THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Paul’s Call to Imitation:  
The Rhetorical Function of the Theme of Imitation in its Epistolary Context

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the
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Doctor of Philosophy

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By
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Paul’s Call to Imitation:
The Rhetorical Function of the Theme of Imitation in Its Epistolary Context.

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The Pauline call to imitation is one of the most distinctive aspects of Pauline thought. The explicit call to imitation occurs five times in the non-disputed Pauline letters: 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; and Phil 3:17. It is a call to imitate the example that Paul sets before the community to which he writes. Although these letters are the only ones in which Paul explicitly calls others to imitate him, the theme of imitation occurs throughout his writings.

The monographs and articles that have addressed the theme of imitation in Pauline thought use either the historical-critical method or a rhetorical method to develop their thesis. This study examines the rhetorical function of the theme of imitation in its epistolary context. The rhetorical situation of the community to which Paul writes is an important element in the study of his letters. Therefore, examining each call to imitation within the rhetorical situation of the community to which Paul writes provides a clear understanding of his call to imitation.

Although each call to imitation is found within a different rhetorical situation, this study argues that with each call to imitate him, Paul establishes a new set of community relationships to which each believing community must adhere. Within this new set of relationships there are four themes that are crucial to Paul’s call to imitation: humility, suffering, unity, and salvation. These four themes form the shape and structure of true community life.
Paul’s call to imitation and his desire to create this new set of community relationships requires believers to live in humility and to be willing to endure suffering. The purpose of this imitation is to create unity within the community so that at the parousia all believers will share in salvation. Through his own example and the example of Christ, Paul demonstrates the example he calls others to imitate.
This dissertation by Jason G. Weaver fulfills the dissertation requirements of the doctoral degree in Biblical Studies approved by Frank J. Matera, Ph.D., as Director, and by Francis T. Gignac, D.Phil, and John P. Heil, S.S.D. as Readers.

___________________________
Frank J. Matera, Ph.D., Director
___________________________
Francis T. Gignac, D.Phil, Reader
___________________________
John P. Heil, S.S.D., Reader
To my wife, Amanda
Paul saw some men who love to think;
    they gathered on the street.
  They love discussion and debates,
    would rather talk than eat.

Their heads were in clouds, it seemed;
    they loved ideas so!
They could not hear enough of them;
    to lectures they would go.

--Donna Streufert, *Preacher Paul Visits Athens*
# Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations viii

Acknowledgements x

Chapter One: Pauline Imitation: A History of Research 1

Usage of the Terms μίμησις and μιμέομαι Prior to the NT 2
  Μίμησις and Fine Art 3
  Instruction and Ethics 5
  Μίμησις in the LXX and Pseudepigrapha 6
  Μίμησις and Philo 8

Usage of the Term in the New Testament 10
  Imitation in Light of Authority and Obedience 10
  An Implicit Call to Imitate Christ 19
  The Theme of Imitation and Pauline Ethics 29
  Sharing in Paul’s Experience of God’s Grace 34
  Imitation in Relation to Christian Goals: Humility and Self-Renunciation 36

Conclusion and Critique 41

Chapter Two: Suffering and Hope: Imitation in 1 Thessalonians 46

The First Letter to the Thessalonians 47
  The Content of the Letter 47
  The Purpose of the Letter 49

1 Thess 1:2-10: An Introduction to the Theme of Imitation 50
  The Thessalonians’ Conduct (1:2-5) 50
  The Effect of Election (1:6-8) 61
  The Thessalonians’ Response to Conversion (1:9-10) 65

1 Thess 2:1-16: Implicit Paraenesis toward Proper Conduct through the Triad 67
  “Work of Faith” (2:1-4) 68
  “Labor of Love” (2:5-12) 73
  “Endurance in Hope” (2:13-16) 79
# Conclusion

Chapter Three: Imitating Paul in Light of the Scandal of the Cross: Imitation in 1 Corinthians 1–4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The First Letter to the Corinthians</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Purpose of 1 Corinthians 1–4</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Cor 4:14-21: Call to Imitation</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Cor 1:10-13: Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Cor 1:14–4:13: Paradigm of the Scandal of the Cross</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul’s Mission (1:14-17)</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Word of the Cross and Wisdom (1:18-25)</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Social Standing of the Corinthians (1:26-31)</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul’s Presence among the Corinthians (2:1-5)</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wisdom of the Mature (2:6-16)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Spiritual Immaturity of the Corinthians and the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Preacher (3:1-17)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming Wise by Becoming a Fool (3:18-23)</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Attitude of the Cross (4:6-13)</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter Four: Seeking the Advantage of the Other: Imitation in 1 Cor 8:1–11:1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Call to Imitation (1 Cor 11:1)</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food That Has Been Offered to Idols (1 Cor 8:1-13)</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love over Knowledge (1 Cor 8:1-3)</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Sacrificed to Idols and the Conscience of the Weak (1 Cor 8:4-13)</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul’s Rights and His Freedom Not to Exercise Them (1 Cor 9:1-27)</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul’s Apostolic Freedom (1 Cor 9:1-3)</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul’s Right to Economic Support (1 Cor 9:4-12a)</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul’s Non-use of His Rights (1 Cor 9:12b-18)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul’s Purpose (1 Cor 9:19-23)</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Purpose of Rigorous Self-Control (1 Cor 9:24-27)</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ethic of Responsibility toward Others (1 Cor 10:23-33)</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

Chapter Five: Living according to the Cruciform Pattern: Imitation in Philippians

Call to Imitation (3:17)

A Life That Is Worthy of the Gospel of Christ (1:27-30)

The Cruciform Pattern (2:1-4)

The Christ Hymn (2:5-11)

“Work Out Your Own Salvation” (2:12-18)

The Lifestyle of the Opponents (3:1-4)

Paul’s Example (3:4b-14)

Striving toward the Goal (3:12-16)

The Believers’ Vindication (3:17-21)

Conclusion

Chapter Six: Pauline Imitation

Summary of Previous Chapters

1 Thessalonians
1 Corinthians 1–4
1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1
Philippians

Pauline Imitation

Why Does Imitation Appear So Prominently in These Letters?
Community Relationships and Paul’s Call to Imitation

Conclusion

Bibliography
Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<td>AB</td>
<td>Anchor Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGAJU</td>
<td>Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnBib</td>
<td>Analecta Biblica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BETL</td>
<td>Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHT</td>
<td>Beiträge zur historischen Theologie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bib</td>
<td>Biblica</td>
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<tr>
<td>BibInt</td>
<td>Biblical Interpretation</td>
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<td>BNTC</td>
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</tr>
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<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNT</td>
<td>Commentaire du Nouveau Testament</td>
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<td>ConBNT</td>
<td>Coniectanea neotestamentica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EKKNT</td>
<td>Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Critical Commentary</td>
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<td>Int</td>
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<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSNT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</td>
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<td>JSNTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCL</td>
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<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Lectio divina</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA\textsuperscript{27}</td>
<td>Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland, 27th ed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCB</td>
<td>New Century Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>NICNT</td>
<td>New International Commentary on the New Testament</td>
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<td>Tyndale Bulletin</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBC</td>
<td>Word Biblical Commentary</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>WUNT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZNW</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends who have supported me through this process.
Chapter One
Pauline Imitation: A History of Research

Imitation is a crucial theme in Paul’s writings. Paul calls upon his communities to become imitators of him. This call to imitation is one of the most distinctive aspects of Pauline thought. The explicit call to imitation occurs five times in the non-disputed Pauline letters: 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; and Phil 3:17.\(^1\) It is a call to imitate the example that Paul and other Christian churches set before the community. Although these letters are the only places where Paul makes an explicit call for others to imitate him or a Christian church, the theme of imitation occurs elsewhere in his writings.\(^2\) The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the rhetorical function of this theme in 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians in its literary and epistolary framework. In this first chapter, I will examine the use of the terms μίμησις and μιμεῖομαι prior to Paul’s usage in the NT. Following that, I will present a history of research that summarizes how the theme of imitation in Paul has been interpreted by previous scholarship. In the conclusion, I will present where I find the arguments of previous scholarship to be lacking and present my understanding of Paul’s use of the theme of imitation in his letters. This background will prepare the reader for the examination that will follow in subsequent chapters.

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\(^1\) The non-disputed Pauline letters are 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philippians, Philemon.

\(^2\) See Gal 4:12; Rom 15:3.
Usage of the Terms \(\mu\iota\mu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma\) and \(\mu\iota\mu\epsilon\omicron\omicron\alpha\varsigma\) Prior to the NT

The earliest usage of \(\mu\iota\mu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma\) and \(\mu\iota\mu\epsilon\omicron\omicron\alpha\varsigma\) is found in the 6\(^{th}\) cent. B.C.E, and is used regularly in both poetic and prose works. The earliest usages employ the terms to mean to “mimic,” “imitate,” “represent,” or “portray,” and they are always used in relation to the fine arts.\(^3\)

The term \(\mu\iota\mu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma\) is used in early writings to define the early states of the learning process for humanity. According to Aristotle, humanity begins its learning by imitating those things that it sees in nature. Aristotle writes, “From childhood man has an instinct for representation, and in this respect, differs from the other animals that he is far more imitative (\(\mu\iota\mu\epsilon\omicron\omicron\epsilon\omicron\omicron\iota\nu\)) and learns his first lessons by representing these things.”\(^4\) People learn by making what they see in nature into reality rather than through simple mimicry. When humans mimic the actions of those things that they see in nature, they become aware of the nature of those things.\(^5\)

Plutarch reports that Democritus saw how humanity imitated the natural world:

Democritus declares that we have been their pupils in matters of fundamental importance: the spider in weaving and repairing, the swallow in homebuilding, of the sweet-voiced swan and nightingale in our imitation (\(\mu\iota\mu\eta\sigma\iota\nu\)) of their song.\(^6\)

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\(^3\) Willis P. de Boer (The Imitation of Paul: An Exegetical Study [Netherlands: Kampen, 1962] 1) notes that the term, when associated with the fine arts, means “to express by means of imitation.” de Boer writes, “The earliest uses speak of imitation brought about through the dance and the dramatic expression of religious ritual.”


\(^5\) This is especially true when one looks at Aristotle’s understanding of tragedy, according to Brant (“The Place of mim\(\epsilon\)\(\iota\)\(\varsigma\),” 288).

Animals teach humans over time and therefore what humans have learned to do as human beings begins through observation of the natural world. Hippocrates also observes that humanity copies and imitates what is natural.

The term μίμησις serves as a cosmological concept as well. It is used to show how the material world serves as a copy or an imitation of the ideal/invisible world. For Plato, the material world (our reality) serves as an imitation of the invisible world of ideas. Plato postulates that there are originally two worlds, “an intelligible and unchanging model and . . . a visible and changing imitation (μιμημα) of it.”7 The visible world is an imitation of the world of ideas because it “imitates, through its actions and appearance, the intelligible world.”8 As an image of the invisible world, the material world is a partial or incomplete copy of the complete and perfect idea.9 Reality as humanity knows it is simply an imperfect copy of truth that exists in the world of ideas.10

**Mίμησις and Fine Art**

The term μίμησις also occurs in philosophical discussions of the fine arts, especially in Plato and Aristotle. When Plato refers to the poet in Book 10 of *The Republic*, he states

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8 Brant, “The Place of mimēsis,” 288.

9 de Boer, *Imitation of Paul*, 4. de Boer writes that Plato also understands imitation in terms of participation. The object participates in the idea and vice versa. For Plato, this is a mechanical and ontological imitation. Elizabeth Castelli (*Imitating Paul: A Discourse in Power* [Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991] 86) notes that mimetic activity is derivative; it derives from the level above it but is never able to attain perfection.

10 Mark Edward Hopper (“The Pauline Concept of Imitation” [Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1983] 40), states that according to Plato the task of the philosopher is to penetrate past this realm of appearance in the material world to reach the truth that exists in the realm of ideas.
that the imitator imitates that which is already a copy of the world of ideas. Since the imitator is imitating that which is already an imperfect model, the imitator’s copy is further removed from the idea and the truth.\textsuperscript{11} For Plato, the imitator simply copies reality without bringing expression to the idea. Plato takes an exceptionally harsh stance against poets, calling them imitators because of their inability to create. He considers all art to be mimetic, but since art is several degrees removed from the truth, it is deceptive and it corrupts human nature.\textsuperscript{12}

Aristotle understands imitation in the fine arts differently than Plato. For Aristotle, fine art is not twice removed from the truth as Plato believed it to be. Aristotle understands it to be a manifestation for higher truth and reality because it speculates on those things that might happen and not on those things that have happened.\textsuperscript{13} The poet, for instance, draws on the phenomena of life for his material. In doing so, the poet makes something new from the real and the actual.\textsuperscript{14} The artisan, for Aristotle, does not merely copy what he sees or understands from the world of ideas. Instead, he creates something new based upon his experience of the real within the material world.

\textsuperscript{11} See Plato \textit{The Republic} 10. 597. (ed. and trans. P. Shorey; LCL [London: Wm. Heineman, 1946] 442-47. Plato writes, “The creator of the phantom, the imitator . . . knows nothing of the reality but only the appearance.” See also Plato \textit{Republic} 602b.

\textsuperscript{12} Hopper, “Pauline Concept,” 40-41.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 54.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 55. Imitation at this point, according to Hopper, becomes a creative force. Brant ("The Place of \textit{mimēsis}," 287) notes that this is a process of making and not a process of becoming.
Instruction and Ethics

According to the philosophers, μίμησις also serves a function in the world of instruction and ethics. The activity of imitation was a crucial element of the pupil/master, parent/child relationship. Pupils imitate their masters in order to become like them. The action of imitation goes beyond just mimicking words; it entails mimicking actions in order to bring the words and deeds of the master into being. Pupils often lived in the same household as their masters in order to observe their master’s every action.

The process of imitation is also significant in the realm of ethics. It is a crucial element for one’s moral development. By imitating what is good and righteous, one becomes morally good. Plutarch quotes Democritus who suggests, “It is necessary either to be good or to imitate (μιμεῖσθαι) goodness.”\(^\text{15}\) For the Greek writers and philosophers, good and bad examples had a powerful hold on human behavior and conduct. People’s moral living was generally determined by the example they chose to follow, whether good or bad. For Plato, this ethical side of μίμησις is significant in education. One begins to imitate those things to which one has become attached, whether they are good or bad.\(^\text{16}\)

The pupil and the child learn how to perform their duties by imitating the actions of their master and parent, respectively. The process of imitation according to the Greek writers and philosophers was essential for vocational and moral instruction. In order to lead a good life and to perform one’s duty well, one must imitate good examples.

\(^{15}\) Democritus Fragment 39 (Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker; ed. Hermann Diels; Berlin: Weidmann, 1952) 155.

\(^{16}\) Hopper, “Pauline Concept,” 44-45. Hopper further notes that since this is the case, the philosopher attempts to imitate eternal realities.
Miμησις in the LXX and Pseudepigrapha

The term μίμησις and related terms occur a number of times in the LXX. The term appears three times in the Wisdom of Solomon. Wisdom 9:8 states:

You have bid me to build on your holy mountain
and an altar in the city that is your lodging place
an imitation (μίμημα) of the holy tent, which you had prepared from the beginning.

The term μίμημα is used as a simple comparison, comparing the new temple on the holy mount to that of the holy tent used in the wilderness during the Exodus. The term is also used in Wis 4:2:

They imitate (μιμοῦνται) it (virtue) when it is present
and long for it when it is gone;
and forever crowned in triumph
they conquer in undefiled contests of valor.

Humanity imitates virtue when it is present. This suggests that when a good example is presented to humanity, humans will imitate it in order to improve themselves. The term also occurs in Wis 15:9:

For it not his concern that he is about to die
nor that he has a short life
but he vies with goldsmiths and silversmiths
he imitates (μιμεῖται) the bronzesmith
and thinks it glorious that he moulds counterfeits.

Wisdom speaks of the idol maker who imitates the work of the bronzesmith. Whereas the bronzesmith creates beautiful and real things, the idol maker moulds false gods and considers them to be glorious. The verb form is used here to denote active imitation. The idol maker strives to imitate the work of the bronzesmith in order to create those things he considers glorious.
The only other occurrences of μιμησίς and related terms in the LXX are found in 4 Maccabees. In both instances (4 Macc 9:23; 13:9), a group of brothers is exhorted to imitate the example of those who have suffered persecution and in one instance martyrdom. In 4 Macc 9:23 we read: “Imitate (μιμήσασθε) me, brothers, he said, and do not turn away in my struggles, nor renounce our courageous brotherhood.” The brother who is being executed for his refusal to renounce the law exhorts his brothers to imitate the example he sets for them. They are being called to suffer just as their brother suffered. In this instance, the theme of imitation is used in regard to a moral example. In 4 Macc 13:9 there is another call to imitate a moral example in the face of persecution: “Brothers, let us die as brothers for the law: Let us imitate (μιμησόμεθα) the three young Assyrians who despised the same ordeal of the furnace.” This time the call is to imitate Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were willing to be cast in the furnace for the sake of the law.

Μίμησίς and related terms occur in the OT Pseudepigrapha. The term is used twice in the Testament of Benjamin. In both T. Benj. 3:1 and 4:1 the call is to imitate a moral example. T. Benj. 3:1 states, “Do also therefore, my children, love the Lord God of heaven, and keep his commandments, and be imitators (μιμούμενοι) of the good and holy man Joseph.” Joseph sets a moral example that is pleasing to God. Accordingly, those who wish to please God should imitate Joseph’s example. T. Benj. 4:1 states, “Do you know the end of the good man, my children? Be imitators (μιμήσασθε) of his compassion in a good mind, so that you may wear crowns of glory.” The benefit of imitating good is that one will be crowned in glory. Imitating the good moral example is something that is pleasing to God, and when one does so properly one is rewarded for this imitation.
Testament of Asher 4:3 states, “One man hates him that shows mercy, and does wrong to the adulterer and thief: this, also, is double-faced, but the whole work is good, because he imitates (μιμεῖται) the Lord’s example, in that he does not receive that which seems good with that which is really bad.” People who are impartial and who follow the example of God do not accept things which seem to be good but in fact are bad. One imitates the moral example of God so that one can be like God.

The term μίμησις also occurs four times in the Letter of Aristeas (188, 210, 280, and 281). In each instance, the king asks a question of the Jewish translators of the LXX how to be a proper ruler. In each case, he is informed that in order to be a proper ruler he should imitate the example set by God. For instance, a good king is one who imitates the benignity and kindness of God (188). In order to be a proper ruler, the king must be just as God is just (210). Effective leaders are those who imitate the righteousness of the king, who imitates the example of God (280, 281). Imitating a proper example allows one to do one’s task effectively.

Μίμησις and Philo

The term μίμησις and related terms are prevalent in the works of Philo. Philo is greatly influenced by Plato’s cosmology and the relationship of the two worlds. When Philo uses the term μίμησις, he is usually focusing on the ideas of original and copy.¹⁷ Philo also uses the verbal form in two different ways. First, it refers to some form of conscious

¹⁷ Michaelis, TDNT, 4. 664.
imitation. Second, the term states simple comparison. Philo also uses the term to express imitation of an example, especially Moses. Philo states that it is natural for students to imitate their masters, and it is necessary for loyal children to imitate their parents:

Necessarily then do His loyal children imitate (μιμούμενοι) their Father’s nature and, with a forwardness that brooks no delay, do what is excellent, and the most excellent deed of all is before all else to honor God.

Philo also speaks of imitation in regard to imitating God. He believes that one can imitate God. Imitating God and God’s ways should be a general rule for all human conduct.

Having considered how μίμησις and its terms are used in the Greco-Roman world prior to the NT, I will turn to the theme of imitation in the NT as interpreted by various scholars. The understanding of the theme of imitation in the NT is different from the use of the term in the Greco-Roman world prior to the NT. In the work that proceeds from here, I will examine five ways in which scholars have interpreted Paul’s distinctive usage of the theme of imitation.

18 Ibid.
19 Hopper, “Pauline Concept,” 91.
21 de Boer, Imitation of Paul, 13. See also Hopper, “Pauline Concept,” 90.
Usage of the Term in the NT

In this section, I will provide a history of research on the theme of imitation in the NT as understood by previous scholarship. This section is subdivided into five sections, each dealing with a particular view of how Paul uses the theme of imitation. When necessary, I will begin each subsection with the common themes found among scholars. I will then address each scholar’s unique perspective on those themes.

Imitation in Light of Authority and Obedience

According to the scholars that I will examine in this category, the underlying theme of Paul’s call to imitation is a need to recognize Paul’s authority and to be obedient to that authority. As a representative of Christ, Paul’s call to imitation is a call to recognize and be obedient to his authority and his apostolic position. Paul’s apostolic position grants him a privileged and unique position within the community, making him the sole authority figure who must be obeyed. Paul cannot call on the community to imitate him if he does not hold this position of authority. His authority is associated with and, for some scholars, equated to God’s and Christ’s authority; Paul, God, and Christ serve as authoritative examples to be imitated. Paul is granted his authoritative position within the community because his authority is equated with Christ’s. Since Paul is a representative of Christ, he serves as the mouthpiece of God; therefore, his exhortation is God’s exhortation. Paul proclaims the exhortation of God and not his own exhortation.
Wilhelm Michaelis

In his article in *TDNT* on μιμέομαι, Michaelis identifies three different uses of μιμέομαι and related terms in Paul’s letters. Michaelis insists that there is no single basic usage of the term μιμέομαι for Paul.22 First, Paul uses the term as a means of simple comparison. This suggests that imitation does not require any sort of conscious action on the part of the imitator (1 Thess 2:14; 1 Thess 1:6).23

The second usage Michaelis proposes is the call to follow Paul’s example (2 Thess 3:7, 9; Phil 3:17).24 For Michaelis, μιμέομαι and τύπος are related, and when they are used together, μιμέομαι signifies recognition of authority.25 Within this distinct usage, there is a summons to obey Paul’s demands; in essence this is an implicit call to obey Paul.26

In the third and final usage obedience is prominent. Here one finds an explicit call to obey Paul (1 Cor 4:16; 1 Cor 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6; Eph 5:1).27 Since Paul’s focus is on authority, he is able to call the community to imitate him. For those who imitate Paul, their imitation is “an expression of obedience.”28 Paul’s focus is on his call to imitate him; therefore, there is no place in his thought for the concept of imitatio Christi. The point for

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23 Ibid., 671. Michaelis suggests that 1 Thess 1:6 might fit into this category. Although this may be a means of simple comparison, Michaelis does not suggest that this call to imitation is a call for believers to surrender their individuality; the imitator and the model remain distinct.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 668-71.

26 Ibid., 672.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 668.
Michaelis is this: Paul serves as an authority figure within his communities, who above all must be obeyed: “Recognition of the authority of Paul is plainly implied in these passages, so that following his example carries with it obedience to his commands.”\(^{29}\) If the communities are to imitate Paul, “the thought is that they are to be obedient, that they must act in accordance with his directions.”\(^{30}\)

Hans Dieter Betz

In his work, Betz examines the relationship between Nachfolge (following) and Nachahmen (imitation).\(^{31}\) The concept of following is found most often in the Gospels, and it would appear that Paul does not draw from their thinking.\(^{32}\) Paul’s apostolic exhortation to imitation is the exhortation of God; Paul serves as God’s mouthpiece. Although Paul has authority, he does not speak on his own authority. Rather he is the “hermeneut of the divine salvation event.”\(^{33}\)

Although Paul is in the position of authority, he always understands himself as an imitator of Christ and not as a second Christ (1 Cor 11:1).\(^{34}\) Paul calls believers to imitate him and not Christ directly because:

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 672.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.


\(^{32}\) Ibid., 138. This is not to suggest that Paul would have been unfamiliar with the language of following but that Paul does not make use of it in his theology.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 154.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 155.
Weiterhin ist für den paulinischen Apostolat offenbar konstitutiv, daß Paulus nicht
direct zur μίμησις τοῦ Χριστοῦ aufruft, sondern zum μυμείσθαι des Apostels, denn
nur im μυμείσθαι des Apostels, d.h. im Gehorsam gegenüber dem apostolischen
παρακαλέιν geschieht μίμησις τοῦ Χριστοῦ.\(^\text{35}\)

Through proper obedience to the apostolic παρακαλέιν one becomes an imitator of Christ. In
order to imitate Christ, believers must be obedient to God’s exhortation that Paul presents.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul calls upon believers to witness his ways of which Timothy will
remind them. The “ways of Paul,” which Timothy will present, are the things that Paul
intends the community members to imitate. It is not clear what these things are, but Betz
suggests they are related to the Pauline διδάσκειν.\(^\text{36}\) The focus is on obedience to Paul’s
teachings and not on mimicry of what he does.\(^\text{37}\) Through obedience to Paul’s teaching and
by walking the ὁδός that Paul presents, believers become imitators of Christ and share in
salvation. By imitating the way present in the Apostle’s διδάσκειν, the believer is moving
toward salvation.

Paul’s call to obey his authority must be understood against the background of his
arguments with his opponents.\(^\text{38}\) As an apostle, he serves as a representative of Christ and
Christ’s Gospel. This authority,

\(^{35}\) Ibid.

\(^{36}\) Ibid.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 156-57. Betz (Nachfolge, 158-59) suggests that by being an imitator of Paul, one does one’s
part in maintaining the unity of the community. The key to upholding the community is self-renunciation which
will help to resolve the schism in the church.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 178.
Anyone who rejects Paul’s Gospel and authority by accepting the authority and gospel of one of Paul’s opponents rejects the gospel of Christ and so Christ himself. Paul uses imitation language to refer to the life of believers as existence “in Christ Jesus.” Through baptism, believers are incorporated into Christ and become part of his body. Through their existence believers manifest what it is to be in Christ. His call to imitation summarizes the entire Pauline paraenesis. Paul’s call to imitation is grounded in the obedience that the life of Christ exhibits.

Adele Reinhartz

For Reinhartz, Paul claims authority over his communities. However, his position of authority, determined by his apostolic role, is a position of spiritual authority, which is dictated by his humility. Paul intends to defend his apostleship by claiming his superiority through humility “not only to his churches but also to his opponents, including possibly other apostles.” What necessitates the call for imitation in each case is either a perceived threat

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39 Ibid., 179-80.
40 Ibid., 169.
41 Ibid., 175. This idea and formula is found generally in Rom 6:17, but Paul presents it more specifically with his call to imitation in Phil 3:17.
43 Ibid., 403.
to Paul’s apostolic authority (1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians) or his need to be recognized as the sole apostolic authority (Philippians).⁴⁴

Even though every call to imitation is different, each contains some similar features. First, they reflect Paul’s understanding of his apostolic authority as grounded in Christ. Second, they reflect Paul’s belief that he has an apostolic relationship to his communities. Third, Paul’s call within each situation is within the context of defense of his apostleship. Because of this, the call to imitation is meant “to convey to his churches his right to exhort them in this manner even in the face of opinion to the contrary within the churches themselves.”⁴⁵ Paul constantly defends himself from outside threats, and it is through his apostolic relationship to the community that he is given the right by God to exhort them to imitate him.⁴⁶

John Howard Schütz

Schütz claims that Paul never rejects the claim to authority. Instead he erects a canon of legitimacy.⁴⁷ Within Schütz’s so-called “rhetoric of apostolic authority” one can find Paul’s call to imitation. Paul’s authority is based on the fact that “Paul’s life as an apostle

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⁴⁴ Ibid., 397-403. Reinhartz suggests that even though the Thessalonian community has become imitators of Paul, Paul still finds it necessary to defend his apostolic authority against a perceived threat.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 403. Reinhartz notes that this last point goes against scholarly consensus. Paul’s call to imitation comes from Paul’s self-understanding as an apostle grounded in humility. If Paul’s superiority is found in his weakness, “humility and other noble attributes, it is because it is these traits which Paul finds lacking in his churches and also, one might suggest, which Paul’s opponents found lacking in him.”

⁴⁶ Ibid. Paul is establishing his spiritual authority, not only to the communities, but also to the opponents, and possibly against other apostles.

itself reflects the power of God made manifest in the gospel."\textsuperscript{48} It is for this reason that Paul himself becomes and serves as the normative example for Christians.\textsuperscript{49} The position of “ideal” exemplar of what a Christian should be grants Paul a unique authoritative position. Paul’s call to imitate himself is no accident. His apostolic self-consciousness is “shot through with this awareness of his personal service in weakness which is at the same time God’s power in him.”\textsuperscript{50} Paul’s call to imitation and his authority is possible because of the work he does in weakness, which is in fact the power of God. However, Schütz rightly points out that Paul does not appear to understand himself as different from other believers in Christ.\textsuperscript{51} Although he is in a position of authority, he is aware of the shared power of apostolic authority. According to Schütz, just like the \textit{auctor} Paul is able to diffuse his authority over those whom he exercises authority.\textsuperscript{52} Schütz suggests that Paul is not asserting his own authority but the primary source of power. When those who hear Paul are able to perceive this power correctly, they share in his authority.\textsuperscript{53}

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\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 226.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 231.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 204.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. Schütz defines what Paul is doing in terms of Jouvenel’s description of the \textit{auctor}, who is the father and adviser “whose primary function is to augment the power at his disposal by seeing that it is diffused through those over whom he exercises authority, all the while guaranteeing the ultimate rightness and fitness of their actions so long as these are grounded in that power which he exhibits.”
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
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Elizabeth Castelli

Castelli begins with this fundamental question: what are the basic ideological effects of Paul’s call to imitation, especially in terms of power relations and the drive to sameness that is inherent in the mimetic process? The notion of imitation marks a relationship between two elements, with a constant movement on one part towards the other.\(^{54}\) The call to imitation establishes an authoritative relationship and a relationship of power in which imitation and sameness are celebrated, and differences are problematic and disrupt social relations.\(^{55}\) The model to be imitated serves as the standard to which all others should move, and the model, by establishing the terms of the relationship, creates a hierarchical and asymmetrical relationship.\(^{56}\)

Castelli objects to the opinions of other scholars (Betz, de Boer, Schulz, etc.) because they overlook the notion of power that is, in her view, evident within Paul’s call to imitation. Scholars seem to suggest a preexistent Christianity or tradition that should not be assumed, since there was no such tradition in the time of Paul.\(^{57}\) Tradition is not a monolithic, pre-existent truth but is the result of discourse and ideology.\(^{58}\)

\(^{54}\) Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 21. Castelli defines “sameness” as the end result of the movement from difference to similarity.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 22. Castelli argues that imitation should be understood as a celebration of identity, where sameness is glorified and difference is castigated.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 44.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 26-27. Her main issue is that scholarship does this by completely ignoring the power language that is implicit and explicit in the writings. Scholars ignore it because they find the authority of the tradition to be self-evident.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 33.
Paul’s rhetoric of imitation raises questions regarding “the political nature of the relationships between authorship and authority . . . and the ways in which discourse and its control reinscribe and rationalize power relations.”\(^{59}\) Paul, as the privileged speaker and authoritative model, establishes himself and his tradition as authoritative. This develops profound social implications making a distinction between sameness and difference, those who belong and those who do not. This distinction found in Paul’s call creates “a unity of action.”\(^{60}\) The call to imitation creates a hierarchy and reinscribes Paul’s privileged position, which creates a sense of sameness among those who acknowledge Paul’s privileged position.\(^{61}\) Paul’s call to unity and imitation creates a group identity.\(^{62}\) The call sets up social formations and power relations, which create a particular structure of relationships. Paul is the authoritative model, those who move toward sameness with him are destined for salvation, and those who do not are destined for damnation.\(^{63}\)

Paul’s call to imitation “uses rhetoric to rationalize and shore up a particular set of social relations and power relations.”\(^{64}\) By establishing his position of power in this nonreciprocal hierarchy, Paul establishes the authority of his tradition. His hierarchy is in tune with the divine order, and those who properly participate in it move toward salvation.\(^{65}\)

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 89.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 96-97.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 97.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 102-3.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 112.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 115.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 117.
Castelli’s conclusion is this: Paul’s call to imitation sets out to solve particular problems in the community (disunity), to reauthorize his own teachings, to reassure that the communities follow a particular pattern, and to guarantee their claims to salvation. His call to imitation is a “reinscription of imposed power relations as natural within the emerging social formation of early Christianity,” and it seeks through its rhetoric and personal authority to persuade others into a subordinate relationship.66

_An Implicit Call to Imitate Christ_

This group of scholars understands Paul’s call to imitation of himself as an implicit call to imitate Christ. The _imitatio Christi_ that is done through the _imitatio Pauli_ is the true goal of all believers. The question to ask is what elements of Paul’s life are meant to be imitated by the believer. Paul imitates certain elements from the life of Jesus that serve as those things that believers should imitate. The three things to be imitated are humility, self-denial, and self-sacrifice. All three are to be practiced for the benefit of the other. Paul imitates these and Christians should do likewise because this is the behavior that Christ portrays as the ideal way. The believer is meant to emulate the attitude and actions of servanthood characteristic of the life of Jesus.

This call to imitation focuses on the father/child relationship between Paul and his communities. Paul calls on his communities to imitate him because he is their spiritual father. He stands as the concrete representation of Christ to the community. As the community’s father, it is his duty to mediate proper imitation. There is also a hierarchical

66 Ibid.
structure to this imitation. The imitation of Paul is a gradual assimilation to the imitation of Christ. Paul serves as the mediator to his communities. In order to imitate Christ properly, which is the true goal of believers, believers must imitate Paul who models Christ.

David Stanley

For Stanley, Paul’s call to imitation indicates his special relationship and privileged place within the communities he has founded, a relationship built upon their acceptance of Paul’s kerygma.⁶⁷ For Paul, the call to imitation does not focus on the earthly life of Jesus but is a focused and “graduated assimilation to the ‘image’ of the glorified Christ.”⁶⁸ The community is associated with Christ through baptism, and this association is ordained by God.⁶⁹ From baptism, the members of the community begin to assimilate themselves to the likeness of Christ.

Paul’s role in this process begins with the concept that Paul shares in Christ’s role as the suffering servant. Since the Thessalonian community has received the gospel with joy in the midst of tribulation, they have “been given the grace of sharing in Paul’s vocation as the Suffering Servant, and so have come to resemble Jesus himself, the Suffering Servant par excellence.”⁷⁰

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⁶⁸ Ibid., 861-62.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 862.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 866.
Within this hierarchical structure of imitation, Paul’s “mediatorial role is highly necessary.” 71 Paul, as mediator, transmits the faith in this graduated assimilation to Christ. 72 In the Corinthian correspondence, when Paul calls on the community to imitate him as he imitates Christ, Paul does so because he is the concrete representation of Christ: “By insisting upon this necessarily mediated imitatio Christi, Paul is simply witnessing to the necessity of apostolic tradition in the life of the Church.” 73 Paul as the concrete representation of Christ creates a connection from his followers to Christ through imitation of himself.

Stanley proposes three points that are essential to understanding Paul’s theme of imitation. First, Paul calls to imitation only those communities that he has founded and who know his gospel. Second, because they accept his gospel, a special bond is formed between him and his community. He serves as a living testimony to Christ, and the way in which he functions and speaks is “determined chiefly by his conviction that he carries on the role of Christ as the Suffering Servant of God.” 74 Third, because of this, Paul proposes to his communities a mediated imitation. Paul’s mediated imitation of Christ is the result of Paul’s apostolic authority and “the need of those he has fathered in the faith to have an objective, concrete norm against which they can ‘test’ . . . the influence of the Spirit.” 75

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71 Ibid., 874.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 877.
75 Ibid.
Ernest Tinsley

Tinsley’s work begins with an examination of how Israel serves as the *imitato Dei*.\(^{76}\) Israel imitates God by following or walking in God’s ways. Following this discussion, Tinsley addresses the use of imitation in the NT. He begins by showing how Jesus’ mission in the NT is to be the “Way.” The Father gave this mission to Jesus. The Father showed Jesus the way in which he should walk, and in keeping with his mission Jesus committed himself to this task.\(^{77}\) Jesus then becomes the way to be followed or imitated by all who believe or follow him.

This process creates a continuity between the Hebrew Bible and the NT. Jesus becomes an imitator of Israel, which has been an imitator of God and of God’s ways. Those who follow Jesus imitate him. Paul, who serves as an imitator of Christ, assumes this pattern and calls his communities to imitate him. By imitating Christ through Paul, the Christian “participates in and makes his own the saving events of the ‘Way’ of Israel which has been uniquely summed up and transformed in Christ.”\(^{78}\) Just as following in the ways of God meant salvation for the people of Israel, imitating the “Way” of Christ through self-giving results in salvation for Christians. This transformation into following/imitating Christ entails following the one who is the perfect exemplar of love and imitation.\(^{79}\)


\(^{77}\) Ibid., 67-68.

\(^{78}\) Ibid.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 139.
imitates the way of God, and by imitating Christ’s love and self-giving, believers imitate God, which is the true goal of being a Christian.  

Because of the father/child relationship, Paul calls the community to imitate him, and they must abide because one must walk in the ways of one’s father. Tinsley wants to emphasize that Paul is not looking for undue devotion or admiration. His call to imitation focuses on Christ as Paul presents him to his community. The aspects of suffering and humiliation can be found in any believer, not just Paul, who exhibits humility, self-giving, and service. Paul serves as the best example for his communities because he was physically present with them and they were able to see these aspects within his own life.

Willis de Boer

deoer states that the earliest understanding of imitation “carried the thought of bringing to expression, representation, and portrayal.” The imitators take the example and bring it to expression in their lives. Paul’s call to imitation focuses on bringing to expression three recurring themes: humility, self-denial, and self-sacrifice, all for the sake of Christ and

\[^{80}\] Ibid.

\[^{81}\] Ibid., 139. What one could possibly suggest here is that just as God serves as the father of Israel and Jesus as the spiritual father of the disciples, so too does Paul serve as the spiritual father of his communities.

\[^{82}\] Ibid.

\[^{83}\] Ibid., 140.

\[^{84}\] de Boer, The Imitation of Paul, 15.
the salvation of others.\textsuperscript{85} To imitate Paul’s way of life is to imitate Christ’s way, represented ideally by Christ in the above three elements.\textsuperscript{86}

For de Boer, Christ’s early life is the element believers are called to bring to expression in their own lives. His life is the pattern for his followers “because they were in living union with him, and were being formed anew according to his image.”\textsuperscript{87} Christ’s example serves to stimulate the believers’ participation “in the salvation and transformation” that comes from emulating Christ.\textsuperscript{88} Paul’s imitation, based on the “basic Christian way,” teaches his communities the proper Christian way.\textsuperscript{89} By doing so, he brings about the full expression of Christ in their lives. Paul shows himself to be a true imitator of Christ by bringing Christ to expression in his life and serving as an example for others.\textsuperscript{90}

Paul calls on his communities to imitate him rather than Christ because, as their spiritual father, he is their link to the coming union with Christ.\textsuperscript{91} To assimilate with Christ,

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 207. Paul calls the community to imitate those aspects of life that are important for the sake of Christ and the sake of others, not every action or aspect of his life.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 212.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 213.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid. de Boer (Imitation of Paul, 214) notes that Paul takes his role as personal example very seriously and views it as part of his teaching of what is proper Christianity. Paul serves as the example of that which he is teaching; he does so because he makes these teachings vividly real to his followers. Paul calls only on communities that he founded to imitate him because these communities would have been familiar with Paul’s ways and his personal example.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 214. Paul is speaking of this imitation to those whose faith was born out of the faith/gospel presented by Paul.
the community must first shape itself into the pattern displayed by Paul. This is the point of de Boer’s argument: in order to imitate Christ, believers must first imitate Paul. This preliminary or not-yet-mature imitation should be understood as a mediated imitation. The final goal is to outgrow the imitation of Paul. Later, when they are mature, Christ will come to full expression, and “their lives will be characterized by a directedness and immediacy of relationship to Christ.” As fully mature Christians, their imitation of Christ will override imitation of Paul. By beginning with Paul, the community brings to expression those things that it sees in Paul as the true Christian way.

Anselm Schulz

In his investigation of the use of *imitatio Christi* in the letters of Paul, Schulz shows how the double form of Christian imitation (“Imitate me as I imitate Christ”) is a clear sign of mediated imitation: “Der Apostel eifert seinem Herrn unmittelbar nach und verpflichtet deshalb (καθός) auch die Gläubigen zu einer vermittelten Nachahmung Christi.” By summoning believers to imitate him, Paul is calling them to imitate Christ who is represented in Paul.

With the imperative in 1 Cor 11:1, Paul calls on believers to take both him and Christ as examples. When addressing what the community is to imitate, Paul refers to his own

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92 Ibid. de Boer states that Paul serves in a “pattern-forming position.” Paul serves as an illustration of the kind of response a Christian is called to make through the experience of salvation in Christ.

93 Ibid., 214-15.

94 Ibid., 215.

selfless motives when discussing the struggle in the community between the “stronger” and “weaker” members. Paul seeks the benefit of others and not his own way. Schulz suggests that this is the \textit{Gesichtpunkt} of Christ’s life that Paul is imitating.\footnote{Ibid., 285-86.} Paul refers to the model of Christ in his imperative because he wants the community to know that this is the aspect of Christ’s life that he imitates and that they should imitate as well.

Schulz suggests that Paul’s call to imitation is a result of his striving in his apostolic work to have his ministry correspond to the selfless service of his Lord. Paul, in the community, stands as the illustrative medium of Christ sacrificing himself for his church. By summoning the strong to forgo their rights (1 Cor 10:23–11:1, Paul calls them to active imitation of Christ. Since Paul is the father of the community, the community having received his preaching, is aware of the Christ example that Paul emulates.\footnote{Ibid., 286.}

Andrew Clarke

Clarke suggests that Paul’s call to imitation represents his understanding of leadership.\footnote{Andrew D. Clarke, “‘Be Imitators of Me’: Paul’s Model of Leadership,” \textit{TynBul} 49 (1998) 329-60.} For Paul, the call to imitation is a summons to point the believers toward the true example of Christ. In the Corinthian correspondence, Paul’s call for imitation points the community toward Christ and toward himself.\footnote{Ibid., 347. Clarke (“Leadership,” 342) notes that the imitation motif fits into the wider Corinthian context in which Paul reinforces the content of “his teaching by referring to the conduct of his life.” Paul understands himself to be a model to be imitated but he is not the proper or true example.} In the Philippian correspondence Paul
demonstrates that he is attempting to follow Christ more closely. He does not call the community to do anything that he is not doing as well. Paul portrays Christ in Philippians as the example to imitate as well as the goal at which Paul has been aiming. Paul calls the community to recognize that Christ serves as the ultimate goal of their imitation.

