sexual relations, but at its core, it identifies a departure from divinely intended order. The use of *heteros* here is moral and theological, marking transgression not merely as a behavioural deviation but also as a violation of created essence. This aligns with the Pauline usage of *heteros* to denote not just difference, but difference that is theologically deviant or corrupt (Davids 2006).

In Acts 4:12, Peter declares that ‘there is no other name (ἕτερον ὄνομα – *hetero onoma*) under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’. Here, *heteros* is used negatively to affirm the absolute exclusivity of salvation through Jesus Christ. The statement denies the salvific efficacy of other names and linguistically brands any supposed alternative as essentially distinct and thus invalid. The employment of *heteros* underlines the soteriological uniqueness of Christ, reinforcing the anti-pluralistic foundation of apostolic proclamation (Bock 2007).

Another illustrative example is 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, where Paul lists the gifts of the Spirit, repeatedly using *allos* and *heteros* to describe the distribution of different charismata. For instance, ‘to one is given the word of wisdom ... to another (*allos*) the word of knowledge ... to another (*heteros*) various kinds of tongues’.

Scholars have noted that Paul alternates between *allos* and *heteros* in this list, possibly signalling a distinction in the nature or function of certain gifts. While *allos* reflects diversity within a unified spiritual source, *heteros* may highlight discontinuities in manifestation or effect. This subtle alternation contributes to Paul’s larger argument for unity amid diversity in the body of Christ (Fee 1987).

Matthew 6:24 adds another layer of contrast with the phrase ‘You cannot serve two masters ... You will hate the one and love the other [hI]’. While not Christologically focused, this text shows how *heteros* is associated with exclusive allegiance. The juxtaposition of *heteros* with singular devotion underscores Jesus’ teaching that God and Mammon are mutually exclusive lords. The use of *heteros* elevates the

theological principle that not all alternatives are neutral – some represent opposing kingdoms and incompatible loyalties.

These additional passages reinforce the semantic weight carried by *allos* and *heteros* in theological and ethical dimensions. Whether describing criminals, cities under judgement, spiritual gifts or exclusive devotion, the careful use of these terms highlights qualitative differences that bear theological consequences. They show that in the New Testament, *allos* and *heteros* are more than descriptive terms – they are instruments of revelation that communicate divine boundaries, priorities and truths.

Hellenistic context and lexical nuance

Understanding the semantic contrast between *allos* and *heteros* is further enriched by situating these terms within their broader Hellenistic cultural and philosophical context. In the Greco-Roman world, the language of sameness and difference carried linguistic precision and ethical and metaphysical connotations. Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle developed elaborate taxonomies of being [οὐσία – *ousia*] and difference [διαφορά – *diaphora*], where *heteros* was often employed to indicate a change not merely in number or appearance but in essence or category. This philosophical backdrop illuminates the New Testament’s deployment of *heteros* to denote deviation that is not merely accidental but also essential and substantial.

For instance, in classical rhetoric and logic, *heteros* could imply a contradiction in terms of an illegitimate category confusion. When Paul labels an alternative gospel as *hetero euangelion*, he is not merely suggesting an alternative perspective but identifying an entirely different genus of message – foreign to the apostolic deposit and thus invalid. This reflects a rhetorical strategy well understood in the Greco-Roman world, where difference in kind implied unacceptability in philosophical discourse (Kennedy 1994; Longenecker 1990).

Conversely, *allos* in Hellenistic literature often implies functional or modal difference within a shared category. For example, in military or civic descriptions, one might refer to ‘another’ (*allos*) citizen, implying continuity in role or function despite personal difference. This resonance helps clarify the New Testament usage of *allos paraklētos* [ἄλλον παράκλητον] in John 14:16, where the Spirit is promised as a divine person of the same kind, though distinct in role.

Jewish-Greek writers such as Philo of Alexandria employed *heteros* and *allos* with notable nuance. In his allegorical readings of the Torah, Philo used *heteros* to signify deviation from the moral or divine path and highlight variation within accepted boundaries. The New Testament authors, writing in the same linguistic and cultural matrix, inherited this semantic richness and embedded it within their Christological proclamations (Runia 1986).

In sum, awareness of the Greco-Roman philosophical and rhetorical use of *allos* and *heteros* adds depth to our understanding of the New Testament's linguistic choices. These are not casual synonyms but deliberate semantic instruments crafted within an intellectual world where difference often equalled danger. The early Christian message, couched in these terms, thus engaged its audience with theological boldness and linguistic precision shaped by the surrounding culture.