Why imitate Paul and not Christ directly? The example of Paul is given only in the “context of his following and directing the church also to follow the greater example of Christ.” The call to imitate Paul is a means of imitating Christ. Christ’s actions represent Paul’s model of proper leadership. Christ serves as the exemplar of leadership, and Paul follows Christ as an imperfect imitation of Christ. Paul’s call to imitation is imitation of Christ through Paul, who serves as an imperfect model of Christ.

Gerald Hawthorne

Hawthorne claims that one becomes a disciple by imitating Christ’s thoughts and actions. Paul calls upon the community to pattern their lives after Christ. Its whole attention should be on Christ who serves as the supreme model.

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100 Ibid., 349.
101 Ibid., 349-50. The specific characteristics to be emulated are Christ’s humility and obedience.
102 Ibid., 350.
103 Ibid., 360.
105 Ibid., 167.
Paul calls upon the community (here the Philippian community) to emulate the attitude and actions of servanthood that characterize Jesus. Paul’s example holds up for the community the attitude and actions of Christ that “clearly show God’s ideal pattern for discipleship—indeed, the ideal pattern for human existence in general.”

Why then imitate Paul? Paul patterns his life after Christ in actions, not in words. He presents himself as one who copies the life of Jesus. Hawthorne suggests that although it may seem odd that Paul would shift his focus from the supreme model to lesser examples, the reason for this is that he understands himself and those who follow him to be “continually patterning their lives after Christ, the example par excellence.” Therefore, by imitating Paul and those who are closely associated with him, the believer is imitating the example set forth by Christ.

Phillipe Nicolet

Like Stanley, Nicolet understands Paul’s role to be that of mediator, “un intermédiaire tout en ayant une forte conscience de porter un responsabilité permanente envers les communautés qu’il a créées.”

Since these are communities that Paul has founded, it is his

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106 Ibid., 169. Hawthorne (“The Imitation of Christ,” 171) states that Paul calls upon the Philippian community to follow the example of Christ who forgoes his own personal ambition and arrogance and selfishness.

107 Ibid., 172. Paul’s example and his life are shaped by his personal experience of Christ. Within the Philippian correspondence, Paul models Jesus’ behavior by becoming completely obedient just as Christ did, according to Hawthorne (“The Imitation of Christ,” 173).

108 Ibid., 177.

109 Ibid.

responsibility to mediate proper imitation of Christ. The way in which one becomes a proper imitator of Christ is made present in the proclamation and existence of Paul. This method of imitation does not mean that Christ is to be understood as a model to be imitated, nor does it mean that the believer must suffer as Christ suffered, be humbled as he was humbled. This imitation means to live a life “qu’il a inaugurée par son abaissement et par sa [Christ’s] mort sur la croix.” This imitation of Christ and Paul is a matter of living one’s life “in Christ” so the life of the believer should not be understood as a life identical to that of Christ’s. This imitation is determined by the idea that believers now find their existence determined eschatologically in Christ. The call to imitation, then, is a call to recognize that since members of the community have become believers, they must recognize that their life is now founded in Christ. To imitate Paul, then, is to live a life in Christ.

The Theme of Imitation and Pauline Ethics

The theme of imitation plays a significant role in Pauline ethics. The focus of those scholars who address the theme of imitation in Pauline ethics is on the humble, giving, and obedient love of the crucified Christ. The goal is to serve others and to seek the concern for the other over one’s self. The believers are called to seek the advantage of the other and to forgo their own needs and desires. The proper goal of Christian ethics is found in this imitation of the self-giving Christ and to share his concern for others.

111 Ibid.
112 Ibid., 412-13.
113 Ibid., 413.
Victor Paul Furnish

For Furnish, the *imitatio Christi* passages show how Paul “regards Christ’s obedience as paradigmatic for the believer’s new life in Christ.”\(^{114}\) Believers must make Christ’s obedience an active part of their life. Inherent within this action are certain activities that believers must do. Believers should conform themselves to the humble, giving, and obedient love of the crucified Christ rather than specific actions of the earthly Jesus.\(^{115}\)

The focus for Christian ethics is this, “Not rules but personal relationships are of primary importance in the Christian’s deciding what and what not to do.”\(^{116}\) Believers’ ethics are to be guided by how they understand themselves in personal relationships. Furnish correctly points out that the exhortation to imitation in 1 Cor 11:1 refers to wanting to please and do good to all people.\(^{117}\) Therefore, believers’ ethics should be driven by their concern for the sake of the other, which in itself is an imitation of Paul, who imitates Christ.

For Furnish, there are two themes that make the imitation passages cohesive. The first is the need for humble, selfless service. The second is the “almost inevitably attendant need to suffer as Christ suffered in order to be obedient.”\(^{118}\) Believers must be willing to give of themselves for the sake of the other and be willing to suffer just as Christ suffered in

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\(^{114}\) Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968) 218. Furnish understands all Pauline calls to imitation to be calls to imitate Christ, even those that do not mention Christ explicitly. When Furnish speaks of Christ’s obedience, he is referring to Christ’s willingness to empty himself and to die on the cross.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., 223.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 220.

\(^{117}\) Ibid.

\(^{118}\) Ibid., 223.
order to be obedient. Christian ethics is grounded in the believers’ imitation of Paul and Christ’s willingness to endure suffering and his willingness to selflessly serve the other.  

Frank Matera

Matera notes that the constant process of imitation is a matter of believers seeking the advantage of the other and forgoing their own needs/desires. The theme of imitation plays a prominent role in the moral teachings of Paul, inasmuch as believers are called to imitate Paul who has conformed himself to the suffering of Jesus. In his life as an apostle, Paul “has so conformed himself to Christ’s sufferings that his life now manifests the very gospel he preaches.” Paul presents himself as the human embodiment of the gospel he preaches to them.

The theme of imitation is found in the Christ hymn of Phil 2:6-11. This passage shows what behavior believers should imitate. For Matera, the comparison between Christ and the believer is to be found in “the behavior exemplified by Christ’s sacrificial love” and in Paul’s call to humility within the community. In order to build unity in the community, which Matera suggests is the call found throughout this entire letter, believers must look toward the interests of others first and not toward their own interests, just as Christ did.

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119 Ibid.


121 Ibid., 174.

122 Ibid., 179.

123 Ibid.
Paul’s ethics are shaped by imitating the self-emptying of Christ. It is this attitude that shapes the ethical life of believers.\textsuperscript{124}

The moral exhortation of Philippians is this: the believers must live their lives in a manner worthy of the gospel it proclaims. Believers must live their lives in imitation of Christ’s self-emptying action so that they work out their salvation. It is this ethic of self-emptying action that will make them “blameless and innocent children of God on the day of the Lord’s parousia.”\textsuperscript{125} The believer imitates Christ’s self-emptying action by imitating Paul, who presents himself as a model who has forsaken all for God. By imitating Paul, the community will be brought into unity, which is the goal of the ethic of imitation.\textsuperscript{126}

For Paul the model of imitation is conforming the believers’ life to Christ’s death. In order to live an ethical, good life, the community must learn to conform itself to Christ’s death. It is those who humble themselves who will be conformed to Christ.\textsuperscript{127} The key to understanding the theme of imitation and its role in ethics is this: One must learn to imitate Paul and Christ in order to live in unity. Because the Lord is near, the ethical and moral lives of the community are found within the ethical horizon of the parousia. In order to be pure and blameless at the parousia, the community must imitate this ethic of self-emptying.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{124} Matera (ibid., 179) states that the call to imitation is not a call to imitate specific or moral values from the life of the earthly Jesus. Just like Furnish as noted above, the focus is on the self-emptying attitude of the crucified Christ.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 180.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 181.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 182.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 183. According to Matera (ibid., 150-51) the call to imitation in 1 Cor 11:1 serves as a reminder of Paul’s conduct that he lays out for the community in chap 9. The call to imitation is a constant process in which one seeks the advantage of the other and forgoes one’s own needs/desires. The moral
Richard Burridge

Burridge suggests that in order to serve as a disciple of Christ one must imitate Jesus’ actions and deeds.\textsuperscript{129} The call to follow Christ and to imitate Paul is practical. Just as followers of Christ are called to act in accordance with his ways, so too are imitators of Paul called to act in accordance with his ways. This is why Paul points out his own example to his communities. He does so in order to give his communities something to model themselves on.\textsuperscript{130} Just as Christ serves as the pattern for Paul, Paul serves as the pattern for his communities.

According to Burridge both μιμησις and παραδείγμα involve imitation of specific actions and deeds.\textsuperscript{131} This call to imitation goes beyond the examples of humility and self-giving and becomes “an active ethic of concern for others.”\textsuperscript{132} The call to imitation then is a call to imitate the self-giving love of Christ, manifested in his concern for others. Jesus’ example of self-giving love “even to death on the cross lies at the heart of Paul’s own life as well as his theology and ethics—and must be worked out in the practical ways of self-denial and concern for others.”\textsuperscript{133} This is the goal of Christian ethics.

\textsuperscript{129} Richard Burridge, \textit{Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to NT Ethics} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 144.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 145-46. For example, in Philippians the call is to imitate Christ’s self-emptying love and humility. In Corinthians, there is still an emphasis on self-emptying, but now with a stronger focus on the concern for others. Eating meat sacrificed to idols serves as an example of how one can apply the act of self-emptying love to practical ethics.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 147.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 148.
This concern for others, or as Burridge calls it, our “other regarding conduct,” is a key part of our moral responsibility. This “other regarding conduct” is the life pattern of Christ, and the concern for others is the way in which the believer fulfills this life pattern within the community.\textsuperscript{134} The basis of concern for others arises out of the key point about imitating Jesus: the imitation in view concerns an imitation of self-giving and self-abasement for the sake of others.\textsuperscript{135} The focus for Paul is always on Christ’s example rather than on Jesus’ sayings. Following Christ’s self-giving love, which Paul manifests to his communities, is at the core of Pauline ethics and theology.\textsuperscript{136}

\textit{Sharing in Paul’s Experience of God’s Grace}

David Stanley

For Paul, preaching the gospel was the key element of his understanding of his apostleship.\textsuperscript{137} The theme of imitation is closely related to Paul’s understanding of his own relationship to Christ as well as his relationship to the communities to which he preaches. Paul’s orientation toward Christ is a major factor in his relationship to his communities.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 154.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 148.


\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 131. There are four experiences in Paul’s life that Stanley (ibid., 131) presents as the way in which Paul understands his relationship to Christ. First is Paul’s initial confrontation with the risen Lord. Second is Paul’s baptism. Third is Paul’s reception of traditions about Jesus that predate his own ministry. Fourth is “the vicissitudes of his career as apostle.” These four experiences show how Paul understands his relationship to Christ.
He is able to call himself an imitator of Christ because he has been united with Christ “in the twofold event proclaimed by the gospel, death and resurrection.”

Paul’s relationship with Christ serves as the basis for his declaration to be an imitator of Christ, and it allows Paul to serve as the model of imitation for his communities. Paul’s life is to be transparent so that the power of the gospel, which is the way in which one is led to salvation, can shine forth to the community. The gospel is the necessary element to understanding Paul’s theme of imitation. Rather than a call to obedience to authority, Paul’s call to imitation is a result of his “radical insight into the gospel as the communication of God’s saving power in Christ and his total awareness of human impotence vis-à-vis that divine power.” Paul realizes that humanity cannot attain salvation on its own. One must rely on the work and power of God that is presented in the gospel story of Jesus’ death and resurrection. In order to imitate Christ, believers must orient themselves in Christ through Christ’s death and resurrection. In doing so, they share in the power of the gospel. By imitating Paul, the community is able to share in the grace received by him, which made him realize that he could not rely on himself for salvation. For Paul the call to imitation is a call to have his communities share in his experience of humanity’s need to rely fully on God’s grace, which Paul presents in his gospel.

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139 Ibid., 132.
140 Ibid., 134-35.
141 Ibid., 141.
142 Ibid.
**Imitation in Relation to Christian Goals: Humility and Self-Renunciation**

According to this group of scholars the main emphasis of Paul’s call to imitation focuses on self-humiliation and self-renunciation. Believers must act in accordance with Christ’s attitude of self-humiliation and self-renunciation. Believers are called to follow the self-emptying love of Paul and Christ. The purpose of imitating the self-emptying love, self-humiliation, and self-renunciation of Christ is that believers can be exalted just as Christ is exalted. The entire process of imitation is done through the ethic of self-renunciation. The believer’s new life in Christ is present in self-humiliation and self-renunciation.

Boykin Sanders

Sanders’s article on 1 Cor 4:16 suggests that understanding the term imitator in this passage is essential for a proper grasp of the term throughout the entire Pauline corpus.\(^{143}\) For a clear understanding of imitation, one must realize the significance of the “in Christ” formula within the motif of imitation of Paul: “It is closely related to Christ and to the gospel in which Christ is proclaimed as crucified.”\(^{144}\) In this idea of being “in Christ,” we find the background for what Sanders refers to as the communal principle. The community, which follows the pattern of existence found in Christ, is built through baptism into Christ. This community then becomes one in which individuals do not seek their own interests but the interests of others. The motif of imitation is built within this communal principle.\(^{145}\)

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\(^{143}\) Boykin Sanders, “Imitating Paul: 1 Cor. 4:16,” *HTR* 74 (1981) 353-63, here 353.

\(^{144}\) Ibid., 356.

\(^{145}\) Ibid.
Within the Corinthian correspondence, imitating Christ establishes the communal principle and excludes divisiveness found in the community through boasting.\(^{146}\) The communal principle calls upon the members of the community to renounce their self-interests and to seek the interests of others.\(^{147}\) Paul can call on the Corinthians to imitate him because his entire existence is in service to Christ; he does not seek to serve himself.\(^{148}\) The central criterion for Paul, then, is his communal concern, which demands that one renounce one’s desires and needs in order to build up the community in which believers are now “in Christ” through baptism.\(^{149}\)

William Kurz

Kurz’s article suggests that Paul’s call to imitation is a call to imitate the self-renunciation found in the life of Christ and modeled in the life of Paul.\(^{150}\) Kurz’s focus is on Philippians 2–3, especially the parallel examples presented of Christ and Paul. His assessment is that the central chapters of this letter, chaps. 2 and 3, are dominated by the pattern of imitating the self-emptying love of Paul and Christ.\(^{151}\) Both of the examples presented by Paul in this letter focus on the importance of letting go of the believers’ self in

\(^{146}\) Ibid., 362.

\(^{147}\) Sanders (“Imitating Paul,” 362) defines the communal principle as a demand that one “relinquish one’s own concerns for the greater good of the body of Christ.”

\(^{148}\) Ibid.

\(^{149}\) Ibid., 363.


\(^{151}\) Ibid., 105.
order to make themselves weak, so that God’s power may be manifested. Once believers have done this, they can be exalted by God. When Paul chooses the way of Christ’s death for his life, he relinquishes all that he has gained as a Jew. Kurz’s argument is that this choice is parallel to the choice that Christ makes as presented in the Christ hymn of Phil 2:6-11. Both Paul and Christ once held a position that they now understand to be expendable. It is this kenotic choice that the believers are called to imitate. As the community witnesses the examples of Paul and others, they are called “to imitate their [the personal example’s] self-sacrifice for the interests of others.” The imitation of this self-emptying example indicates a life patterned on the crucified Christ.

Stephen Fowl

Fowl’s examination of the hymnic material in Philippians 2 comes to a similar conclusion regarding Paul’s call to imitation. According to Fowl, Paul uses the hymn in Phil 2:6-11 to support the ethical demands of 1:27–2:4. They are designed to give the Philippians directions for their lives. The hymn is also used to support Paul’s arguments against his opponents in 3:1-16.

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152 Ibid., 108.
153 Ibid., 115.
154 Ibid., 118. Kurz notes how the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus presented in the text show how they too are self-sacrificing. Timothy does not seek his own means but those of the Philippian community. Epaphroditus, who at one point is near death, shows his willingness to sacrifice even his own life for the sake of the mission.
155 Ibid.
The church has faced opposition to this point. Paul wants to emphasize that there will be suffering. To endure this suffering and to remain steadfast, the community must be unified. Paul calls upon the community to set aside rivalry for humility. Paul demands two specific types of behavior that he suggests will ensure that unity prevails. First, they must be of the same mind. Second, they must turn their attention away from themselves to others.\textsuperscript{158} For the Philippians to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, they must remain “steadfast in faith, united in selfless love and concern for one another.”\textsuperscript{159}

The community is being called to conform to the suffering and humility of Christ. Just as Christ suffered and was humiliated and exalted by God, so will the Philippian community. To know Christ is to know the fellowship of his sufferings and to be conformed to his death.\textsuperscript{160} Once believers have been conformed to Christ’s death they can be exalted. Suffering and humiliation, however, cannot be separated from exaltation.\textsuperscript{161} The model presented by Paul is one of self-humiliation and suffering, the model to be imitated in order to be conformed to Christ’s death.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 77.
\item \textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 87-88.
\item \textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 89. According to Fowl this will lead to suffering but will also lead to salvation.
\item \textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 99.
\item \textsuperscript{161} Ibid. Fowl (ibid., 100) notes that the struggle here between Paul and his opponents is that the theology of the opponents accommodates only the exalted Christ of 2:9-11. Their theology ignores the suffering Christ of 2:6-8. For them, it is only the exaltation that is of any importance.
\end{itemize}
For Brant, this attitude serves as a realization of the believers’ Christian goals. The theme of imitation in Paul’s letters is more active than mimicking Paul’s actions.\textsuperscript{162} The imitator engages in the act of μίμησις, and this process can take place only after baptism. Once believers have been baptized into Christ, all aspects of their life should reflect the reality of being one in Christ.\textsuperscript{163} They must conform their behavior to the image of God that has been presented in Christ.\textsuperscript{164} Following baptism, believers in Christ must shape their life and act in accordance with this new identity, through the adoption of an ethic of self-renunciation and self-humiliation based on their new nature in Christ.\textsuperscript{165}

For Paul, “Mimēsis is a process in which the imitator expresses, through the subordination of his or her interests to those of others, the ideal presented in Christ.”\textsuperscript{166} The call to imitation is a call to self-humiliation and self-renunciation, just as these principles have been presented in the life of Christ and now are presented concretely in the life of Paul.

\textsuperscript{162} Brant, “The Place of mimēsis,” 286.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 286-88. According to Brant, Paul recognizes that those who act in accordance with their new life in Christ are imitators. Those who do not live their lives in accordance to their new life in Christ must be exhorted by Paul to become imitators. For those who need to become imitators, the call to imitation “fulfils a pedagogic function in that the imitator comes to recognize and to understand those attributes of which the Christian life consists” so that the imitator may perform proper imitation.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 289.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 290. The call to imitate Paul is not to be understood as an assertion of his own status, according to Brant (“The Place of mimēsis,” 291). It is to be used as an example of his own conformity to the image of Christ.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 292.
This process of self-renunciation is a movement toward final conformity with Christ. The entire process of imitation serves as a means for realizing Christian goals.\textsuperscript{167}

When Paul calls communities to imitate him, Brant suggests that Paul is not making claims to authority as many would like to assume. The nature of Paul’s authority is to be understood as weakness and humility. Believers must subordinate their personal will in order that they may conform themselves to Christ (who is the goal for Christians).\textsuperscript{168} Once the believers recognize Paul’s authority, which is found in weakness and humility, they share in that authority. Paul’s authority comes from the belief “that he concretely manifests the ethic inherent to a life in Christ.”\textsuperscript{169}

\textbf{Conclusion and Critique}

In this chapter, I have done two things. First, I have examined the use of \textit{mimhsij} and related terms prior to the NT. Second, I have provided a history of research on how the theme of imitation in Paul is interpreted. Modern scholarship focuses on five uses of Paul’s theme of imitation. Some scholars focus on the theme in terms of Paul’s apostleship and obedience to his authority. This focus on the call as a summons to be obedient to Paul’s authority overlooks other crucial elements of Paul’s call to imitation. Michaelis overlooks the need for \textit{imitatio Christi} in Paul’s call to imitate himself. His call to imitation is not a recognition of his physical authority as Michaelis would suggest, nor does it suggest that he believes himself to be superior in any way.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 298.

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 298-99.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 299.
Betz’s, Reinhartz’s, and Shütz’s arguments are better in that they define what believers are to be obedient to and where Paul’s authority originates. Betz suggests that Paul demands obedience to his exhortation, which is the exhortation of God, and not to his own authority. Reinhartz recognizes Paul’s authority as spiritual rather than physical. The weakness of her argument is that she claims that Paul is constantly defending his apostleship. Shütz’s argument is stronger still in that he recognizes Paul’s authority as found in his weakness, which is God’s strength.

Castelli’s approach to Paul’s call to imitation is too modern. She applies an understanding of power and authority that neither Paul nor his communities would recognize. Paul does not always appear to understand himself as an authority figure or in need of obedience as Castelli would suggest. Although each of these scholars discusses Paul’s relationship to his communities, they lack a discussion on how self-giving and self-renunciation affects and defines those relationships. It is Paul’s self-giving example that determines his relationship to his communities and not his position of authority.

Stanley (1984) focuses on the theme of imitation as a call to lead Paul’s communities to share in his own experience of God’s grace. As with the last group, Stanley does not address the issue of one’s relationship to others and the need for self-giving and renunciation. His suggestion that the death and resurrection of Christ serve as the only elements of Christ’s life that one must correspond to, overlooks the elements of humiliation, self-giving, and self-renunciation in Paul’s call to imitation. Paul’s discussion of imitation is more oriented towards these elements in the life of Christ prior to his death, and it is these elements that Stanley ignores.
Nearly all of the remaining scholars agree that believers are called to imitate Christ’s self-humiliation, self-renunciation, and his desire to seek the needs of others over his own needs. Stanley, Tinsley, de Boer, Schulz, Clarke, Hawthorne, and Nicolet suggest that believers imitate Christ’s self-humiliation and self-renunciation through a mediated imitation of Paul. When Paul calls his communities to imitate him, he points to an example that is above his own. The imitation of Paul serves as a pathway toward proper imitation of Christ. Furnish, Matera, and Burridge see the call to imitate these aspects of Christ as a means to establish a proper Christian ethics. This behavior of self-giving is what Paul expects for his communities and this is why he calls the communities to imitate his example since he exemplifies this ethic. Sanders, Kurz, Fowl, and Brant all focus on the theme as it is a call to imitate these particular behaviors, with one scholar (Brant) recognizing that by imitating these aspects of Christ believers are moving toward the realization of Christian goals. Since believers are now “in Christ,” they must live a life patterned after the crucified Christ. Paul expects that since they have joined the fellowship “in Christ,” they must now live a life in imitation of Christ’s self-humiliation, self-renunciation, and concern for the needs of others.

My interpretation of the theme of imitation in Paul builds upon the position of the last group. An integral part of this theme of imitation is the believers’ relationship to other members of their community and their concern for other’s needs over their own. I agree with the last group that what Paul is calling his communities to imitate is the aspects of self-humiliation, self-renunciation, and concern for the needs of others. However, I propose that they miss the overall purpose of Paul’s explicit call to imitation. I recognize within the context of the call to imitation that Paul is defining a new set of communal relationships.
The structure of Pauline imitation is meant to define a new set of relationships, which lead to the creation of true community.

Through my examination I will identify common themes that develop within Paul’s call to imitation with regards to defining this new set of communal relationships. The four themes that I will address are: humility, suffering, unity, and salvation. I will examine in Paul’s call to imitation how the elements of humility, through self-renunciation, and suffering, through persecution and forgoing one’s own rights, shape believers’ conduct. I will also explore how, through their proper conduct, believers create unity within the community. I will also explore the implications that this new set of relationships and proper conduct has for believers, including the implications of forming a destructive set of community relationships. My purpose will be to show how, through their imitation of Paul and others, believers create true community to ensure the salvation of all believers. Those who create a destructive set of relationships, however, live in danger of destruction or exclusion at the parousia.

In Chapters Two to Five, I will examine the call to imitation as it occurs in 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians 1–4, 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1, and Philippians, respectively. I will examine the call within its epistolary context and show how the need for a new set of communal relationships underlies Paul’s call to imitation. I will explore how Paul uses both his and Christ’s example in the call to imitation rhetorically to encourage believers to act in humility and with a willingness to endure suffering so that they may unify the community. In Chapter Six, I will present a composite sketch of the rhetorical function of the theme in the
epistolary context of these letters and show that there is an overall structure to Paul’s theme to imitation that is developed through four common themes.
Chapter Two

Suffering and Hope: Imitation in 1 Thessalonians

In the previous chapter I discussed the history of research on the theme of imitation within the Pauline corpus. The scholars who have taken on this task do not agree about Paul’s use of this theme. Some see it as a way for Paul to establish his authority or an implicit call to imitate Christ. Others understand Paul’s call as a means of moral exhortation or as a way of guiding believers towards self-denial. Although some of these aspects are present in Paul’s call to imitation, many scholars overlook the importance of the relationship between imitation and suffering. In each of his calls to imitation Paul understands that suffering will accompany imitation.

The theme of imitation occurs in 1 Thessalonians. In this letter Paul reminds the Thessalonians how they became imitators of himself, the Lord, and the churches in Judea through their acceptance of the suffering that accompanies the Christian life. The Thessalonians suffer on two counts. First, they suffer at the hands of those who persecute them. Second, they suffer by forgoing their own rights for the sake of others. Although they suffer, they endure with hope, knowing that one day this suffering will come to an end (1:9-10). Paul uses the triad of “work of faith,” “labor of love,” and “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ” to present this truth to the Thessalonians (2:1-16).

In this chapter I will show how Paul uses the triad in this letter to explain how the Thessalonians have become imitators of himself, the Lord, and the churches in Judea. I will discuss how he uses the example of his own life as implicit paraenesis to exhort the Thessalonians to further imitate this behavior so that they may continue to grow in faith,
love, and hope. Finally, I will show how Paul highlights how hope will help them endure these sufferings.

The First Letter to the Thessalonians

The Content of the Letter

The letter consists of two parts. The first part (1:1–3:10) is a thanksgiving that has an implicit paraenetic function.¹ The second (3:11–5:28) consists of paraenesis and a typical Pauline closing. Paul begins the letter with a typical greeting introducing himself, Silvanus, and Timothy (1:1). After this, he gives thanks to God for the Thessalonians’ faith in action, their imitation of his example, the work of their own example, and their conversion (1:2-10). In chap. 2 Paul continues to give thanks but shifts the focus to his conduct within the community. In this section Paul uses the example of his conduct as an implicit paraenesis of how the community must act.

In 2:13-16 Paul again gives thanks for how the community received the gospel. He recalls how they became imitators of the Judean churches through their suffering. Paul offers them a word of hope, and he shows them that just as they suffered, so too did many believers who went before them. Following this, he says that he longs to see and return to them, but he has been hindered from doing so (2:17-20). Despite this he is filled with joy because of them.

At the beginning of chap. 3 Paul tells the Thessalonians of his anxieties about them. He worried that their persecutions had become too much for them to bear. It is for this

¹ Gordon D. Fee (The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009] 7) notes that the thanksgiving constitutes about 60% of the letter.
reason that he sent Timothy to encourage them. Upon his return Timothy informed Paul that
the Thessalonians have remained strong in their faith and love. Paul is encouraged by this
report, and he gives thanks for what has happened among them (3:1-10).

Following the close of the thanksgiving section, Paul begins his paraenesis by
offering a prayer that God will direct him to them and that they will increase and abound in
their love for one another (3:11-13). In chaps. 4 and 5 he explicitly exhorts the community to
adopt a certain conduct. Also, he addresses a number of issues that have arisen in the
community.

In 4:1-8 Paul warns the Thessalonians to abstain from πορνεία and control their own
bodies, because they have been called to holiness and must act accordingly. In 4:9-12 he
exhorts the Thessalonians to love one another, to keep to themselves, to live quietly, and to
work with their own hands. In 4:13-16 he addresses the Thessalonians’ concern about those
believers who have died prior to the parousia. Their concern is that the deceased will not
share in the parousia when Christ returns. Paul informs them that the deceased are better off
than those who are alive because the dead will gather with Christ first when he returns.

In 5:1-11 Paul turns to a related concern about when the parousia will take place.
Paul informs them that they need not concern themselves with such issues because the day of
the Lord will come unexpectedly. He adds an ethical exhortation, emphasizing how they
must act since they have been destined for salvation. In 5:12-19 Paul admonishes them to
care for and build up one another. He ends the letter (5:20-28) with a typical Pauline closing.
Purpose of the Letter

The overall purpose of 1 Thessalonians is found in its paraenesis. Paul writes to the Thessalonians to exhort them to proper conduct (service to others, humility, and gentleness). Much of this paraenesis is implicit. For example, the material contained in chaps. 1–3 serves as implicit paraenesis to encourage the Thessalonians to imitate Paul’s behavior. Paul offers himself as a trustworthy model who encourages them to act as he has by reminding them of what they have been taught and reinforcing what they already know. He wants to remind them of his ministry among them because this will encourage them to conduct themselves as he does. He encourages them because their new social and religious situation adds further stress and separates them from their fellow citizens. Under such stress it would be easy for the Thessalonians to revert to their old ways of living. Accordingly, through his implicit and explicit paraenesis, Paul exhorts them to act as he has, so that they may continue to grow in faith, love, and hope despite such stresses.

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2 Leon Morris (The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959] 20-21) notes that Paul writes to encourage the Thessalonians because of his concern and joy for them. Abraham J Malherbe (The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary [AB 32B; New York: Doubleday, 2000], 56; 80-85) says that Paul’s focus throughout the letter is on conduct and not on doctrine. Paul uses chaps. 1–3 as a way of strengthening their bond to prepare them for the paraenesis in chaps. 4–5.

3 See Fee, Thessalonians, 7-8. See also Benjamin Witherington III, 1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 21-22. Malherbe (Letters, 56) notes that the constant reminders give the reader a glimpse of what Paul’s initial instruction must have been.

1 Thess 1:2-10: An Introduction to the Theme of Imitation

Two instances of μιμήται occur in 1 Thess 1:2–2:16. Within this context Paul’s use of μιμήται forms an inclusio around the material related to imitation (1:2-10; 2:13-16). In the first section (1:2-10) Paul introduces the theme of imitation and shows how the triad of faith, love, and hope will shape his call to imitation. He introduces the Thessalonians to the fact that those who imitate him, Christ, and the Judean churches will suffer. However, believers will experience hope in the midst of this suffering.

The first occurrence of μιμήται is in the opening thanksgiving (1:2-10). This thanksgiving consists of three parts. In part one Paul gives thanks for how the Thessalonians conduct themselves (1:2-5). In part two they are commended for the way they received the gospel and for what resulted from it (1:6-8). In part three Paul reminds them of their conversion and explains what he means by “hope in endurance of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:9-10).

The Thessalonians’ Conduct (1:2-5)

The Thanksgiving of the letter begins:

We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you whenever we pray, we constantly remember in the presence of our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, beloved

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5 See Malherbe, Letters, 105; Morris, Thessalonians, 50-51. Mary A. Getty (“The Imitation of Paul in the Letter to the Thessalonians,” in The Thessalonian Correspondence [ed. Raymond F. Collins; BETL 87; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990] 279-81) also recognizes a threefold structure though she finds a different focus: cooperation with God’s grace (1:2-5), suffering persecution (1:6), relating the notion of example to that of the identity of the community members (1:7-10).

6 The three genitives πίστεως, ἀγάπης, and ἐλπίδος are all genitives of production. A genitive of production is defined by Daniel B. Wallace (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996] 104) as a genitive substantive that “produces the noun to which it stands related.” Wallace notes that this type of genitive is not common. However, in the present
In this thanksgiving Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he remembers them constantly in his prayer. More specifically, he remembers their “work of faith,” their “labor of love,” and their “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This triad of faith, love, and hope reflects three qualities of Christian character. The Thessalonians’ work, labor, and endurance context this seems to be the best understanding of the genitive. In this verse, ἔργον, κόπω, and ὑπομονή are produced by πίστεως, ἀγάπης, and ἐλπίδος, respectively. Believers’ work, labor, and endurance are produced by their faith, love, and hope. From another perspective we could read these genitives as attributive genitives. An attributive genitive according to Wallace (Greek Grammar, 86) is one in which “the genitive substantive specifies an attribute or innate quality of the head substantive.” In 1:3 then, we would read “faithful work,” “laborious love,” and “hopeful endurance.” Although this reading is quite plausible, within the context of 1:1–2:16, where Paul discusses particular actions that are produced by the attributes of faith, love, and hope, it seems unlikely that the attributive genitive would fit. Another possibility is the genitive of source. Wallace (Greek Grammar, 109) defines the genitive of source as a genitive where “the genitive substantive is the source from which the head noun derives or depends.” In 1:3 we would read “work derived from faith,” “labor derived from love,” and “endurance derived from hope.” This reading is rather similar to the genitive of production. However, there are two reasons why we should prefer the genitive of production over the genitive of source. First, the genitive of source is rare in Koine Greek. Second, the genitive of source would suggest that work, labor, and endurance are all dependent upon faith, love, and hope for their origin. In this particular context Paul is not suggesting that their work, labor, and endurance are dependent upon the three elements of the triad. Instead, he suggests that the three actions are produced by the three elements. They do not find their origin in faith, love, and hope but are produced by them. It is for this reason that I prefer the genitive of production.

7 Some manuscripts including Κα and C read τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ. Another manuscript, Κα*, reads τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν. It appears that the scribes of these manuscripts had difficulty with the idea of Paul claiming that the gospel was his. However, it is not unlikely that Paul would have referred to the gospel as his own, in that each preacher would have added his own distinct elements when proclaiming the gospel. Paul’s gospel would have been distinct from Peter’s gospel and communities would have been aware of such differences. Because of this, along with the strong manuscript evidence, the reading of the NA27 is preferred.

8 All translations are mine based on the Greek text of the NA27, unless otherwise noted.

9 James L. Boyce (“Graceful Imitations: ‘Imitators of Us and the Lord’ (1 Thessalonians 1:6),” in All Things New: Essays in Honor of Roy A. Harrisville [ed. Arland J. Hultgren, Donald H. Juel, and Jack D. Kingsbury; Word & World 1; St. Paul: Word & World, 1992] 140) notes that the thanksgiving brings out the purpose and themes of the letter which are linked to and revolve around faith, love, and hope. See also Nicolet, “Concept d'imitation,” 397. Brant (“The Place of mimesis,” 291) suggests that the emphasis on the triad is significant because it focuses on those activities that lead to persecution mentioned later in the letter.

Fee (Thessalonians, 22) states that “of the Lord” applies to all three elements of the triad. Although it is possible, the later context in which Paul discusses their endurance strongly reflects the element “of the Lord,” where the others do not. See also Paul-Gerhard Müller, Der Erste und Zweite Brief an die Thessalonicher: Übersetzt und erklärt von Paul-Gerhard Müller (RNT; Friedrich Pustet: Regensburg, 2001) 99-103; Bédarigaux, Les Épîtres aux Thessaloniciens (Paris: Gabalda, 1956) 367-68; Wolfgang Weiss, “Glaube–Liebe–Hoffnung: Zu der Trias bei Paulus,” ZNW 84 (1993) 199.
make visible their Christian character. Here, Paul commends the Thessalonians for their faith, love, and hope. These are three virtues that they learned from him because he modeled them in his ministry.

The terms faith, hope, and love have a particular meaning in Pauline theology. In Pauline theology faith is understood as a soteriological concept that has a specific object and content, Jesus Christ. Although faith is an important soteriological concept, it is also an important ethical concept. Human beings respond to God’s divine grace by living their lives in faith. For Paul this faith is described as the “obligation of a Christian conduct of life.” Faith is what determines the believers’ conduct and it is the benchmark and monitor for conduct. A specific part of this conduct is the believers’ responsibility to others.

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12 James D. G. Dunn, The Theology of Paul the Apostle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 634.

13 Jürgen Becker, Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles (trans. O. C. Dean Jr.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 431-32. Becker notes that faith demands obligatory conduct, and it is on this that Paul bases his Christian ethics. He further states that the salvific will of the electing God cannot be separated from the will of God according to which believers are to live. There is a close connection between the believers’ new salvific state and their conformity to ethical norms.

14 Dunn, Theology, 636-37. Dunn adds that the believers’ conduct flows from their faith.

15 Ibid.
Faith is closely related to hope and love. Faith generally occurs within a setting of endurance and patience, and it is found within a context of the practice of hope.\textsuperscript{16} It is this hope that helps believers persevere in their faith. Their faith is “the power of salvation in the present, and makes us eagerly await for its future realization.”\textsuperscript{17} Hope allows believers to know that their faith will be fully realized at the parousia. Believers endure and persist in their lives through their faith, which “motivates our endurance because it is the first installment of that future salvation.”\textsuperscript{18}

Faith and love are also closely related. Much like faith, Christian conduct finds its origin in love. Faith operates most effectively through love. Dunn describes the two as a single concept, “faith-through-love” or “love-energized-faith.”\textsuperscript{19} Faith and love exist in a symbiotic relationship that determines the life of believers. No matter how we may choose to look at them, the two are linked.

Much like faith, hope for Paul has a specific content, and it signifies a hoped for reality.\textsuperscript{20} The nature of hope is fixed on a specific object, time, and place – the parousia and the glory to come.\textsuperscript{21} Hope and faith are linked because “faith not only is hope but it has a

\textsuperscript{16} Beker, \textit{Paul the Apostle}, 149.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Dunn, \textit{Theology}, 637.

\textsuperscript{20} Beker, \textit{Paul the Apostle}, 146.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 148. Hope has an apocalyptic specificity. See also Becker, \textit{Paul}, 140.
hope; it [faith] cannot exist without the specific object of hope.”

This hope prevents believers from being overcome by Paul’s belief that all humanity stands under divine wrath. They know that they will be spared this wrath when Christ returns because he will rescue them.

Faithful believers wait in expectation for the parousia.

For Paul the foundation of theology is election and election’s temporal horizon is the parousia. Election designates the reality of salvation and the parousia designates the basis for believers’ hope. Through election believers are called into the church, “which in its hope…concentrated not on the resurrection but on the imminent coming of the Lord.” Believers endure because of the hope that the Lord will return and will deliver them from judgment.

Finally, love is a key aspect in the life of the believer. For Paul and for Christ, love is the summary of the law. When Jesus and Paul refer to the love command, they are referring to Jesus’ refusal to serve his self-interests. For Jesus and Paul the whole law is fulfilled by loving one’s neighbor. Believers should seek to serve their neighbors by conducting

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22 Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 146. For Beker hope is not just the posture of one’s faith, but it is always directed toward this specific object.


24 Ibid. Dunn (*Theology*, 437) adds that there is a tension between a beginning which ensures the end (the first fruits of the Spirit) and a longing for the end itself. It is within this tension that believers conduct themselves.


themselves in an attitude of gentleness and humility. By bearing one another’s burdens believers fulfill the law.

There is a tension in the salvation process between love and liberty. Believers, in their relationships with others, are not implicitly restricted in their liberties. However, believers must forgo actions that do not aid in the building up of fellow believers because of their love for fellow believers. Their love does not permit them to do anything that would be detrimental to others. For example in 1 Corinthians 8–10 believers have the right to eat food that has been sacrificed to idols because they know that there is only one God. However, if eating such food affects the faith of “weaker” believers, “stronger” believers must not partake of the meal. By avoiding such things they humble themselves and serve the needs of others. Love is the controlling factor and is defined as the concern to serve the other. It finds its frame of reference in believers’ sacrifice based on the prior sacrifice of Christ. Believers in Christ must adopt Paul and Christ’s attitude of gentleness and humility in order to serve fellow believers. Love brings believers to restrain their own convictions for the benefit of the whole.

Paul provides his converts with guidelines that are mostly concerned with personal relations. When he gives these guidelines, the focus is on the effect these activities will have on the conduct of believers and how this conduct will be an example to others. All of

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28 In 1 Cor 8–10 Paul states that all things are permitted but not all are good. See Dunn, Theology, 658; Bruce, Paul, 201.

29 Dunn, Theology, 658.

30 Ibid.

31 Becker, Paul, 436.
their conduct is to be directed by love, because through love believers serve their neighbors with gentleness and humility and fulfill the law. The triad of “work of faith,” “labor of love,” and “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ” presupposes this understanding of faith, love, and hope noted above.

The triad of faith, love, and hope in 1 Thessalonians embraces the lives of believers and their imitative activity. Each element of the triad represents an aspect of imitation. The first two elements of the triad reflect how believers must conduct themselves in their lives and in regards to fellow community members. The final element of the triad reflects how believers conduct themselves in light of the knowledge of Christ’s imminent parousia. Paul will use the triad in chap. 2 to discuss the example he presents to the Thessalonians in his ministry to them. Although he has already commended them for faith, love, and hope, his implicit paraenesis in chap. 2 encourages them to imitate his example so that they may continue to grow in these virtues.

Their “work of faith” is their steadfastness in the face of suffering and persecutions.\(^{32}\) The Thessalonians must continue to remain steadfast in two things. First, they must remain steadfast in their faith despite persecutions. Second, they must remain steadfast in their conduct and service toward others. Since faith directs how believers should live and serves as a monitor for their conduct, the Thessalonians must conduct themselves in light of their faith.\(^ {33}\) In 1:3 Paul praises them for their “work of faith.” In 2:1-4 he will outline what the

\(^{32}\) See Schnelle, *Apostle Paul*, 178. James Everett Frame (A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians [ICC 38; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912] 76) notes that Paul is not talking about works that produce faith but works that are the product of one’s faith and election.

\(^{33}\) Frederick Fyvie Bruce (1 & 2 Thessalonians [WBC 45; Waco: Word Books, 1982] 12) notes that this faith is also based on an assurance of salvation. Gregory K. Beale (1 - 2 Thessalonians [The IVP New Testament Commentary; Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2008] 74) observes that this faith is also based on an assurance of salvation.
“work of faith” entails. Using himself as the model, Paul will implicitly exhort the Thessalonians to remain steadfast in the face of persecution and suffering. Suffering is a necessity for believers and comes in all forms (1:6; 2:1-4). To grow in their faith the Thessalonians must imitate Paul’s example and accept this suffering in their lives.

The Thessalonians’ “labor of love” is their conduct as believers in light of their election. Conduct is a key part of being a believer, and it is an integral part of the model they set for other communities. Their conduct is to be directed by an attitude of gentleness and humility. Belief in Christ coupled with love and an attitude of gentleness and humility summon believers to follow Christ’s example and to forgo their own rights for the sake of others.34 The Thessalonians already conduct themselves in this way, however they must continue to do so. Although the Thessalonians may have the right to seek after their own needs, their love for their neighbors leads them to forgo this right in order to serve their neighbors in gentleness and humility. This is not an easy task however. The word κόπος indicates that the Thessalonians have expended extraordinary effort, while the concept of love (ἀγάπη) suggests a concern or a mutual support for others even in the face of adversity.35

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34 Brant (“The Place of mimēsis,” 290) states, “mimēsis is a process in which the imitator expresses through the subordination of his or her interests to those of others, the ideal represented by Christ.” Nicolet (“Concept d'imitation,” 400) adds that the Thessalonians share in the glory of the Lord by partaking in abasement. See also Tinsley, Imitation, 138.


Paul wants the Thessalonians to grow in love. In order to do so they must continue to imitate the example of gentleness and humility that he implicitly calls them to in 2:5-12. He embodied the gospel, acting totally for the sake of the Thessalonians, and their perception of this is what led to their conversion.\textsuperscript{36} By conducting themselves in gentleness and humility they exhibit this “labor of love” and help build up the Christian community.

Imitation of gentleness and humility exemplified in forgoing of one’s rights is rooted in the life of the Lord as well as in the life of Paul. Christ serves as the epitome of how one shows love for others.\textsuperscript{37} Christ himself called for humility and cross-bearing. Knowing that Christ is the epitome of this attitude, whenever he preaches of Jesus, Paul is speaking of the self-denying Lord.\textsuperscript{38} Believers should adopt this attitude so that they may walk in union with Christ in his suffering.\textsuperscript{39}

Finally, their “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ” means that Thessalonians endure the suffering associated with imitation because of the hope they have vested in the

\textsuperscript{36} Malherbe, \textit{Letters}, 126.

\textsuperscript{37} Tinsley, \textit{Imitation}, 138-39. Furnish (\textit{Theology and Ethics}, 223) states that God’s love is found in the grand humiliation of Christ, and it is this that the Thessalonians should strive to imitate. See also de Boer, \textit{Imitation of Paul}, 122. Betz (\textit{Nachfolge}, 141) comments that the imitator associates himself with the life and work of Christ.


\textsuperscript{39} de Boer, \textit{Imitation of Paul}, 97.
parousia, the specific object of their hope. Their hope is always present in the knowledge that one day Christ will return. They continue to work and labor, which brings them much suffering, because of the hope that, at the parousia, their suffering will come to an end and they will be rescued from the wrath to come. Paul will explain how they grow in hope in 1:9-10 and 2:13-16.

Paul encourages the Thessalonians to imitate his example because he is aware of the persecution and tribulations that they face. Their tribulations could cause them to lose these three virtues, therefore his implicit paraenesis in chap. 2 and his call to imitation are meant to encourage them to grow in faith, love, and hope. Although they are to be commended for their faith, love, and hope, it is necessary for them to grow further.

Paul speaks in 1:4 of the election of the Thessalonians. In the election process God is the principal agent in that he offers his grace to the Thessalonians, but election requires acceptance of this grace by the Thessalonians.⁴⁰ In v. 3 Paul offers implicit evidence of the authentic character of their election: their conduct in faith, love, and hope.⁴¹ In vv. 5-7, he will offer explicit evidence of the Thessalonians’ election by God.⁴²

⁴⁰ On God as principal agent, see Stanley, “Imitation in Paul's Letters,” 134; Best, Thessalonians, 70; Green, Thessalonians, 87; de Boer, Imitation of Paul, 109; Frame, Thessalonians, 77; Richard, Thessalonians, 47; Fee, Thessalonians, 27. Fee states that the immediate cause for thanksgiving is their service and love. But the ultimate cause is grounded in God’s election.

Benjamin Witherington III (1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006] 64-65) states that election refers to their conversion and not to their final salvation, because there is no guarantee of salvation. Betz (Nachfolge, 144) notes that election language in 1:4 is important because it proves that the Thessalonians participate in salvation history.


⁴² Richard (Thessalonians, 47-63) notes that the election and call serve as the goal and the actualization of their conversion. See also Best, Thessalonians, 70; Bruce, Thessalonians, 13. Colin R. Nicholl (From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians [SNTSMS 126; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004] 87) calls election the hallmark of authenticity, which is “present during the mission, indicating that
The Thessalonians accept God’s grace because of the gospel that was presented to them, “not in word alone but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction” (1:5a). The effect of the word among them is the first evidence of their election. The word of God and its power can only take effect when the community accepts it. Because of this election the community begins its “work of faith” (steadfastness in service and faith), its “labor of love” (conduct in service), and its “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul then reminds the Thessalonians of the model that he presented to them (1:5b). He will elaborate on this introductory statement about his conduct in 2:1-12. The imitation of the Thessalonians is linked to the reception of the gospel and Paul’s conduct. Paul explains to the Thessalonians how they should conduct themselves as a result of their

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43 Regarding the fact that the gospel came not only in the word, Charles A. Wanamaker (The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990] 78) clarifies that Paul’s preaching consists of both the words that are spoken and the power that it manifests. Richard (Thessalonians, 64) underscores the dynamism of the gospel, noting that God’s words are released through the words of his intermediaries.

According to Fee (Thessalonians, 31), all of v. 5 serves as the content of what Paul knows about the Thessalonians. He is aware of the experiential/evidential nature of their election and he reminds them of his ministry. In all of this work the Holy Spirit serves as the empowered effectiveness of his preaching.

44 See Richard, Thessalonians, 64.

45 Clarke (“Leadership,” 333-39) states that v. 5b begins “a cycle of example and imitation.” Fiore (Personal Example, 177) claims that the teacher’s example must act in concert with his works. See also Raymond F. Collins, Studies on the First Letter to the Thessalonians (BETL 66; Leuven: Peeters, 1984) 204; Malherbe, Letters, 247.

46 Wanamaker (Epistles, 80) suggests that they imitate Paul because he presents a model for those who have no firsthand knowledge of Christ. Ernest Best (A Commentary On The First And Second Epistles To The Thessalonians [BNTC; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1972] 78) states that Paul offers himself as the example because proper behavior is learned through concrete example, not through a code of rules.
conversion. They have witnessed how Paul conducted himself among them, and having experienced the effects of the gospel message they are called to imitate his conduct.

To summarize, the opening passage of 1:2-5 introduces the major themes that function in Paul’s call and explanation of imitation. First, it introduces the triad of faith, love, and hope that will serve as the model for proper imitation. Second, the community must continue to adhere to a certain conduct now that it has been elected. This conduct, exemplified by Paul, is a conviction brought about by the reception of the word presented to them. Third, this conduct serves as a model to believers in other communities. In the following verses Paul will explain how the triad functions within the call to imitation.

The Effect of Election (1:6-8)

In this section Paul introduces the theme of imitation. He writes:

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in much tribulation with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, you became a model for all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For the word of the Lord sounded out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that there is no need for us to speak about it. (1:6-8)

47 As Hopper (“Pauline Concept,” 107) notes, this section lays the basis for imitation so the gospel is proclaimed by both word and by force of personal example. See also Fiore, Personal Example, 187. They need this model according to Beale (Thessalonians, 55), because genuine faith can come only if the message is delivered by authentic and legitimate divine spokespeople.

Malherbe (Letters, 109; 114) notes that Paul forms this relationship by conducting himself in a manner that could not be separated from the way in which he preached. Légasse (Thessaloniensis, 95) states that Paul calls them to imitate the behavior he re-presents, essentially the behavior of Christ. See also Traugott Holtz, Der erste Brief an die Thessalonicher (EKK 13; Zürich: Benziger, 1986) 46.

48 Some scholars suggest that the phrase “and of the Lord” is a self-correction on the part of Paul to prevent the Thessalonians from thinking he seeks glory. However, the phrase is crucial to the later understanding of how the community conducts itself, so I suggest that the phrase was a part of Paul’s original intention. See Holtz, Thessalonicher, 48. As Légasse (Thessaloniensis, 94) rightly suggests, Paul does not consider himself to be the only example to be imitated. Therefore, the statement “and of the Lord” fits well.
The first occurrence of μιμηταί is found in 1:6. The positioning of the theme of imitation so early in the letter shows it as a prominent theme.\textsuperscript{49} That the Thessalonians have become imitators of both Paul and the Lord serves as the second proof of their election.\textsuperscript{50} This verse introduces the reader to two important themes. First, it introduces the theme of imitation. Second, the verse introduces the necessity of suffering in the life of believers. For Paul suffering is crucial to imitation.\textsuperscript{51} Although suffering is necessary, in this passage we see that suffering and joy are contemporaneous in the life of Christians.\textsuperscript{52} Paul does not elaborate how this joy manifests itself, but he notes that it is joy inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit working within them brings about their joy.

Although the suffering is to be expected, the aspect of joy is puzzling.\textsuperscript{53} Why would the Thessalonians suffer “with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit?” It is primarily because θληψις has an eschatological significance.\textsuperscript{54} Because of the hope that is found in the

\textsuperscript{49} Jonas Holmstrand, Markers and Meaning in Paul. An Analysis of 1 Thessalonians, Philippians and Galatians (CBNTS 28; Stockholm: Almqvist, 1997) 84. Many scholars would suggest that Paul’s call to imitate him is his way of establishing authority. I disagree. In chap. 2 when Paul discusses his position and his conduct within the community, his focus is not on his authority but his self-abasement. The evidence within the letter suggests that Paul refuses to establish his authority. See Birger A. Pearson, “1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation,” \textit{HTR} 64 (1971) 88; de Boer, \textit{Imitation of Paul}, 118; Wanamaker, \textit{Epistles}, 81; Castelli, \textit{Imitating Paul}, 92.

\textsuperscript{50} See de Boer, \textit{Imitation of Paul}, 114, 123. Imitation offers evidence of their election, confirmation of true acceptance of the word, and proof that the gospel has taken root. See also Wanamaker, \textit{Epistles}, 80.


\textsuperscript{51} See Michaelis, \textit{TDNT} 4: 670; Nicolet, “Concept d’imitation,” 399-400.

\textsuperscript{52} Malherbe, \textit{Letters}, 115.

\textsuperscript{53} See Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” 245; Wanamaker, \textit{Epistles}, 82; Légasse, \textit{Thessaloniciens}, 93.

knowledge that Christ will return soon, the Thessalonians find joy in the midst of their suffering. They know that the suffering will come to an end when Christ returns and saves them from their suffering and from the wrath. They are filled with this joy because of the presence of the Holy Spirit within them.

Paul reminds the community in v. 5 that they have seen the example that he presents to them, and in v. 6 he says that they have become imitators of him. Although Paul’s use of μίμησις here is not a command, this call to imitation serves a paraenetic function. In telling them how they have acted, Paul implicitly encourages them to continue to act this way. In acting this way they will continue to grow in faith, love, and hope. He uses his own example, because he lived among them, as a way to exhort them to conduct themselves properly. They are to imitate Christ as well. The Thessalonians cannot imitate Christ in receiving the word, since at no point does Christ receive the word. Rather they imitate Paul and the Lord by enduring suffering in their lives as believers.

Imitation for Paul includes proper conduct in the face of suffering, as is demonstrated in the triad of faith, love, and hope. The Thessalonians model for this can be found in both Paul and the Lord; such suffering is the lot of all believers (3:3). The more they express

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55 See Abraham J. Malherbe, “Exhortation in First Thessalonians,” NovT 23 (1983) 240. He states that a major part of paraenesis is offering a model to imitate. See also Wanamaker, Epistles, 80; Malherbe, Letters, 126; Bruce C. Johanson, To All the Brethren: Text-linguistic and Rhetorical Approach to 1 Thessalonians (ConBNT 16; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987) 84.

56 On this point see Michaelis, TDNT 4 670; Furnish, Theology and Ethics, 221; Schulz, Nachfolgen und Nachahmen, 287; Reinhartz, “Pauline Exhortation,” 401.

57 See Clarke, “Leadership,” 335; de Boer, Imitation of Paul, 96-97. de Boer notes that sufferings “have a definite and vital role to play in the Christian program.” de Boer (122-25) clarifies that Jesus serves as an example because he is possessed with joy, and because of this he is willing to give himself over in calm confidence. See also Marshall, Thessalonians, 54. Wanamaker (Epistles, 82) adds that the joy serves as tangible proof of the effect of Paul’s preaching.
their faith publicly, the more they will suffer. Therefore, “the degree in which the believer is allowed to participate in the sufferings of his Lord, should be the measure of his joy.” The acceptance of the gospel and the imitation that follows leads them to proper conduct in the face of suffering. Since they conduct themselves like this in the face of suffering every day, their imitation is active and ongoing.

In vv. 7 and 8 Paul describes what followed the Thessalonians’ reception of the gospel. After their election the Thessalonians became a model for other communities. Their actions and imitation serve as a model for how communities should act once they have received the word of the Lord. Just as the Thessalonians continue to grow through their imitation of Paul, so to will other communities who imitate the Thessalonians.

The model that the Thessalonians present is the testimony that sounds forth from them, their faith. The sign of their faith is found in their conduct present in the “work of

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Stanley ("‘Become Imitators,’” 866) states that the Thessalonians now share in Paul and Christ’s vocation of suffering. See also Müller, Thessalonicher, 110. Getty ("‘Imitation,’” 279) states that their imitation is not a duplication of Paul and the Lord, but that they act congruently with Paul and Jesus’ example.

58 Witherington, Thessalonians, 71.

59 Brant (‘The Place of mimēsis,” 288) notes that the believers’ life must now be in conformity with the transformation brought on by baptism; their new life must reflect this conversion.

60 See Brant, “The Place of mimēsis,” 291; Clarke, “Leadership,” 338.

61 See Stanley, “Imitation in Paul's Letters,” 135; Stanley, “‘Become Imitators,’” 865. According to Clarke (“Leadership,” 338), the imitation motif is linked now with the example motif of 1:5. See also Malherbe, Letters, 115.

62 Since they are a part of a larger family, de Boer (Imitation of Paul, 125) notes that they can present a pattern for others. See also Best, Thessalonians, 80. Holmstrand (Markers and Meaning, 85) remarks that the hazy distinction between gospel and sender in 1:5 is now apparent among the Thessalonians.

63 Heinrich Schlier, Der Apostel und seine Gemeinde: Auslegung des ersten Briefes an die Thessalonicher [Freiburg: Herder, 1972] 23-24) notes that the report of their faith that rings forth from them is equal to the gospel message. See also Antoon Roosen, “Das Zeugnis des Glaubens in 1 Thessalonicher 1,6-10,” Studia Moralia 15 (1977) 375.
faith,” the “labor of love,” and the “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ” in the face of persecution. The Thessalonians have modeled the example presented by Paul and Christ. The model is found in the triad, which guides their lives as believers. They press forth as believers with the joy inspired by the Holy Spirit even though they are constantly confronted with persecution and suffering. It is this model that they presented to the communities in Macedonia and Achaia, and it is the same model that they find in Paul and the Lord.

*The Thessalonians’ Response to Conversion (1:9-10)*

In the final part of this first chapter, Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

> For they report about us what sort of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, the one who rescues us from the coming wrath. (1:9-10)

In vv. 9-10, Paul recounts reports from other communities of how the Thessalonians received the gospel. Paul’s proclamation of the gospel was so effective that they received and accepted it by turning away from idols to serve the living and true God.

The conversion of the Thessalonians to God is a sign of their new life in Christ.

When Paul proclaimed the gospel to the Thessalonians and presented his behavior as a model to be imitated, he made known to them what it means to serve a living and true God. The

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64 Beale (*Thessalonians*, 58) suggests that the Thessalonians conform to the image of Christ in order to be an influence on others. This serves as the model for discipleship. See also Fee, *Thessalonians*, 38.
Thessalonians, upon hearing the proclamation and seeing Paul’s conduct, turned away from their idols to worship the living God.\(^{65}\)

In v. 10 Paul introduces the aspect of “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ” and reminds the Thessalonians where they rest their hope. In this verse he recalls 1:3 where he praises the Thessalonians for their “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ.” As I elaborated above this hope finds its object in the knowledge that one day Christ will return. The Thessalonians understand themselves to be living in the final age, and they know that at the parousia they will be rewarded for enduring their suffering (especially the suffering associated with their “work of faith” and “labor of love”) in hope of Jesus’ return.\(^{66}\) Prior to this verse Paul reminded the Thessalonians of their conversion, praised them for how they have become a model for other communities, and showed them how their conduct is crucial in this. Here, he reminds the Thessalonians what their reward will be for enduring suffering in their conduct: they will be rescued at the parousia. While the Thessalonians know this, Paul’s purpose here is to encourage them to endure in hope.

The Thessalonians endure and remain faithful even though they have experienced persecution and suffering.\(^{67}\) Because of their reception of the gospel and their work of faith and labor of love in the midst of their suffering, they can endure in hope, anticipating Christ’s

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\(^{65}\) Michaelis (TDNT 4 670) suggests that this is the reason why the Thessalonians become a model.

\(^{66}\) Beale (Thessalonians, 46) notes that it is all three traits that help them “weather the stormy trials of the end times” and not just hope. Masson (Thessaloniciens, 19) states that this is the eschatological hope that all await. See also Légasse, Thessaloniciens, 82; Wanamaker, Epistles, 88; Collins, Studies, 291.

\(^{67}\) Wanamaker, Epistles, 76.
return and the promise of salvation that comes with it.\textsuperscript{68} The hope of this salvation entails two things. First, the Thessalonians will be saved from the wrath of God that will accompany Jesus’ return. Although all humanity is under God’s divine wrath, believers persevere in hope confident that they will be delivered from this wrath. Second, at Christ’s return, they will be rewarded with salvation from their present sufferings.\textsuperscript{69} When he returns, those who persecute them will suffer the wrath from which believers have been delivered. They may suffer now, but the final wrath of God will not come upon them. It is because of this knowledge that they can endure in hope.

To summarize, in the opening part of this \textit{inclusio}, Paul introduces the theme of imitation. Imitation of Paul and Christ entails proper conduct that is expressed in faith, love, and hope, and it will aid the Thessalonians in their continual growth in these three virtues. In the next section, using the triad as his guide, Paul will remind them what the life of the believer entails and what they must imitate. He will warn the Thessalonians of the sufferings they should expect, and he will implicitly remind them of the importance of proper imitation. He will again emphasize the hope that will help them endure this suffering.

\textsuperscript{68} On hope based in the parousia, see Bruce, \textit{Thessalonians}, 12; Furnish, \textit{1 Thessalonians}, 42. de Boer (\textit{Imitation of Paul}, 120) states that their joy stems from salvation in Christ. See also Marshall, \textit{Thessalonians}, 54.

\textsuperscript{69} Wanamaker, \textit{Epistles}, 88. Best (\textit{Thessalonians}, 83-84) states that also their full deliverance does not take place until Christ’s return. See also Morris \textit{Thessalonians}, 61.

Wanamaker (\textit{Epistles}, 76-82) suggests that their hope is in Jesus, and it is this hope that gives them strength. See also Richard, \textit{Thessalonians}, 62; Thomas “1 Thessalonians,” 240.
1 Thess 2:1-16: Implicit Paraenesis toward Proper Conduct through the Triad

In 1:3 Paul commends the Thessalonians for their faith, love, and hope that they learned from his example. In chap. 2 Paul uses the three virtues to structure his implicit paraenesis. Throughout this chapter he reminds the Thessalonians of the example which he continues to model for them in his ministry to them. Through this reminder of his example, Paul implicitly calls the Thessalonians to imitate him so that they can continue to grow in faith, love, and hope. Imitation for the Thessalonians is manifested in the work and conduct that takes place as a result of their reception of the gospel and conversion to God. In essence 2:1-12 serves as an explanation of 1:4-10.70

Paul’s focus on the triad allows him to structure this section (2:1-16) in three parts. Each part reflects an aspect of the life of the believers. The first two parts (2:1-4; 2:5-12) reflect on the suffering manifested in “work of faith” and “labor of love.” The third part, vv. 13-16, deals with the “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ” that helps in the face of suffering.

“Work of Faith” (2:1-4)

In this first part Paul emphasizes the work the Thessalonians do since their election. He also stresses one form of suffering that they must endure. He writes:

For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that the welcome we received from you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and had been insulted, as you know, in Philippi, we had courage from our God to speak to you the gospel of God with much opposition. (2:1-2)

70 See Fee, Thessalonians, 51.
Paul draws the Thessalonians to his example so that they can be strengthened to grow in their virtues. In Philippi, Paul suffered and was persecuted for his belief and proclamation of the gospel (cf. Acts 16:19-24). However, the persecution did not end at Philippi. The text suggests that after he arrived in Thessalonica and began his work he faced “much opposition.” Paul shows early on that suffering should be expected in the life of believers. Suffering and insults will come as a result of believing in Christ. Their suffering should not be understood as unique, it is the lot of all believers (3:3).

Throughout 2:1-12 Paul emphasizes that he presented himself and continues to present himself as a model for them to imitate. In 2:2 he emphasizes the model he expects the Thessalonians to imitate with respect to their “work of faith.” Rather than allow persecutions to weaken their faith and work, they should strengthen it. Despite his sufferings Paul continued to remain steadfast in his faith and his work in service of others. Paul’s faith directed the way he lived. The sufferings endured in Philippi could have resulted in apprehension and anxiety, possibly even a loss of faith. Instead Paul continued to act with

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71 Burridge (Imitating Jesus, 144) suggests that Paul, as the shaper of the community, provides them with the shape they should take. See also Richard, Thessalonians, 88.

72 For those who suggest that Paul is presenting the apostles as models for the community to imitate see Richard, Thessalonians, 88; Furnish, 1 Thessalonians, 52; Abraham J. Malherbe, “Gentle as a Nurse”: The Cynic Background to 1 Thess ii,” NovT 12 (1970) 203-17.

Some scholars suggest that in 2:1-12 Paul is setting up a defense of his own activity, continuing the defense that he began in 1:5. See J. A. D Weima, “An Apology for the Apologetic Function of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12,” JSNT 68 (1997) 73-99; Légasse, Thessaloniciens, 82; Fee, Thessalonians, 36; de Boer, Imitation of Paul, 98; Frame, Thessalonians, 90; Bruce, Thessalonians, 24; Morris, Thessalonians, 67-68.

73 Paul’s service to others is his proclamation of the gospel for the sake of their salvation. This is not the service of all believers, and this is not what Paul is exhorting his followers to do. What Paul is doing is exhorting his followers to imitate his example of pursuing their service in spite of the sufferings they endure.
confidence because of the “courage from our God.”

Paul emphasizes that faith demands that believers remain steadfast in their service in the face of persecutions. This is the model to which he implicitly exhorts the Thessalonians. They must remain steadfast in their lives as believers despite persecution and suffering. Instead of allowing persecutions to deter them, they must be emboldened by them, allowing their faith to grow further.

In spite of the suffering that comes from persecution associated with being a Christ-believer, Paul remained steadfast in his faith and service and conducted himself in gentleness and humility (see 2:5-12). He introduces in these verses the first form of suffering associated with imitating him and Christ: suffering associated with persecution for being a believer. Just as Paul remained steadfast in his Christian service and conduct, so must the Thessalonians.

Paul furthermore reminds the Thessalonians of his conduct:

For our exhortation does not come from delusion or from impure motives or through trickery, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not to please human beings but God, the one who tests our hearts. (2:3-4)

He did not present the gospel erroneously, nor from an impure motive, or through trickery. In the next section (2:5-12) Paul will clarify these statements. But one point is clear. He did not come in order to deceive the Thessalonians. His service and actions were for their benefit. The gospel he presented to them is pure, clear, and without error because it is God’s gospel. Whereas a human gospel can be susceptible to error, impure motives, and trickery

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74 Légasse, Thessaloniens, 112-14. Brant (“The Place of mimēsis,” 291) recognizes that joy is a response to the Thessalonians’ suffering and does not deter their activity.

75 Frame (Thessalonians, 92) suggests that the ability to preach in spite of persecution is proof of the power of the message. The message itself is not devoid of power, so it helps the messenger persevere.
the gospel of God cannot. What Paul states here is that despite the suffering he never wavered from his true service.

Paul was approved by God and entrusted with the gospel because, in spite of suffering, he remained steadfast in his faith and in his service to others. God tests Paul’s heart and faith throughout his service and suffering and finds him worthy to be entrusted with the gospel. Again Paul’s language is paraenetic. He implicitly suggests to the Thessalonians that his example is the way they should conduct themselves. Although they are to be commended for their behavior thus far, Paul finds it necessary to exhort them so that they will conduct themselves properly. The purpose of this is Christian growth and maturity. Despite persecutions the Thessalonians must continue to conduct themselves as believers in Christ.

Paul implies that those who imitate him must please God rather than human beings. He wants to contrast his service with self-benefiting service. Pleasing God entails attending to the needs of others. Paul seeks to please God, because he has been approved by God. Since Paul seeks to please only God, there can be no ulterior motive in his work or life. His

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76 See Wanamaker, *Epistles*, 93; Furnish, *1 Thessalonians*, 52.

77 See Richard, *Thessalonians*, 95-97; Bruce, *Thessalonians*, 26; Marshall, *Thessalonians*, 61. Morris (*Thessalonians*, 70) suggests that Paul is writing here in defense against opponents who suggest that he is no better than the typical preacher who seeks his own needs. Malherbe (*Paul*, 35-48) suggests that Paul is placing himself within the philosophical circles of his day but separating himself by showing how his behavior is different from the traditional philosophical preachers. He uses many of the same themes that they do but offers them in a paraenetic manner. See also Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophical Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 3-4; idem, *Letters*, 156; Fee, *Thessalonians*, 53; Walter Schmithals, *The Office of the Apostle in the Early Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969) 136-55; Frame, *Thessalonians*, 9-12; Bruce, *Thessalonians*, 27-28.

78 See Bruce, *Thessalonians*, 27; Marshall, *Thessalonians*, 64.
actions are prompted by his concern for others, and this work is guided by his faith. The fact that God tests Paul’s heart has a paraenetic function as well. It reminds the Thessalonians that just as God has examined Paul’s heart, so God examines their hearts. If the Thessalonians want to be approved by God, they must imitate the example Paul presents to them. In light of the suffering that comes from imitation of Paul’s conduct, the Thessalonians find comfort in knowing that they please God.

To summarize, in this part Paul focuses on the first element of the triad, “work of faith.” For Paul, the “work of faith” is remaining steadfast in one’s faith and one’s service despite persecutions. He calls them to further imitate this behavior. This work is produced by faith in God, and this faith demands that the Thessalonians work for others. Paul reminds them of the example they should follow. He emphasizes how he remained steadfast and continued to work for their sake in spite of the sufferings he endured. His example implicitly exhorts the Thessalonians to remain steadfast and to continue with their service no matter what persecutions they may endure. In the next section Paul will elaborate upon this “work of faith” by exhorting them to their “labor of love.”

79 See Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” 249-52.
80 See Wanamaker, Epistles, 95.
“Labor of Love” (2:5-12)

The second part of 1 Thessalonians 2 focuses on the second aspect of the triad, the “labor of love.” This section serves as further implicit paraenesis with Paul serving as the example.81 Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

Just as you know, and with God as our witness, we did not come with flattering words or with a pretext for greed or seeking honor from human beings, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle82 in your midst, as a mother nurses her own children. So deeply we cared for you that we are well pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our very selves, because you have become beloved to us. You remember our labor and our toil, brothers and sisters. We worked night and day in order to not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are our witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and righteously and blamelessly our conduct was toward you believers. Just as you know, we dealt with each of you as a father with his own children, urging you and encouraging you and exhorting you to walk worthily of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. (2:5-12)

Paul emphasizes his conduct in his work. First, he states that if he came with flattering words, or with a pretext for greed (seeking to earn money for himself), then he has something to gain. Second, he states that he does not come seeking honor from human beings, nor does he make demands as an apostle. What Paul means is that he does not conduct himself in an

81 See Wanamaker, Epistles, 98.

82 Many manuscripts including P66 B* C* D* F G I 104* 326* pc it vg cl ms bo and the Greek text of the NA27 read νηπίοι (infants). The textual evidence for this reading is strong, and contextually such a reading could fit with the occurrence of τροφίς and τέκνα later in the verse. However the manuscript evidence is strong for a reading of ἡπίοι as well; see K2 A C2 D2 0278. 33. 1739. 1881 vb vg (sy) sa ms; Cl. The reading of the Greek comes down to a matter of either dittography (ἐγεννηθηκεν νηπίοι) or haplography (ἐγεννηθηκεν ἡπίοι). The term νηπίος is a commonly used term by Paul, occurring 11 times in his writings, while the term ἡπίος is a very uncommon term in the NT altogether occurring only one other time in 2 Tim 2:24. Although νηπίος is a common term used by Paul, it should be noted that Paul only uses this term when referring to his followers and never to himself. Along with that the context seems to be better suited for ἡπίος especially when we read this verse in relation to v. 6. In v. 6 Paul tells the Thessalonians that he does not seek glory from humans but only glory from God. The idea of being “gentle” in their midst makes a better connection between vv. 6 and 7 than does being an “infant” in their midst. Because of this contextual evidence, the reading ἡπίοι is preferred. For more on this, see Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (2nd; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 561-62.
arrogant attitude. He expects the Thessalonians to forgo their own rights and not to conduct themselves in an arrogant way in their “work of faith.” They are to conduct themselves with the same attitude of gentleness and humility they saw in Paul’s example.

In the previous section (2:1-4) Paul implicitly discusses how he was honest in his work. Here he explicitly expresses four actions that he did not perform. First, he reminds the Thessalonians that he did not use flattering words. Second, he reminds them that he did not preach with a pretext for greed. In these two examples Paul shows how he forgoes his own interests and desires.

Third, he never sought honor from human beings but only from God. This is not to say that he did not receive honor from human beings, or that he was not due honor, but it was not his goal. Fourth, Paul has the right as an apostle of Christ to demand financial and physical support from the Thessalonians, but he forgoes this right. Instead, he worked to support himself. In these two examples Paul shows how he did not conduct himself in an arrogant way.

Paul never used his authority for his own self-interest. Instead, he always conducted himself with the interests of others as his first priority. He exercised his apostleship in gentleness and humility. When he was in the midst of the Thessalonians, he nourished

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83 J. B. Lightfoot (Notes on Epistles of St Paul from Unpublished Commentaries [London: Macmillan, 1904] 23) remarks that flattery in this sense is “flattery not merely for the sake of giving pleasure but for the sake of self-interest.”

84 See Frame, Thessalonians, 98; Morris, Thessalonians, 74; Marshall, Thessalonians, 68.

85 Best (Thessalonians, 100) comments that vv. 7b-12 serve as an outline for how Paul exercises his apostleship. He does not do so with authority but with love.
those who should have supported him. Through love he humbled himself to serve them by forgoing his own needs and rights.86

Paul exemplified the “labor of love” by seeking to serve the needs of others over his own. In each of the examples listed above Paul shows how he never sought to take advantage of the Thessalonians. Instead, he conducted himself in gentleness and humility with their needs always in view. The Thessalonians imitate this “labor of love” by forgoing their own rights and conducting themselves in gentleness and humility.87 In doing so they continue to grow in love.

How do believers conduct themselves without self-interest? They do so by imitating Paul’s example of gentleness. In introducing the attitude of gentleness, Paul introduces another form of suffering associated with imitating him and the Lord – forgoing one’s rights for the sake of others.88 Those who imitate Paul in the “labor of love” must avoid any desire to fulfill their own self-interest. By avoiding this attitude they grow in love and strengthen the community. Paul forsook what was due to him as an apostle, because the Thessalonians had become “beloved” to him, in order to tend to the needs of others, as a mother does for

86 Green (Letters, 127) adds that this example of being gentle fits well with Paul’s denial that he imposed the weight of his apostolic authority upon the Thessalonians.

87 Wanamaker (Epistles, 101) states that Paul’s example of love is designed to establish the norm for true leadership. To this point, Helmut Koester (“I Thessalonians—Experiment in Christian Writing,” in Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History. Essays Presented to George Huntston Williams [ed. F. F. Church and T. George; SHCT 19; Leiden: Brill, 1979] 42) adds that gentleness is not a device used by Paul but is a total commitment to service.

88 According to Burridge (Imitating Jesus, 148), the focus is not on any particular action but on images of self-emptying and humility. Bruce (Thessalonians, 33) adds that the gospel that they present to the community is the gospel of the one who emptied himself.
her own children.\textsuperscript{89} Instead of attempting to fulfill his own self-interest, Paul lavished upon them gentleness and affectionate care.\textsuperscript{90} His metaphor of a mother illustrates someone who, through gentleness, gives up her needs for the sake of others. The Thessalonians must serve as the mother who forgoes her own rights and tends to her children because of this attitude of gentleness.

Paul emphasizes humility in “labor of love” by contrasting the attitude of arrogance with the attitude of humility. Again Paul’s behavior serves as the example for how the Thessalonians should conduct themselves.\textsuperscript{91} In Paul’s ministry to the Thessalonians he toiled night and day in order to provide for himself.\textsuperscript{92} The purpose of this was not to burden anyone within the community. Paul, as an apostle, could have conducted himself in arrogance by seeking honor from the Thessalonians or demanding that they serve his needs. Instead, he humbled himself and labored to provide for his needs and the needs of others.

\textsuperscript{89} See Frame, \textit{Thessalonians}, 100; Bruce, \textit{Thessalonians}, 33. Richard (\textit{Thessalonians}, 101) states that the example of the mother not only emphasizes self-giving but also reflects the deep and special relationship that Paul had with the Thessalonians.

Some scholars translate τροφή as “nurse” or “wet nurse.” Both of these translations have similar characteristics and can express a similar meaning or emphasis with regards to forgoing one’s rights. However, translating it as mother better captures Paul’s analogy. The mother, as opposed to the nurse, devotes all of her attention to the needs of her child at every given moment. This is Paul’s emphasis, that the believer must serve the other always. For those who read “nurse” or “wet nurse” see Wanamaker, \textit{Epistles}, 101; Malherbe, \textit{Letters}, 146. For mother, see Rigaux, \textit{Thessaloniciens}, 520; Marshall, \textit{Thessalonians}, 71.

\textsuperscript{90} Morris, \textit{Thessalonians}, 74.

\textsuperscript{91} Wanamaker (\textit{Epistles}, 103) notes that Paul’s work serves as the paradigm for the Thessalonians’ work and conduct. See also Fee, \textit{Thessalonians}, 77-79. Fee notes how the focus is on Paul’s observable behavior. Getty (“Imitation,” 279) writes that his work is the example that he gives to them. It involves self-abasement, it is socially humbling, and economically unnecessary. His focus is on serving the needs of the other.

\textsuperscript{92} Richard (\textit{Thessalonians}, 103) comments that the workshop not only serves as a means of support, but also provides the principal forum for evangelization. The statement that Paul works night and day could be understood as hyperbolic. However, I agree with Getty (“Imitation,” 280) who writes that Paul’s work is constant because his imitation of Christ is constant. There is never an end to his work or imitation.
Paul describes his work as labor and toil, emphasizing that this is not an easy task. Believers must toil in order to seek the needs of others and to bear their burdens. This leads to an attitude of humility in which they forgo their self-interests and seek to please God. Such work and such an attitude is motivated by love, and this love leads to further growth of the community. This serves as a model to the Thessalonians because they must conduct themselves likewise in their own service. They have done so, but they must continue to imitate his behavior. With a humble attitude none see themselves as superior to others.

Paul further describes his behavior by saying that he acted devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly among them. These attitudes suggest that Paul works with humility to serve the community. Devotion, righteousness, and blamelessness suggest a deep level of humility. Paul’s implicit paraenesis is not meant to suggest that the Thessalonians are acting improperly. Rather, it is meant to encourage them to humble behavior. Paul reminds them of his behavior so that it remains fresh with them.

In vv. 11-12 Paul shows the Thessalonians that by conducting themselves with an attitude of gentleness and humility they will act worthily of God. In 2:1-10 Paul reminds the Thessalonians how one walks worthily to please God. In v. 11 he reminds them that he exhorts them as their father. Whereas in v. 8 Paul referred to himself as a nursing mother, here he refers to himself as their father. The analogy is meant to emphasize the role of the

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93 See Green, Letters, 130.

94 Wanamaker, Epistles, 101.

95 Richard, Thessalonians, 104. Best (Thessalonians, 107) notes that the worthy walk is the kind of conduct that is appropriate to God’s kingdom. This type of behavior should be exhibited by those who are to inherit the kingdom. This is why I suggest that Paul in 2:1-11 is laying the outline for how they should behave. By comporting themselves in such a way, they will inherit the kingdom. Best would add here, however, that this does not suggest if they do not act in this way that their salvation is in danger.
father toward his children. The father was to serve as the source of instruction to his children, guiding them in their behavior.\(^96\) The father was to encourage his children to imitate his ways. They are aware of their father’s ways and must conduct themselves in this way. As a father explains to his children how they must understand their social existence within the family, Paul as their spiritual father explains to the Thessalonians how they must understand their new social existence as Christians, which entails suffering.\(^97\)

Since they have been elected, the Thessalonians have endured persecution, forgone their own rights, and have sought the well-being of others as they see in Paul. They have acted this way in order to be considered worthy of God. They must continue to conduct themselves this way so that they may continue to grow in the virtues of faith, love, and hope. If they do not act this way, they will be excluded from the kingdom.\(^98\) As the Thessalonians comport themselves properly, they are found worthy of God and his love.

To summarize, in this second section Paul focuses on the second aspect of the triad “labor of love.” He emphasizes that the Thessalonians must continue to conduct themselves in their service with gentleness and humility by forgoing their own needs as both he and Christ conducted themselves. Their presence as believers within the community should never be a burden to others. Instead, they must bear one another’s burdens in gentleness and humility, forgo their own self-interests, and through love serve one another. In doing so they grow in love as a community. He explains to them that coupled with the persecution that

\(^96\) Paul’s use of father is steeped in the Greek tradition of moral instruction. A teacher was a father, and his pupils were his children. See Malherbe, *Paul*, 54-55.

\(^97\) See Wanamaker, *Epistles*, 106.

\(^98\) See Wanamaker, *Epistles*, 107. Wanamaker adds, the Thessalonians’ behavior is a response to God’s offer of salvation. They must respond to this call or they will face exclusion.
they will endure, the Thessalonians will also suffer on account of the fact that they forgo their own rights. As those who have been elected by God, the Thessalonians must conduct themselves in this attitude while making sure that they are not a burden to others.

“Endurance in Hope” (2:13-16)

In the two sections prior to this passage Paul deals with the first two parts of the triad. In his discussion of “work of faith” and “labor of love,” he discusses the suffering that is required of those who imitate him and the Lord. Since their election, the Thessalonians have adopted the triad and have accepted the attendant suffering. Paul implicitly exhorts the Thessalonians to imitate the example he shared with them in his ministry. In his conduct Paul exemplified the virtues of faith, love, and hope. His purpose for encouraging them is that they may grow in these virtues. The report of their behavior has gone forth from them and has become a model to others. However, this imitation comes at a cost. The Thessalonians must suffer. First, they suffer persecution as believers. Second, they suffer by forgoing their own rights for the sake of others. If they wish to grow they must endure this suffering. But the triad is not yet complete. There is one other virtue in Paul’s example that they imitate. Although the Thessalonians suffer, they do so with “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In this final section of 2:1-16, Paul returns to the hope that the Thessalonians experience in the midst of their suffering.

In this pericope we find the second occurrence of ἐμπταί and the closing portion of our inclusio. The inclusio opens in 1:2-10 where Paul first discusses imitation. Contained within the inclusio is how those who imitate him are expected to conduct themselves through
Paul’s example. In 2:13-16 Paul closes the inclusio by reminding the Thessalonians of the hope that helps them endure (see 1:10).

Paul offers thanks for the community:

And because of this also we constantly give thanks to God, that when you received the word of God you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as it is, the true word of God, which is also at work among you believers. For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Judea in Christ Jesus, for you suffered the same things from your fellow compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out; they displeased God and oppose everyone, by trying to stop us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they are constantly filling up the measure of their sins; but the wrath\(^99\) has overtaken them at last. (2:13-16)\(^100\)

Paul again, as in the opening part of the inclusio, offers thanks to God for the behavior of the Thessalonians. They have begun to conduct themselves properly, and twice in the first two chapters of this letter Paul gives thanks for their conduct. When Paul spoke the word to them, the Thessalonians made the conscious decision to accept the word and all that it

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\(^99\) The so-called Western text (D F G 629 latt) read \(\text{h` ovrgh. tou/ qeou/ }\). It would seem that the scribes felt it was necessary to include the phrase “of God” to clarify the origin of this wrath. However, from the context of the letter as a whole it would be evident to the audience exactly which wrath Paul was alluding to, especially when one refers back to 1:10. Because of this, the reading of the NA\(^27\) is preferred.

\(^100\) There is a great deal of scholarly discussion about the authenticity of this passage. Many scholars see it as an interpolation. The suggestion is that the material contained in this passage does not reflect Pauline thinking and because of this it should not be considered a part of the original letter or as an integral part to the letter. Pearson (“Interpolation,” 87-91) offers the following evidence as to why this should not be considered Pauline. First, he argues that it would be improbable that Paul would cite Judean Christians as examples to Gentile churches since this does not adhere to his usage elsewhere. Also, Pearson suggests that 2:14 is both historically and theologically incongruous with what we know about Paul. Finally, he suggests that the wording is too similar to what is found in 1:2. His suggestion is that someone is writing in Pauline fashion to establish a Pauline framework.

On the other hand, Hopper (“Pauline Concept,” 110-20) rejects this argument. Hopper suggests that this section is integral to the text as a whole. It presents the same sequence as is seen in 1:5-8, further emphasizing what Paul is attempting to say to the Thessalonians. Wanamaker (Epistles, 109) adds that this is a disruption; a part of Paul’s rhetorical style that he adopts for this letter. I agree with Hopper and Wanamaker. First, it forms an inclusio around the material describing proper conduct. Second, by disrupting the flow of the letter, it adds to the emphasis of the importance of suffering. Finally, it serves as the completion to Paul’s discussion about the triad and its significance within imitation and the paradox of suffering and joy and sets the foundation for what is to follow. See also Masson, Thessaloniens, 131.
entails. Here it entails working for the sake of others in the face of persecution and forgoing their rights. The Christian life takes the form of humiliation and suffering.  

More importantly, when the Thessalonians received and accepted the word they did so recognizing it for what it truly is, the word of the living and true God. They recognized it as such because of the way that Paul conducted himself in his ministry, as is outlined in 2:1-10. He shows that his ministry was not meant for his own personal gain but to bring glory to God and to deliver the word of God to the Thessalonians. In his ministry Paul exemplified the virtues which they have imitated and are called to imitate.

In v. 14 Paul tells the Thessalonians that they have become imitators of the churches in Judea. Again their imitation lies in their acceptance of the suffering that is a necessary part of the Christian life. Like Paul and the churches in Judea, the Thessalonians have taken up the mantle of suffering in their service to others. They now conduct themselves as those who have gone before them. They suffer because of their faith in Christ.