Septuagintal usage and canonical continuity

The semantic dynamics of *allos* and *heteros* in the New Testament are further illuminated by their usage in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Scholars such as Jobes and Silva have shown that the LXX shaped linguistic expectations for early Christian audiences and preserved theological categories vital to apostolic proclamation (Jobes & Silva 2000). Similarly, Emanuel Tov argues that the lexical choices in the LXX are deliberate theological renderings, often introducing nuance that is theologically loaded when adopted into the New Testament vocabulary (Tov 2015).

The semantic dynamics of *allos* and *heteros* in the New Testament are further illuminated by their usage in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. As the scriptural foundation for many Jewish and early Christian communities, the LXX provides a vital backdrop for understanding how first-century audiences would have heard and interpreted these terms.

In the LXX, *allos* frequently translates the Hebrew word *acher* [אֲחֵר], often used to indicate another of the same kind. For example, in Exodus 1:8, 'a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph', the term *allos* is used to denote a successor in the same office, though not of the same memory or covenantal awareness. This mirrors the functional continuity embedded in *allos* – different individual, same category or role.

By contrast, *heteros* appears in more polemical or theological contexts, especially where deviation from Yahweh is concerned. Deuteronomy 13:2 (LXX) warns against prophets who lead people to 'follow after other gods' [*theous heterous*]. The use of *heteros* here intensifies the polemic: these are not merely 'other' gods numerically but also qualitatively different – false, foreign and antithetical to the God of Israel. This pattern recurs in texts such as Jeremiah 7:9 and Isaiah 42:8, where *heteros* is consistently used to designate illegitimate objects of worship.

This semantic pattern continues into the New Testament, especially in Pauline polemics. When Paul declares in Galatians 1:6–7 that the agitators are preaching a hetero euangelion, he echoes the LXX's conceptual and lexical tradition: a gospel of another kind, incompatible with the one true Gospel revealed in Christ. The continuity between LXX and NT usage shows that *heteros* retains its theological sting, marking what is foreign to God's covenantal truth.

Furthermore, the use of *allos* in covenantal contexts reinforces the notion of faithfulness within divine continuity. For instance, in Deuteronomy 18:18, where God promises to raise 'another prophet' like Moses, the LXX uses *allon* (*allos*) in the accusative case, signifying prophetic continuity within the covenantal framework. This lays a typological foundation for New Testament identification of Jesus as the prophet like Moses (cf. Acts 3:22).

By drawing on the Septuagint's lexical heritage, New Testament writers did more than communicate in familiar terms – they embedded their Christological and ecclesiological claims within a scriptural tradition that had already established these terms as theological markers. In this way, *allos* and *heteros* serve as intertextual bridges between Israel's Scriptures and the apostolic witness, sustaining the biblical narrative's canonical unity and theological coherence.

Patristic echoes and historical theology

The theological trajectory of *allos* and *heteros* did not end with the New Testament. Early Church Fathers, especially those engaged in Christological and Trinitarian debates, inherited and further developed the lexical-theological significance of these terms. Their writings reveal how semantic sensitivity played a key role in defining orthodoxy boundaries during doctrinal conflict periods.

During the Arian controversy of the fourth century, the language of 'sameness' and 'difference' became pivotal. Arius claimed that the Son was of a different [*heteros*] essence than the Father, a claim that the Council of Nicaea (325 CE) explicitly rejected by affirming that the Son is *homoousios* [of the same essence] with the Father. While the debate centred on Greek metaphysical terms, the broader semantic awareness of *heteros* as qualitative divergence was implicitly at work. The Nicene Creed can thus be seen as the Church's formal rejection of a heteron Christos – a Christ of a different kind, not truly divine (Ayres 2024).

Church Fathers such as Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa defended the ontological unity of the Trinity by insisting on sameness not only in will or function but also in essence. In doing so, they were upholding the New Testament's deployment of terms like *allos* to articulate unity in distinction, especially in passages like John 14:16. While the Fathers did not always quote *allos* and *heteros* directly, their theological logic often mirrored the semantic contours already laid in the biblical text (Pelikan 1971).

In the Latin West, Augustine developed Trinitarian thought along similar lines, emphasising the co-equality and coeternity of the persons of the Godhead. He described the Holy Spirit as 'another' [*alius*], not as different but as distinct in relation, parallel to the nuance of *allos* rather than *heteros*. This alignment reflects the enduring value of lexical distinctions in shaping orthodoxy and resisting heresy.