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101 See Best, Thessalonians, 111; Johanson, To All the Brethren, 96. Thomas (“1 Thessalonians,” 256) suggests that this section alludes to 1:5-10, which serves as a description of how rapidly they entered into a Christian way of life. They are not the first to be afflicted; they know that this is the expectation. See also Getty, “Imitation,” 280. Getty suggests that “suffering members help define the community’s boundaries and identity.” The purpose of the suffering then is to create a communal bond. See also Castelli, Imitating Paul, 94.

102 Frame (Thessalonians, 107) notes that it is recognized as the living word of God because its power is working within the believers.

103 Some scholars do not view this as active imitation, suggesting that they did nothing to bring about this persecution. They are not deliberate in their imitation; they simply have a reproduced experience. However, by this point it is clear that what Paul has in mind here is the service of the Thessalonian community. For those who suggest passive imitation, see Willi Marxsen, Der erste Brief an die Thessalonicher (Züricher Bibelkommentare; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1979) 47; Clarke, “Leadership,” 335; Schütz, Apostolic Authority, 227; Wanamaker, Epistles, 112; Best, Thessalonians, 111; Bruce, Thessalonians, 45; Green, Letters, 141; Holtz, Thessalonicher, 49; Castelli, Imitating Paul, 94; Schulz, Nachfolgen und Nachahmen, 287; 316. Schulz refers to them as “unintentional companions in misfortune.”

de Boer (Imitation of Paul, 99-100) notes that the whole passage has a passive tone to it, but it is active in that they suffer religious persecution. The active nature of their imitation is not necessarily due to any work on their part but is found in the fact that they offer resistance to those who wish to persecute them. See also
Paul focuses on the sufferings of the Judean churches because they belong to the mother church of Christianity. They have imitated the example of Jesus and the prophets in suffering. Because of this, they serve as an example to other communities. The Thessalonians must now follow in this rich history of imitation. The Judean churches have suffered persecution at the hands of the Jews who had Jesus and the prophets put to death and the Jews who had persecuted Paul and attempted to prevent him from spreading the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul imitates the example set for him by Jesus and the prophets (continuing their service in the face of persecution), and he presents himself as a model to the Thessalonians. The Thessalonians too have accepted the suffering in the midst of their service, which serves as a token of the genuineness of their faith. The suffering should be understood as the shared experience of God’s true people through the ages.

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104 See de Boer, *Imitation of Paul*, 104. Holtz (*Thessalonicher*, 100-1) notes that this is the only formal place where Paul does not refer to imitation of himself.

105 Tinsley (*Imitation*, 140) writes, “The corporate life of a Christian community had a recognizable shape which other Christians could take as the means of their imitation of Christ.” See also de Boer, *Imitation of Paul*, 105; Best, *Thessalonians*, 111.

106 Schütz (*Apostolic Authority*, 226) emphasizes the fact that they are imitators of the Judean churches because they have suffered for their faith. Though Paul is the norm, he is not the only one who can be imitated. de Boer (*Imitation of Paul*, 101) writes that they are imitators in showing the same faith and courage in the face of persecution.

    Hopper (“Pauline Concept,” 115) states that the point of imitation is their steadfast endurance. He further emphasizes that it should not be understood as identity but similarity on the part of the imitators.

107 See Bruce, *Thessalonians*, 45. Bruce notes that they are commended for becoming imitators. A further token of their faith is that they now imitate the Judean churches. Bruce (50) writes, “Persecution for the sake of Christ is treated as evidence of the genuineness of the faith of those who suffer it.” See also Morris, *Thessalonians*, 89; Malherbe, *Letters*, 173; Masson, *Thessaloniciens*, 31; Schütz, *Apostolic Authority*, 226.

have preceded the Thessalonians in faith have suffered, so the Thessalonians must expect to suffer as well.

In 2:16 we see a second use of ὀφείλην. The only prior usage of this term is found in 1:10 (ὁφείλην) where Paul reminds the Thessalonians of their fate at the parousia of Christ. In 1:10 Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they will be rescued by Christ from the coming wrath. Here Paul uses ὀφείλην again to recall what he said to them in 1:10. They are exempt from the wrath that has befallen those who have persecuted the Christ-believers. Paul’s reference to 1:10 also echoes 1:3 where they are praised for their “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul reminds them of the hope they have that allows them to endure the suffering at the hands of those who wish to persecute them. He also encourages them to grow in this hope so that they may continue to endure suffering. Just as the Jews who persecute the Judean churches have filled the measure of their own sin and have begun to suffer God’s wrath (which will be completed at the parousia), so too have the Thessalonian community members who persecute believers. In the end, when the community of believers is saved, God will judge those who persecute believers. Hope of salvation at the parousia is what helps them endure in the face of persecution.

What this means for the Thessalonians is that there will be an end to their suffering. They have joined themselves to Christ who attains glory through suffering. Their joy comes from knowing that they too will attain glory at the parousia. Their suffering in their “work of faith” and their “labor of love” will be rewarded when they are saved from the

109 Getty ("Imitation," 280) states that within an apocalyptic context, suffering persecution promises reward for those who are faithful and punishment for their persecutors. This is what Paul is emphasizing here. See also Légasse, Thessaloniciens, 141; Barclay, “Conflict,” 16.

coming wrath and their suffering is brought to an end. All of their hope lies in this (1:10). That is why they adopt the third aspect of the triad. They endure persecution and forgo their rights in hope that they will be saved at the parousia.

Hope is where we find the completion of the triad. Paul reminds the Thessalonians of what they can expect in their lives. Now he draws this to a conclusion by emphasizing salvation. In their lives as believers the Thessalonians have and will continue to suffer persecution. This persecution and suffering can be enough to discourage them from persevering in their faith. However, it is this final element, this “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ,” that gives them what they need to press forward and to persevere in suffering.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that the Thessalonians, by their imitation, conduct themselves in the way that they see exemplified by Paul. Throughout the letter Paul points to the example of his own life to exhort the Thessalonians to imitate him. By their imitation, the Thessalonians have accepted the suffering and persecution that comes as a result of their acceptance of the word of God as presented by Paul. Paul commends them for their “work of faith,” “labor of love,” and “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ,” three virtues which Paul exemplified in his ministry to them. They imitate Paul by conducting themselves properly in the face of this persecution. How they go about this conduct can be seen in the triad of “work of faith, “labor of love,” and “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul uses this triad as a guide to exhort the Thessalonians to conduct themselves in these
three virtues. The purpose of the exhortation is to encourage them to grow in faith, love, and hope.

Through their imitation the Thessalonians will suffer on two accounts. By their “work of faith,” which is their service of others, the Thessalonians will suffer at the hands of those who persecute them. By their “labor of love,” which is the way they conduct themselves in their service, they will suffer as a result of forgoing their rights for the sake of others. This is necessary because it aids in the building up of the Christian community. In order to be successful in their “labor of love,” the Thessalonians must conduct themselves in an attitude of gentleness and humility, which they see in Paul’s example. For Paul all actions should be directed to building up of the church and fellow believers. Although the first two elements of the triad describe the necessary sufferings that come from imitating Paul, it is the third element of the triad that describes how they persevere. In their “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ” the Thessalonians endure these sufferings with hope, knowing that at the time of the parousia their suffering will come to an end. This hope is necessary for the life of the believer.

First Thessalonians is the first letter in the Pauline corpus where the theme of imitation appears. In the next chapter I will look at the theme of imitation in 1 Corinthians. I will argue that imitation requires suffering on the part of believers. I will also argue that there is a development in Paul’s understanding of forgoing one’s rights and how humility factors into the life of imitation. Paul’s call to imitation in 1 Corinthians will show how an attitude of humility will help in building up of the church.
Chapter Three

Imitating Paul in Light of the Scandal of the Cross: Imitation in 1 Corinthians 1–4

In the previous chapter I discussed the theme of imitation in 1 Thessalonians. I showed how Paul reminds the Thessalonians that in their lives as believers they imitate Paul by accepting the suffering that comes with being a believer in Christ. I argued that Paul uses his own example as a way of implicitly exhorting the Thessalonians to further imitation of himself. He focuses on the triad of “work of faith,” “labor of love,” and “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ” to highlight the suffering of the Thessalonians in their lives as believers. Paul’s emphasis is on the need for believers to humble themselves and accept suffering for the sake of Christ.

In this chapter I will focus on the first occurrence of Paul’s theme of imitation in 1 Corinthians. Paul will highlight the need for believers to become spiritually mature so that the power and wisdom of God can be revealed through them. He will address the problem of factions within the Corinthian community that threatens to disrupt the unity of the body of Christ. He will use the example of himself, the other apostles, and the spiritual person to show how believers can become mature in order to build unity in the body of Christ. The Corinthians must imitate him by appropriating the scandal of the cross in their lives and adopting an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross. Paul expects them to let go of their worldly understanding of wisdom so that through their conduct they can reveal the power and wisdom of God to the world. In doing so they will help to unify the body of Christ and fulfill their salvation.
The First Letter to the Corinthians

The Purpose of 1 Corinthians 1–4

In 1 Corinthians 1–4 Paul writes to the Corinthians to exhort them to unity. In order to do this they must adopt an attitude that corresponds to the scandal of the cross. This requires that they grow in the understanding of the Spirit in their presence and adopt an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross. Although this attitude will make them appear as weak and foolish to the world, they will be strong, wise, and mature in the eyes of God. The mature Christian must endure suffering, for it is only at the parousia that this suffering will come to an end. Paul and the other apostles serve as examples of people who have adopted an attitude that corresponds to the scandal of the cross (2:1-16; 4:8-13). Paul will exhort the Corinthians to follow his example so that they can maintain the unity of the body of Christ.

1 Cor 4:14-21: Call to Imitation

I will begin this exegesis by introducing the theme of imitation in 1 Cor 4:16. Throughout this chapter I will fill out the meaning of “become imitators of me” from what Paul says in the material that precedes this statement. The material in 1 Cor 1:10–4:13 serves as the basis for what the Corinthians are called by Paul to imitate. He calls the Corinthians to imitate the example of maturity, which he discusses in 1:10–4:13. His hope is that they too will adopt an attitude and lifestyle that reflects the scandal of the cross. The purpose of this imitation is to bring unity to the community.

In this final pericope Paul writes:
I do not write this to you in order to shame you but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you may have countless pedagogues in Christ, you do not have many fathers; for I have begotten you in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I encourage you then to become imitators of me. For this reason I am sending Timothy to you, who is my beloved child and faithful in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, just as I teach everywhere in every church. Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you; but I am coming to you soon if the Lord wills, and I will know not only how these puffed up ones are talking, but also their power. What do you wish? That I should come to you with a rod or in love and a gentle spirit? (4:14-21)

This pericope is the culmination of 1 Corinthians 1–4.¹ Paul brings his discussion of wisdom and folly to a close by admonishing the Corinthians to imitate him. In the passages that lead up to this pericope he has shown that they must become mature by appropriating the scandal of the cross in order to unify the body of Christ.

Paul begins this final pericope by informing the Corinthians that he is not seeking to shame them but to admonish them. He wants to remind them that they are his beloved children and it is his responsibility to admonish them. He needs them to understand what they must do to bring unity to the community, and he seeks to do this by reminding them that they are his beloved children, in Christ. He then reminds the Corinthians, “Though you may have countless pedagogues in Christ, you do not have many fathers; for I have begotten you in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (4:15). Paul does not deny that there are other teachers nor does he attempt to say that these other teachers are not reputable. His point is that these

¹ See E. C. Still, “Divisions over Leaders and Food Offered to Idols: The Parallel Thematic Structures of 1 Corinthians 4:6-21 and 8:1–11:1,” Tyndalierevue 55 (2004) 19. Still writes that 4:8-13 is the summarizing high point of 1 Corinthians 1–4. 1 Cor 4:16-21 serves as the prescription for imitation which will serve as the solution to the problem of disunity.
teachers are not their spiritual fathers. Paul is the one who has brought them the proclamation of Christ crucified and who has brought them into the body of Christ.²

By reminding them that he is their spiritual father Paul places himself in a position to admonish the Corinthians to “become imitators of me.” As their spiritual father he has set before them the example they are to imitate. In the passages leading up to this he lays out what it is that he expects them to imitate so that they may build up the community. The Corinthians have failed to understand the paradox of the cross and appropriate it in their lives. Because of this they are not mature and have an attitude and lifestyle that does not correspond to the scandal of the cross. Paul as their father sets the example by which they can become mature and attain unity and the fullness of salvation.

Paul tells the Corinthians that he is sending Timothy to remind them “of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church” (4:17). Timothy will serve as a concrete example of what Paul encourages them to do in 1 Corinthians 1–4. Paul’s ways are what the Corinthians witnessed when he was with them and what he has taught them through this letter. For Paul this means adopting an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross.³ As Paul’s “beloved child” Timothy would have imitated Paul’s way. Timothy will come to the Corinthians to remind them of how Paul acted while he was among them, and he will further ensure that the Corinthians understand what Paul means in

² Benjamin Witherington III (Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995] 138) suggests that being one’s father in faith does not grant one authority. What it means is that one must suffer for the sake of the other.

³ de Boer (Imitation of Paul, 150) notes that these are the ways that Paul has come to know and walk since he became a Christ believer. Paul exemplifies an attitude of humility, self-giving, toiling, blessing, enduring, and entreating. He lived in this way when he was in their presence and now expects them to imitate his example.
this letter. They will see first hand just how believers appropriate the scandal of the cross in their lives.

Paul’s call to imitation in 4:16 is meant to reinforce what it means to be a believer in Christ. Throughout 1 Cor 1:10–4:13 Paul will lay out for the Corinthians what they must imitate in order to be mature and wise. He will explain what it means to appropriate the scandal of the cross and to have an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to it. He will also explain the implications that this appropriation, attitude, and lifestyle will have for their lives as believers. His understanding of the paradox of the cross leads him to be wise and mature according to God’s standards. By adopting Paul’s understanding of the cross the Corinthians will imitate him. He will summon them to set aside their misunderstanding of the gospel and accept the weakness and folly associated with the cross of Christ in order to build up the body of Christ. Since they have not appropriated the scandal of the cross in their lives and have misunderstood the manifestation of the Spirit among them, factions have developed which threaten to destroy the unity of the community.4 It is necessary for them to imitate Paul in order to bring unity to the community.

1 Cor 1:10-13: Statement of the Problem

In this opening pericope (1:10-13) Paul introduces the problem that faces the Corinthian community, factions. He hopes that by imitating him they can overcome the factions that divide the community. Paul writes:

4 See Lawrence L. Welborn (“Μωρὸς γενέσθω: Paul's Appropriation of the Role of the Fool in 1 Corinthians 1–4,” BibInt 10 [2002] 434), who writes that God always chooses what the world considers foolish. This is exhibited in the crucified Christ.
Now I encourage you brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement with one another and to not have schisms among you, but to be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For I have received news concerning you, my brothers and sisters, from Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you. What I mean by this is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for your sake? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1:10-13)

The problem of factions is introduced here and characterizes Paul’s discussion throughout 1 Corinthians. The Corinthians have aligned themselves with the particular apostle who baptized them (Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and even to Christ), because they believe that apostles mediated a special wisdom to them. The act of baptism created a bond between baptizer and...
initiate. Through this bond the Corinthians would have received the gospel and recognized the presence of the Spirit among them. However, because of their worldly understanding of wisdom they have not fully appropriated the gospel and they have misunderstood the manifestation of the Spirit, which they believe to be the fullness of salvation. They believe that through baptism and the presence of the Spirit they already share in God’s eschatological reign. Their understanding of wisdom is that it grants power. Therefore, they believe that their reception of the gospel and the manifestation of the Spirit means that they are wise and already share in the eschatological reign of God.

The Corinthians’ misunderstanding of wisdom, spiritual enthusiasm, and their belief that they already share in the eschatological reign of God resulted in divisions at Corinth.

Some believers associated power and wisdom as the world understands it with a life in

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8 The group that presents a problem is the so-called Christ group since Christ did not baptize anyone in the Corinthian community. However, this may be an example of Paul’s irony. Anthony C. Thiselton (The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000] 122) is correct in stating that the leaders should not be held responsible for what the various groups are claiming. These are not well-organized parties but a group of people who have gathered under the name of the one who baptized them. See also Collins, First Corinthians, 72.

Peter Lampe (“Theological Wisdom and the ‘Word About the Cross’: The Rhetorical Scheme in I Corinthians 1–4,” Int 44 [1990] 118) remarks that each group praises the wisdom of its apostle and then praises its own wisdom which it took from him.

I agree with Welborn (Politics and Rhetoric, 7) that what has developed at Corinth is a power struggle rather than a theological struggle. The power struggle is between those who believe they have true wisdom and those who actually do have true wisdom. The former are misguided in their understanding of wisdom and the power that true wisdom brings.

9 See Frank J. Matera, New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007) 117. See also Collins, First Corinthians, 70. Collins notes that for Paul there needs to be a radical shift in the Corinthians’ epistemology. They have misunderstood the role and significance of the Spirit.

10 It is this comparison of the apostles as wisdom teachers that Sanders (“Imitating Paul,” 355) suggests is the cause of the factions in Corinth. See also Stanley, “Become Imitators,” 871; de Boer, Imitation of Paul, 139; Stanley, “Imitation in Paul’s Letters,” 138.

Thiselton (Corinthians, 165) writes that Paul does not attack wisdom as such but “that which is status seeking, manipulative, or otherwise flawed.” Wisdom does not present the problem only the way in which others understand wisdom. See also Stephen M. Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of I Corinthians (SBLDS 134; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) 109; Becker, Paul, 202-4.
Christ, showing that they have not fully appropriated the gospel nor reached the fullness of salvation. They misunderstood what it means to be the eschatological people of God, the church. They believed that since they lived in the Spirit they were already reigning with Christ (4:8). However, the church does not receive the benefits of the parousia now. It has been called to associate with the wisdom and folly of the cross.

Paul’s call to imitation in 4:16 is meant to help resolve the problem of factions at Corinth and to remind the Corinthians what it means to be the church. Wisdom and power as the world understands them create division. The church, as the body of Christ, must be united. By imitating Paul and adopting an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross, the Corinthians can be “united in the same mind and same purpose” (1:10). In 4:8-13 he will show them what this attitude and lifestyle entails so that they can recognize the unity of all believers. They do so by associating themselves with the wisdom and folly of the cross. Paul’s question “Is Christ divided?” emphasizes that as brothers and sisters in Christ they enjoy an inherent unity. His reference to the division of Christ is a reference to the church as the body of Christ. Every believer shares a place in the body of

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12 Mitchell (Rhetoric of Reconciliation, 1) and Witherington (Conflict and Community, 93) regard 1:10 as the central thesis statement of the entire letter. See also Collins, *First Corinthians*, 69. Yung Suk Kim (“‘Imitators’ (Mimetai) in 1 Cor. 4:16 and 11:1: A New Reading of Threefold Embodiment,” *HBT* 33 [Forthcoming] 3) notes that the ideal of the Pauline community is the achievement of perfect harmony, unity at the expense of diversity. See also Maria Pascuzzi, “Baptism-Based Allegiance and the Divisions in Corinth: A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 1:13-17,” *CBQ* 71 (2009) 814.

13 Welborn (“Discord,” 87) suggests that this could also be read as follows: “Has the body of Christ been split into parties?” The language of factions is steeped in the political realm of the Greco-Roman world and it is quite possible that Paul is referring to political strife here.

Christ and therefore factions are not permissible.¹⁵ There is a rift within the Corinthian church regarding what the gospel and the manifestation of the Spirit among them means. As a result the Corinthians have a misguided understanding of what it means to live in Christ. By his call to imitation Paul hopes to dispel these inaccurate views so that the Corinthians can be united. Once they imitate him and adopt an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross they will end the factions that divide them and work towards fulfilling their salvation.

**1 Cor 1:14–4:13: Paradigm of the Scandal of the Cross**

*Paul’s Mission (1:14-17)*

Following Paul’s statement of the problem in the Corinthian community he gives a brief explanation of his mission. Paul writes:

> I give thanks [to God]¹⁶ that I baptized no one except for Crispus and Gaius, in order that no one can say that he was baptized in my name. However, I did baptize the household of Stephanas, as for the rest I do not know any other I baptized. For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ should not be emptied. (1:14-17)

Having discussed the problem of factions in the previous pericope, Paul finds it necessary to clarify his mission to the Corinthians. He states that his mission is to proclaim the cross of Christ, not to baptize. Although Paul appears to de-emphasize his role in baptism, at no point

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¹⁵ According to Thiselton (*Corinthians*, 118), Paul wants to dissolve all the parties. For Paul, all believers share in the unity of the body of Christ, therefore there should be no rival groups among them. See also Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 34.

¹⁶ Some manuscripts including Κ* B 6 1739 sa*⁷⁰⁶ bo*⁷⁰ al omit the phrase τῷ ἐκκλῆσίᾳ. Although the manuscript evidence is in favor of omitting the phrase I have left it in because it follows the pattern of common usage in Paul. In other instances of εὐχαριστῶ in Paul the phrase τῷ ἐκκλῆσίᾳ follows. See Rom 1:8; 7:25; 1 Cor 1:4; 14:18.
does he denigrate the importance of baptism. The Corinthians, however, have misunderstood the purpose of baptism and have used it to divide the church.

The Corinthians believe that through baptism and the manifestation of the Spirit they have been granted divine wisdom that allows them to share already in God’s eschatological reign. This has created factions in the community. Therefore Paul clarifies that it was not his mission to baptize “but to proclaim, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ should not be emptied” (1:17). He does not want believers to attach themselves to the one who baptized them because they will then associate with the baptizer and overlook the significance of the cross. Paul does not want the cross of Christ to become devoid of its salvific power. Paul’s reference to “cleverness of speech” emphasizes that he does not use rhetoric in order to persuade the Corinthians. For Paul rhetoric is not necessary because the power of the cross is revealed in the cross itself. The Corinthians, however, have failed to recognize the power associated with the cross of Christ and factions have developed within the community.

As Paul will show, the Corinthians’ spiritual enthusiasm is misplaced because the wisdom and power of the gospel are revealed in the cross. They have misunderstood life in Christ, believing that power and wisdom were granted to them at baptism, thereby allowing them to enjoy the eschaton in and through their experience of the Spirit. The cross does reveal power and wisdom but not in the way the world expects. The wisdom and power of life in Christ are revealed in the weakness and folly of the cross. The Corinthians must

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18 See Collins, First Corinthians, 85; Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 47.
recognize that there is suffering and weakness associated with the life in Christ that is only overcome at the parousia. In believing that their power and wisdom came at baptism, they empty the cross of its power. Paul’s purpose is to reveal this wisdom and power through his proclamation and example so that the cross of Christ can maintain its salvific importance. In order to correct their misunderstanding, Paul calls them to imitation of himself. They are called to appropriate the scandal of the cross in their lives so that they may be united and attain the fullness of salvation. They do this by imitating the example they see in Paul. In his example they recognize that power and wisdom are manifested in the weakness and folly of the cross. Paul’s life serves as an example of how one appropriates the scandal of the cross. He associates with the weakness and folly of the cross in order that God’s power and wisdom may be revealed through him.

The purpose of Christ’s life and death on the cross is to reveal the wisdom and power of God.\textsuperscript{19} In what follows Paul will reveal to the Corinthians the difference between wisdom and power as they understand it and the wisdom and power of God. Paul does this so that the Corinthians can understand what it means to imitate him and to adopt an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross. They must understand what the wisdom and power of God revealed in the cross means for their lives as believers. In doing so they will end their factions and unify the church.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{19} See Collins, \textit{First Corinthians}, 85.}
In 1 Cor 1:18-25 Paul introduces the scandal of the cross, which is crucial to his explanation of imitation in 1 Corinthians 1–4. He addresses the point that God’s power and wisdom are revealed in the weakness and folly of the cross. In order to imitate Paul, the Corinthians must appropriate the scandal of the cross and accept the weakness and folly found in it. To the world this concept is foolishness. Paul states:

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those [of us] who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and I will confound the understanding of the shrewd.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputant of this age? Has God not shown the wisdom of [this] world to be foolish? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not recognize God by wisdom, God determined to save the faithful through the foolishness of preaching. Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those who are called, both Jew and Greek, Christ is God’s power and God’s wisdom. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. (1:18-25)

In 1:18-25 Paul introduces the crux of his argument that he will develop in 1:26–4:13. Here and in the two pericopes that follow he introduces his theology of the cross. The purpose of this section is to reveal to the Corinthians the way in which God has chosen to save the world.21 Paul explains the importance of the wisdom of God and how the wisdom of God affects the lives of believers. He emphasizes that wisdom as the world understands it separates believers from the power and wisdom of God, which is revealed in Christ.

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20 The demonstrative τούτου is present in later witnesses including P¹¹ Ρ² C³ D⁵ F G L Ψ 1739 1881 pc Ἱ σὺ σαμοί bo⁹ Cr⁰ Epiph. I have included the demonstrative in my translation due to the presence of the demonstrative in the preceding expression τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου. Despite the strong evidence for omitting the demonstrative (P⁶⁶ Ῥ* A B C* D Π 33 81 630 1175 1506 1739 2464 al sa⁹ bo⁹ Cr⁰ Spe), I have translated it here because it better suits the reading of the text.

Paul begins this pericope (1:18-25) by showing how the world understands the wisdom of God, which is the cross of Christ. Paul writes that the cross of Christ is “foolishness to those who are perishing.” Those who are perishing are those who have rejected the cross. They are those who see no value in the cross because their understanding of wisdom does not permit them to see power and strength in the cross. Wisdom for those who are perishing, due to their Greco-Roman background, is power and strength. In their understanding wisdom represents degrees of human achievement. Being wise means that one has already arrived at one’s goal. The Corinthians share this understanding of wisdom. Because of the manifestation of the Spirit among them as a result of baptism they understand themselves to have gained divine wisdom, which results in their being sated, rich, and reigning (4:7). They understand themselves as already sharing in the resurrection. They can only recognize wisdom in the sense that it grants one status or some level of accomplishment.

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22 Collins (First Corinthians, 101) maintains that the judgment of God has been brought upon those who judge the message of the cross negatively.

23 Kim (“Imitators”, forthcoming) suggests that Paul is challenging the conventional social values of the Romans. At the heart of his message is a deconstructive message of Christ crucified which challenges the honor/shame culture. Paul’s purpose is to show how weakness and suffering are considered powerful according to God.


25 See Becker, Paul, 204. Frank J. Matera (“Imitating Paul in Order to Follow Christ,” The Living Light 38 [2002] 39) states that because of their understanding of wisdom the Corinthians believed themselves to be truly wise and a part of God’s eschatological rule. See below at 4:8-13.

Brant (“The Place of mimēsis,” 293) notes that the Corinthians have confused God’s wisdom with a worldly sort which grants powers and nobility.

26 See Thiselton, Corinthians, 165.
Members of the Corinthian community who have yet to appropriate the gospel fully believe that the fullness of salvation is manifested in the Spirit they received at baptism.\(^{27}\) They have misunderstood the cross and failed to recognize that the power and wisdom of God are revealed in the cross, which to the world is foolishness.\(^{28}\) They fail to see that the cross has the ability to transform everything, including their understanding of power and wisdom.\(^{29}\) The cross presents a new frame of reference in which weakness and folly are greater than power and wisdom as the world understands them.\(^{30}\)

The cross as the source of power and wisdom is viewed as foolishness because it was an instrument of shame and suffering in the Greco-Roman world.\(^{31}\) Those who were wise and powerful did not associate with the cross.\(^{32}\) The idea that power and wisdom comes from the cross goes against everything that members of the Greco-Roman society knew to be true. This mindset does not allow them to recognize that the cross is the revelation of God’s power and wisdom, which overshadows any other wisdom.\(^{33}\) Their “wisdom,” based on the

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\(^{27}\) De Boer (Imitation of Paul, 139) states that the Corinthians’ strife is clear evidence that they have yet to be captured by true spirituality.

\(^{28}\) See Matera, New Testament Theology, 117.

\(^{29}\) See Thiselton, Corinthians, 148.

\(^{30}\) Thiselton, Corinthians, 166. Believers must understand wisdom in light of the broader purposes of God.

\(^{31}\) Welborn (“Fool,” 422) notes that Paul purposely replaces the content of the Gospel metaphorically with a symbol of cruelty to show that a reversal of the understanding of wisdom has taken place.

\(^{32}\) See Lawrence L. Welborn, Paul, the Fool of Christ: A Study of 1 Corinthians 1–4 in the Comic-Philosophic Tradition (JSNTSup 293; New York: T & T Clark, 2005) 123-29.

\(^{33}\) Matera (New Testament Theology, 119) notes that the message of the cross is related to the power and wisdom of God. Paul emphasizes that the Corinthians neglect the cross because they do not understand what is revealed in the paradox of the cross.
manifestation of the Spirit, allows them to share in the resurrection without having experienced the cross. They neglect the cross, which Paul’s proclaims in Christ crucified, because they believe they have attained salvation already.

There were those, however, who recognized the cross for what it truly represented. For those who are “being saved” the cross represents true wisdom and power.\(^{34}\) It is through the weakness and folly of the cross that God reveals his wisdom and power to the world. For believers the cross serves as the basis for Christian identity and has the ability to reshape Christian existence.\(^{35}\) They must associate their lives with the weakness and folly of the cross so that God’s power and wisdom can be revealed through them. They understand that it does not represent the totality of salvation but the beginning. They know that life in Christ entails suffering and weakness, and that the benefits of a life in Christ come to fruition at the parousia.\(^{36}\)

Paul follows his introduction to the scandal of the cross with a series of rhetorical questions. Paul writes, “Where is the wise person? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputant of this age? Has God not shown the wisdom of this world to be foolishness?” (1:20). Here Paul engages the wise of the world in an attempt to show the foolishness of their wisdom. The wise of this world cannot share in the eschatological reign of God, which

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\(^{34}\) Collins (First Corinthians, 90) suggests that the two groups that Paul mentions here show just how divisive the cross is. It separates the people into two distinct groups, the foolish and the wise.

\(^{35}\) Thiselton, Corinthians, 147.

\(^{36}\) J. Héring (The First Epistle to the Corinthians [London: Epworth, 1962] 8) writes, “It is highly characteristic of Paul’s soteriology that he does not speak of ‘the saved’ . . . but of those who are being saved . . . Salvation is not yet gained in its totality.”
is meant only for the one who is learned in God’s wisdom. The wise of the world fail to see the power of the cross. The power of God in weakness overpowers the wisdom and the wise persons of this world.

What Paul writes next is the crux of this passage. The world did not recognize God through the wisdom of the world. The world’s wisdom rejects God’s wisdom as foolishness because it exemplifies weakness and folly. However, the proclamation of the cross states that it is through this foolishness that God determined to save the world. This contradicts what the world expects and accepts. The Corinthians mistakenly believe that the manifestation of the Spirit in their midst is the fullness of salvation. They believe that they have reached the fullness of divinity and already enjoying heavenly perfection.

To the world it is foolishness to think that power and wisdom could come through weakness and folly of the cross. Power is not associated with things such as the cross. According to the world’s standards the savior of the world should not suffer and die on something as vulgar as the cross. However, it is through this reversal of the world’s standards that God chooses to save humanity. God does not provide the world with what it expects. Instead, he overturns its expectations by providing it with salvation. Christ

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37 See Collins, First Corinthians, 92.

38 See Matera, New Testament Theology, 120. Matera notes that “the word of the cross stands in contradiction to every human attempt to determine how God should act.” The world expects power and wisdom, but what it receives from God is weakness and foolishness.

39 See Becker, Paul, 205. Paul will addresses this explicitly in 4:8-13, where he notes that the believers’ claims that they are filled, rich, and reigning lead them to believe they are beyond the reach of the world.

40 Schnelle (“Apostle Paul, 199) writes, “God’s act in Jesus Christ is thus manifest as a paradoxical event that both anticipated and contradicts human doing and human wisdom.” See also Lampe, “Theological Wisdom,” 127.
reveals God’s power and wisdom through the weakness and folly of his death on the cross. He serves as the exemplar of God’s power and wisdom to the world by bringing salvation through the cross. For Jews who demand signs this is a stumbling block because their savior, the Messiah, cannot die on a cross. The law does not permit it. The Messiah does not die on a cross; rather he brings about restoration through power. For Greeks who understand wisdom as power and strength, a crucified savior is foolishness. Wisdom is meant to gain a person “mastery” in life. It does not come in the form of weakness and suffering, but in esteem. For Greeks the cross represents the opposite of esteem. The cross was not meant for revealing wisdom but for punishing criminals. The Greeks could not have recognized the cross for what it truly is, God’s power.

What Paul writes about the paradox of the cross is foundational for what he says in 4:16 about imitating him. To imitate him the Corinthians must appropriate the scandal of the cross: that God reveals his power and wisdom in the folly and weakness of the cross. In doing so they must adopt an attitude and lifestyle associated with this scandal. The wisdom and power of God are revealed through the weakness and folly of Christ in his crucifixion. The Corinthians must live a life that the world recognizes as foolish so that the wisdom and power of God can be revealed through them. In doing so they recognize the unity of all believers in the wisdom of God and build up the body of Christ.

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41 Deut 21:22-23

42 See Welborn, “Fool,” 423.

43 Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 108-27.

44 Thiselton, Corinthians, 171. He writes, “To renounce one’s own powers in order to place one’s trust entirely in the actions of an Other,” this “constitutes the negation of all that Greeks or gentiles understood about the path to success.” See also Collins, First Corinthians, 106.
Paul will outline in 1:26–4:13 what the attitude and lifestyle of the cross consists of using his own example and the example of the spiritual person. The Corinthians are dangerously close to putting their faith in human wisdom and in doing so have created factions. While they believe that this human wisdom allows them to reign with God now, they are immature in their thinking. Through Paul’s example they will see that humility, suffering, lowliness, and weakness are the marks of having adopted an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross. In adopting this attitude and lifestyle the Corinthians will live a life that is foolishness to the world by revealing God’s power and wisdom in weakness and folly, and in doing so they will build up the body of Christ and fulfill their salvation.

The Social Standing of the Corinthians (1:26-31)

In this pericope Paul emphasizes the importance of lowliness by describing the social standing of the Corinthian community (1:26-31). His purpose is to remind the Corinthians of their election, and to show them that they have not yet attained the fullness of salvation. Paul writes:

Consider your calling, brothers and sisters, that there were not many who were wise according to the flesh, not many powerful, not many highly born. But God elected the foolish things of the world in order to humble the wise, and God elected the weak things of the world in order to shame the strong, and God elected the insignificant things of the world and the contemptible, those that are nonexistent, in order to

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45 Some manuscripts including B C D I 1881 f r vg sy Or read καί before the phrase τὰ μὴ ὀντα. I agree with Metzger (Textual Commentary, 480), following BDF § 490, that the καί “seems to be an interpolation prompted by the preceding series of objects,” each joined to the other by a conjunction. The phrase τὰ μὴ ὀντα is not another element of this series but is meant to categorize all the previous terms (insignificant things, dreadful) in one category. “Those who are non-existent” comprise the entirety of all those who are neglected by society. Because of the context and the strong support for the shorter reading I have translated the text without the additional καί.
nullify those things which do exist, so that no one might boast before God. By him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that as it is written, “Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord.” (1:26-31)

The Corinthians believe that the manifestation of the Spirit among them grants them wisdom, which allows them to share already in God’s eschatological reign. This understanding has led them to believe that they are superior to other believers who live their lives in weakness and folly according to the world. However, those who live in the weakness and folly of the cross are mature in Christ.

In 1:26-31 Paul counters the Corinthians’ claims to superiority by reminding them of their social standing. He reminds them that when they were elected not many were “wise according to the flesh, not many powerful, not many highly born.” Paul recalls that when they were called to the body of Christ not many of them were of high social standing. Not many of them were wise as the world understands it. Paul calls them to remember their beginnings and to realize that they are still among the lowly.

There is a benefit to being among the lowly. Paul informs the Corinthians that God has chosen the “foolish things,” “the weak,” “the insignificant and the contemptible,” “those that are nonexistent” in order to humble the elite. God chooses the weak and foolish according to the world to reveal his power and wisdom. In this way God makes those who

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46 This is a common belief among scholars regarding the early Christians. Wayne A. Meeks (The Moral World of the First Christians [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986] 191-92) refers to “status inconsistency” with regards to the various early church communities. This means that the church consisted of a cross-section of the population from the most poor to the very rich. See also Witherington, Conflict and Community, 23-24. Collins (First Corinthians, 98-99) notes that social stratification is the main cause for the problems at Corinth. Paul recalls their social status in order to disabuse them of the idea that their social status determines the quality of their relationship with Christ.

47 Thiselton (Corinthians, 157) is right in noting that the cross is where one finds God.
are outsiders according to the world’s standards insiders. Again, Paul draws out the theme of societal reversals. The outsiders and lowly are the ones who are granted access to God’s wisdom. Paul tells the Corinthians that God chooses the insignificant to show that power and wisdom are manifested in weakness and folly. What God desires is not what the world expects. God chooses those who are ignored and overlooked by the world in order to counteract what the world finds important. The Corinthians must adopt their situation as the attitude by which they live so that God’s power and wisdom can be revealed in them.

Paul’s purpose in reminding the Corinthians of their status when God elected them is to show them that their understanding of wisdom is misguided. Their election does not grant them power and wisdom as the world understands it, but requires them to understand weakness and folly. Many members were nothing (τὰ μὴ ὑπάρχοντα) according to the world and that is exactly why God chose them. The life of the lowly is the life of those who have appropriated the scandal of the cross. They are foolish, weak, insignificant, and nothing to the world. However, in conducting themselves in this manner they reveal the wisdom of God. In imitating Paul they accept their original status and become wise in the eyes of God.

Paul reminds them that all believers share the same foundation, Christ. Since they are “in Christ” they all share “in the status and state of ‘belonging,’ which finds expression in the

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48 Collins (First Corinthians, 99) states that Paul is using the rhetorical strategy of redefinition in which he redefines the social understanding according to God’s standards.


50 Lampe (“Theological Wisdom,” 126) notes that Paul recalls their own experiences to them in order to teach them true wisdom.
way in which the limbs of a body belong to the body." God chose them because they were weak and foolish according to the world so that God could reveal his power and wisdom in them.

Paul’s Presence among the Corinthians (2:1-5)

In the next pericope (2:1-5) Paul begins to show the Corinthians what it means to adopt an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross. Through his example they can recognize what it means to appropriate the scandal of the cross. Paul states:

And when I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come in such a way as with superior eloquence or wisdom proclaiming to you the mystery of God. For I was determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my word and my proclamation was not in persuasive [words] of wisdom, but in an exhibition of Spirit and power, so that your faith should not be in human wisdom but in the power of God. (2:1-5)

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51 Thiselton, Corinthians, 190. See also Schrage, Der erste Brief, 214; C. Wolff, Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther (THKNT 7; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1996) 45.

52 The reading μαρτύριον τοῦ θεοῦ is well supported by such manuscripts as א B D F G Ψ 33. 1739. 1881 א b vg sy b. The translation “the witness of God” does not fit the context of the letter. Paul’s use of μαρτύριον in 2:1 is followed by another usage of mystery in 2:7. Here Paul writes that he and the other apostles spoke to the Corinthians “the wisdom of God in mystery, the hidden things, which God pre-determined before the ages for our glory.” Within the context μαρτύριον better suits the reading and captures the point that Paul is addressing. While the Corinthians believe themselves to have gained some sort of special knowledge Paul reveals to them the mystery of God, the deep, hidden things. I follow the reading of P46vid א C pc ar r sy b. 1881 א b vg sy b sa. The translation “the witness of God” does not fit the context of the letter. Paul’s use of μαρτύριον in 2:1 is followed by another usage of mystery in 2:7. Here Paul writes that he and the other apostles spoke to the Corinthians “the wisdom of God in mystery, the hidden things, which God pre-determined before the ages for our glory.” Within the context μαρτύριον better suits the reading and captures the point that Paul is addressing. While the Corinthians believe themselves to have gained some sort of special knowledge Paul reveals to them the mystery of God, the deep, hidden things. I follow the reading of P46vid א C pc ar r sy b. 1881 א b vg sy b sa.

53 For my translation I have followed the reading of the NA including the final ζ on πεθανόν. The reading πεθανόν ἀνθρωπόντικης σοφίας λάθος as attested by א C Ψ (630) א b vg is tempting since Paul is likely speaking of his rhetorical ability here and comparing himself to the orators of his day. If this is true then a reading including “human wisdom” would suit the context. Since the context suggests that this is what Paul is referring to it is unlikely that a scribe would remove ἀνθρωπόντικης from the text since it clarifies what Paul is writing. It is more likely that a scribe added ἀνθρωπόντικης in order to clarify further what Paul is addressing indirectly. For this reason I support the reading of the NA.
Paul wants to highlight that it is through those who adopt the attitude of the cross that God reveals his power and wisdom. He builds upon the previous section, showing how in weakness and folly God’s power and wisdom are revealed.

Paul sums up the message he is proclaiming when he writes, “I determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.” The message itself, Christ crucified, does not require any superior rhetorical skill or wisdom, for the wisdom it reveals is found in the cross. Paul’s proclamation is the revelation of God’s wisdom and power through weakness and folly. He conducts himself in such a way that the message of the cross is uninhibited by him.  

Paul shows the Corinthians that in his presence before them he exemplified an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross. He came to them “in weakness,” in “fear,” and “in much trembling.” He exemplifies the proclamation by his willingness to appropriate the scandal of the cross and all that it entails in his life. He conducts himself in weakness and folly according to the world so that the cross can be proclaimed. He comes as wise and mature, understanding that power and wisdom are found in weakness and folly. He lives the message of the cross and shares in Christ’s death and resurrection to reveal God’s wisdom. He calls the Corinthians to imitate his example.

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55 Collins (*First Corinthians*, 116-17) is right in suggesting that Paul is not the typical Hellenistic orator. He deprecates both himself and his oratory in order to emphasize the power of the gospel. He humbles himself so that the message can take center stage. He may not be wise, but he has power, which he receives from God.
The proclamation, as Paul states, will be an exhibition of the Spirit and power. Paul proclaims a word that the world finds foolish. But it is not the proclaimer that has power. The message that Paul presents is Christ crucified and this message reveals the true wisdom of God through the Spirit. The Corinthians have the Spirit but they have not properly perceived it. It is through the Spirit that the power and wisdom of God are revealed. The Corinthians must examine the cross through the Spirit in order to appropriate its meaning. Without doing so they will focus on the proclaimer and ignore the power of the cross. The wisdom and power of God are revealed through the word of the cross, and it takes shape not in any act of Paul’s but in the work of the Spirit. Paul’s appearance in weakness and folly and his willingness to appropriate the scandal of the cross in his life as he proclaims Christ crucified proves that he is mature.

Paul presents himself in this way so that the Corinthian community will place its faith in God’s power and wisdom and not in the power and wisdom of human beings. Paul does not provide the means for salvation but proclaims the message through which God’s power and wisdom are revealed. They must not place their faith in Paul because he does not grant salvation. Therefore Paul presents himself as weak and foolish so that the believers do not put their faith in the proclaimer but in the message of the gospel.

The importance of this section is that it acts as a piece of implicit paraenesis. Following his discussion on how God uses the foolish of this world to overthrow those who consider themselves to be wise, Paul presents himself as an example of how he is foolish yet God uses him to accomplish his task. Paul is used by God to overthrow the world’s
understanding of wisdom. The Corinthians must likewise act in a way that God’s power and wisdom are revealed.

Paul presents himself as a model of wisdom and maturity for the Corinthian community to imitate. In this pericope (2:1-5) he begins to address how the mature person conducts himself. The factions within the community have led believers to hold themselves in positions of superiority over one another. They believe the “wisdom” they gained at baptism grants them access to God’s eschatological reign now. What Paul emphasizes through his example is that power and wisdom are found in weakness and folly. Believers must conduct themselves as mature to bring unity, so that God’s power and wisdom can be revealed through them. In recognizing that they are unified in their weakness the community can be united and work towards fulfilling their salvation.

The Wisdom of the Mature (2:6-16)

Here Paul distinguishes between the spiritual person and the natural person. Paul’s purpose is to call the Corinthians to be mature. He writes:

But we do speak wisdom to the mature, although it is not a wisdom belonging to this world, nor to the rulers of this world, those who are doomed to perish. But we speak the wisdom of God in mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew. For if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, “What no eye has seen and no ear has heard and has not entered into the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him.” But to us God has revealed through the Spirit; the Spirit fathoms everything even the depths of God. For who among human beings knows what is human except the human spirit within him? In the same way no one has recognized what is God but the Spirit of God. Now we did not receive the spirit of the world but the Spirit of God, so that we may know the things given to us as a gift by God; And it is also of this that we speak, not in words imparted to us by human wisdom but imparted to us by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things in spiritual words. For the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God;
for to him it is foolishness and he is unable to know, because they must be examined spiritually. Now the spiritual person examines all things, but by no one is he examined. For “who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ. (2:6-16)

The emphasis in this section is on spiritual maturity. The spiritually mature person recognizes that God’s power and wisdom are found in the weakness and folly of the cross. Paul’s call to imitation in 4:16 is a call for the Corinthians to be spiritually mature, just as he is. In order to be mature the Corinthians must appropriate the scandal of the cross in their lives and adopt an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross.

When Paul claims that he preached wisdom to the mature (the spiritually mature) what he means is the word of the cross, or Christ crucified. The mature are those who are capable of recognizing God’s power and wisdom in Paul’s proclamation. Their maturity does not suggest that they have attained the fullness of salvation, which will take place only at the parousia. Instead it suggests that they recognize the cross of Christ as God’s power and wisdom. The word of the cross, as has been established, is foolishness to those who understand wisdom as the world does, the spiritually immature. That is why Paul states that the wisdom he proclaims is not a wisdom “belonging to this world, nor to the rulers of this world, those who are doomed to perish” (2:6). The world cannot recognize it as wisdom. His reference to “those who are doomed to perish” (καταργομένων) refers back to 1:18 where Paul refers to the word of the cross and says that it is foolishness “to those who are

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56 The term τελειός needs to be understood from the perspective of completion or maturity. Paul is not using the term in the sense of perfect, because in his view there is no one who has reached perfection. Collins (First Corinthians, 128) states that Paul uses it against those who consider themselves to be perfect.

57 See Hering, First Epistle, 16.
perishing” (ἀπολλυμένοις). Paul is still speaking of the same group, those who reject the cross of Christ because they see it as foolishness.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that he speaks “the wisdom of God in mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory.” Paul’s proclamation reveals a deeper wisdom that the wisdom of this world cannot comprehend. God’s power and wisdom are revealed through the weakness and folly of the cross. It is this wisdom and power that Paul proclaims. Through this wisdom God determined to do what the wisdom of this world cannot do, to save the world.

God predetermined that it was through an act of weakness and folly that he would bring salvation to the world. The rulers of this world could not recognize the power and wisdom of God in the person of Christ. His ability to reveal God’s power and wisdom through lowliness, humility, and suffering was foolishness to them. With this attitude Christ revealed God’s power and wisdom to the world.

The rulers of this world’s inability to recognize God’s wisdom in Christ led to the ultimate act of God’s wisdom, Christ’s death on the cross. It was through this act that God’s power and wisdom are made manifest to the world. The fact that salvation should come through such an act is foolishness to the world. Paul shows that through this act God has once again inverted the world’s understanding of wisdom and power.

Paul’s quotation in 2:9 states that the wisdom of God is something that is prepared for those who love him, the spiritually mature. Paul’s use of this verse is meant to emphasize that the wisdom of God can only be comprehended spiritually. Only those who have

58 Frederick Fyvie Bruce (1 and 2 Corinthians [London: Oliphants, 1971] 49) notes that to humble oneself for the sake of others is the mark of heavenly love. Christ does this to bring God’s love to earth.
properly perceived the Spirit understand how to recognize God’s wisdom. Through the Spirit believers can recognize the power and wisdom of God in the weakness and folly of the cross. For the natural person it is foolishness, but to those who have perceived the Spirit it is the power and wisdom of God.

Mature persons can only recognize God’s wisdom through the Spirit because it is only through the Spirit that they understand the depths of God. Believers receive the Spirit of God so that they “may know the things given to us as a gift by God” (2:12). If believers had received the spirit of the world, they would have understood the cross as foolishness. Instead they are granted the Spirit of God, which allows them to comprehend the cross as power and wisdom.

The mature person speaks spiritual words imparted by the Spirit. He can speak of the cross as revealing God’s power and wisdom because he has been granted the gift of the Spirit. He examines things spiritually, unlike the natural person. The immature examine the cross of Christ from a worldly perspective, seeing it as weakness and foolishness. They have the Spirit because of their baptism, but they have not fully matured in the spirit. In order to understand the cross it must be examined spiritually.

Paul concludes this examination of spiritual and worldly matters by asking “for who has known the mind of the Lord, that he instructs him?” (2:16). Paul’s point with the rhetorical question is that there is no one who has known the mind of the Lord and has been

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59 Thiselton (Corinthians, 259) comments that humans can only gain access to God if God allows them access.

60 See Matera, New Testament Theology, 121.
able to give him counsel. As Paul established above, only the Spirit truly understands the depths of God, and it is through the Spirit that mature persons are able to understand God.

The “we” to whom Paul refers are the mature whom he has been discussing. Those who have the mind of Christ are the ones who recognize that God’s power and wisdom are revealed in the weakness and folly of the cross. Only those who are mature (have a spiritual mind) can comprehend such an idea. Paul’s call to imitation in 4:16 is a call to maturity. He calls the Corinthians to imitate the example of maturity that he sets before them. They must recognize the Spirit in their presence as that which reveals the power and wisdom in the cross. They must appropriate the meaning of the cross in their lives and adopt an attitude that corresponds to the scandal of the cross. In examining all things spiritually they are able to distinguish the natural from the spiritual and realize that power and wisdom are found in the weakness and folly of the cross. Living as mature persons will have implications, which Paul will discuss in 4:8-13. On the one hand there will be suffering. But on the other, the Corinthians will be united in their weakness and folly and build up the body of Christ.

*Spiritual Immaturity of the Corinthians and the Role of the Preacher (3:1-17)*

In 3:1-17 Paul discusses the spiritual status of the Corinthians. After explaining what it means to be a mature person, Paul informs the Corinthians that they are not yet among the mature. This immaturity has created factions within the community. His call to imitation in 4:16 is for them to become mature persons so that they can create unity. Paul writes:

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61 Collins (*First Corinthians*, 127) claims that the “mind of Christ” highlights the divisions within the community. Paul’s purpose is to dispel the lack of harmony that has fractured the community by reminding them that all believers share the “mind of Christ.”
And I, brothers and sisters, was not able to speak to you as spiritual persons but as
persons of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not food; for not
yet are you able to eat. But, even now you are not able, for yet you are of the flesh.
For even still there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not still of the flesh
and conducting yourselves as humans? For when anyone says, “I belong to Paul,”
and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not acting as humans? What then is
Apollos? What then is Paul? Ministers through whom you began to believe, each as
the Lord granted to him. I planted, Apollos watered, but God made to grow;
therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God the
one who makes to grow. For the one who plants and the one who waters are one, for
each one receives his own wages according to his own labor; For we are God’s co-
workers, you are God’s field, God’s building. According to the grace of God
bestowed upon me, as chief architect I laid the foundation, but another is building
upon it. But each must be careful how he builds. For no one can lay another
foundation other than the one that has been laid, which is Jesus Christ. For if any one
should build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,
each one’s work will become evident, for the day will be revealed by fire. And the
fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If anyone’s work remains who built
upon it he will receive his wage; but if anyone’s work is burned up he will suffer loss,
but he himself will be saved, though as through fire. Do you not know that you are
the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone corrup
tes the temple of God, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God is holy, which you
are. (3:1-17)

When Paul first came and proclaimed to the Corinthians, he was only able to speak to
them as infants because they were spiritually immature. As natural persons they were
concerned with the wisdom of this world, which they believed made them perfect. What

62 Some manuscripts including p66 D F G 33 M b sy; Ir Cyp read ἐροτεῖς καὶ διχοσταίων. Although this
reading is well attested in early manuscripts I agree with Metzger (Textual Commentary, 482) that the longer
reading appears to be a gloss of the so-called Western text meant to add more depth to the passage. The term
διχοσταίων is found in the list of vices in Gal 5:20 and it may be from there that scribes selected the term to
add to the list of vices present in Corinth. The reading of the NA27 is preferred.

63 The reading τίς (“who”) instead of τι (“what”) is attested twice by p46vid Ρ2 C D F Ψ G 1881 M sy. This
reading is likely due to an attempt to clarify what appears to be a mistake on the part of Paul. It would be
more common for a writer to say, “who is Paul?” rather than “what is Paul?” Paul expects his audience to
answer these questions with a resounding “nothing” when they read his explanation of his and Apollos’s tasks
in light of God in v. 7. Since the expected answer is “nothing” the question must be “what” and not “who.” See
Metzger, Textual Commentary, 483. The reading of the NA25 is preferred.

64 Collins (First Corinthians, 139-40) states that Paul addresses them in this way because they believe
they are perfect, whereas Paul sees them as infants. Their lack of maturity is evident from their factions. He
calls them infants in order to reprimand them.
they failed to perceive in Paul’s proclamation was that the wisdom and power of God is found in the weakness and folly of the cross. They were unable to see what the Spirit revealed to them because they perceived things naturally.

The problem as Paul sees it is not that they were in this state initially but that they have persisted in it. Paul writes that “even now” he is unable to speak to them as spiritual people. The Spirit has been among them yet they have failed to move beyond their initial spiritual state; they have yet to become mature. They are not spiritual persons and they do not have the mind of Christ. They have not reached this point yet because of the jealousy and strife brought about because of their misunderstanding of wisdom, believing that they share in the eschatological reign of God. This is a clear sign of their immaturity. They believe that the wisdom of the world makes them spiritual. They then believe that they already share in the eschatological reign of God. This immaturity is guided by their misunderstanding of wisdom, which prevents them from being truly united.\(^6^5\)

Another reason they have not yet become mature is that they have misconstrued the purpose of the apostles. They have focused on the natural (the apostle) and not on the spiritual (the proclamation he delivers), which is Christ crucified. However, the apostles proclaim the wisdom of God, which is weakness and folly and not worldly wisdom. As co-workers they have appropriated the scandal of the cross and conduct themselves with an attitude that corresponds to the scandal. Since there is no competition among the apostles,

\(^6^5\) See Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 291-92. Paul’s teaching is useless to them because they are already spiritual. They do not need the solid food that he can provide because they believe that they are beyond any need for it. Although they believe that they are focused on Christ, they are still rooted in their own self-interests. Their unspiritual nature is due to the fact that they continue to seek only their own ends.
there should be none among believers. In order to be mature the Corinthians must examine the message of the apostles.

Paul emphasizes that believers must be like the apostles. They must share the mind of Christ. The Corinthians fail to examine the cross spiritually because they have not perceived the Spirit. They remain immature and their immaturity has led to factions within the community. They must imitate Paul’s example of maturity by appropriating the scandal of the cross and adopting an attitude that corresponds to the scandal of the cross. They imitate Paul by letting go of jealousy and strife and by not seeing themselves as superior but united. They do so by accepting the weakness and folly associated with the cross. This allows them to recognize the unity of all believers and to end the factions that divide the body of Christ.

_Becoming Wise by Becoming a Fool (3:18-23)_

In this pericope (3:18-23) Paul reaffirms how the Corinthians can become truly wise. Here he writes:

Let no one deceive himself; if anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool, so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “He traps the wise in their own cunning,” and again, “The Lord knows the reasoning of the wise that it is useless.” Therefore, let no one boast in human things; for all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or age or life or death or present or future; all belong to you, you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. (3:18-23)

Paul reminds the Corinthians that those who are wise according to the world’s standards are not wise according to God. The reason for this is that to God the wisdom of the world is
foolishness. Wisdom as the world understands it is useless to those who wish to understand true wisdom.

Paul has already informed the Corinthians in 1:26-31 of the benefits of being viewed as foolish by the world. The foolish are God’s chosen instrument to reveal his power and wisdom to the world. It is through the weak and the foolish that God overcomes the “wise and powerful” of this world. Paul closes this chapter by stating that all things, no matter what they are, belong to believers. But there is more. Believers belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God. The importance of this statement is that it emphasizes the unity of believers. All believers are one in Christ, therefore all are one in God. One is not superior to another. More importantly there is no distinction. Therefore, they must continue to build up the community by imitating Paul’s example.

In order to become truly wise, believers must become fools in the world’s eyes. Paul admonishes the Corinthians that if they believe they are wise in this world they must abandon the world’s wisdom to become foolish. This is how the mature person conducts himself. He presents himself with an attitude that the world finds foolish. However, it is through this attitude that God’s power and wisdom are revealed. Paul calls the Corinthians to adopt this attitude. In 4:8-13 he will show them what it means to adopt an attitude of the cross and what implications it will have on their lives.

The Attitude of the Cross (4:6-13)

Here Paul explains what it means to imitate him. Through his example and the example of other apostles Paul demonstrates what it means to be a mature person. In his call
to imitation (4:16) Paul calls the Corinthians to spiritual maturity. This means that they must appropriate the scandal of the cross in their lives and adopt an attitude that corresponds to this scandal. In 4:6-13 Paul writes:

Now these things, brothers and sisters, I applied to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that from us you may learn not to go beyond what is written, so that you should not set one over another. Who gives you preference then? What do you have that you did not receive? For if you did not receive it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? Yet you are sated, yet you are rich, without us you have become kings! If only you had already become kings so that we might reign with you! For it seems to me, God has exhibited us apostles as least of all, as those condemned to death. For we have become a spectacle to the world and to the angels and to humans beings. We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ; we are weak, you are strong; you are honorable, we are in disrepute. To this very hour we are hungry and thirsty and we are naked and we are beaten and we are homeless and we toil working with our own hands; when ridiculed, we bless, when persecuted, we endure, when slandered, we encourage. We have become as refuse of the world, the scum of everything to this day. (4:6-13)

This pericope serves as the crux of Paul’s paradigm of what it means to adopt the scandal of the cross. Leading up to this passage he has noted that mature persons are to have “the mind of Christ.” In this passage he will clarify what it means to have “the mind of Christ.”

Paul begins this section by stating that he has applied all of “these things” to himself and Apollos, “so that you may learn not to go beyond what is written” (4:6). What he means by “these things” is found in the discussion leading up to this. He has shown that there is no competition between himself and Apollos because they share the mind of Christ.

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66 De Boer (Imitation of Paul, 140) calls 1:10-4:5 a veiled allusion to what the Corinthians must learn in the example of Paul and Apollos. The present actions of the Corinthians are at odds with the way Paul and Apollos view themselves and each other. See also Collins, First Corinthians, 176.

67 Sanders (“Imitating Paul,” 354) states that since Paul and Apollos are servants, they cannot be set in competition with one another. So ταῦτα refers to his and Apollos’s role as servants according to 3:5-4:13. See also Kathy Ehrensperger, “Be Imitators of Me as I am of Christ: A Hidden Discourse of Power and Domination in Paul,” LTQ 38 (4 2003) 250-53. When Paul discusses his and Apollos’s relationship he does not deny differences but acknowledges them positively.
apostles generally, and Paul and Apollos in particular, are unified in their mission to proclaim
Christ crucified. They do so both in their proclamation and in their participation in Christ’s
death and resurrection. They recognize that God’s power and wisdom are found in the
weakness and folly of the cross.

Paul follows this with a series of rhetorical questions. He writes, “Who gives you
preference then? What do you have that you did not receive? For if you did receive it, why
do you boast as if you did not receive it?” The Corinthians have taken upon themselves
claims of superiority. These claims are based on their misconception of wisdom and the
Spirit.

Paul’s language following the rhetorical questions takes an ironic tone. This section
emphasizes the eschatological nature of this letter. The Corinthians’ wisdom theology and
overrealized eschatology has led them to believe that they are satiated, rich, and reigning
already with God. They believe themselves to be wise according to the world’s standards
and believe that they already share in the benefits of the eschaton. They believe that through
the “wisdom” they received at baptism that they are already saved. For Paul these are clear
signs of their immaturity. Their immaturity has given them a misguided understanding of the
implications associated with a life in Christ. Their arrogance has led to the immaturity
evidenced by the factions. Had they properly perceived the Spirit and the cross, they would

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68 Witherington, Conflict and Community, 137.

69 Thiselton (Corinthians, 357) is right in noting that the Corinthians have an overrealized eschatology. They believe that they have already arrived and that they have already achieved perfection. This is related to their Greco-Roman understanding of wisdom. For them wisdom is granted only to those who have arrived. Their belief that they reign now with Christ is compatible with their understanding of wisdom.

70 See Schnelle, Apostle Paul, 206.
have recognized that God’s power and wisdom are manifested in the weakness and folly of the cross. Having appropriated this, they would realize that the life in Christ entails weakness and folly as the world understands it. The only cure for their immaturity is to imitate Paul. They must appropriate the scandal of the cross in their lives and adopt the attitude of the cross in order to attain unity and the fullness of salvation.

The Corinthians’ belief that they have attained the fullness of salvation sets them above the apostles, according to Paul. They have received all of the rewards of salvation while the apostles still await theirs. The apostles continue to live in weakness and folly while the Corinthians reign with God. Paul wishes that their claims were true so that he and the other apostles could share in God’s reign with them. To prepare for the parousia the Corinthians must adopt an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross as Paul has.

Paul then offers the Corinthians an example of what life is like for the mature person. His peristasis catalogue in 4:8-13 will describe his own experience as one whom the world considers foolish and will serve as the way in which the Corinthians can know if

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71 See Reinhartz, “Pauline Exhortation,” 397. See also Brant, “The Place of mimēsis,” 294. According to Brant, in order to be prepared for solid food the Corinthians must behave a certain way. They can grow from immaturity to maturity by imitating Paul. For Brant this is what the imitation process entails.

72 Schnelle (Apostle Paul, 206) notes that because of their new reality the Corinthians believe that suffering should just fade away. Their goal is to evade creaturely limitations: “not humility but exaltation and lordship appear to them as the appropriate expression of their redeemed state.”

73 See de Boer, Imitation of Paul, 144. He says that this explanation is necessary because the personal and contentious pride in the community is tearing it apart. There is an inconsistency in that the Corinthians claim to be living the Christian life, yet they are living a life contrary to it. Ehrensperger (“‘Be Imitators of Me,’ 255) adds that they have to live under the conditions of this world. Suffering is an indication of a real life in Christ. In this sense the meaning of the cross is turned upside down: rather than a sign of failure, it is a sign of life. Witherington (Conflict and Community, 136) adds that Paul attempts to change the climate of disunity by offering his own example of suffering.
they are imitating Paul properly. The apostles have been reckoned by God as the least of all people, condemned to death, and a spectacle before the world. While the Corinthians reap the benefits of their superior wisdom the apostles are considered least of all. If the presence of the Spirit signifies that all Christians are now reigning with Christ, why do the apostles still suffer? They suffer in this age because they have become foolish according to the world by accepting the weakness and folly associated with the cross. Those who are mature are weak and foolish according to the world, not satiated, rich, and ruling. The apostles are not superior to anyone. They have adopted the attitude of the cross and live a lifestyle according to it. Therefore, they live accordingly so that the wisdom and power of God can be revealed through them. Paul makes a clear contrast between the behavior of the Corinthians and the behavior of the apostles. For Paul the lowliness of the apostolic life, which is the life of the mature, overshadows the elevation of personalities, as is seen among the Corinthians.

What the world fails to realize is that it is in weakness and folly that God’s power and wisdom are revealed. The word of the cross is found in what the world reckons to be foolish, weak, and shameful. The world cannot recognize it because it seeks wisdom in power and strength. The apostles accept the weakness and folly associated with Christ’s death in order to proclaim Christ crucified and to reveal God’s power and wisdom to the world.

Paul then makes the claim that the apostles are “fools for the sake of Christ.” He means that he conducts himself as foolish in the eyes of the world in order to reveal God’s

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75 See Clarke, “Leadership,” 344. Still (“Divisions,” 20) adds that 4:8 shows that the Corinthians believe themselves to have fully arrived at the goal of Christian existence. This proves that they have a clear misunderstanding of the Christian life.
power and wisdom. Through a series of antitheses Paul further distinguishes the mature from the immature. It is the example of how the mature conduct themselves, exemplified by Paul, that the Corinthians are called to imitate. The apostles are foolish, weak, and disreputable, while the Corinthians are wise, strong, and of high standing. Paul shows that those who live the mature life must accept being foolish, weak, and disreputable in the world’s sight.\footnote{Paul Hertig (“Fool's Gold: Paul's Inverted Approach to Church Hierarchy (1 Corinthians 4), with Emerging Church Implications,” Missiology 35 [2007] 289-90) notes that Paul’s self-presentation as foolish is grounded in his theology of the folly of the cross. He uses it to reevaluate the norms of social rank.}

Once again the focus is on reversal of values. What is considered weak by the world is considered strong by God. What society understands to be important is as nothing to God.\footnote{See Thiselton, Corinthians, 361; H. Merklein, Der erste Brief an die Korinther Kapitel 1–4, Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus und Mohn, 1992).} The Corinthians, who seek “wisdom,” overlook the cross. For them salvation is already present. But in Paul’s example they can see the appropriate attitude of one who is truly wise.

The apostles are hungry, thirsty, naked, beaten, homeless, and they toil with their own hands in their work of proclaiming Christ crucified.\footnote{I agree with Welborn (“Fool,” 428) that Paul is referring to the mime of the Greco-Roman stage when he uses the term “fool.” His words here in this peristasis catalogue are an accurate description of the social experience of the mimes of Paul’s day. Their social status was miserably low, just as is the social status of Paul and the other apostles. Nguyen (“God's Execution,” 42) notes that Paul’s ignobility and nakedness mark him as infamia. Because of this they occupy the lowest place in the Roman social hierarchy. Nguyen (“The Identification of Paul’s Spectacle of Death Metaphor in 1 Corinthians 4.9,” NTS 53 [2007] 493) remarks that actors both on the stage and gladiators in the arena were considered infamia. See also Welborn, Paul, the Fool of Christ, 56-81.} For the Corinthians this is foolishness. Paul shows that they have misunderstood the message of the gospel. For the one who has adopted the foolishness of the cross is wise in the eyes of God. Paul finishes by stating that the apostles, “when ridiculed, we bless, when persecuted we endure, when slandered we encourage” (4:12-13a). In this he sums up what the mature person must do. The mature
person must accept the ridicule, the persecution, and the slander that comes with being a believer. And with it they must in turn bless, endure, and encourage. In doing so they reveal the power and wisdom of God and continue building the body of Christ. Paul has appropriated the scandal of the cross in his life. In doing so he has revealed the power and wisdom of God to the world to help build up the body of Christ.\textsuperscript{79} The Corinthians must do the same so that they too can reveal the power and wisdom of God. Through their imitation they recognize the unity of all believers in the weakness and folly associated with the scandal of the cross. This helps them to build up the body of Christ.

Paul concludes by stating that he and the other apostles “have become as refuse of the world, the scum of everything to this day” (4:13b). In this statement Paul contradicts the Corinthians’ mode of thinking. He defines his role as an apostle as something menial and base in order to show them how false their understanding of the Christian life is.\textsuperscript{80} His purpose is to show what is necessary to become mature. The mature person is the one who accepts the weakness and folly of the cross. In his call to imitation Paul summons the Corinthians to imitate this maturity. They must appropriate the paradox of the cross and adopt an attitude and lifestyle associated with the paradox. Their misunderstanding of wisdom has led them to misunderstand the cross. By adopting the attitude of the cross, the Corinthians will recognize that the power and wisdom of God are revealed in the weakness of the cross.

\textsuperscript{79} de Boer (\textit{Imitation of Paul}, 154) comments that Paul’s refusal to retaliate to the treatment he has received shows his acceptance of the Christian duty of love. He writes, “The Christian way was the way of humility and of giving oneself in love to others.”

\textsuperscript{80} See Clarke, “Leadership,” 345. Collins (\textit{First Corinthians}, 190) notes that the language of scum and refuse is scapegoat terminology. Paul is associating himself with the scapegoat who sacrifices for the sake of others. See also Bruce, \textit{Corinthians}, 51.
and folly of the cross. They will realize that the life in Christ entails suffering and weakness, and they will recognize the unity of all believers in Christ.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that in 1 Corinthians 1–4 Paul calls the Corinthians to imitate him in his maturity. Throughout the letter he points to the example of himself and the spiritual person as the way in which the Corinthians can become mature. He wants them to appropriate the scandal of the cross in their lives and adopt an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross. Adopting the attitude of the cross means that they recognize and accept that God’s power and wisdom are revealed in the weakness and folly of the cross. To the world this idea is foolishness. But to those who are spiritually mature it is the power and wisdom of God. The factions, which are a result of the community’s spiritual immaturity, threaten to tear the community apart. Paul calls the Corinthians to maturity so that they can understand that all believers participate in the scandal of the cross. In understanding this they live their lives in accordance with the scandal of the cross and reveal God’s power and wisdom to the world through weakness and foolishness.

In the next chapter I will address the second occurrence of the theme of imitation in 1 Corinthians. I will continue to focus on the necessity of believers to adopt an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross in order to ensure the unity of the body of Christ. Paul will continue to develop his understanding of humility and unity as a necessary part of the Christian life. Paul’s call to imitation will continue to show how humility and suffering for the sake of others builds the unity of the body of Christ.
Chapter Four

Seeking the Advantage of the Other: Imitation in 1 Cor 8:1–11:1

In the previous chapter I examined Paul’s call to imitation in 1 Corinthians 1–4. In that passage Paul calls the Corinthians to imitate his example of spiritual maturity. He calls them to appropriate the scandal of the cross in their lives and adopt a lifestyle that corresponds to the attitude of the cross. They do this by recognizing that God’s power and wisdom are found in the weakness and folly of the cross. They must recognize this and grow to spiritual maturity so that they can put aside the factions that threaten to destroy the community. Therefore, Paul called them to imitate his example of spiritual maturity so that the community can be unified and will be able to reveal God’s power and wisdom in the weakness and folly of the cross.

In this chapter I will examine Paul’s second call to imitation in 1 Corinthians. Paul will again turn to his own example to show the Corinthians how they should conduct themselves. He will develop a general ethical principle by which the Corinthians should live. He will call the Corinthians to seek the advantage of others rather than their own. In order to do this, believers must allow love, not knowledge, to be their ethical guide. He will then use the example of his own life to show the Corinthians how they are to live by this ethic. He calls them to live by this ethic because there are some in the community who are in danger of being led to destruction by those who seek their own advantage. Paul will teach the Corinthians that by adhering to this ethic they will build up other believers. In doing so they will insure the salvation of others as well as their own.
The Purpose of 1 Cor 8:1–11:1

1 Cor 8:1–11:1 serves two purposes. First, Paul uses this passage to establish a general ethical principle by which the Corinthians should live. Second, the passage is paraenetic in that Paul uses the example of his own life as a way of calling the Corinthians to apply this ethic to their lives (8:13; 9:1-27; 10:31-33). He will exhort the Corinthians to follow this example so that they can build up the body of Christ and help others reach the goal of salvation.

Call to Imitation (1 Cor 11:1)

The call to imitation in 1 Cor 11:1 is the culmination of Paul’s discussion of food that has been offered to idols. In 1 Cor 11:1 Paul explicitly calls the Corinthians to imitate him. He writes, “Become imitators of me just as I imitate Christ.” This call to imitation follows chaps. 8–10 where Paul presents a general ethical principle through his own example that he expects the Corinthians to imitate (8:13; 9:19-27; 10:32).\(^1\) He uses the issue of food that has been offered to idols as the occasion to develop this ethical principle. They will see in his example that the guiding ethical principle for the life of believers is to seek the advantage of others in order to build them up and bring them to salvation.

The material found in 8:1-13, 9:1-27, and 10:23-33 serves as the basis of this ethical principle. In 8:1-13 Paul will discuss the importance of love rather than knowledge as the guide for believers’ conduct and the necessity of seeking the advantage of the other with regards to salvation. In 9:1-27 he will turn to his own example to show how he lives out the

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\(^1\) According to Nicolet (“Concept d'imitation,” 407) Paul’s call to imitation and the material that precedes it in chaps. 8 and 9 causes the Corinthians to examine their own behavior.
principle he sets forth in 8:13. Finally, in 10:23-33 he will turn to the ethic of responsibility for others. Through Paul’s implicit paraenesis, present in his own example, and through the explicit paraenesis found in 10:23-33 the reader will understand what Paul means when he calls the Corinthians to imitate him.

**Food That Has Been Offered to Idols (1 Cor 8:1-13)**

In 1 Corinthians 8 Paul introduces the issue of food that has been sacrificed to idols, which has been a major point of contention among the Corinthians. There are those (the knowledgeable) who believe that they have the right to eat this meat because there is only one God. There are others (the weak) who believe that eating such meat is idolatry. Paul’s concern is that the weak, following the example of the knowledgeable, will eat this meat and their conscience (συνείδησις) being weak will be defiled. The issue at stake is the salvation of the weak. Therefore, Paul introduces his ethic of responsibility to others so that believers will not be stumbling blocks for fellow believers.²

**Love over Knowledge (1 Cor 8:1-3)**

In this opening passage Paul will lay the groundwork for his call to imitation and inform the Corinthians that they misunderstand what should guide their actions. If they do not correct this misunderstanding there will be dire consequences for the body of Christ. Paul writes:

² Clarke (“Leadership,” 346) writes, “The overriding theme is one not of claiming or defending rights, but rather of laying them down for the wider benefit of building up the ‘weaker’ members of the community.”
Now, concerning food that has been sacrificed to idols, we know that we “all have knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If one claims to know something, then one does not know as one ought to know. But if one loves, then one is known. (1 Cor 8:1-3)

Paul begins his discussion of food sacrificed to idols and his ethical principle by discussing knowledge and love. Some of the Corinthians, whom Paul is quoting, claim to have knowledge. Knowledge, according to Paul, puffs up whereas love builds up. When he speaks of building up he is referring to fellow believers as well as to the body of Christ. Knowledge, used in the wrong way, can be dangerous to the community. Knowledge alone does not seek the benefit of the other but only the benefit of the individual who is puffed up through the knowledge one has attained. The one who has knowledge believes that one can do what pleases oneself without considering the consequences that such actions may have on others.

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3 Some witnesses including P46 and Cl omit the phrase τὸν θεὸν. I follow the early manuscript evidence in omitting the phrase. The passage as it reads here fits the context better. Scribes may have found it necessary to clarify what Paul was referring to in this passage. However, since he is discussing the importance of love over knowledge, the reading without τὸν θεὸν is acceptable.

4 The absence of the phrase ὃν´ αὐτῷ from P46 N* 33 and Cl should be expected since they also lack the phrase τὸν θεὸν. My purposes for following P46 N* 33 and Cl here are similar to those found in n. 3.

5 According to Collins (First Corinthians, 309), Paul introduces the discussion about food offered to idols as the problem within the community, but Collins goes on to note that knowledge is the real issue. Fee (Corinthians, 363) also comments that Paul’s first concern is with the Corinthians’ attitude. They have misunderstood the nature of Christian ethics, which springs from love and not knowledge.

6 John C. Brunt (“Love, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility: The Contribution of 1 Cor. 8–10 to an Understanding of Paul's Ethical Thinking,” SBLSP 1991, 22) notes that from the very beginning, Paul is addressing one’s attitude toward others. Karl Maly (Mündige Gemeinde [Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967] 101) believes that 8:1 is the fundamental theme of the entire letter. For Maly, love plays a role in building up of the entire community. Though space does not allow me to discuss the letter as a whole, it is clear that 8:1 is the key to this passage in that Paul focuses on the importance of love for building up the community.

7 Brunt (“The Place of mimēsis,” 294) writes that when believers are puffed up with knowledge they act inappropriately. See also C. K. Barrett, Essays on Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 7; Mitchell, Rhetoric of Reconciliation, 126.
The other side of Paul’s aphorism is that love builds up. Love, not knowledge, focuses on building up the community. His use of ὁικοδομεῖ opens an inclusio that is closed in the final passage (10:23–11:1). Within this inclusio Paul explains how the Corinthians should imitate him so that they build up the community and participate in Christ’s salvific work. Although the knowledgeable believe that their knowledge grants them freedom, Paul informs them that true freedom finds its expression in love, which calls for a limit on freedom. Therefore, the aim of their ethics must be the benefit and advantage of others.

Love is the key to building up the community of Christ so that others may attain salvation.

In 8:2-3 Paul examines the right kind of knowledge. He states that the person who claims to know does not know correctly, whereas the person who loves is known. For Paul knowledge itself is not enough. A person’s claim to know something is a clear sign that one lacks true knowledge, which is love. Believers can have knowledge but if this knowledge is not tempered by love (proper knowledge) it does not build up the community;

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8 Thiselton (Corinthians, 611) suggests that knowledge is so divisive that it can stand only in contrast to the unifying potential of love. See Mitchell, Rhetoric of Reconciliation, 126-49.

9 Brunt (“Love, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility,” 27) adds that this love is a “radical concern for the well-being of each individual.” One’s freedom is not unchecked authority because it is shaped by faith in Christ. Therefore, it must seat itself in love. See also Duane F. Watson, “1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1 in the Light of Greco-Roman Rhetoric: The Role of Rhetorical Questions,” JBL 108 (1989): 304.

10 See Fee, Corinthians, 367.

11 Paul is not trying to suggest that one should not have knowledge. He is comparing two forms of knowledge, one that is informed by love, and one that is not. Collins (First Corinthians, 310) points out that knowledge does need to be distinguished from love so that Paul can point out that those who claim to have knowledge do not have the right kind of knowledge. There are two types of knowledge: the purely intellectual and the knowledge that is accompanied by love. Collins writes, “The latter is experiential and, in the case of the knowledge of another person or of God, a mutual experience.” See also Fee, Corinthians, 378. Conzelmann (1 Corinthians, 141) notes that knowledge is of no value itself. It requires the proper attitude as well, which in this case would be love.

12 See Fee, Corinthians, 368. Fee continues that this person has failed to act in love. True knowledge consists in one’s ability to live in love, not in the accumulation of data or in the correctness of one’s theology.
rather, it puffs up the individual. Believers must move from a purely individual focus to a community focus so that the community may be built up and brought to salvation.

Food Sacrificed to Idols and the Conscience of the Weak (1 Cor 8:4-13)

Paul’s first use of his own example as a way of establishing a general ethical principle by which the Corinthians should conduct themselves occurs in this passage (8:13). He will use the specific example of food as a way of presenting his overarching principle of seeking the advantage of the other. He writes:

Therefore, concerning food that has been sacrificed to idols, “We know that idols do not exist in the world” and that “no God exists except one.” For, indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or upon the earth, just as indeed there are many gods and many lords, “but for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things are and we exist for him, and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things are and through him we exist.” But not all have this knowledge; since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours to choose does not somehow become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if someone sees you, who possess knowledge,

13 Still (“Divisions,” 30) remarks that knowledge applied without love results in the same evil against which Paul warns in 4:6, mainly puffing others up against one another. See also Hock, Social Context, 140.

14 Thiselton (Corinthians, 621) adds that knowledge can lead to an exalted sense of self, which may cause harm to one’s neighbor. See also Fee, Corinthians, 387.

15 Some manuscripts including 630. (1881) and pc at the end of this verse read καὶ ἐν πνεῦμα ἐπίλυμν ἐν ὕ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν αὐτῷ “and in one Holy Spirit, in whom are all things, and we in it.” This textual variant can be explained as the work of scribes who include this final phrase to introduce a trinitarian formula into the letter. Due to lack of manuscript evidence, the text of the NA27 is preferred.

16 The reading συνειδησεῖ is found in manuscripts K2 D F G M lat sy: Ambst. This reading most likely developed through scribal assimilation to the συνειδήσεις found later in the verse. The reading of the NA27 as found in manuscripts K* A B P Ψ 33. 81. 630. 1739. 1881 pc vg sy ms bmg co is to be preferred. See Metzger, Textual Commentary, 491.

17 Some manuscripts including p66 B F G latt do not read the pronoun οὗ here. The likely explanation is that this was an attempt by scribes to generalize Paul’s statement regarding those who are overseen eating at
eating in the temple of an idol, might one not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to eat food that has been offered to idols? For one who is weak, the brothers and sisters for whom Christ died are destroyed by your knowledge. So, whenever you sin against your brother or sister and wound their conscience, which is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother or sister to be scandalized, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause them to fall. (8:4-13)

At the beginning of this passage Paul again quotes the Corinthians, this time in reference to their knowledge regarding the existence of idols. There are those in Corinth who possess knowledge (8:1, 10), and they understand that idols represent nothing. For those who are knowledgeable, eating meat that has been offered to idols is of no consequence because they know there is only one God. This knowledge has granted them, they believe, the freedom to eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols. Paul asserts, however, that although they know there is only one God, there are many lords and gods according to the world. These so-called lords and gods exist because there are those who grant them reality by believing in them.  

The problem, however, as Paul expresses it, is that not everyone has this knowledge. There are those in the community whose conscience is weak, and they do not yet understand that idols are meaningless and empty. They are so accustomed to their pagan practices that they still believe that the meat sacrificed to an idol is offered to a real god. Because of their inability to distinguish the meat from the idol, when they partake in a cultic meal their

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18 Thiselton (Corinthians, 632) writes that the problem here is that the weak see these as real powers and real threats. Paul will go on to point out that the strong must take this into account. Thiselton (633) continues that “The strong asserted an ontological and existential monotheism in which the so-called (λεγόμενοι) gods were non-existent nothings.” However, as he points out, the gods did exist subjectively by being believed in. See also Conzelmann, I Corinthians, 149; Khiok-Khng Yeo, Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 And 10: A Formal Analysis with Preliminary Suggestions for a Chinese, Cross-Cultural Hermeneutic (New York: Brill, 1995) 189-90; Wolff, Der erste Brief, 171-72; Fee, Corinthians, 373.
conscience is defiled.\textsuperscript{19} For the knowledgeable this group is weak because they lack “proper” knowledge, which would grant them the freedom to eat meat without question of conscience. Paul clarifies that meat is morally neutral. For the weak, however, this is not true.\textsuperscript{20} Participation in cultic meals would lead them away from God.

In 8:9 Paul warns the knowledgeable not to allow their “right to choose” to become a stumbling block to others.\textsuperscript{21} They have exercised this “right to choose” as their ethical authority to eat meat that has been offered to idols. Their knowledge has puffed them up to seek their own desires without consideration for the larger community.\textsuperscript{22} Paul warns the knowledgeable that if the weak see them participating in the cultic meals, they will be encouraged to do likewise. Since their conscience is weak, the weak will be led into idolatry because they will believe that they are participating in idol worship.\textsuperscript{23} Therefore, if the knowledgeable allow knowledge alone to be their ethical guide, others can and will be led to

\textsuperscript{19} Paul Douglas Gardner (\textit{The Gifts of God and the Authentication of a Christian: An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 8–11:1} [Lanham: University Press of America, 1994] 40-45) remarks that wrong knowledge equals wrong actions. Since the weak still believe these gods do exist, then eating meat that has been sacrificed to them is idolatry.

\textsuperscript{20} Brunt (“Love, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility,” 23) notes that eating meat becomes ethically significant whenever consideration for another person enters the picture.

\textsuperscript{21} Fee (\textit{Corinthians}, 378) suggests that the stumbling block principle is the criterion for Paul’s own action. This serves as a paradigm for others but is also a springboard for a defense of his own actions.

\textsuperscript{22} Although believers are to seek the greater good of the community, they must not lose a sense of self. While they are trying to create unity, they are still individuals. Ehrensperger (“Imitators,” 256) writes that believers are not to give themselves up nor flutter without personal identity.

Thiselton (\textit{Corinthians}, 649-50) states that Paul’s focus is on one’s right to choose, but one’s right to choose must take into account that choices affect others. Believers must not engage in any activities that may cause the insecure to stumble.

\textsuperscript{23} Thiselton (\textit{Corinthians}, 608) suggests that Paul is encouraging the stronger believers to consider and respect the social standing of the weaker members of the community. In doing so, they will avoid doing anything that may cause another to stumble.
destruction. All claims to knowledge and rights must be qualified by one’s responsibility to those who do not know.\(^{24}\)

The knowledgeable have allowed their rights to become a detriment to their weaker brothers and sisters. What they fail to recognize is that true Christian rights are not granted by knowledge but by love.\(^{25}\) In order to avoid leading other believers to destruction, the stronger believers must limit their rights by love.\(^{26}\) Knowledge does grant believers rights, but love builds up by forgoing those rights that may be detrimental to others.\(^{27}\) Once they forgo their insistence on their personal freedom grounded in their “knowledge,” they will build up the community.\(^{28}\)

The knowledgeable must recognize that these weak brothers and sisters are the ones “for whom Christ died” (8:11).\(^{29}\) Here, Paul implicitly introduces the example of Christ

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\(^{25}\) de Boer (*Imitation of Paul*, 155) suggests that within Paul’s writing there are two points that he must address them as Christians. First, he must address that Christians do have freedom. More importantly, he must address that as Christians, believers are bound to act in love.