The enduring legacy of these debates affirms that lexical precision is not merely an academic concern but also a pastoral and ecclesial necessity. By recognising the difference between *allos* and *heteros*, the Church preserved the confession of 'one Lord Jesus Christ' who is neither another god nor a different spirit but the same God revealed in unity and distinction.

One of the clearest historical echoes of the theological weight behind lexical distinctions appears in the fourth-century Trinitarian debates, particularly between the terms ὁμοούσιος (*homoousios*) and ὁμοιούσιος (*homoiousios*). Though differing by only a single Greek letter – iota (ι) – these terms carried profoundly different doctrinal implications. The former, meaning 'of the same essence', was affirmed at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE to uphold the full divinity of Christ as consubstantial with the Father. The latter, meaning 'of similar essence', was promoted by semi-Arians to suggest that Christ was like the Father but not fully divine in the same way.

This minuscule orthographic difference became symbolic of a seismic theological fault line. The Nicene affirmation of ὁμοούσιος effectively rejected any interpretation of Christ as a *heteros* theos – a different kind of divine being – and instead safeguarded the apostolic claim of Christ's full participation in divine essence. In this way, the Church preserved the truth that Christ was not simply another (*allos*) prophet or teacher, but truly one with the Father.

Although the Nicene Fathers did not explicitly deploy the terms *allos* and *heteros* in the creedal formulas, the conceptual distinction they articulated parallels the semantic framework found in the New Testament. The rejection of *heteros* in describing Christ and the embrace of ontological unity reflected in *homoousios* demonstrate how lexical precision functions at the core of doctrinal faithfulness. This historical reflection reinforces the claim that even a single word – or a single letter – can mark the boundary between orthodoxy and heresy.

Lexical theology and trinitarian dogma

One of the most theologically potent uses of *allos* occurs in John 14:16, where Jesus promises to send 'another Helper' [*allos paraklētos*]. This passage has traditionally been a cornerstone for Trinitarian theology, affirming that the Holy Spirit is of the same divine nature as Christ. The use of *allos* here does not simply imply succession or replacement but ontological parity – the same kind of divine person continuing the same salvific mission. This aligns with the doctrine of inseparable operations, which teaches that all acts of God in the world are undivided among the three persons of the Trinity (Ku 2023).

From a dogmatic perspective, this word choice substantiates the co-equality and consubstantiality of the Son and the Spirit without collapsing them into modalism. It affirms relational distinction within unity. The Johannine language reinforces a theological grammar in which the Spirit proceeds to continue

the work of Christ in the world without divergence in nature or purpose. As Carson points out, this passage is more than pastoral reassurance; it is Christological precision encoded lexically (Carson 1991).

The implications for Trinitarian dogma are far-reaching. In a theological climate where the personhood of the Spirit is sometimes diminished or functionalised, the lexical evidence from *allos* helps restore proper balance to pneumatology. It strengthens the claim that the Spirit is not merely a divine force or emanation but a distinct person, coequal and coeternal with the Son. Such linguistic nuances reinforce the coherence of Nicene theology, where Christ and the Spirit are not merely temporally successive but essentially united in divine being and salvific purpose.

Thus, the semantics of *allos* not only operate at the exegetical level but also extend deeply into systematic theology. By affirming sameness of kind, the term protects the integrity of divine identity. It secures a theological framework in which the mission of the Spirit is not an afterthought but an extension of Christ's very presence and purpose among believers.

Semantic strategy in anti-heresy polemics

The use of *heteros* in the Pauline corpus reveals a consistent semantic strategy to identify and discredit theological deviations. Particularly in Galatians 1:6–7, Paul's employment of *heteron* euangelion is not a casual expression of disagreement but a sharp denunciation of what he perceives as a fundamentally different and dangerous gospel. The distinction between *heteros* and *allos* in this passage is deliberate; Paul reinforces that the alternative Gospel proclaimed by the agitators is not a legitimate variation of the true Gospel (*allos*) but a distorted message of a wholly different nature (*heteros*) (Dunn 1993; Schreiner 2010).

Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 11:4, Paul warns against those who preach 'another Jesus', receive 'a different spirit' and accept 'a different gospel'. The tripartite repetition of *heteros* marks an escalating rhetorical pattern, underscoring the pervasiveness and seriousness of the threat. Here, Paul is not merely engaging in polemics; he is drawing doctrinal boundary lines that define the core of Christological orthodoxy. To proclaim a Jesus whose nature, mission or identity deviates from the apostolic testimony is, for Paul, to step outside the bounds of saving faith (Hultgren 1985).