\(^{26}\) Hopper (“Pauline Concept,” 138) writes that true Christian freedom is sometimes limited by an obligation to Christian love. Thiselton (*Corinthians*, 623) notes that Christian love seeks the welfare of the other. He writes, “Hence, if ’the strong’ express love, they will show active concern that ’the weak’ are not precipitated into situations of bad conscience, remorse, unease, or stumbling.” Thiselton (p. 640) also points out that when Paul refers to συνεδρίας he is not referring to the conscience as a true guide to moral judgment. Instead, it means “Freedom and ’rights’ … must be restrained by self-discipline for the sake of love for the insecure or vulnerable, for whom ’my freedom’ may be ”

\(^{27}\) Arhibald Robertson (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* [ICC 33; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1914] 164) writes, “Loving consideration for the weakness of others buttresses them, and strengthens the whole edifice of the church.”

\(^{28}\) Freedom, according to Brunt (“Love, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility,” 27), finds its fulfillment in community. See also Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 149. Conzelmann writes that the knowledge employed by the isolated subject brings destruction, not edification.

\(^{29}\) Collins (*First Corinthians*, 323) is right in suggesting that Paul’s familial language in 11b-13 shows the egregiousness of the actions of the strong. Those whom they lead to destruction are their own family members.
whom he imitates (11:1). Christ died for the weaker brothers and sisters, and his sacrificial act serves as a means for building up others and bringing them to salvation. Therefore, the knowledgeable must look beyond themselves to the well-being of others just as Christ did. However, they continue to partake in cultic meals, eating meat that has been offered to idols, without concern for their weaker brothers and sisters who are led into destruction by their knowledge. They have not limited their rights by love and therefore do not seek the advantage of the other.

Paul warns the Corinthians that when they sin against their brothers and sisters, whose conscience is weak, they sin against Christ who died for them. Herein lies the potential danger of seeking their own desires through knowledge rather than the well-being of the other through love. They can lead weaker brothers and sisters into destruction, thereby endangering their salvation. The knowledgeable, likewise, endanger their own salvation by sinning against Christ and his salvific work on the cross.

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30 Thiselton (Corinthians, 651) notes that true wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ’s concern for the weak and the insecure. Christ’s concern is so great that he renounces his own rights, even to death on the cross. See also Paul’s example in chap. 9.

31 It may be the aim of the strong, that through participating in the cultic meals they are encouraging the weak to do likewise in order to edify the weak. Thiselton (Corinthians, 651-52) points out that Paul would suggest in this matter that the strong are not edifying the weak but causing them to return to improper participation in cultic rituals. See also Fee, Corinthians, 359.

32 Again Paul draws on the point that he expressed in 8:1-3 that there are two forms of knowledge. Thiselton (Corinthians, 626) comments that the strong use a particular knowledge to claim their rights, while they misunderstand true knowing, which is associated with loving. He writes, “The process of genuinely coming to know and being known entails a stance of acting loving and building others.”

33 Conzelmann (1 Corinthians, 149) remarks that believer’s conduct towards others has a great effect on Christ.

34 Watson’s (“Rhetorical Questions,” 306) point is that by following the example of the strong, the weak are then sinning against their own conscience.
In 8:13 Paul turns to his own example as implicit paraenesis to present a general ethic for how the Corinthians should conduct themselves. For Paul personal conduct should be viewed in light of the effect it has on others.\(^\text{35}\) Does it build others up or destroy the other?\(^\text{36}\) This is the approach Paul takes toward food. If food will cause others to fall, then Paul will abstain from meat. He acts responsibly from a position of love.\(^\text{37}\) Although he is at liberty to eat meat, he uses love to limit his rights so that others may not be led to destruction.\(^\text{38}\) Paul’s overriding criterion for his actions is the salvation of others.\(^\text{39}\) Just as Christ sacrificed his rights to bring salvation to the weak, Paul sacrifices his rights so as not to cause others to fall from salvation.\(^\text{40}\)

\(^{35}\) See Brunt, “Love, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility,” 24-26. He writes that Paul’s ethics will always find an occasion for its expression in love and moral responsibility. See also Kim (“Imitatio Christi,” 217) who notes that believers are to live their lives in a “christologically patterned orientation to others.”

\(^{36}\) Witherington (Conflict and Community, 196) points out that one must ask one’s self these questions before he acts, “Is this loving? Does it build up the body of Christ?” The purpose of such questions is that they help believers realize that salvation is found in self-sacrificial actions and not in self-helping ones.

\(^{37}\) Brunt, “Love, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility,” 24. See also de Boer, Imitation of Paul, 155. de Boer writes, “For the sake of love the Christian willingly forgoes the exercise of various rights … which are his by reason of freedom in Christ.”

\(^{38}\) For Brunt (“Love, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility,” 22) freedom must be guided by love and therefore all actions (the eating of idol meat in this instance) must be subordinated to the issue of love. Conzelmann (1 Corinthians, 150) suggests that the strong person’s renunciation, which Paul demonstrates here, is an act of freedom. This renunciation is considered as such because it recognizes one’s brother and sister to be one freed by Christ. See Hopper, “Pauline Concept,” 138; Hock, Social Context, 60-61.

\(^{39}\) See Bruce N. Fisk, “Eating Meat Offered to Idols: Corinthian Behavior and Pauline Response in 1 Corinthians 8–10 (A Response to Gordon Fee),” Trinity Journal 10 (1989) 66. Reinhartz (“Pauline Exhortation,” 398) suggests that this is what the Corinthians are to imitate. They should make the “salvation of others the overriding criterion for action, superseding even the liberty that comes from being in Christ.” Hopper (“Pauline Concept,” 137) remarks that seeking the advantage of the other so that they do not fall is the way in which Paul imitates Christ’s saving work. It is also the way in which believers can continue the work of salvation.

\(^{40}\) Thiselton (Corinthians, 652-55) notes that Christ’s death is an act of self-giving love for the other. Believers must give up their own rights in order to build up the community.
Believers must understand their freedom in terms of their relationship with others.\footnote{See Schnelle, \textit{Apostle Paul}, 213. See also Dunn, \textit{Theology}, 705. Dunn notes that Christian freedom is affirmed by the fact that it is constrained by its consequences on others. Believers must always judge their actions based on how they will affect others. Witherington (\textit{Conflict and Community}, 187) points out that the problem is not the meat but the social and moral effects that the meat has in certain situations. He states that the Corinthians must be aware of interpersonal behavior. See also Furnish, \textit{Theology and Ethics}, 220.} Therefore, Paul’s stance with regards to freedom is governed by what he writes in 8:2. Love is more important than knowledge. Through love believers reject self-serving behavior and seek only that which benefits the other.\footnote{Raymond F. Brown, \textit{An Introduction to the New Testament} (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 520.} Love builds up because it takes into account the weakness of the other.\footnote{Ibid.} It seeks to strengthen that weakness by serving the needs of the weak. Believers must understand that they do not have unlimited freedom, and that freedom is not true freedom when it does not observe the needs of the other.\footnote{Collins (\textit{First Corinthians}, 327) notes that the refusal to exercise one’s rights is not a limitation of freedom; it is the foundation of freedom. Believers are free to choose not to exercise their rights.} True freedom is found in conducting oneself as Paul does by seeking the needs of the other so that they do not fall.\footnote{See Belleville, “Imitate Me,” 125; Robertson, \textit{Corinthians}, 225-26; Fowl, “Imitation of Paul,” 429.}

Seeking the advantage of the other is the example Paul wishes the Corinthians to imitate and the general ethic by which they should conduct themselves.\footnote{See Brant, “The Place of \textit{mimēsis},” 294. Believers must focus on the interests of others over their own self-interest.} They must consider how their actions will affect others.\footnote{Ibid.} The consequence of not conducting themselves in this way is the potential destruction of brothers and sisters. If their actions are
guided by love, they will seek the advantage of the other in order to build up the community and bring others to salvation.\footnote{137}

**Paul’s Rights and His Freedom Not to Exercise Them (1 Cor 9:1-27)**

In this section Paul turns to the example of his own ministry to illustrate the general principle that he presents in 8:13.\footnote{49} The example that he presents is a major part of his call to imitation in 11:1. He will discuss how as an apostle he is due certain rights (9:1-3). He will then focus specifically on his right to economic support (9:4-12a). He will declare his liberty not to use his rights and discuss his non-use of his apostolic rights (9:12b-18). Paul follows his discussion of the non-use of his rights as an apostle by informing the Corinthians of his purpose in not making use of his apostolic rights (9:19-23). In the final passage (9:24-27) he will use his own example in an extended athletic metaphor to show why he practices rigorous self-control. Through this section he will come to the main point of 8:13, showing how in his own life he did not seek his own advantage but the advantage of the other in order to bring them to salvation.

\footnote{Belleville (‘‘Imitate me,’’ 126) suggests that for Paul imitation means that believers must set aside their personal rights and privileges for the good of others. See also Rom 15:2-3.  
Witherington (Conflict and Community, 196) is right in noting that some of the Corinthians have allowed their knowledge to create within them an elitist attitude. They may have some right ideas but these ideas have resulted in wrong social consequences. The believers must stop being individualistic and status conscious and focus on the effect their actions have on other believers.}

\footnote{1 Cor 9:1-27 takes the form of a rhetorical device known as a digression. Paul uses this digression to break away from the somewhat harsh tone of 8:1-13. See Witherington, Conflict and Community, 191. Though it may seem that this digression moves away from Paul’s discussion of food that has been offered to idols, it remains within the realm of Paul’s overarching point of forgoing one’s rights for the sake of others. Collins (First Corinthians, 329) notes that the digression is Paul’s way of showing the knowledgeable why they should forgo certain rights. Exercising one’s rights is not a sign of true freedom, but rather freedom is found in renouncing one’s rights.  
Mitchell (Rhetoric of Reconciliation, 47-50) notes that Paul offers proof by example, which is an important rhetorical device.}
Paul’s Apostolic Freedom (1 Cor 9:1-3)

In this passage Paul begins his account of his example by establishing his freedom as an apostle. Paul writes:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, certainly I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my defense against those who would examine me. (9:1-3)

Paul begins with a series of rhetorical questions that he uses to establish his rights as an apostle. To each of the questions that he puts forth, the answer would be yes. Paul is free. He is an apostle, and the fact that he has seen the risen Lord establishes that he is an apostle. He reminds the Corinthians that they are the seal of his apostleship because he has brought them to the faith. In 9:3 Paul states that “this” is his defense. “This” refers to vv. 1-2. For Paul there is no need for further proof of his apostleship. He uses this passage to remind the Corinthians that as an apostle he is guaranteed certain rights that he is free to exercise at any time.

Paul’s Right to Economic Support (1 Cor 9:4-12a)

In this passage Paul turns to one particular right, his right to economic support. Paul writes:

Do we not have the right to our food and drink? Do we not have the right to have a Christian wife accompany us as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas do? Or is it only Barnabas and I that have no right to refrain from work? Who at any time pays the expenses for being a soldier? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk? Do I speak this (solely) on human authority? Does the law not say the same thing? For it
is written in the Law of Moses, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is threshing the wheat.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Or does he speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever plows should plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of partaking in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much that we should reap material things? If others have this claim over you, do we not all the more? (9:4-12a)

Paul and other apostles have the right to be provided for by the communities they serve.51

Paul notes that he works with his own hands in order to provide for his needs so that he will not be a burden to others, nor a hindrance to the gospel that he preaches.

Paul offers two proofs for his right to be remunerated. His first proof is found in his series of examples in 9:7 of the soldier, the vine dresser, and the shepherd. He uses these examples to illustrate the right of those who work to be supported in the work that they do. Those who work should reap the fruit of their labors.52 Paul’s work—his obligation—is proclaiming the gospel, and he has the right to receive economic support for doing such work. His second proof is found in the scriptural reference in 9:9. Here he quotes Deut 25:4 to give divine authority for his right to economic support. His argument is that Deut 25:4 is not about oxen but about apostles. Just as oxen have the right to the grain they thresh, so apostles have the right to be fed from their work.

In 9:10 Paul clarifies his point by stating that every person who sows hopes to receive something from that work. Since Paul and other apostles have sown spiritual seeds among

50 I have followed manuscripts P 46 Θ A B D 1 2 33. 1881 Ψ; Or Epiph and have translated φιμώσκεις. This reading follows the reading of the LXX (Deut 25:4).

51 See John K. Chow, Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth (JSNTSS 75; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 107-12; Schrage, Der erste Brief, 280-81.

52 Witherington (Conflict and Community, 203) points out that Paul is stating that the worker is certainly worthy of his wages, as Christ would suggest, but does this mean he must necessarily receive them? Paul would say no.
the Corinthians through their preaching, it is not too much to expect to receive material
benefits in return. This is especially the case for Paul, as he points out in 9:12, since he was
the first to preach the gospel to them. His rhetorical question in 9:12a suggests that there are
other apostles who insist upon economic support from the Corinthians. Since they have the
right to this, does not Paul have the right all the more since he is their spiritual father?

Paul’s Non-use of His Rights (1 Cor 9:12b-18)

Paul uses 9:4-12a to establish his right to economic support. However, Paul’s
purpose in establishing this right was not to shame the Corinthians into providing for him but
to show how he refrains from using his apostolic rights. Paul writes:

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything in order not
to put anything as a hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those
who are employed by the temple get their food from the temple, those who attend to
the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? Likewise, the Lord ordered that
those who proclaim the gospel should get their living from the gospel. But I have
made no use of these rights. Nor do I write this in order that these things should be
applied to me. For it is better for me to die than that—\(^{53}\) No one will deprive me of my
ground for boasting.\(^{54}\) For if I preach the gospel this gives me no ground for
boasting, for I am under an obligation. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. For
if I do so by my own will, I will have a reward; but if I do it unwillingly, I am
entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? Just that in my proclamation
I might offer the gospel free of charge so as not to make full use of my rights in the
gospel. (9:12b-18)

\(^{53}\) Metzger (Textual Commentary, 492) notes that it is possible to punctuate this text with a full stop
here instead of a dash. The reading would then be “Truly no one shall deprive me of my ground for boasting.”
However, Metzger points out that this use of \(\eta\) is classical and does not occur anywhere else in Paul. Therefore,
the punctuation of NA\(^{27}\) is preferred.

\(^{54}\) Some manuscripts including \(\text{K}2\) \(\text{C}1\) \(\text{D}1\) \(\text{Ψ}1\) \(\text{M}\) \(\text{syh}\) read \(\text{iōn \ τί \ κενωση αὐτής}\). Some scribes may have been
confused by Paul’s structure when he broke off the sentence following \(\eta\). Therefore, they may have adjusted
the reading to \(\text{iōn \ τί \ κενωση αὐτής}\) in an attempt to carry on with Paul’s syntax. However, since Paul is likely using
a figure of speech known as aposiopesis, the reading of NA\(^{27}\) is adopted here. See Metzger, Textual
Commentary, 492.
In 9:12b Paul reminds the Corinthians that he and those with him have not made use of these rights. They endure not being provided for so that they will not hinder the gospel of Christ.\(^5^5\) Again Paul’s aim is not to scandalize others so that he can bring them to salvation. Paul does not want those whom he serves to think that he only proclaims the gospel so that they will provide for him. He does have the right to economic support, just as those employed in the temple have the right to be supported for their service.

Following another pronouncement of his non-use of his apostolic rights in 9:15, Paul insists that his point is not to shame the Corinthians into providing for him (9:16).\(^5^6\) He would rather die than have this happen. Rather, he writes to show how he has not taken advantage of these rights in order seek the advantage of others. He does not do this by his own free will. Rather, he is under obligation to proclaim the gospel (9:16). According to 9:18, Paul’s reward is that he gets to proclaim the gospel free of charge. This paradoxical statement is grounded in Paul’s desire not to be a hindrance to the gospel (8:13; 9:12b). His conduct is always guided by his concern for the salvation of others. His reward, then, is that he proclaims the gospel free of charge.

\(^{5^5}\) Dustin W. Ellington’s (“Imitating Paul's Relationship to the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1,” \textit{JSNT} 33 [2011] 307) point that Paul is aware that any action of his could inadvertently hinder the gospel is crucial to understanding Paul’s point. Paul is carefully constructing his ethic to show that believers must realize that every action, no matter how insignificant, can be a hindrance.

Collins (\textit{First Corinthians}, 333–42) writes that Paul enjoys his rights, but he did not use them for the sake of the gospel. As one who endures all things for the sake of the gospel, he is motivated by love.

\(^{5^6}\) Paul’s repetition of this point, according to Ellington (“Imitating Paul's Relationship,” 308), is meant to emphasize the specific behavior Paul wants the Corinthians to imitate.
Paul’s Purpose (1 Cor 9:19-23)

Paul states his reason for not making use of his apostolic rights in 9:19-23.\textsuperscript{57} He writes:

For though I am free in regard to all people I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, in order that I might win Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law (though I am not under the law),\textsuperscript{58} in order to win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law, though I am not outside of God’s law but am under the law of Christ, so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I became all things to all people, so that by all means I might save some. I do this all\textsuperscript{59} for the sake of the gospel, in order that I might share in it. (9:19-23)

1 Cor 9:19-23 stands at the center of Paul’s argument. This is the example that he wants the Corinthians to imitate.

Paul emphasizes his freedom and right not to use that freedom (9:19). He has made himself a slave to all so that he might win as many as possible for Christ.\textsuperscript{60} Put another way, Paul is free to be a slave to all.\textsuperscript{61} His reference to himself as a slave is pertinent to his ethical

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\textsuperscript{57} See Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 698. Thiselton remarks that this is the rhetorical climax to 9:1-18. In vv. 19-23 Paul is putting his own strategy and example into sharper focus. Thiselton writes, “Whereas vv. 1-18 focus largely on the strategy and personal example of forgoing the ‘right’ to substance, however, these verses [19-23] show that standing in solidarity with ‘the other’ as against autonomy or self-affirmation, lies at the heart of the gospel.” Paul will accentuate this point in 9:23 when he says that he does all of this “for the sake of the gospel.”

\textsuperscript{58} The phrase μὴ ἄνωτερον ὀπό νόμον is not read in manuscripts D\textsuperscript{2} (L) Ψ1881 Μ sy\textsuperscript{9}. The most plausible explanation for this reading is that the phrase was omitted during transcription.

\textsuperscript{59} Some manuscripts including Ψ Μ sy read τούτο instead of πάντα. It would appear that later scribes wished to be more precise with Paul’s wording. The context of the passage does not require such clarification. Because of this and the stronger manuscript evidence for πάντα, NA\textsuperscript{27} is preferred.

\textsuperscript{60} Robertson (*Corinthians*, 190) notes that Paul does not say that he wins all of them, but “all the more.”

\textsuperscript{61} Kim (“Imitatio Christi,” 200) notes that Paul uses his own freedom to become a slave to all so that he may save them. See also Schnelle, *Apostle Paul*, 214; Collins (*First Corinthians*, 348) raises an interesting point that as a slave, Paul is void of rights.
understanding. By enslaving himself, he gives up seeking his own advantage in order to seek the advantage of others so that they might be saved. Thus Paul demonstrates through his self-enslavement and renunciation how love can legitimately limit one’s freedom. The Corinthians too must enslave themselves to others so that others might be saved.

Paul mentions the groups to whom he enslaves himself in 9:20-22. These groups represent the whole of humanity as understood by Paul. Paul acts like a Jew and becomes like one under the Law so that he might win them. Though Paul is free from the Law, he places himself under the Law so that he might win over his Jewish compatriots. He seeks their salvation rather than his own rights.

Paul then states that he becomes as one outside the law to win those outside the law. He emphasizes in 9:22, however, that although he becomes as one outside the law he is not outside of God’s law but is under the “law of Christ.” In order to understand this we must turn to Paul’s letter to the Galatians where he refers to the “law of Christ.” In Gal 6:2 Paul tells the Galatians to “bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” This verse falls within a context in which Paul is discussing Christian liberty and

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Conzelmann (1 Corinthians, 159) notes that Paul’s freedom, which he claims for himself, takes the form of service. He is free to choose this service for others. His self-understanding as a slave to others is in harmony with the fact that his office is determined by the cross. Since he is thusly linked to Christ, he must serve others.

Ellington (“Imitating Paul's Relationship,” 308) maintains that to enslave means to relinquish one’s freedoms for the sake of the gospel and the salvation of others.

See Thiselton, Corinthians, 699.

Thiselton (ibid., 701) writes that believers must enter into this voluntary slavery because it performs “a wholesome, even essential, saving purpose in Christ-like obedience and love for the other.”

Kim (“Imitatio Christi,” 200) adds that Paul clearly has in mind here Jesus’ teaching on love. For Paul love is the main point; therefore he looks back to the teaching of Jesus about love. Schnelle (Apostle Paul, 214) points out that freedom is the result of being bound to the law of Christ.
whether or not the Galatians need to observe the Mosaic Law. Paul warns the Galatians that although they are free, they should not use their freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence. Instead, through love, they should become slaves to one another. They should be guided by their love, submitting to all, so that they may fulfill the law, which is summed up in the phrase, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal 5:14).

For Paul this is what Christ did on the cross. Christ enslaved himself by bearing the burdens of others, so that they might be saved. It is this example that Paul imitates in 1 Cor 11:1 and the example he encourages the Corinthians to imitate in 9:19-23. Out of love for others they must enslave themselves to one another, bearing each others’ burdens.

In 9:22 Paul brings the conversation back to the experience of the Corinthians to solidify his point. He states that he became weak so that he might win the weak. Here Paul probably has in view the knowledgeable in Corinth. Those who boast in their knowledge must do the same. He proclaims that he becomes all things to all people so that he might save some. Through his actions he seeks the advantage of others so that they might be

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66 This is in large part what Paul himself imitates. Matera (“Imitating Paul,” 40) writes that what Paul is saying here is this: “Just as Christ surrendered himself for the sake of others, so have I sacrificed myself for the gospel. Now, each of you, the strong and the weak, must imitate me and do the same.” See also Kim (“‘Imitators’,” 19) who notes that this surrender is how the believers participate in Christ crucified. See also Fee, Corinthians, 426.

67 Thiselton (Corinthians, 661) notes that Paul draws his own lifestyle from Christ. Christ serves as the paradigm for one who does not cling to one’s rights but who subordinates one’s rights for the welfare of others. Thiselton (p. 663) says that chap. 9 serves a paradigmatic function in relation to the request made in chap. 8 to forgo one’s right to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Robertson (Corinthians, 192) states that Paul follows the lex amoris which he calls the Corinthians to imitate. The “law of Christ” restrains believers and keeps them from wandering to other objects than the service of God and humanity.

68 It is important to note here, as Dale B. Martin (Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 120-21) does, that Paul only calls those who have rights (the strong and socially influential) to give up their rights.
saved. In his actions Paul participates in the gospel’s act of salvation. By recounting the example of his life, Paul implicitly calls upon the Corinthians to imitate him.

In 9:23 Paul remarks that he does “it all for the sake of the gospel.” What he means by “all” is enslaving himself to others. He does this for the sake of the gospel, so that the gospel may go forth unhindered and he might share in its blessings. In order to share in its blessings he must conduct himself in such a way that he does not hinder the gospel so that others may come to salvation.

In 9:19-23 Paul presents himself as an example to imitate. His purpose for not using his apostolic rights is that he might win others for Christ. Paul’s example stands in contrast to that of the knowledgeable at Corinth who insist upon their rights. Through his example, Paul shows how he forgoes his rights as an apostle for the sake of the community. The knowledgeable at Corinth must do the same.

The Purpose of Rigorous Self-Control (1 Cor 9:24-27)

The extended athletic metaphor in 1 Cor 9:24-27 serves as another example of Paul’s behavior that the Corinthians ought to imitate. He writes:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one wins the prize. Run in such a way that you might win it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor box as though beating the air; but I

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69 Ellington’s (“Imitating Paul’s Relationship,” 309) point here is that Paul uses “save” to show how he models a partnership with the gospel. He participates in its saving power so that he can help lead others to salvation. A crucial point here is that one’s behavior can make a difference in another person’s salvation.

70 de Boer (Imitation of Paul, 155) suggests that Paul does this so that others may be saved, but also so that he may participate in salvation. This point will become clearer in the extended athletic metaphor of 9:24-27. Betz (Nachfolge, 161) comments on this passage by suggesting that for Paul partaking in the gospel is equated with the imitation of Christ. See also Robertson, Corinthians, 193.
punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I should not be disqualified. (9:24-27)

The emphasis is on self-control and forgoing one’s own rights so that others may benefit. The race is a metaphor for salvation. Paul calls upon the Corinthians to train in such a way that they will attain salvation. Their actions must always be directed toward salvation, whether it is their own or others’.

He then turns to the training of athletes in order to emphasize how the Corinthians should run the race. Just as an athlete exercises self-control in order to win a perishable prize, believers must do the same to win an imperishable one. When Paul states in 9:24 that only one wins the prize he is referring to believers collectively. Believers run the race for salvation together so that all may win. The gift of salvation is not an individual gift but a communal one. Believers exercise self-control by seeking the advantage of the other in order to build up the community. If they seek their own advantage, they will not receive the imperishable wreath. They will be destroyed by the freedoms of those who seek their own rights.

In 9:27 Paul returns to the example of his own life by stating that he subjects himself to rigorous self-control, punishing his body to enslave it. What he means by this is that he practices self-control to the point that he enslaves his body to insure that he does not lead

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71 Victor Pfitzner (Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature [Leiden: Brill, 1967] 87) notes that Paul’s point here is that an athlete’s efforts are in vain if he has not properly trained and abstained from everything that harms his path. The same is true for believers. Their salvation and success is just as open to harm by their lack of self-control, as is the salvation of others.

72 Reinhartz (“Pauline Exhortation,” 398) writes that Paul’s hope is that others who imitate him might attain the imperishable wreath by striving for the salvation of others by giving up their own freedoms.
others to destruction. His first purpose for doing this is so that others might be saved (9:19-23). His second purpose is found in 9:27b, “so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.” Paul’s own salvation is dependent, in some respects, on the salvation of others. If he proclaims but does not seek the advantage of others, and they are led to destruction by his knowledge, then he is disqualified from the blessings of the gospel. For if he sins against a weaker brother or sister, he sins against Christ. Therefore, if he does not exercise self-control he will be disqualified from the race.

The Ethic of Responsibility toward Others (1 Cor 10:23-33)

In this final section Paul returns to the issue of food sacrificed to idols. The purpose of this section is twofold. Its first purpose is to sum up what Paul has said regarding food sacrificed to idols. Its second purpose is to call the Corinthians to imitate the ethic of responsibility to others, which Paul has implicitly called them to through his own example in 8:13 and 9:19-27. Paul writes:

All things are allowed but not all things are beneficial; all things are allowed but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage but the advantage of others.

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73 Thiselton (Corinthians, 716) notes that it is the whole life of the believer that is at issue. He writes, “The whole of everyday life must be held captive to the purposes of the gospel.”

74 Stanley (“Become Imitators,” 874) notes that believers are working towards their own salvation as well. Therefore, self-control for the sake of others is crucial to their own salvation. With regards to Paul’s salvation Stanley writes, “His assertion that he puts the spiritual profit of others ahead of his own is simply a paradoxical way of saying that he aims at saving his own soul by saving others.”

75 Collins (First Corinthians, 383) notes that this is part of Paul’s deliberate rhetoric. Here, he is arguing from the perspective of advantage. He tells the Corinthians implicitly here that it would be to their advantage to follow his example. They too will share in the blessings of the gospel. See also Witherington, Conflict and Community, 225.

76 Some manuscripts including Β² C³ H (P) Ῥ Ῥ τ vg sy read μοι after each instance of πάντα in v. 23. From looking at the larger context, certain scribes may have amended the text in light of 6:12. Since Paul is writing in this context with a more general tone directed more towards the Corinthians, it is unlikely that he
Everything which is sold in the meat market you may eat without question of conscience. “For the earth belongs to the Lord and its bounty is his.” If a certain unbeliever invites you and you wish to go, eat whatever is set before you without question of conscience. But if someone says to you, “This has been sacrificed to idols” do not eat for the sake of the one who informed you and for the sake of conscience. I mean the other’s conscience and not your own. “For why should my liberty be subject to the judgment of another’s conscience?” “If I partake with thanks, why should I be denounced for that which I give thanks?” Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage but that of the many, in order that they may be saved.

This section serves as an explicit explanation of Paul’s ethic of responsibility toward others, which he is calling the Corinthians to imitate. In this section he explicitly states what this ethic entails: seeking the advantage of the other over one’s own.

1 Cor 10:23 concludes the inclusio begun in 8:1. Paul writes, “All things are allowed but not all things are beneficial; all things are allowed but not all build up” (10:23). Paul’s use of οἰκοδομεῖ calls the reader back to 8:1 and his discussion of knowledge and love. Here in chap. 10 he returns to the point he introduced in 8:1-3. Knowledge seeks only the good of the individual, whereas love seeks the advantage of the community. For Paul knowledge allows believers to recognize that they have rights. This knowledge, if not used correctly, will not be beneficial to the community and has the potential to be destructive (8:11).

Paul’s use of οἰκοδομεῖ is intended to remind the Corinthians of the point he made in 8:1-3. Their actions must be guided by love. Therefore, even though their knowledge has granted them rights, they must limit their rights through love. Believers must do this because

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would refer to himself here. The manuscript evidence weighs heavily for the shorter reading, therefore the NA²⁷ is preferred. See Metzger, Textual Commentary, 495.

⁷⁷ Some manuscripts including Η� Ψ Ρ syb read τοῦ γάρ κυρίου ἢ γῆ καὶ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῆς at the end of this verse. Looking at the broader text, this insertion is certainly a gloss from v. 26. The addition is not necessary, therefore the reading of the NA²⁷ is preferred.
love seeks to build up the community, whereas knowledge puffs up the individual. Paul’s point is that they must be guided by love and do that which benefits and builds up the community.  

The paraenesis in 10:24 is meant to show the Corinthians what their conduct would look like if they allowed their actions to be guided by love rather than by knowledge. Paul writes, “Let no one seek one’s own advantage, but that of the other” (10:24). This verse is the crux of the ethic of responsibility toward others and of Paul’s call to imitation in 11:1. This explicit paraenesis follows the implicit paraenesis that he puts forth in 8:1–9:22 by pointing to his own example and the example of Christ. Paul’s hope is that the Corinthians will imitate his and Christ’s example of self-sacrifice by seeking the advantage of others. The purpose of such imitation is twofold. First, it builds up the community (8:1-3; 10:23). Second, it brings others to salvation (9:19-23; 10:33). By allowing themselves to be guided by love, believers seek what builds up the community and what leads others to salvation.

In 1 Cor 10:25-29a Paul returns to the discussion of food sacrificed to idols. Here he addresses two specific points regarding the food that one eats. Paul informs the

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78 Brant (“The Place of mimēsis,” 295) points out that the way of Christ that Paul imitates is meant to promote unity, in other words to build up the community. The imitator, when acting as Paul does, gains understanding of his own actions. As Brant writes, “The actions should be deliberate and self-shaping in order to realize the goal of spiritual maturity.” For Brant, this is the unity of all believers.

Conzelmann (1 Corinthians, 175) notes that all actions must serve the purpose of up-building the community and not just the individual. Paul makes this point concrete in 10:24.

79 de Boer (Imitation of Paul, 156) writes that it is significant that Paul begins this final section with the command of love. Paul needs to make explicit in this final pericope the importance of using Christian love to limit one’s freedoms.

80 I agree with Kim’s (“Imitatio Christi,” 199) point that Paul not only focuses on the risen Christ when looking to the example of Jesus but also to the life and teachings of the historical Jesus. His point on the issue of one’s responsibility to others is that Paul has in view not only the death and resurrection of Christ, “but also his teaching about behaving responsibly in the interest of others.”
Corinthians that they may eat anything that is sold in the meat market without questions of conscience (10:25). In 10:26 Paul quotes Ps 24:1 to support his point, “For the earth is the Lord’s and its bounty is his.” Believers may eat anything sold in the market because it comes from the earth and therefore belongs to God.

Paul then turns to a specific point regarding eating in the private home of a nonbeliever. If believers are invited to a nonbeliever’s house for a meal they are allowed to eat whatever has been set before them. However, if someone at this same meal informs them that the meat that they are about to eat has been sacrificed to an idol, they should refrain from eating for the sake of the other’s conscience (10:27-29b). Paul returns to the necessity of self-control and seeking the advantage of the other. If there is the potential that a believer’s right to eat this meat could affect another’s conscience, the informed believer must refrain from doing so. Paul has shown in 8:11 that the potential danger of disregarding the conscience of the other is destruction. Although their knowledge makes it acceptable to eat meat, their love must serve as their guide to build the other up.

The two objections presented by Paul in 10:29b-30 represent potential objections by those who are knowledgeable. There are those who would argue that since they are knowledgeable their actions should not be determined by the conscience of another. Likewise, if they give thanks for what is set before them, they should not be judged for that which they give thanks. Paul does not present explicit answers to these questions; however, the answers are implicit in what he has written.81 Believers’ actions should be determined by

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81 Watson (“Rhetorical Questions,” 314) notes that Paul does not need to receive a reply from the Corinthians regarding this point. He also notes that there does not need to be a formal conclusion from Paul. It would appear that Paul does not explicitly present a formal conclusion on this point. However, his reply to
the conscience of others because of the danger they pose to the weak (8:11). Believers must be aware that their actions have an effect on others. Therefore, they must consider others by seeking their advantage.

Paul introduces another element of paraenesis in 10:31. He tells the Corinthians, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things for the glory of God” (10:31). This begins Paul’s summation of chaps. 8–10. Believers must do all things for the glory of God. Within the context of 1 Corinthians 8–10 this means that believers should seek to build up their brothers and sisters out of love rather than act in a way that causes them to stumble and bring them to destruction. In every aspect of their lives, they should seek the advantage of the other so that they will build up the community and help others reach salvation.

Therefore, the way in which believers can bring glory to God is by imitating the pattern of Christ’s life that Paul set forth in 8:1–9:27 and here in 10:23-33. Christ exhibits...

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82 Thiselton (Corinthians, 792) states that in all situations believers must realize, “At one level the Christian is free . . . On the other hand, always to ask about the impact or effect of these things on the self-awareness . . . of the other must play a part in the believer’s decision about how freedom which God granted is to be constructively used.”

83 Stanley (“Become Imitators,” 873) writes that this verse along with vv. 32-33 serves as a well-balanced statement of Christian liberty. A Christian is truly free when he or she does all things for the glory of God.

Robertson (Corinthians, 223) states that Paul means this to be used as one’s guide in doubtful cases.

84 Thiselton (Corinthians, 793) suggests that in this conclusion Paul is pointing out that believers must do only those things that take into account a concern for the other. This then constitutes “a proper use of the gospel freedom.” Following this pattern, according to Thiselton (p. 794), brings glory to God and not to the self.

85 Watson (“Rhetorical Questions,” 306) suggests that to live in the glory of God is to consider the needs of others in the highest regard. See Rom 15:7; 1 Cor 6:20; Phil 1:11, 2:1.
the glory of God by acting for the sake of the other, to which Paul has alluded in 8:11 and 9:23. Everything believers do must be done out of their concern for others and a desire to build up the community. Love, not knowledge, should be the believer’s ethical guide.

First Cor 10:32-33 returns to Paul’s own example as the pattern that believers should imitate. He writes, “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage but that of others in order that they may be saved” (10:32-33). He urges the Corinthians to offend no one through their actions. This is the outcome of his call for them to do all things for God’s glory.86

We should not overlook the verbal link between ἀπρόσκοποι in 10:32 and πρόσκομμα in 8:9. Paul uses the term ἀπρόσκοποι to say that believers should give no offense to others. This term is related to πρόσκομμα in 8:9, both sharing the same verbal root, where Paul warns believers not to be a cause of stumbling for other believers. Just as they need to be aware that they must not allow their freedom to become a stumbling block for the weak, so they must be certain that their actions are not a cause of scandal to others (10:32).

Paul turns to his own personal example in 10:33 to remind the Corinthians how they can avoid scandalizing others. He writes, “Just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage but that of the other, in order that they may be saved” (10:33). His example is motivated by his commitment to the salvation of others.87 This is how the


87 See Ellington, “Imitating Paul's Relationship,” 310. Still (“Divisions,” 38) states that in imitation of Paul, the Corinthians are to “sacrifice unto the end [so] that their brothers [and sisters] may be saved.” See also Nicolet, “Concept d'imitation,” 404. Nicolet suggests that Paul renounces his own rights so that others may be saved. This is what Christ did. Although Paul cannot do exactly what Christ did, by renouncing his own rights he recognizes Christ’s salvific work and in this he finds the foundation of his liberty. See also Thiselton, Corinthians, 795; Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 97-172; Witherington, Conflict and Community, 39-48.
Corinthians should conduct themselves. Paul tries to please everyone in everything he does by seeking the advantage of the other and not his own. If this requires self-sacrifice, then Paul will do it (8:13; 9:19-27).

He explains that his reasoning for conducting himself in this way is so that others “may be saved.” This is the overall goal of his ethic of responsibility for others. Believers must conduct themselves in a way that others are brought to salvation. Such conduct imitates Christ who brought life to others by sacrificing himself. As Paul has shown the Corinthians, if they do not act in this way they will be disqualified from sharing in the benefits of the gospel (9:27). Paul knows that if he conducts himself with his own interests in mind he will be a cause of stumbling for other believers. This in turn will lead to destruction (8:11). Thus Paul would sin against his fellow believers and Christ and put himself in danger of being disqualified (9:27). Therefore, Paul conducts himself by seeking the advantage of others so that they may be brought to salvation and so share in the benefits of the gospel (9:23).

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88 Kim (“Imitatio Christi,” 197) is right in suggesting that this is the example that Paul wishes them to imitate. He adds that the example they see in Paul is a result of his imitation of Christ. 1 Cor 10:33 represents Christ’s own example.

89 The purpose of this, according to Conzelmann (1 Corinthians, 179), is not opportunistic but devotion and service.

90 This goes back to 8:13 as well. There, Paul states that he will not eat meat if it will cause his brother or sister to fall. This is a clear example of Paul attempting to please all people in everything he does. See also 9:19-23. See Kim, “Imitatio Christi,” 198.

91 de Boer (Imitation of Paul, 158) points out that the key to Paul’s conduct is the salvation of others. He gives himself completely to the salvation of others, and this is what he calls them to imitate. It is also in this statement that Paul gives his main point of imitation. de Boer writes, “It is the development of such an attitude and such a conduct toward other men that one is always promoting their salvation. The salvation of others must take precedence over the pursuit of one’s own desires or the exercise of one’s own rights.”

92 Thiselton (Corinthians, 796) writes, “The imitation of Christ takes its bearings-on his saving work. Christ’s work brought life to others by giving himself up. It is this pattern that Paul appeals.”
This is the example that Paul calls the Corinthians to imitate in 11:1. He wants them to seek the advantage of others, choosing love rather than knowledge as their ethical guide. In doing so they will build up the community in Christ and bring others to salvation. As believers their concern must be the well-being of others. This may mean that they must limit their rights by love. Paul calls the Corinthians to move beyond their individual concerns, which are guided in their knowledge (8:1-12) to a community concern guided by love.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined Paul’s call to imitation in 1 Cor 11:1. All of the material leading up to his call to imitation in 11:1 has served as the example that Paul wants the Corinthians to imitate. Believers must conduct themselves in a way that does not become a stumbling block for others (8:9, 13). They will do this by making love their ethical guide (8:1), forgoing their own rights and seeking the advantage of the other over their own advantage (8:13; 9:19-27; 10:24). Paul uses his own example to show how he has forgone certain apostolic rights for the benefit of others (9:1-23). The purpose of such self-sacrificing love is to build up the community and bring others to salvation (8:1-3; 9:19-23). If the knowledgeable at Corinth fail to do this, they will lead other believers to destruction (8:11). Believers who seek their own advantage sin against their fellow brothers and sisters and Christ (8:12). This will disqualify them from receiving the benefits of the gospel (9:27). Therefore, believers must follow Paul’s example, which he outlines for them in 1 Cor 8:1–9:27 and 10:23-33 by making love their ethic.
In the next chapter I will examine the call to imitation in Phil 3:19. Once again the necessity of self-sacrifice and forgoing one’s rights will be prominent. Paul will show that just as Christ gave up his rightful position so that others might benefit, so believers must do the same. He will also show that although Christ does give up his rightful position for the sake of others, he is rewarded by being exalted. Paul will use his own example, following the example of Christ, to show the Philippians how they should conduct themselves towards others. Paul’s hope is that he, like Christ, will be exalted by God.
Chapter Five

Living according to the Cruciform Pattern: Imitation in Philippians

In the previous chapter I examined Paul’s call to imitation in 1 Cor 8:1–11:1. In that passage Paul calls the Corinthians to imitate his example of forgoing his own rights for the sake of others. His call to imitation in 1 Cor 8:1–11:1 is meant to urge the Corinthians to practice self-sacrificing love in order to build up the community and bring others to salvation. In order to do this they must make love the norm by which they conduct themselves.

In this chapter I will examine Paul’s call to imitation in his letter to the Philippians. He turns to the example of Christ and his own example to give the Philippians a model by which they should conduct themselves. Within this letter he will describe a cruciform pattern, which is exemplified in the example of Christ and his own life, to serve as a guide for their conduct. They must imitate this example so that they will be a unified community. Unity is necessary for two reasons. First, it helps believers to endure the suffering and humiliation that occur in the Christian life. Second, unity assures the salvation of all believers. Throughout this letter Paul will urge the Philippians to live according to a cruciform pattern of life that entails the elements of humility and obedience.

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1 I have adopted the term “cruciform” from Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), especially pp. 253-59. In this section Gorman shows that cruciformity is the focus of the letter to the Philippians. From this point forward, when I use the term cruciform I am basing it on Gorman’s use of the term.
Call to Imitation (3:17)

Paul’s call to imitation in Phil 3:17 is the culmination of his discussion to live a life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ. Living a life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ entails adopting the cruciform pattern of life found in the life of Christ. Paul himself adopts this pattern in his own life and for this reason he can call on the Philippians to imitate him. In Phil 3:17 he writes, “Join others in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.” Paul’s use of the term συμμιμηταί emphasizes the purpose of his call to imitation – unity.²

Paul’s call to imitation follows Phil 1:27–3:16, a section in which he presents the Philippians with the cruciform pattern he expects them to imitate. He highlights two concrete examples of this pattern: Christ (2:5-11) and himself (3:8-14). He calls them to imitate this pattern in order to nurture unity within the community.

Each section of the present chapter will address a particular element of Paul’s call to imitation. In 1:27-30 he exhorts the Philippians to unity by urging them to live a life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ. In this passage he addresses the first reason for unity. In 2:1-4 he continues the theme of unity and introduces the first element of the cruciform pattern the Philippians should imitate – humility. He then uses the example of Christ in 2:5-11 to illustrate this cruciform pattern of life.

In 2:12-18 Paul highlights the second reason for unity when he calls the Philippians to work out their salvation. In 3:1-4a he warns of opponents who threaten the unity of the

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church, and he warns the Philippians to be cautious of them. Finally, in 3:4b-16 he turns to his own example to demonstrate how the example of Christ informs his own life and in turn becomes a model for others.

**A Life That Is Worthy of the Gospel of Christ (1:27-30)**

Paul begins his exhortation to the Philippians in 1:27-30. He explains the importance of unity for the sake of the community.

> Only, live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I should come and see you or am absent and hear about you, that you stand firm in one spirit, one soul striving for the faith of the gospel and that you will not be intimidated by those who are your enemies. For this is a sign of their destruction, but of your salvation, and this is from God. This has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for his sake. You have the same struggle, which you saw in me and now you hear I still have. (1:27-30)

In the previous passage (1:12-26) Paul reminded the Philippians of his imprisonment and willingness to suffer so that the gospel may go forth. He informs them that to live is beneficial for them since it allows him to continue to share the gospel. However, to die is gain for him because he would be with Christ. Although he recognizes the advantage of dying, Paul realizes that he must live because of the work that remains to be done. Therefore, he will continue to remain with them for the sake of his gospel.

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3 Some manuscripts including C* D* F G pc b vg*ms read ῧμίν in place of Ὸμίν. Although the change to the first person plural would be reasonable since much of the letter is dedicated to unity, the second person plural occurs in a section where Paul is discussing the life of the Philippians specifically. Therefore, the reading of NA27 is preferred.

4 L. Gregory Bloomquist (*The Function of Suffering in Philippians* [JSNTSS 78; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993] 156) notes that Paul gives up his own desires and continues to live in suffering for the sake of the Philippian community. This both ensures the fruits of his labor and presents the Philippians with a credible example to imitate. On Paul’s choice to remain in the flesh, see also Robert Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms: A Study for their Use in Conflict Settings* (AGJU 10; Leiden: Brill, 1971), 116.
In 1:27-30 Paul prepares for his call to imitation in 3:17. He introduces the theme of unity as an important element of imitation and highlights the first reason why unity is necessary. He begins by calling the Philippians to “live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ.” To live a life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ they must stand united by adopting a cruciform pattern of life.  

The Philippians must stand firm in one spirit, strive with one another in one soul, and not be intimidated by their opponents. Paul’s repeated use of “one” emphasizes the necessity of unity. Here, he introduces the first purpose of their unity, the endurance of suffering and humiliation for the sake of Christ and his gospel. When he urges them to “stand firm in one spirit” he is calling them to share a common purpose. This common purpose is reflected in standing “as one soul striving for the faith of the gospel.” His call for them to “strive together” points to the necessity of unity so that they can remain faithful in the face of persecution.

5 Gerald Hawthorne (Philippians [WBC 43; Waco: Word Books, 1983] 54) notes that following his discussion of life and death in 1:12-26, Paul turns his attention to life by describing what is expected of one who is called to be loyal to faith.


7 See Bonnie B. Thurston and Judith M. Ryan, Philippians and Philemon (SacPag 10; Collegville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 69.

8 According to Hawthorne (Philippians, 57), Paul’s point here is to develop camaraderie, so that they will strive together toward one goal. See also Pfitzner, Paul and the Agon Motif, 116-18; Ralph P. Martin, Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 80-81. Regarding remaining faithful in the face of persecution see Fowl, Story of Christ, 86; Gordon D. Fee, Paul's Letter to the Philippians (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 155.
Paul finds it necessary to urge them to unity because there are enemies who threaten to distract believers from a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Unity is the way in which the community can stand in the face of such intimidation, and it will aid them in facing the suffering that is a part of being a believer in Christ. In light of what Paul has said we can assume that he urges them to unity because of the opponents who live among them. The intimidation caused by the opponents threatens to draw believers away from their faith. His use of “opponents” in 1:28 creates a thematic inclusio with 3:18. Throughout 1:27–3:21 Paul will refer to these opponents three times (1:28; 3:1-4; 3:18). In each instance he will reveal a new element regarding what sets them apart from believers. Within this inclusio Paul will explain how believers should conduct themselves to maintain unity and overcome their opponents.

Paul continues by reminding the Philippians that their unity will be a sign of their opponents’ destruction. But for the Philippians it will serve as a sign of their salvation. Paul’s language suggests that since the unity of the Philippians is a sign of their salvation, then the opponents must be living in disunity and seeking their own selfish interests. Since salvation is a communal event for Paul, the unity of the community is necessary. The opponents, who live selfishly (cf. 3:18-21), cannot hope to attain salvation.

9 A. H. Snyman (“A Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians 3:12-21,” ActaPatByz 17 [2006], 329) suggests that Paul’s call to unity is necessary because the Philippians are facing great adversity and are tempted to turn from the faith.

10 Hawthorne (Philippians, 56) notes that standing firm in one spirit and striving together in faith presents a united front, which is the only way to insure victory. He adds (60) that believers’ willingness to stand up in the face of opposition means that they will suffer. But this suffering is for the sake of Christ (1:27-30). See also Stephen Fowl, “Christology and Ethics in Philippians 2:5-11,” in Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2 (ed. Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 147.
Paul continues to address the theme of suffering in 1:29-30. The Philippians must know that God has graciously granted them not only the privilege of believing in Christ but the privilege of suffering for his sake as well. The two elements are related. If a person believes in Christ, then he knows that he will suffer.\textsuperscript{11} Suffering for the sake of Christ is the same as suffering for the sake of the gospel. We will see in Christ’s and Paul’s pattern of life how each suffered for the sake of the gospel. A life of suffering is a crucial part of living a life based in the cruciform pattern of Christ.\textsuperscript{12} The Philippians unity will help them endure this suffering and remain faithful to the gospel.

Paul turns to his own example stating that the Philippians now share in his struggle (1:30). Therefore, they must maintain an attitude of joy in the midst of suffering (1:12-26).\textsuperscript{13} Paul calls them to stand united in suffering as a community with all who believe. He emphasizes this when he notes that in their struggle they stand united with him. The willingness of believers to suffer is crucial for their imitation of the cruciform pattern of life and for the unity of the community.\textsuperscript{14} Paul’s exhortation in the following passage will show

\textsuperscript{11} Thurston and Ryan (Philippians, 70) note that to believe and to suffer are two sides of the same coin. It is a gift for believers to suffer.

\textsuperscript{12} de Boer (Imitation of Paul, 170) regards the reference to suffering here as Paul setting the stage for his call to imitation. Fee (Philippians, 170) suggests that even their suffering comes from God. Suffering is a sign to believers that God looks upon them with favor.

\textsuperscript{13} For Reinhartz (“Pauline Exhortation,” 400) this is the main point of Paul’s call to imitation. Having the proper attitude allows believers to share in the power of the resurrection.

\textsuperscript{14} It will have an effect on the blessings that come from remaining steadfast to the gospel in the face of suffering. Reinhartz (“Pauline Exhortation,” 401) writes, “If it [suffering] is accepted, it will lead to the blessings of salvation, exaltation, and resurrection.” Bloomquist (Function of Suffering, 158) suggests that their willingness to suffer marks their willingness to give themselves over for the sake of the gospel, just as Paul has done. See also Hansen, Philippians, 101; J. H. Michael, The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928), 19; K. Grayston, The Letters of Paul to the Philippians and to the Thessalonians (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 15.
the Philippians the key elements of the cruciform pattern of life that he expects them to imitate. The exhortation in 2:1-4 will serve as a guide as to how they should live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

**The Cruciform Pattern (2:1-4)**

In this passage Paul presents the Philippians with the first element of the cruciform pattern of life that they are expected to imitate. He also continues to emphasize the importance of unity.

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation from love, if any fellowship in the Spirit, any compassion or sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility value others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. (2:1-4)

This passage is the crux of Paul’s call to imitation. He introduces the first element of the cruciform pattern of life, and he instructs the Philippians how to conduct themselves in order to achieve unity.\(^1\)

The initial part of this passage (2:1-2a) focuses on the necessity of unity. On the basis of the encouragement they enjoy in Christ, the consolation that comes from love, the fellowship in the Spirit, and compassion and sympathy, he exhorts them to make his joy

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\(^1\) According to Fowl (*Story of Christ*, 77), Paul uses this section to support the ethical demands he makes in 1:27-30. The instructions found in 1:27–2:18 are meant to teach believers how they are to live in the midst of hostile surroundings. See also Williams, *Enemies*, 121.
complete. The protasis of 2:1-2 suggests that since these elements exist, it is imperative for the Philippians to respond to his personal appeal.\textsuperscript{16}

This appeal hearkens back to the purpose of his call to imitate him. In order to make his joy complete the Philippians must live as a united community by living a life worthy of the gospel of Christ.\textsuperscript{17} They do so by being of the same mind, by sharing the same love, and being in full accord and one mind. To have the same mind means that they are to share a common purpose (cf. 1:28). That purpose is to stand united and to persevere in faith in order to reach salvation. To have the same love means to be united in selfless love (2:3-4). To be in full accord means to live in harmony with one another. Communal harmony is a crucial element of their life together as believers, as Paul indicates by the use of “same” and “one” in this passage (cf. 2:2).

In 2:3-4 Paul warns the community against attitudes that disrupt this unity. He also introduces the first element for adopting this cruciform pattern of life, which is exemplified in the life of Christ – humility.\textsuperscript{18} He tells the Philippians that they must act without selfish ambition or conceit. These attitudes, which Paul renounces, are the attitudes that can create

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\textsuperscript{16} Hansen (Philippians, 105) points out that the “if” clauses mark the motivation for unity. Regarding this personal appeal, Fee (Philippians, 183) notes that Paul’s life is bound up in their success. Therefore, he calls on them to persevere. See also 2:18.

\textsuperscript{17} According to Fowl (Philippians, 79), encouragement in Christ, consolation from love, fellowship in the Spirit, and sympathy are all specific characteristics of life in Christ. The most important aspect of them is that they are relational. They refer to the interactions that believers have with other believers. Therefore, they promote unity.

\textsuperscript{18} Hawthorne (Philippians, 69) notes that 2:3 serves as the linchpin to the success of the Christian community. See also Williams, Enemies, 126.
disunity among the Philippians. Selfish ambition and conceit are the attitudes of those who seek only their own needs rather than those of the community. It is possible that the opponents, especially if they lived in disunity, exemplified such attitudes. Indeed they may have attempted to intimidate the Philippians through their selfish ambition and conceit. If so, their lifestyle would have been a threat to those who strove to live as a united community. The Philippian community will not be united if these attitudes take root among its members.

Instead of living a life of selfish ambition and conceit, the Philippians must conduct themselves in humility in order to live a life worthy of the gospel. Such humility will manifest itself in self-renunciation. Living in humility leads to valuing others as better than oneself. It creates a selfless attitude, which manifests itself in surrendering one’s prerogatives and seeking the interests of others rather than one’s own. In order to attain unity the Philippians must cultivate humility, which will enable them to set aside their selfish concerns for the sake of the community. Living in humility is the cruciform pattern that they see in the examples of Christ and Paul, and it is the model that Paul expects them to imitate.

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19 Hopper (“Pauline Concept,” 152) notes that Paul is concerned with their pride and the toll that it is taking on the unity of the church. His purpose in calling them to humility is to recall them to unity. On the attitudes of selfish ambition and conceit as the cause of disunity, see also Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 97; Williams, *Enemies*, 121.

20 Hawthorne (*Philippians*, 68) writes, “Unity cannot coexist with individualism or partisanship.” See also Fee, *Philippians*, 187-89. He suggests that true unity is found in considering the needs of others over one’s own. This is the safest way to right relationships and unity. Thurston and Ryan (*Philippians*, 76) suggest that Paul is urging the Philippians to climb down from “the throne of self” so that they can be like-minded with Christ. They must “unthrone” for the good of others and the community. Fowl (*Philippians*, 84) notes that Paul is urging them to avoid behaviors that cause an inflated sense of self.

21 See Kurz, “Kenotic Imitation,” 103. Hawthorne (*Philippians*, 79) writes “humble, self-sacrificing service to one another done in love is a must for a Christian disciple who would live as a Christian disciple should.” This example is found not only in Christ but also in Paul. See Fowl, *Philippians*, 85.
When he calls them to share the same love, then, he is summoning them to live in humility, viewing the needs of others as more important than their own.22 By turning their attention from themselves to others, believers will live in selfless unity through love.23

A lifestyle of selfish ambition and conceit runs counter to the lifestyle necessary to live as a believer. Selfish ambition and conceit seek only what is best for the individual, and this creates disunity within the community. Seeking unity through humility will help the Philippians to overcome the opponents. For believers to attain unity, however, they must humble themselves by seeking the interests of others.24

**The Christ Hymn (2:5-11)**

Paul now turns to the example of Christ. His purpose is to give the Philippians an illustration of one who lived according to this cruciform pattern. Paul will also address a second element of the cruciform pattern, obedience.

Let25 the same mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but

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22 Fowl (*Story of Christ*, 88) notes that having the same love means turning one’s attention from the self to others. Love then is “directed at a single aim.” See also Jean-Francois Collange, *L’Épître de Saint Paul aux Philippiens* (CNT 10a; Neuchatel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1973), 79. This will be the same selfless love that they see in the example of Christ. See Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 68; Fee, *Philippians*, 185.

23 This selfless unity is based upon selfless love on the part of believers. See Hopper, “Pauline Concept,” 153. Fowl (*Story of Christ*, 88-89) also notes the importance of a selfless unity. He writes, “Paul’s claim thus far is that if the Philippians are to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, then they must remain steadfast in their faith, united in selfless love and concern for one another.”

24 According to Stanley (“Imitation in Paul's Letters,” 137) such attitudes find their basis in the gospel. Obedience to the gospel will assist them in realizing their salvation as a community.

25 Some manuscripts including P^46^ R^2^ D F G P 075. 0278. 1739 1881. Μ lat sy^b^ read γὰρ at the beginning of this verse. Despite the manuscript evidence for reading “for” I have omitted the word because the text itself does not require it. Metzger (*Textual Commentary*, 545) notes that a majority of the committee was convinced that had the connective been there in the original, there would be no reason for it to have been
emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being in human form, he humbled himself, being obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted him, and gave to him the name that is above all names, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (2:5-11).

In this passage Paul turns to the example of Christ in order to illustrate the exhortation he presented in 2:1-4. It is Christ who embodies the cruciform pattern, and it is by imitating his example that the Philippians can maintain unity within the community.

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26 Within this passage there appears to be a Christ-Adam typology. A discussion of this, however, would go far beyond the scope of this chapter. However, we cannot overlook the textual variant here that may have been influenced by such typology. Some manuscripts including \( \text{P}^{16} \) \( \text{t vg}^{\text{ms}} \) \( \text{mcion}^{\text{T}} \) \( \text{Cyp} \) read the singular \( \alpha \nu \theta \rho \omega \pi ου \). This reading seems to suggest that some scribes were convinced that Paul was referring to one man in particular, Adam, when he said that Christ took human likeness. Within the context of the passage I am more willing to suggest that Paul has in mind the overall form of humanity and not just one particular human. The context serves a more universal purpose; therefore, the plural is to be preferred.

27 Some manuscripts including \( \text{D F G} \) \( \Psi \) 075. 0278. 1881 \( \text{R} \); \( \text{Cl}^{\text{ex}} \) \( \text{Thd} \) do not read the article τό before \( \alpha νομα \). The scribes of the Textus Receptus and the so-called Western texts may have been attempting to suggest that Christ was given an unspecified name. Some scholars, including Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 238-39), suggest that it is the title Lord that God gives to Jesus as the name above all names. However, it is clear from the proceeding verse that the name that is to be the name above all names is “Jesus.” The purpose of this is to connect the pre-existent Christ with the earthly Jesus. Therefore the text of the NA is preferred. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 546.

28 Some manuscripts including \( \text{A'} \) \( \text{F G} \) 1505* \( \text{pc b g} \) \( \text{vg}^{\text{ms}} \) \( \text{sa}^{\text{ms}} \); \( \text{Or}_{\text{lat}}^{\text{p}} \) do not read Χριστός. The so-called Western texts and those that were influenced by them appear to be attempting to clarify the passage by having v. 11 read like v. 10. However, the inclusion of Christ fits the theological context. Also, there is no easy explanation for the omission. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 546.

In 2:5 Paul uses “same mind” to create a verbal link to the previous passage (2:1-2). By this verbal link, readers understand that when Paul calls them to have the same mind, he is thinking of the example of Christ in 2:6-8. They are to orient their communal life in a way that is fitting for those who live within the realm of Christ. This will require both the elements of humility and obedience.

The hymn stands in a paraenetic context and Christ’s example contains a strong ethical emphasis. In the hymn (2:6-11) Jesus represents the two elements necessary for living a life worthy of the gospel (cf. 2:3-4). First, Paul writes, “Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (2:6-7). In this verse Paul illustrates Christ’s humility through his self-renunciation. Even though he

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stand as an ethical appeal on the part of Paul, I will argue that the context of the passage, within the larger scope of Philippians, indicates this passage as an ethical appeal on the part of Paul.

Kurz (“Kenotic Imitation,” 105) notes that the immediate context for this hymn is an exhortation to community harmony. According to Kurz, this is accomplished by avoiding competitive self-promotion, which Paul warns against in 2:3-4. See also David J. MacLeod, “Imitation of the Incarnation of Christ: An Exposition of Philippians 2:5-8,” Bibliotheca Sacra 158 (2001), 310; Castelli, Imitating Paul, 96.

30 See Fowl, Story of Christ, 91. Hansen (Philippians, 113) notes that this is what Paul means when he calls them to be like-minded.


32 It should be noted that Paul recognizes that there is no way in which believers can imitate the redemptive work of Christ. His call to imitate the example of Christ focuses on Christ’s humility and obedience. See Stanley, “Imitation in Paul's Letters,” 137; Hawthorne, “The Imitation of Christ,” 169; Hooker, “Philippians,” 155; Williams, Enemies, 69; Clarke, “Leadership,” 350. Hooker (“Philippians,” 154) suggests that the mark of Christian ethics for Paul is that believers must conform themselves to true existence, which belongs to those who are in Christ.

33 Paul’s reference to Christ’s self-renunciation further strengthens his exhortation to the Philippians in 2:4 to look to the interests of others. See Brant, “The Place of mimēsis,” 296. A major purpose of this Christ hymn, according to Brant, is to illustrate the ethical principle of self-renunciation as the way in which the Philippians should conduct themselves. See also Hansen, Philippians, 116, 154. Martin (Carmen Christi, 94) argues that it is on the good example of others that the Philippians should focus.
was in form equal to God, he emptied himself to take the form of a slave.\textsuperscript{34} By letting go of his prerogative and by not exploiting his position, he placed himself at the disposal of others.\textsuperscript{35} Christ, in his humility, valued the needs of others as greater than his own; therefore, he emptied himself for the sake of others.

Paul emphasizes Christ’s humility further when he writes, “Being found in human form, he humbled himself.” Christ, in humbling himself, does not seek glory and status. Instead, he lowers himself to the lowest point by becoming a slave. This transition from highest to lowest serves as an exemplar of humility. Christ values others to the point of abasing himself in order to serve them. Paul’s purpose, then, is to illustrate the kind of humility that he expects from the Philippians (2:4).\textsuperscript{36} They must empty themselves to the point that they put themselves at the disposal of others, valuing their needs as greater than their own.

Christ’s humility leads to the second element of the pattern – obedience. Christ not only humbles himself by becoming a slave, he humbles himself to the point that he becomes “obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” His obedience includes suffering and humiliation. Christ, upon humbling himself, remains obedient to God’s call in his life and endures the suffering and humiliation that accompanies death on the cross. The crucifixion

\textsuperscript{34} Bloomquist (Function of Suffering, 166) suggests that Christ taking the form of a slave points out that he is one who has no apparent power to escape his inevitable destiny. See also Hansen, Philippians, 148.

\textsuperscript{35} See MacLeod, “Imitation,” 319; N. T. Wright, “ἀπεισιμός and the Meaning of Philippians 2.5-11,” JTS 37 (1986), 245. See also Fowl, Philippians, 96; Hawthorne, Philippians, 86.

\textsuperscript{36} Dodd ("Story of Christ," 160) suggests that it is Christ’s humility that provides the mindset that the Philippians are to emulate in their community relations. Fee (Philippians, 176) also notes that Paul’s reference to humility here is a direct response to the vices he pointed out in 2:3. Whereas the Philippians need to display humility, Christ is humble. See also Hansen, Philippians, 121; Fowl, Philippians, 99.
stands as the lowest point of his suffering and humiliation. Although Christ had the means to avoid such suffering, he remains obedient for the sake of the gospel. God’s true character and power are revealed in Christ’s obedient act on the cross.

Christ stands as the ultimate example of one who adopts the cruciform pattern in his life. Christ empties and humbles himself to the point that he becomes a slave, remaining obedient unto death, in order to serve the needs of others. In this passage and the passage that precedes it, Paul presents two ways of thinking, one that is selfish and one that is selfless. The selfish attitude is the one that seeks its own selfish ambition. The selfless attitude is exemplified by Christ in his self-renunciation. In Christ’s case, he humbled himself to the point of death on a cross so that the gracious gift of salvation could become available to all. Here, Paul implies that Christ’s obedient death is for the sake of others. Instead of abandoning his role in the face of suffering and humiliation, he remained obedient in order to bring salvation to all. Everything that Christ did in bringing salvation is the opposite of the selfish ambition that Paul censures in 2:3. In order to overcome these

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37 See Hansen, *Philippians*, 156.

38 Hawthorne (*Philippians*, 89) notes that the crucifixion serves as the pinnacle of Christ’s humiliation. See also Fee (*Philippians*, 210) who suggests that the real humiliation here is that one who was God could take on this vocation. See also Fowl, “Christology,” 143. Bloomquist (*Function of Suffering*, 163) notes that 2:6-8 develops Christ’s self-humiliation. It contrasts with his status as slave to Lord. See also Michael, *Philippians*, 92; Collange, *Philippians*, 71.

39 Williams (*Enemies*, 133) notes that the reference to the cross serves as a contrast to those who are not willing to adopt a similar attitude of obedience and self-sacrifice. Humility and obedience lead to the cross.

attitudes (2:3-4) and live as a united community, the Philippians must adopt this pattern found in the example of Christ.\[41\]

The suffering and humiliation that Christ experienced is not the end of the hymn however. In the second half of the hymn (2:9-11) Paul states that after Christ’s obedient death on the cross, God exalted him.\[42\] Paul uses Christ’s exaltation following his humiliation to teach the Philippians that in the Christian life, the way of exaltation is the way of humiliation.\[43\] This stands in sharp contrast to attitudes of selfish ambition and conceit. In order to be exalted the Philippians must let go of selfish desires and humble themselves so that God can raise them up. God’s exaltation of Christ was the outcome of Christ’s obedience.\[44\] Because of his obedience and willingness to serve others he was vindicated by God. The second part of the hymn, then, serves to encourage the Philippians that they will be vindicated if they adopt the cruciform pattern of Christ in their lives.\[45\]

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\[41\] Regarding Christ’s example Hawthorne (“The Imitation of Christ,” 166) writes that believers are to cut “the cloth of one’s life according to the pattern for authentic living that has been given by Jesus Christ and so following his example with respect to one’s attitude and actions.”

\[42\] Paul’s reference to Jesus as being the name above all names is meant to connect the preexistent Christ to the earthly Jesus. See Hooker, “Philippians,” 154; Hurtado, “Jesus as Lordly Example,” 121; MacLeod, “Imitation,” 311. For those who see “Lord” as the name above all names, see O’Brien, \textit{Philippians}, 238-39.


\[44\] See Hawthorne, \textit{Philippians}, 90. Fowl (“Christology,” 143) also notes this. He adds that the exaltation serves as an affirmation that Christ’s disposition and actions are appropriate to one who is equal to God.

\[45\] Fee (\textit{Philippians}, 228) remarks that Christ serves as the forerunner of eschatological glory (3:11-14; 3:20-21). Those who suffer now will be transformed at the parousia. See also Thurston and Ryan, \textit{Philippians}, 91.
“Work Out Your Own Salvation” (2:12-18)

In this passage Paul points out the second reason why unity is necessary. He also calls the Philippians to imitate the obedience of Christ’s example. The purpose of their obedience is to further the unity within the community.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, just as always you have obeyed me, not just in my presence but all the more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For God is the one who works in you and the one who enables you to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling and disputing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God within this crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine as a light in the world. Hold fast to the word of life, that I may boast in the day of Christ, that I did not run in vain or toil in vain. But even if I am poured out upon the altar for your faith, I rejoice and I rejoice with all of you. For the same cause do you rejoice, and you rejoice with me (2:12-18).

This passage serves as application of what came before. Following Paul’s exhortation to emulate the model that they find in Christ, Paul reminds the Philippians that they have always obeyed.

Paul’s reference to obedience in this passage recalls Christ’s obedience in 2:5-11. God exalted Christ, who was obedient in the face of suffering unto death by emptying himself and humbling himself for the sake of others. Christ’s obedience is what the Philippians must imitate. Just as Christ remained obedient in the face of suffering and

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Fowl (Story of Christ, 92) writes that Paul uses this section to “support the view that God will vindicate the Philippians if they adopt the Christ-like virtues prescribed in 2:2-4 and remain steadfast in their faith.” Just as God saved the obedient, humiliated, and suffering Christ, so God will do the same for believers.

46 A few manuscripts including B 33. 1241 VG, Ambst do not read oξ. According to Metzger (Textual Commentary, 546), the probable explanation for its omission is an oversight on the part of the scribe. This explanation seems to be sufficient for the text.

47 See Fee, Philippians, 229.

48 On the necessity of obedience see Fee, Philippians, 226; Thurston and Ryan, Philippians, 93.
humiliation, so the Philippians must remain obedient so that they can “work out” their own salvation.\(^\text{49}\)

The Philippians will “work out” their salvation by adopting a cruciform pattern of life. Paul is not suggesting that what they do earns their salvation since salvation is a gift freely given by God. What he means by “work out your own salvation” is to restore the harmony in the community.\(^\text{50}\) He is referring to the “present ‘outworking’ of their eschatological salvation within the believing community in Philippi.”\(^\text{51}\) This entails committing themselves to a life of humility and obedience. Just as Christ subordinated his own prerogatives to bring salvation to humanity, so believers must subordinate their prerogatives in order to attain salvation as a community.

Paul tells the Philippians that it is God that provides them with the desire to do what is right. He writes, “For God is the one who works in you and the one who enables you to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Paul informs the Philippians that their desire to subordinate their prerogatives for the sake of others is the result of God working within them. It is through these actions that they work out their salvation. God grants them the will and the desire to want to seek the needs of others over their own. In conducting themselves in this way they are not earning their salvation but working it out through what they do. Paul notes that they work for God’s “good pleasure.” What he means by this is that when they

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\(^\text{49}\) Fee (Philippians, 229) suggests that Paul’s present concern is their obedience. He continues (233) by saying that faith in Christ is equivalent to obedience in Christ, which means coming totally under his lordship.

\(^\text{50}\) See Brant, “The Place of mimēsis,” 297. Hawthorne (“The Imitation of Christ,” 166) suggests that the pattern that Paul lays out is a matter of orthopraxis not orthodoxy.

\(^\text{51}\) Fee, Philippians, 235; n. 23. See also Thurston and Ryan, Philippians, 94-98; Williams, Enemies, 136.
conduct themselves in humility and obedience they bring pleasure to God, who desires them to do good.

Paul emphasizes the second purpose of unity, to ensure salvation. When Paul states “your salvation” he is not thinking of it in the singular. This is a communal task. Therefore a crucial part of living out their salvation is living in unity with one another. The true path to salvation is through unity. Paul emphasizes this when he tells them to “do all things without grumbling and disputing,” since grumbling and disputing do not promote unity. These negative attitudes along with the attitudes of selfish ambition and conceit are not suitable for living a life worthy of the gospel. Paul, therefore, calls the Philippians to live in a way that shows that they have responded positively to the power of God.

Paul continues to exhort the Philippians by urging them to hold “fast to the word of life, that I may boast in the day of Christ, that I did not run in vain or toil in vain.” His exhortation to “hold fast” to the word of life echoes his call for them to strive for the faith of the gospel in one soul (1:28). Again, he refers to the necessity for unity in the face of opposition to remain steadfast in the faith. This unity allows them to work out their

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52 Hawthorne (Philippians, 98) adds that the entire church is spiritually ill (2:3-4); Therefore, the church as a whole must take the necessary steps to restore itself to wholeness. Understanding this call to work out their salvation in an individual sense would go against 2:4. See also Hansen, Philippians, 172; Fee, Philippians, 229.

53 The Philippians’ goal can only be reached through a coordinated effort. This is why Paul states “Join others in imitating me.” He knows that it will be impossible for them to do this alone. They must bend their wills to the will of others. See Brant, “The Place of mimēsis,” 297.

54 Fee (Philippians, 162; 243) notes that selfish ambition, vain conceit, and grumbling are all attitudes that do not keep with heavenly citizenship. If the Philippians are to be citizens of heaven, they must let go of these attitudes and adopt attitudes of humility, selflessness, and obedience. Hawthorne (Philippians, 99) remarks that grumbling promotes ill will within the community. It does not aid them in attaining harmony.
salvation. It also allows Paul to boast in the day of Christ. Paul’s success is intimately related to the Philippians ability to remain steadfast in the faith.

**The Lifestyle of the Opponents (3:1-4)**

In this passage Paul begins to contrast communal harmony and individualism. He emphasizes the need for unity in the face of opposition in order to safeguard the salvation of the Philippians.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome for me, for it is a safeguard to you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware the mutilators of the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh, even though I too have reason for confidence in the flesh (3:1-4a).

Paul’s purpose in warning the Philippians against the opponents is to safeguard the Philippians. When he says that he wants to protect them, he is referring to their salvation. The opponents, through their selfish attitudes, threaten to bring disunity to the community.

Paul once more calls attention to the opponents whom he addressed in 1:27-30. He warns the Philippians to beware of the opponents, to whom he refers to as “dogs,” “evil workers,” and “mutilators of the flesh.” Paul warns the Philippians of them because they advocate circumcisions. This is why Paul calls them “mutilators of the flesh.” They concern themselves with customs instead of the things of the Spirit.

Paul’s harsh language reflects how dangerous the opponents are. Here Paul reveals how the opponents conduct themselves. He writes that those who imitate him “worship the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.” This could suggest that from Paul’s perspective, those whom he describes here place their confidence in
the flesh inasmuch as they advocate circumcision. They pride themselves on their pedigree, and circumcision serves as a sign of that pedigree.

Paul warns the Philippians against putting their confidence in the flesh so that they will safeguard their salvation. In order to do so they must adhere to the pattern that Paul lays out in 2:1-4 and follow the example of Christ in 2:5-11. By living according to this pattern they will live as the true circumcision. This is a circumcision of the heart in which believers put their confidence in Christ and in the service of the Spirit.

In this section Paul begins to distinguish “we” from them. While the opponents are mutilators of the flesh, believers are the true circumcision. Those who are the true circumcision are the united community who serve the Spirit of God and boast in Christ. Here Paul establishes a distinction that he will clarify in 3:17-21 to show how believers differ from the enemies. He will explain how, through their individualistic manner of life, the enemies of the cross threaten communal harmony, drawing the community away from salvation. This distinction is meant to give believers two examples that can be imitated. There are those who live a life worthy of the gospel (we) and those who live according to the flesh (they). The “we” know their end to be salvation, while “they” will meet destruction.

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55 Bloomquist (Function of Suffering, 179) believes that the purpose of 3:1-11 is to battle those who prize status according to the flesh. For Paul they have fallen short of existence in Christ.

56 Nicolet (“Concept d'imitation,” 407) argues that Paul’s call to imitation sits within a polemical context of “we” against “them.” See also Snyman, “Rhetorical Analysis,” 342; Castelli, Imitating Paul, 95.

57 Fee (Philippians, 298) suggests that 3:3 is the principle sentence in Paul’s present appeal and its theology will be explicated in 3:4-14.

58 Castelli (Imitating Paul, 95) notes on the striking difference between the two fates.
The fact that believers live in Christ by the power of the Spirit identifies them as the eschatological people of God.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{Paul’s Example (3:4b-14)}

Paul turns to his own example to show how he imitates the example that Christ models in 2:5-11. Paul’s purpose is to show how the example of Christ informs his own life and makes him a model to be imitated.\textsuperscript{60}

If anyone thinks he is confident in the flesh, I am all the more confident: circumcised on the eighth day, from the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, according to the law a Pharisee, according to zeal, a persecutor of the church, according to righteousness based on the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I considered as loss for the sake of Christ. But what is more I also consider all to be loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I consider them as rubbish, in order to gain Christ and be found in him, not having my righteousness, the one from the law, but the one through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead (3:4b-14).

In this passage Paul explains why he can boast in the flesh, if he wishes. As he explained in the last passage, the opponents boast in the flesh instead of in Christ. Therefore, Paul begins by stating that if there is anyone who has the right to boast in the flesh, he has the right all the

\textsuperscript{59} See Fee, \textit{Philippians}, 300.

\textsuperscript{60} See Fee, \textit{Philippians}, 303. Fowl (\textit{Philippians}, 152) suggests that Paul’s presentation of himself in chap. 3 is meant to present the skills, habits, and way of life he desires to see formed. He is calling the Philippians to adopt a particular pattern of reasoning appropriate for those who are in Christ. Bloomquist (\textit{Function of Suffering}, 167) notes that Paul uses his own example to establish the grounds for his appeal. He does not want the Philippians to think that he calls them to do anything that he himself has not already done. He continues (p. 168) by stating that in Paul the experiences of the Christ-type become visible. The fate of the Christ-type is expressed in 2:6-11 and Paul fully expects to suffer the same fate. See also Furnish, \textit{Theology and Ethics}, 221; Collange, \textit{Philippiens}, 91; D. Patte, \textit{Paul's Faith and the Power of the Gospel: A Structural Introduction to the Pauline Letters} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 177.
more. He was circumcised on the eighth day, a Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, zealous above all others, and righteous according to the law.\textsuperscript{61} He held a privileged position within Judaism. He had achieved all things according to the flesh, even a righteousness based on the law.

Paul remarks, however, that upon encountering Christ he now considers all of these “gains” as a loss.\textsuperscript{62} Although he has the right to boast in the flesh, he has surrendered his privileged position because of Christ.\textsuperscript{63} In fact, Paul goes further and notes that he considers “all” to be loss because of the “surpassing worth of knowing Christ.” For him there is nothing more important than knowing Christ. Unlike the enemies who pride themselves on their pedigree, Paul forgoes his former status in order to know Christ.

Paul writes that it is for Christ’s sake “that I suffered the loss of all things, and I consider them as rubbish, in order to gain Christ and be found in him.” He notes that he voluntarily writes off everything that appeared to be an asset, in order to receive the true gain, which is Christ.\textsuperscript{64} While he once counted on his privilege and position to fulfill the law

\textsuperscript{61} Regarding righteousness according of the law, Fee (Philippians, 296) notes that for the enemies, to whom he refers to as Judaizers, it is the means and gauge of righteousness. For the enemies as Judaizers see Betz, Nachfolger, 146; Gunther Bornkamm, “Der Philippbrief als paulinische Briefsammlung,” in Neotestamentica et Patristica (ed. W. C. van Unnik; NovTSup 6; Leiden: Brill, 1962), 195.

\textsuperscript{62} According to Dodd (“Story of Christ,” 160), Paul’s self-exemplification in 3:6-17 is related to 2:6-11 by being “an account of how his perspective or point of view was transformed through his encounter with Christ.” See also Hawthorne, Philippians, 136.

\textsuperscript{63} Paul’s language would suggest that the enemies he addressed in the previous passage pride themselves on their pedigree. This is why Paul finds it necessary to address his own pedigree. See Hawthorne, Philippians, 123. He notes (p. 130) that Paul compares himself to his opponents and shows that his pedigree is far superior to theirs.

\textsuperscript{64} See De Boer, Imitation of Paul, 183; Fee, Philippians, 320; Williams, Enemies, 183. Hawthorne (Philippians, 135-39) agrees on this point. He adds that Paul knows that these things were gains for him. His pedigree contributed to his well-being.
as his way to attain righteousness, he now knows that the righteousness that comes from God can only come through faith in Christ.\textsuperscript{65} It is because of his faith that he empties himself of all he valued for the sake of Christ and his gospel.

That Paul suffers the loss of all things reinforces that suffering and humiliation are an integral aspect of gaining Christ and being “found in him.”\textsuperscript{66} The suffering comes from losing all that one holds to be important. It goes against basic human nature. However, it is in this element that we begin to see how Paul’s life is informed by the example of Christ in the Christ hymn. Paul imitates Christ’s kenotic example by forgoing the status he once held for the sake of Christ and his gospel.\textsuperscript{67} Humility requires that, like Christ, Paul place himself as the disposal of others by becoming a servant as Christ did (cf. 1:1). Just as Christ suffered for others, Paul suffers the loss of all things for the sake of Christ. His willingness to suffer the loss of all things for Christ is the same as suffering for the sake of the gospel. It is by becoming humble as Christ was humble that he imitates Christ’s humility.

Paul’s goal in imitating Christ’s humility is threefold. He writes that he wishes to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings by being

\begin{itemize}
\item In order to gain Christ, Paul must first empty himself of all that he once gloried. He is modeling here the same behavior he witnesses in Christ. See Thurston and Ryan, \textit{Philippians}, 124-27.
\item \textsuperscript{65} See Hawthorne, \textit{Philippians}, 128-30. He notes that Paul’s assets can serve as grounds for righteousness. However, even though he has every reason to rely on himself, he will not do so. Instead, he relies on the salvific work of Christ as his means for righteousness. See also Williams, \textit{Enemies}, 239; J. Gnilka, \textit{Der Philipperbrief} (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), 186-89.
\item \textsuperscript{66} De Boer, \textit{Imitation of Paul}, 183.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Hopper (“Pauline Concept,” 154) notes that Paul’s teaching on Christ’s kenosis and his own kenosis form the basis for his call to imitation. Bloomquist (\textit{Function of Suffering}, 167) notes that Paul and Christ act the same way in the same situation. They empty themselves and endure suffering for the sake of others.
\end{itemize}
conformed to his death.” First, Paul says that he suffers the loss of all things so that he may “know” Christ. This knowledge is intimate and experiential whereby Paul is in Christ. As one who is in Christ, Paul’s lifestyle must reflect this. Therefore, it is necessary for him to conform himself to the cruciform pattern he sees in Christ’s life.

Second, not only does Paul want to know Christ intimately, he also wants to know the power of his resurrection. Here, Paul is referring to the salvation event that takes place at the resurrection. It is through the resurrection that Paul can know Christ and become perfect in him. He can know the power of the resurrection now. However, its full effect will only be realized at the parousia. But there is a cost to knowing the power of the resurrection. Paul must first know the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. Being a believer in Christ and having experienced the power of the resurrection means that Paul is required to know the sufferings of Christ as well. This is not to say that Paul’s sufferings are the same as Christ’s, or that

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68 For Fee (Philippians, 313) this is the ultimate goal as expressed by Paul. Betz (Nachfolge, 146) argues that knowing the power of the resurrection and the fellowship of Christ’s suffering and being conformed to Christ’s death corresponds directly to righteousness from God through faith.

69 See Williams, Enemies, 185.

70 Nicolet (“Concept dimitation,” 408) argues that, for Paul, the crucifixion is happening presently. Therefore, he lives in the suffering in order to receive salvation. Andrew Perriman (“The Pattern of Christ’s Sufferings: Colossians 1:24 and Philippians 3:10-11,” TynBul 42 [1991], 69) suggests that involvement in Christ’s suffering is a present experience that stretches into the future. However, Paul’s hope of resurrection encourages him to continue to share in the sufferings. Fee (Philippians, 314) notes that for Paul knowing Christ is a two-sided reality. It includes both Christ’s suffering and resurrection. See also Bloomquist, Function of Suffering, 180.

71 Hawthorne (Philippians, 144) notes that the power of the resurrected Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings are different aspects of the same experience. See also Hansen, Philippians, 243; Williams, Enemies, 188; Joseph Fitzmyer, “‘To Know Him and the Power of His Resurrection’ (Phil 3.10),” in Melanges Bibliques en hommage au R. P. Beda Rigaux (ed. A. Descamps and A. de Halleux; Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), 421-25. See Nicolet, “Concept dimitation,” 408. He suggests that believers must accept the judgment of the cross on their lives. The suffering that is part of being a believer is a necessary condition of their salvation. Fee (Philippians, 333) adds that the way forward for believers is through suffering. De Boer (Imitation of Paul, 171) notes that the life in Christ is different from obedience to the Law in that it requires vigorous activity and struggle. It is not a passive event.
they have the same value. However, his sufferings are intimately related to Christ’s.72

Paul’s point in including his willingness to continue to endure suffering is to show the Philippians that suffering is necessary for working out their salvation.73 In order to know the resurrection they must also know Christ’s sufferings. What Paul states here is that he humbles himself by divesting himself of his prerogatives, counting all things as loss so that he can be perfect in Christ, knowing the salvific power of his resurrection.

Paul’s third purpose in imitating Christ’s humility is to conform himself to Christ’s death. But how does Paul do this? Does this mean that, like Christ, he too will suffer crucifixion? It does not. Instead, this statement is related to the discussion of Christ’s obedience in 2:8. It is here that Paul shows how he imitates the second element of the cruciform pattern of Christ’s life. Christ was obedient unto death, even death on the cross. Being conformed to Christ’s death, therefore, means that Paul must become obedient as was Christ. He must become obedient to the gospel, which entails a life of humility.74 His obedience in the face of suffering is a crucial element of his imitation.

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72 See Fee, Philippians, 333. He writes, “Through our suffering the significance of Christ’s suffering is manifested to the world.” Williams (Enemies, 73) notes that there is a mimetic nature to their sufferings. Paul’s sufferings mirror Christ’s. See also H. Windisch, Paulus und Christus (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1934), 235. Patte (Paul's Faith, 173) notes that Paul’s experience of suffering is descriptively similar to Christ’s but not ontologically.

73 See L. Gregory Bloomquist, “Subverted by Joy: Suffering and Joy in Paul's Letter to the Philippians,” Int 61 (2007) 276; Hansen, Philippians, 245. Fee (Philippians, 332) notes that Christ’s resurrection grants Paul a unique perspective on his own sufferings. It is a reminder that he must endure suffering “as well as an empowering presence whereby the suffering was transformed into intimate fellowship with Christ himself.”