The semantic distinction is not incidental but foundational to Paul's apologetic framework. Early Christians needed to distinguish between superficial similarities and essential truths in a religiously pluralistic and philosophically diverse Greco-Roman world. The term *heteros* thus becomes a marker for heresy, a way to preserve the Gospel's integrity amid cultural and theological pressures. It empowers the community to name and reject distortions while remaining anchored in the apostolic kerygma.

This linguistic awareness remains vital for the Church today. Contemporary theological landscapes are rife with

reinterpretations of Jesus that mirror the heterodox trends of the first century – be it the ‘political Jesus’, the ‘mystical Christ’ or the ‘moral teacher’ divorced from divinity. In such contexts, recovering Paul’s semantic discernment can be a hermeneutical guide for safeguarding doctrinal boundaries. The distinction between *allos* and *heteros* continues as a theological compass for navigating false teaching and reaffirming the exclusive claims of the biblical Christ (MacArthur 2021).

Lexical discernment and ecclesial formation

The distinction between *allos* and *heteros* is not merely a tool for academic theology but holds practical implications for the life and formation of the Church. In pastoral contexts, where congregations are increasingly exposed to varied interpretations of Christ – through social media, popular spirituality or even well-meaning ecumenical efforts – semantic clarity becomes vital for catechesis and discipleship. Teaching believers to distinguish between the true Christ of the Scriptures and alternative portrayals becomes a safeguard against doctrinal drift (Wright 2013).

Church history reveals that theological clarity has often hinged on linguistic precision. From the councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon to the Reformers’ insistence on sola scriptura, the text’s precise exegesis and faithful transmission have been crucial in guarding the faith. As Jaroslav Pelikan observes, ‘What the Church of Jesus Christ teaches in one century, it often defends in the next’ (Pelikan 1971:1). In the same spirit, this article affirms that the lexicon of the New Testament remains a theological resource for spiritual formation and doctrinal fidelity.

In theological education, lexical discernment should be integrated into curricula that form pastors, teachers and leaders. This means going beyond grammatical analysis to include theological reasoning embedded in words like *allos* and *heteros*. Such training equips future ministers to interpret texts accurately and shepherd congregations in discerning Christ rightly amid a multitude of competing voices (Vanhoozer 1998).

By embracing the theological significance of New Testament language, the Church renews its commitment to proclaiming Christ faithfully. Words matter – not only because they carry meaning but also because, in Scripture, they often carry revelation.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the New Testament writers used *allos* and *heteros* not as interchangeable synonyms but as intentional theological expressions. The consistent use of *allos* indicates continuity and ontological unity, particularly between Christ and the Holy Spirit, affirming the Trinitarian coherence of divine relationship. In contrast, *heteros* conveys discontinuity and deviation, marking a clear distinction between authentic apostolic teaching and distorted interpretations of the Gospel.

Through close examination of passages such as John 14:16, Galatians 1:6–7, Hebrews 7:13, John 5:43 and 2 Corinthians 11:4, it becomes evident that these lexical distinctions carry profound Christological significance. The New Testament authors employed linguistic precision to safeguard the identity of Jesus and the integrity of the Gospel message. Thus, *allos* and *heteros* serve as lexical boundary markers, affirming the true Christ and rejecting false representations.

The contemporary implications of these findings are both theological and pastoral. In a context marked by doctrinal diversity and reinterpretations of Christ’s identity, a renewed attention to lexical precision can strengthen the Church’s teaching, preaching and apologetic engagement. Understanding how the New Testament distinguishes authentic continuity from false alternatives helps clarify the boundaries of faith and the uniqueness of Christ’s person.

Moreover, this study underscores the importance of semantic awareness in theological education and ministry. Careful attention to biblical vocabulary not only enhances exegetical accuracy but also deepens the Church’s witness in a pluralistic age. Just as the early Church preserved orthodoxy through precise language, so too must contemporary theology uphold the integrity of its confession through faithful interpretation of Scripture.

Ultimately, lexical discernment is a form of theological fidelity. Within the words of Scripture lies the Word Himself; thus, to handle these words carefully is to honour the truth of Christ and to preserve the clarity of the Gospel for future generations.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

CRedit authorship contribution

Isak Suria: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Writing – Original draft, Writing – Review & Editing. Muner Daliman: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Resources, Funding acquisition. David Ming: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Writing – Original draft, Writing – Review & Editing, Funding acquisition. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Sekolah Tinggi Teologi (STT) KADESI Yogyakarta research ethics committee (No. 09/Dir-PS/STTK/P/IIV/2025).

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting this study and its findings are available within the article and its listed references.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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