74 This is Paul saying yes to the life in Christ. Hawthorne (Philippians, 148) notes that here Paul is bringing his life in line with his position in Christ. He renounces his own selfish desires, and says yes to “Christ who was calling him to conform to his death by daily taking up his cross in self-sacrificing service to others.” Hansen (Philippians, 247) notes that the reference to obedience is a reference to the suffering. “Living in Christ means living the story of Christ, being conformed to the pattern of Christ’s narrative.” This includes Christ’s obedience. Fee (Philippians, 334) notes that Christ’s sufferings are not sufferings in general but those that
Paul’s humility and obedience have one purpose: the resurrection from the dead.\(^{75}\) He hopes that just as Christ was vindicated by God after his humble obedience in the face of suffering so too will he be vindicated.\(^{76}\) This is the goal of believers’ imitation of a cruciform pattern of life. By adopting the cruciform pattern of Christ in his life and conforming himself to Christ’s death, Paul believes that he too will be exalted. The sufferings that Paul will endure by conforming himself to Christ’s death will have a positive result.\(^{77}\) This is a lifelong process, since the resurrection of believers will not occur until the parousia (3:20-21).\(^{78}\)

In this passage Paul shows how he exemplifies the cruciform pattern of life that Christ exemplifies in 2:5-11. His life then becomes an example that the Philippians can imitate so that they will live a life that is worthy of the gospel. Both Christ and Paul culminated in his death, and thus were for the sake of others. Therefore, participation in Christ’s sufferings means to “become like him in his death . . . which most certainly means suffering in the same way on behalf of the gospel, thus for the sake of others.” However, being conformed to his death includes the whole of his life, not just his sufferings. Being conformed means to live a life in such a way that their lives bear the same likeness of Christ. See also Fowl, *Philippians*, 155.

\(^{75}\) Fee (*Philippians*, 335-36) notes that resurrection from the dead marks the full future realization of knowing Christ in the present. However, there are two ways in which the future can be realized. It can be realized either through resurrection or transformation at the parousia. The point is that either way the present involves knowing the power of his resurrection as a key to participating in his sufferings. Regarding the notion of being “conformed” to Christ’s death see Collange, *Philippiens*, 132.

\(^{76}\) Randall Otto (“‘If Possible I May Attain the Resurrection from the Dead’ [Philippians 3:11],” *CBQ* 57 [1995], 330) notes that Paul’s endurance of persecution is rooted in his certainty that he will be with Christ (cf. 1:27-30).

\(^{77}\) See de Boer, *Imitation of Paul*, 183. He writes, “The example lies in the total and continuing humiliation of self in favor of gaining Christ and the goal in him.”

surrendered their self-interest in service to others. Christ has already been vindicated, and Paul now awaits his vindication.

**Striving toward the Goal (3:12-16)**

Following his discussion regarding his imitation of Christ’s example, Paul notes that he continues to strive toward the goal of the resurrection.

Not that I have already seized it or already reached the goal; but I press on to seize it, because Christ Jesus has seized me. Brothers and sisters, I myself do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind me, I strive for what is before me. I press forward toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature have the same mind; and if you think differently, also this God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained (3:12-16).

Paul wants the Philippians to realize that he has not yet reached perfection. His statement regarding perfection in 3:15-16 is meant to respond to those who claim that they have already attained perfection. They exemplify this claim in their lifestyle, which Paul denounces in 3:20-21.

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79 Hawthorne (*Philippians*, 159) remarks that Paul calls them to imitate his self-denying, self-giving acts, his willingness to suffer for the sake of others.

80 Some manuscripts including P, D* (F G) (b); (IrLat) Ambst read ἐλαβόν ῥήνῃ δεδικαίωμαι ῥήνῃ τετελείωμαι (“I have already attained righteousness or already attained perfection”). The inclusion of any discussion regarding righteousness, although it could be suggested from the context of 3:4-14, does not suit the purpose of Paul’s passage here. He is more concerned with the perfectionists and that they have stopped striving for the goal of Christian perfection, which is the resurrection from the dead. Therefore, the reading of the NA is preferred.

81 The manuscripts L, 326. 1241* pc; Cl read the indicative instead of the subjunctive here. The context of the verse clearly calls for the subjunctive. Therefore, the reading of the NA is preferred.

82 See Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 155; Williams, *Enemies*, 206-7. Betz (*Nachfolge*, 147) suggests that Paul’s point in this passage is to win those who believe they have already attained perfection over to his point of view.
Paul has not yet reached his goal of resurrection from the dead. This is an ongoing process and he is still pressing on to the goal. He presses on in order that he may seize the prize because he has been seized by Christ. What he means is that his striving for the prize is a result of being in Christ. In 3:12-16 Paul highlights the tension between his present situation and his hope for the future. Here he emphasizes the “already” but “not yet.” Because of the resurrection of Christ believers already experience something of the power of the resurrection in their lives. However, the full experience of this power will not occur until the parousia. Therefore, believers must endure suffering and humiliation in order to pursue the goal of the resurrection. Paul must continue to live out his salvation by conducting himself in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ. That he is continuing to press forward is meant to serve as a point of encouragement. Although they are presently suffering, the Philippians must continue to adhere to the pattern, pressing toward the goal, so that they can share in the prize.

Paul writes, “Brothers and sisters, I myself do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind me, I strive for what is before me.”

Paul’s reference to “what lies behind” him refers to his position of prominence (3:4b-6). He

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83 According to Snyman (“Rhetorical Analysis,” 332) the dominant rhetorical strategy of 3:12-21 is to encourage the Philippians to persevere in pursuing the goal of gaining Christ. Hansen (Philippians, 258) notes that Christian perfection is actually found in imperfection. They have to continue to run the race to achieve the goal.

84 The life in Christ is a constant struggle forward, pushing towards a future goal. The fullness and the blessings of the parousia cannot be experienced here and now. See de Boer, Imitation of Paul, 173.

85 See Snyman, “Rhetorical Analysis,” 334. Fee (Philippians, 320) notes that Paul’s “gaining” and “being found” are future realities and not present. This reflects Paul’s focus on the already but not yet.

86 See Fowl (“Christology,” 146) who adds that just as God redeemed and exalted the obedient Christ, God will likewise redeem the obedient, though suffering, Paul and Philippians. This is meant to serve as a point of reassurance.
has surrendered his status in order to gain the prize. He realizes that in order to attain his goal he must surrender those things that he once held to be important. Like a runner who cannot concern himself with what is behind him, Paul focuses solely on the prize. All believers must strive to attain to the goal.

In 3:15 Paul says, “Let those of us who are mature be of the same mind.” The mature are those who imitate Paul and have adopted the cruciform pattern of life.⁸⁷ He applies what he has just said to the situation at Philippi.⁸⁸ In order to be mature they must follow the example that he presents in the Christ hymn (2:6-11) and in his own example (3:8-14).⁸⁹ He again notes the importance of unity.⁹⁰ Those who are mature must be of the “same mind.” Having the same mind means that they will think in a similar way. This in turn will lead to right living (humility and obedience), which will ultimately lead to unity.⁹¹ The significance of unity is that salvation is a corporate event (see 2:12-18). Those who are vindicated are those who share the same mind by living according to the cruciform pattern of Christ’s life in order to stand united and work out their salvation.

Paul then exhorts them to “hold fast to what we have attained” in v. 16. This is not a reference to vindication because, as he has already stated, vindication will not come until the

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⁸⁷ Paul’s claim to maturity is ironic since he claims to have not yet reached perfection. However, he is calling those who claim to be perfect to a greater moral action. See Hawthorne, Philippians, 146.

⁸⁸ See Fee, Philippians, 353. This appeal applies to all of them, even Paul.

⁸⁹ According to Reinhartz (“Pauline Exhortation,” 400) imitation is connected to maturity in Christ. The mature are “thus minded” and share Paul’s sentiments as found in 3:7-14. See also Stanley, “‘Become Imitators’,” 870; Williams, Enemies, 208.

⁹⁰ See also Hansen, Philippians, 259.

⁹¹ See Fee, Philippians, 354.
parousia. Instead, he calls them to hold fast to what they have already gained in Christ, and to the knowledge of Christ. In holding fast to this they will be able to endure suffering and humiliation. They will be able to surrender their own self-interests in order to serve others.

**The Believers’ Vindication (3:17-21)**

I now return to Paul’s call to imitation in 3:17-21. This is the passage to which he has been building up in this letter.

Join together in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. I have spoken of them many times to you, and now I tell you even in tears. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven from where also we eagerly await the savior the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory by the working of his power by which he brings all things under his control (3:17-21).

Through the example of Christ and his own example, Paul explains what the Philippians are to imitate in order to live a life worthy of the gospel. They must adopt a cruciform pattern of life in two ways. First, they must live a life of humility, which manifests itself in self-renunciation. Just as Christ and Paul surrender their former status in order to serve the needs of others, so too must the Philippians. They must place themselves at the disposal of others, seeking the needs of others for the sake of Christ and his gospel.

Second, they must imitate the obedience of Christ. Christ remained obedient in the face of suffering and humiliation to the point that he suffered and died on the cross. Paul exemplifies this when he states that he “conforms” himself to Christ’s death. He too remains

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92 Thurston and Ryan (Philippians, 131) suggest that Paul is urging the Philippians to live according to what they do know. Fowl (Philippians, 166) refers to this as the practical reasoning that they are to adopt. What they have already attained is an understanding of the gospel in which the crucified one serves as a paradigm for his followers.
faithful to the gospel in the face of persecution. The purpose of their imitation is to achieve unity. This unity is necessary for two reasons. First, it is necessary to endure the suffering that is part of the Christian life. Second, it serves to ensure their salvation. Paul’s call to imitation in 3:17 includes all that he has said thus far.

Paul then states in 3:17b, “Observe those who live according to the example you have in us.” He refers to those in Philippi who already live according to the pattern he presents. This is important for two reasons. First, by calling them to follow the example of others, he is calling them to unity. He wants those in Philippi to join others in imitating him. Second, he recognizes that he is not the only example (see also Timothy and Epaphroditus in 2:19-30).

There are many who adhere to the pattern and therefore stand as examples for others to follow.

The shift to the first person plural “us” in 3:17 may seem out of place. However, it is possible that Paul’s call to imitation refers to more than the pattern of the Christian life. His shift to “us” is designed to show that he too is a co-imitator with others of Christ (cf. 2:5-11). Paul points out that he does not stand alone but stands united with others of the same mind to imitate the example they have in Christ. Again, this is a further illustration of the importance of unity, which permeates this letter. This is important because it relates to the

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93 de Boer (Imitation of Paul, 183) states that the pattern is not limited to Paul, but it is a consistent pattern of Paul and his associates. With the opposition that believers faced in Philippi, Paul was determined to make the appeal to the Christian pattern as broad as possible. Thurston and Ryan (Philippians, 132) write that Paul’s reference to others is meant to emphasize the need for believers to mature in the Christian life. They must learn the Christian life by walking it and imitating those who walk it well.

94 Matera (New Testament Ethics, 43) notes that when Paul calls others to imitate him, he is asking them to share the attitude they see in Christ’s example of humble service on the cross. De Boer (Imitation of Paul, 180) suggests that it is their very imitating that should be imitated.
belief that salvation is a corporate event. All believers, including Paul, must work together to work out their salvation.

Paul then presents a negative (3:18-19) and a positive motivation for his call to imitation (3:20-21). The negative motivation focuses on the “enemies of the cross of Christ.” Here, he closes the inclusio, which he began in 1:27-30 with a reference to the opponents. There are those inside and outside of the church at Philippi who threaten the unity of the community. For Paul these people are enemies of the cross of Christ. Throughout the letter he has warned the Philippians against following the opponents and in 3:18-19 he does the same. The enemies of the cross repudiate everything for which the cross stands. In their understanding the cross is a sign of weakness. They reject all that comes with the cross, including suffering and humiliation, and proclaim only the power revealed of the resurrection. Paul has exhorted the Philippians to walk according to the pattern of life

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95 See Snyman, “Rhetorical Analysis,” 338.
96 Hawthorne (Philippians, 165) comments that the enemies cannot accept what Christ did on the cross. Those who reject the cross, also reject salvation. This is why they are headed for destruction.
97 They have fully rejected the wisdom of God and therefore God’s means of redemption. Paul expects those who imitate his example to be conformed to the cross and God’s wisdom as it is revealed in the cross. See Fee, Philippians, 370. See also Fowl, Philippians, 171-72. Fowl suggests that the enemies seek to avoid suffering and living a life patterned on the suffering and humiliation found in Christ’s example. He notes that they do not necessarily lack the practical reasoning that they should have but they fail to order it properly in light of the cross. See also Hansen, Philippians, 264.
98 Fee (Philippians, 363) notes that what is at issue is living a cruciform existence. They must live a “discipleship marked by the cross and evidenced by suffering on behalf of Christ.” The enemies completely reject these notions. According to Hansen (Philippians, 265), they believe themselves to be above suffering because they have in fact attained perfection.
found in the example of Christ, himself, and others. Here he warns against imitating the example set by the enemies.\textsuperscript{99}

The example of the enemies serves as the antithesis of Paul’s example.\textsuperscript{100} While the enemies fight for personal credit and honor, the example of Paul, which imitates the example of Christ, is characterized by self-renunciation.\textsuperscript{101} Those who walk as enemies of the cross will be destroyed, whereas those who walk according to the cruciform pattern of Christ will be vindicated. The enemies have chosen to live a life that is not defined by the cross. Therefore, they have forfeited the vindication that is the future prize of those who are in Christ.\textsuperscript{102}

The god of the enemies is their “belly.”\textsuperscript{103} What Paul means by this is that they seek only to satisfy their self-interests. This point alone shows how they live contrary to the pattern of Christ. That they seek their own self-interests shows that they live according to the values that Paul censures in 2:3 and 3:1-4. They are led by their selfish ambition and conceit. They only value those things of the flesh. Unlike the enemies who hold to selfish ambition and conceit, those who imitate Paul suffer the loss of all things in order to live a humble life.

\textsuperscript{99} Hawthorne (Philippians, 162) notes that the reason Paul calls them to imitate him is because he does not want them to imitate the example of the enemies. Their example is contrary to the pattern that Paul presents to them.

\textsuperscript{100} Snyman, “Rhetorical Analysis,” 339. de Boer (Imitation of Paul, 176) notes that Paul is aware that his influence and example is not the only one. The other example is “sinister” and leads away from citizenship in heaven. Fee (Philippians, 363) suggests that their example stands in stark contrast to Paul’s own.

\textsuperscript{101} See MacLeod, “Imitation,” 326.

\textsuperscript{102} See Fee, Philippians, 363.

\textsuperscript{103} Thurston and Ryan (Philippians, 133) suggest that by this Paul means that the enemies have deified themselves.
The enemies of the cross glory in their shame, whereas believers conform themselves to the humiliation and suffering of Christ.\textsuperscript{104} The enemies glory in their selfish ambition and conceit and pride themselves on their earthly position, which Paul censures in 2:3. Finally, the enemies have their mind set on earthly things, whereas believers have their citizenship in heaven.\textsuperscript{105} The enemies’ lives are defined by the value and confidence they put on the things of the flesh (3:1-4). However, those whose citizenship is in heaven exemplify the cruciform pattern of Christ’s humility and obedience. They worship the things of the Spirit and boast in Christ. Believers do not look to the things of this life because they know that their true citizenship is in heaven.

Unlike the enemies who seek to find pleasure on earth, believers know that their treasure will come at the parousia. The two groups have a different understanding of what the cross symbolizes. For believers the cross indicates that they too must suffer, sharing in Christ’s sufferings in order to share in the resurrection.\textsuperscript{106} Their perfection is not to be found until the parousia. The enemies, on the other hand, do not hold to the significance of the cross and therefore reject the necessity of suffering for believers in this life.\textsuperscript{107} Therefore,

\textsuperscript{104} Stanley (“‘Become Imitators’,” 871) suggests that the adoption of the pattern found in Christ entails suffering. Thurston and Ryan (Philippians, 133) note that the enemies boast that which they should be ashamed. However, their lifestyle has led them to believe that these shameful things are actually things in which they glory.

\textsuperscript{105} Fee (Philippians, 372) notes that the enemies have abandoned the pursuit for the heavenly prize and they strive only for earthly things. Paul’s description of the enemies helps those who follow his example to be able to recognize them.

\textsuperscript{106} Their citizenship in heaven points to their divine vindication. Even though they are persecuted, at the parousia they will be vindicated. See Fee, Philippians, 379. Bloomquist (Function of Suffering, 181) notes that the world recognizes suffering as an inevitable failure. However, for the citizens of heaven it is a future triumph.

\textsuperscript{107} In fact, they deliberately repudiate everything for which the cross stands. See Snyman, “Rhetorical Analysis,” 339.
there is to be no suffering in this life, people are to seek what pleases them (3:1-4).

However, what Paul states is that in order to be vindicated believers must surrender their self-interest, humble themselves, and suffer, eagerly awaiting “a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” The enemies, who chose to overlook this, will receive their reward, which is their destruction.

In 3:21 Paul addresses the reward that believers will receive if they adopt the cruciform pattern in their lives. This is the goal to which Paul continues to strive, and for which believers must strive as well. Christ, who serves as their primary example, was vindicated by God for his humility and obedience in the face of suffering and humiliation. Paul, who imitates the example found in Christ, awaits vindication as well. In 3:21 Paul tells the Philippians what they can expect if they imitate the example found in Christ and Paul. For them Christ “will transform the body of our humiliation that it may conform to the body of his glory.” Those who adhere to the cruciform pattern can expect that at the parousia they too will be vindicated by God just as Christ was.  

Their imitation is a lifelong journey in which they must continue to live in humility, enduring suffering for the sake of the gospel. We should not overlook the verbal link between 3:21 and 3:10. In order to be “conformed” to Christ’s glorious body, they must be “conformed” to his death. This means they must remain obedient to the faith of the gospel.

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108 See MacLeod, “Exaltation,” 441. Nicolet (“Concept d’imitation,” 408) notes that Paul asks the Philippians to find their salvation assurance in the one who is debased unto death on the cross and is then exalted. They can rely on the belief that just as Christ was exalted, so will they be exalted.

109 See Williams, Enemies, 191.
The enemies do not realize that there is no resurrection or transformation without suffering. See Bloomquist, *Function of Suffering*, 181.

humiliation that comes from being a believer. This suffering comes from two fronts. First, it is present in the loss of those things that one values. Second, it is the result of persecution by those who live according to the flesh. The second purpose of their unity is to ensure their salvation. For Paul salvation affects the entire community. Therefore, it is necessary for the believers to live humbly and obediently so that they can work out their salvation. The result of their humility and obedience is that at the parousia they will be vindicated. Just as Christ was vindicated by God because of his humility and obedience, so the Philippians can be assured that they will be vindicated if they adopt the cruciform pattern of Christ’s life that Paul models and so live in unity with one another.
Chapter Six

Pauline Imitation

In the previous chapter I examined Paul’s call to imitation in Phil 3:17. I concluded that Paul is calling the Philippians to imitate the cruciform pattern they see exemplified in the life of Christ and his own life. They must imitate two elements from the life of Christ and Paul: humility and obedience. Their humility should manifest itself in their self-renunciation for the sake of others. Their obedience should manifest itself in their willingness to endure suffering for the sake of Christ and his gospel. The purpose of this imitation is the unity of the community. This unity serves two purposes. First, it aids believers in dealing with the suffering that comes as a result of their imitation of Paul and Christ. Second, their unity will allow them to share in the fullness of salvation at the parousia, since, for Paul, salvation is a communal event. As a consequence of their imitation of Christ and Paul the Philippians will have their bodies transformed by Christ into glorified bodies like his own.

In this final chapter I will synthesize my research from the previous chapters and present my understanding of Pauline imitation. In order to do so I will examine why the theme of imitation appears so prominently in these letters. I will then examine the structure of Pauline imitation as it is presented in 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians. The structure of Pauline imitation is meant to define a new set of relationships, which create a true community. Paul uses four overarching themes that give this new set of relationships its shape and structure: humility, suffering, unity, and salvation. I will examine each of these themes within the context of Paul’s call to imitation to demonstrate how they redefine
community relationships. I will also explore the implications that this new set of relationships has for believers. Finally, I will also examine the implications of a destructive set of communal relationships based on a selfish lifestyle.

**Summary of Previous Chapters**

*1 Thessalonians*

With his call to imitation in 1 Thessalonians Paul summons the community to continue to conduct itself in the manner that it sees exemplified in him. In his ministry to the Thessalonians Paul has exemplified the three virtues of “work of faith,” “labor of love,” and “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He commends the community for its adoption of these virtues and urges it to continue to conduct itself properly in the face of persecution. Through its conduct, based in this triad of virtues, the community will continue to grow in faith, love, and hope.

The community’s imitation of Paul will result in suffering on two accounts. First, the Thessalonians will suffer at the hands of those who persecute them because of their “work of faith.” Second, they will suffer as a result of forgoing their own rights for the sake of others as a part of their “labor of love.” Their “labor of love” requires an attitude of gentleness and humility, which is exemplified by Paul. Although suffering is a necessary part of their imitation, Paul does not want the Thessalonians to be discouraged. That is why he urges them to continue in their “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The final element of the triad encourages them to continue in their “work of faith” and “labor of love” because at the parousia their suffering will come to an end. Their conduct in gentleness and humility is
crucial in that it builds up other believers so that at the parousia all believers will share in the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 1–4

With his first call to imitation in 1 Corinthians Paul summons believers to imitate the maturity of his faith. In order to do so the Corinthians must appropriate the scandal of the cross in their lives and adopt an attitude and lifestyle that corresponds to the scandal of the cross. The attitude they are to adopt is manifested in humility, lowliness, suffering, and weakness, which they see in the example of Paul. By adopting this attitude they show that they recognize that God’s power and wisdom are revealed in the weakness and folly of the cross.

Paul calls them to imitate his spiritual maturity because their immaturity threatens the unity of the community. Believers must recognize that all believers are called to accept the scandal of the cross. This is why the world views them as weak and foolish. They must work towards building the unity of the community so that all believers can share in the power and wisdom of the cross.

1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1

Paul’s call to imitation in this passage is centered on the need for believers to forgo their own rights and to seek the advantage of others. He summons the Corinthians to imitate the example that he presents to them, because he imitates Christ’s self-sacrificing behavior. The purpose of this self-sacrificing behavior is the unity of the community. In building the
unity of the community believers help to bring others to salvation. Those who seek their own advantage and do not concern themselves with the needs of others threaten their salvation. At the same time they threaten the salvation of other, less mature believers who may be tempted to follow them in their self-seeking ways.

Paul calls on the Corinthians to imitate the example that they find in him because he seeks the needs of others rather than his own needs. He has forgone his apostolic rights in order to bring others to salvation. The Corinthians must imitate this behavior if they hope to attain salvation.

*Philippians*

In Philippians Paul calls the believers to imitate the cruciform pattern that is exemplified in the example of Christ and his own example. They must imitate two specific elements. First, they must conduct themselves in humility. For believers this humility is manifested in the self-renunciation found in the examples of Christ and Paul. The second element is to live in obedience. This requires them to remain faithful to the gospel in the face of suffering and humiliation.

In imitating the cruciform pattern believers build up the unity of the community. The Philippians must surrender all self-seeking prerogatives for the sake of others. In doing this they will create a unified community. Their unity is necessary because it helps them to endure the suffering and humiliation that believers must face. It also allows them to share in the fullness of salvation at the parousia. By living humbly and obediently believers can
ensure the unity of the community and live in hope that at the parousia they will be vindicated.

**Pauline Imitation**

*Why Does Imitation Appear So Prominently in These Letters?*

There are two main factors that explain why Paul calls others to imitate him in 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians. First, Paul calls these communities to imitate him because he founded these churches. Therefore, he has an intimate relationship with each of these communities because he is the one who evangelized them. His spiritual fatherhood, then, grants him the right to call them to imitate him (1 Thess 2:11-12; 1 Cor 4:15).

Second, for Paul there is a perceived need in each of these communities, which can only be dealt with through imitating him. In most instances this perceived need is associated with a perceived threat, whether it is from outside of the community or from within. In each letter Paul presents believers with what he understands to be the perceived need and then presents them with the behavior they must imitate to fulfill that need.

In the two calls to imitation in 1 Thessalonians Paul recognizes that for believers a life of suffering can be detrimental to their salvation. He commends the Thessalonians early in the letter for their “work of faith,” their “labor of love,” and their “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Although they are to be commended for their conduct, Paul finds it necessary to urge them to continue in such behavior so that they can continue to grow in faith, love, and hope. Their continued growth is necessary if they are to share in salvation at the parousia.
In each of his final three calls to imitation (1 Cor 4:16, 11:1, and Phil 3:17) the perceived need appears to be the same. In each it is clear that self-seeking attitudes on the part of some believers and some who stand outside of the church threaten the unity of the community. The self-seeking attitude is dangerous in that it threatens the salvation of the community as a whole. In order to help correct such attitudes Paul presents each of these communities with the proper way in which they should conduct themselves. He turns to his own example to do this because of the intimate relationship he has with these two communities. Their imitation of Paul helps to build unity within the community and contributes to the salvation of all believers.

Community Relationships and Paul’s Call to Imitation

As I discussed in the first chapter some scholars suggest that Pauline imitation focuses on his authority and obedience to this authority.\(^1\) Within this subset of scholars are those who recognize that Paul is establishing himself as the sole authority figure within the community based on his apostolic position (Michaelis). Imitation of Paul is viewed as an expression of their obedience to Paul. Another position presents Paul as establishing an authoritative relationship within his communities, which then creates a non-reciprocal and asymmetrical hierarchy with Paul on top (Castelli). He remains at the top of the hierarchy as the ideal exemplar toward which all believers should strive in their imitation of Paul. His authority allows him to demand that others model themselves after him and that those who

\(^1\) Cf. pp. 10-19.
recognize this authority are destined for salvation. This then creates a subordinate relationship in which those who hope to attain salvation must heed Paul’s call.

Other scholars within this same subset understand Paul’s authority differently. They recognize Paul’s authority as a spiritual authority dictated by his humility (Reinhartz). Paul establishes himself in this position of superiority in order to defend his apostleship. Although this position of authority is based on spiritual authority, Paul never rejects his claim to it. However, his authority is only possible because of the work he does in weakness (Schütz). This authority then makes him no different than other believers. They can all share in the power of apostolic authority through work done in weakness. This thinking suggests that Paul is not alone at the top of the hierarchy.

I am willing to concede to Reinhartz and Schütz that Paul does establish an authority based on his humility. However, there is an element of this humility that needs to be addressed further. Castelli is also correct in suggesting the dangers associated with a non-reciprocal and asymmetrical hierarchy within a community. However, she misperceives the communal relationships to which Paul calls these communities. His relationships are designed to counter the common patron-client relationships of his day.² He does not attempt to establish himself at the top of the hierarchy as the sole authority figure in order to establish power relations in which he is the one with all the power. In reading the letters in which he

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² For a thorough examination of the patron-client relationship in the time of Paul see Peter Lampe, “Paul, Patrons, and Clients,” in Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook (ed. J. Paul Sampley; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 488-523. From what I have deduced from the Pauline letters Paul’s understanding of communal relationships runs counter to what is expected in the patron-client structure. In a patron client structure a patron does whatever is necessary in order to attain higher positions and more honor. In Paul’s understanding this would create a destructive set of communal relationships in which each person seeks only what is best for them and not for the community at large. Therefore, Paul finds it necessary to outline this new set of communal relationships in order for believers in Christ to know how to conduct themselves so that at the parousia they may share in the fullness of salvation.
explicitly calls upon the communities to imitate him it is apparent that this understanding of power and authority is contradictory to what Paul presents.

In Paul’s understanding of communal relationships a hierarchy in which one establishes oneself at the top as a way of making oneself superior to others is destructive. This is not the way in which believers in Christ should conduct themselves. Through his call to imitation Paul develops a new set of communal relationships that are dictated by humility. A true community is understood as a community in which all believers consider themselves equal in Christ and exhibit this fact through humility and a willingness to endure suffering. Paul warns these communities against a destructive set of communal relationships in which some consider themselves as superior to others because of the implications it has for their salvation.

Throughout my research on the theme of imitation in 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians, I have come to understand Paul’s understanding of community relationships. In these letters Paul establishes a new set of community relationships in which believers are to esteem others as more valuable than themselves by considering the needs of others as more important than their own. The purpose of his call is to create a true community in which believers place others above themselves in order for all believers to share in the fullness of salvation. The implied premise is that those who live selfishly place themselves above others and so create a destructive set of communal relationships and so threaten their salvation.

Within this new set of communal relationships are four overarching themes that shape Paul’s call to imitation: humility, suffering, unity, and salvation. The first two, humility and
suffering, represent the way in which believers create true community. The third theme, unity, represents the purpose of this new set of relationships. Finally, salvation represents the overall goal of imitating Paul and Christ. These four themes are present in each of Paul’s explicit calls to imitation, and they help shape our understanding of his new definition of community.

In order to form this new set of relationships believers must imitate the attitude of humility and willingness to suffer found in the examples of Paul, Christ, and other churches. In each call Paul exhorts believers to conduct themselves properly with this attitude as their guide. Humility primarily manifests itself in selflessness, self-renunciation, and self-sacrifice. Although these may be different terms, each of them represents the same attitude. The humility of believers manifests itself in putting the concerns and needs of others above their own. This is crucial because an integral part of their imitation is their relationship to other members of the community. Believers who consider themselves as superior to others are defined by their desire to seek their own needs and avoid suffering, which as we will see has detrimental implications for believers.

In 1 Thessalonians Paul implicitly urges the Thessalonians by the example of his own life to conduct themselves with an attitude of gentleness and humility (2:5-12). He shows them through his own example how he conducts himself in humility instead of arrogance by forgoing his own needs for the sake of others. He reminds them that he was “gentle” among them, gave himself completely to them, and placed others above himself by working for himself (2:7-9). The purpose of such behavior was to place the needs of others above his own, and not to be a burden to others members of the community. Paul did not present
himself as superior to others. Instead, he placed others and their needs above his own. Through his example Paul urges the Thessalonians in their “labor of love” to conduct themselves in humility by forgoing their own rights for the sake of others.

In both calls to imitation in 1 Corinthians (4:16; 11:1) Paul emphasizes the need for an attitude of humility. In the first call to imitation (1 Cor 4:16) Paul addresses the superiority of those who consider themselves “wise.” In order to correct this behavior Paul urges believers to imitate the example presented in his life and the lives of other apostles and to be considered as “least of all” (4:9). They need to consider others as greater than themselves by conducting themselves in a life of humility and lowliness, just as Paul demonstrates in his own example (2:3; 4:9-12).

In his second call to imitation in 1 Corinthians (11:1) Paul again calls upon the Corinthians to place the needs of others over their own by exhorting them to conduct themselves with an ethic of responsibility to others. He exhorts them not to seek their own needs, but to seek the needs of the other (10:24). They are to place others above themselves, just as they have seen in Paul’s example (8:13; 9:12b-27; 10:31-33), which is an imitation of Christ’s example (8:1; 11:1). In both examples neither Paul nor Christ understands himself as superior to others. Rather, they place the needs of others above their own needs. This is the way in which Paul calls the community to conduct itself.

In Philippians, Paul exhorts the community to act in humility by seeking the needs of others and to value them as better than themselves (2:4). He also exhorts them to follow the example of humility they see in the life of Christ and to divest themselves of their prerogatives in order to put themselves at the disposal of others (2:5-8). Paul warns the
Philippians against selfish conduct (2:3-4), which, much like the “superior” conduct found in 1 Corinthians, leads one to put one’s self above others. He exhorts the Philippians to put away any selfish behavior they may have, as it is presented in the life of the enemies (3:18-20), and to value others as greater than themselves.

Believers must also imitate the willingness to endure suffering that they see in the example of Christ, Paul, and other churches. Suffering is a natural part of life in Christ. Therefore, believers must follow the example of those who go before them and persevere in the face of the persecution. As a part of their imitation and creation of this new set of communal relationships they must remain faithful to the gospel and persevere in the face of suffering.

In 1 Thessalonians Paul begins by highlighting their willingness to endure suffering in their imitation. In both 1:6 and 2:14 he states that they have become imitators of him, Christ, and the churches in Judea in their willingness to endure suffering. When Paul commends the Thessalonians for their “work of faith,” he is speaking of their steadfastness. Paul highlights this because suffering is an integral part of being a believer (1:23; 2:1-2; 2:14; 3:3). This suffering can come in a number of ways, either through the persecution brought on as part of being a believer (cf. 2:1-4), or through forgoing one’s own interests in order to better serve the community (cf. 2:5-12).

In the context of his first call to imitation in 1 Corinthians Paul emphasizes that a key element of imitation is a commitment to embrace the lowliness and suffering associated with the cross. The lowliness and suffering of believers is superior to the wisdom of those who think they are wise, because God has chosen the lowly to confound the strong (1:26-31).
Believers are called to experience the power of the cross, which manifests itself in suffering, and to appropriate this suffering in their lives (1:18). With his second call to imitation in 1 Corinthians Paul urges believers to seek the needs of others rather than their own needs. Inherent in these examples is the suffering that believers will endure by forgoing their own rights to serve the needs of others. It is through such conduct that believers experience the suffering associated with being believers in Christ.

In Philippians Paul exhorts the believers to imitate the obedience of Christ, which is his willingness to endure suffering and humiliation (2:8b). Suffering is a requisite part of their belief in Christ (1:29-30). Therefore, in Christ’s example they are implicitly called to manifest their humility in the face of suffering. Paul presents himself as an example as well. He states that he “suffers the loss of all things” for the sake of Christ (3:8). In his own imitation of Christ Paul conforms himself to Christ’s death, which means that he remains obedient to the gospel through his humility (3:10). This is what he calls the Philippians to imitate in 3:17.

The goal of community life, which is attained through imitating the humility and suffering of Paul and Christ, is to help build up others in order to create and maintain unity within the community. Through this unity believers recognize that all are equal in Christ. This unity serves two purposes. The first is to help believers to overcome the suffering that is a part of being a believer in Christ. The second will be discussed below.

I also find the theme of unity in 1 Thessalonians. The Thessalonians must conduct themselves in humility and in their willingness to endure suffering in order to build up the community (2:5-12). They are encouraged through Paul’s example to work for the needs of
others in order to help the community grow in faith. Instead of seeking his own benefit, Paul considers the needs of others and supports himself (2:9). Throughout the letter it is clear that Paul’s guidelines are concerned with the personal relationships of believers. They must recognize the effect that they have on others. Therefore, they must conduct themselves in such a way that they build up the community.

Paul emphasizes the need for unity in the early part of 1 Corinthians when he notes that the supposed “wisdom” held by those who understand themselves to be superior has created divisions within the church (1:10-13). The only way to remedy this disunity is for believers to imitate the example they see in Paul. By appropriating the scandal of the cross in their lives, they will recognize the unity of all believers in Christ who have committed themselves to the cross in all of its weakness and folly (3:18-23). In doing so they will build up the body of Christ. Paul’s own example shows this unity. He states that between himself and Apollos there is no jealousy and strife. Instead, they stand united (4:6-7) and share the mind of Christ. The Corinthians are called upon by Paul to continue to build up the community.

With his second call to imitation in 1 Corinthians Paul addresses the need for unity by explaining to the Corinthians that they should not allow their freedom to become a stumbling block to other believers (8:9). Paul urges them to consider the consequences of their actions in regards to others and to do only those things that build up the church (10:24). In conducting themselves in humility and seeking only the needs of others above their own, believers will do those things that build up the community.
The purpose of the Philippians’ imitation is to nurture the unity within the community. Unity is necessary for believers to stand against their opponents (1:27-30). In order to attain this unity they must live in humility. Paul’s many references to “one” and the “same” throughout Philippians are meant to encourage the Philippians to live in communal harmony with one another (1:27-30; 2:2; 2:5). His emphasis on the theme of unity signifies how dire the need for unity is within the community. By standing united they will be able to face suffering and opposition.

The overall goal of imitation and the creation of a true community is the salvation of all believers. Here we also recognize the second purpose of their unity. As a consequence of their unity through humility and the endurance of suffering believers will share in the fullness of salvation at the parousia. The salvation of all believers is at stake. Those who create a destructive set of relationships through selfish attitudes do not foster unity and cannot be assured of salvation. They do not imitate the example they have in Paul and Christ, and they not only endanger their own salvation, they also endanger the salvation of believers who may be tempted to join them in not imitating Paul.

What I have shown so far is that Paul is concerned with the conduct of believers. The reason for this is that their conduct will result in either salvation or destruction. Their conduct either creates a new set of relationships based on humility or a community in which some consider themselves as superior to others. Paul has demonstrated that when believers lead a lifestyle in which they are guided by their selfish pursuits and avoidance of suffering (1 Corinthians; Philippians) they set themselves above other believers by understanding themselves to be greater than others.
What these community members fail to recognize is that they are in danger of perishing at the parousia. Their selfish lifestyles and avoidance of suffering have caused them to create a destructive set of relationships within the community in which they set themselves above others. In doing so, they endanger their own salvation and the salvation of others when they tempt others to follow their selfish ways. They claim that they should not have to endure suffering because they fail to recognize the power of the cross and the significance of the suffering associated with it. Instead they associate with the power of the resurrection and believe what is to be gained at the parousia has been gained here and now.

The true believers, those who imitate Paul, realize that they must conduct themselves in humility as Paul has done and to recognize the significance of the cross. In doing so they place others above themselves, valuing others as greater than themselves. Through this believers create a new set of relationships within the community. Through their conduct and imitation they can be hopeful that at the parousia they will enjoy the fullness of salvation. In each of the letters presented here Paul emphasizes the importance of creating a new set of relationships so that believers may share in salvation. He shows that there are implications for both those who imitate his example and those who chose to claim superiority.

Paul writes to the Thessalonians regarding the goal of their imitation: their salvation at the parousia. What helps them to endure the suffering that comes as a part of their imitation is the hope they have in the Lord’s parousia (1:3; 9-10; 2:13-16). The trials that they face can result in a loss of their three virtues (“work of faith,” “labor of love,” “endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ”), which can result in the loss of salvation.
Therefore, they must continue to endure suffering and to conduct themselves in humility so that at the parousia they will attain the fullness of salvation (1:9-10).

Those who do not imitate the example of humility they see in Paul will be excluded from the kingdom (2:15-16). However, those who imitate his example will be rescued because of their faithfulness (1:10). Just as Christ attained glory through suffering, so will the Thessalonian believers. However, it is imperative that they realize that this will not take place until the parousia. Therefore, their willingness to endure suffering is crucial.

With his first call to imitation in 1 Corinthians Paul explains to the Corinthians that their unity is necessary for their salvation. In order to attain the fullness of salvation they must be united in humility through the weakness and folly of the cross. Paul encourages believers to be spiritually mature (to share the mind of Christ), because those who are mature recognize the significance of the cross and know that they will attain the fullness of salvation at the parousia (3:1-3). However, those who overlook the wisdom of the cross and who view themselves as superior to others through their supposed “wisdom” are destined for destruction (1:18).

For Paul the Corinthians must humble themselves to the point that they seek the needs of others rather than their own needs because their salvation is at stake. Believers must build others up so that they may attain salvation. This is an example that they find in the life of Christ (8:11-12). Christ forgoes his own rights and dies on the cross so that others may be saved. What Paul expects the Corinthians to understand is that their actions play a crucial role in the salvation of others as well as their own salvation. When one’s actions lead another to go against his conscience then that one has destined the other for destruction
(8:11). At the same time, this will lead the believer who caused the other to stumble to sin against Christ, thereby endangering his own salvation (8:12). When they allow their own liberties to be their guiding force (8:9; 10:23-24; 26-27), they set themselves and their needs above others. In doing so they create a destructive set of relationships that threatens their own salvation.

It is crucial that believers understand that their conduct has an effect on others. It can either build up or destroy. Therefore, Paul urges the Corinthians to humble themselves just as he has done, and to seek the salvation of others (9:19-23). His rigorous self-control (9:24-27) is for the sake of others, but in the end for himself as well. His salvation is also at stake. Therefore, he urges all believers to humble themselves, to seek the advantage of others, in order to build up the church, so that all may attain the eternal prize.

Paul exhorts the Philippians to stand united in order to reach salvation. There are those in the community, the opponents, who through their selfish and “superior” lifestyle, live in disunity and threaten to draw others away from the life in Christ. Those who live in disunity are a threat to salvation (1:28). The opponents’ disunity and selfish conduct is a sign of their own destruction (1:28; 3:18-19). They reject the suffering and the humiliation associated with the cross, and they view themselves as superior to others, because they believe that they have already attained the fullness of the resurrection. However, the unity of believers in humility is a sign of their salvation. Therefore, when Paul exhorts them to work out their own salvation (2:12), he is urging them to restore communal harmony so that they can attain salvation together.
Paul calls upon the Philippians to imitate the example of Christ’s humility and obedience. Christ’s exaltation came as a result of his humiliation (2:9-11). Just as God exalted Christ for his humility and obedience, so too will the Philippians be saved on account of their imitation of Paul and Christ (3:20-21).

Paul wants to make it clear however that full knowledge of this does not come until the parousia (3:10). Paul himself has not yet attained the goal of the resurrection (3:15-16). Therefore, he continues to endure until the end. The Philippians too are called to endure. The result of their imitation will be salvation and transformation at the parousia (3:20-21).

Within Paul’s explicit calls to imitation we can see the way in which he develops this new set of relationships. In each letter he expects believers to conduct themselves in such a way that they place others and their needs above their own. They do so by conducting themselves in humility so that other members of the community are valued as greater than themselves. In doing so he creates a new set of relationships in which those who conduct themselves in this way are united to each other. In creating this true community they can be hopeful that at the parousia they will share in the gift which is intended for those who conduct themselves in humility.

Conclusion

The goal of this dissertation has been to ascertain the meaning of Paul’s theme of imitation in the letters of 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians. In this chapter I have summarized the results and implications of my research. The explicit calls to imitation in these letters involve the creation of a new set of relationships among believers, which
creates true community. Within this new set of communal relationships are four themes that are crucial to Paul’s call to imitation: humility, suffering, unity, and salvation. These four themes form the shape and structure of a true community.

Believers in Thessalonica, Corinth, and Philippi create this new set of relationships through their conduct in humility. They learn this conduct by imitating the example they have in Paul, Christ, and other churches. Their humility is manifested in putting the concerns and needs of others above their own and by not viewing themselves as superior to others. This attitude is to be the guiding force of their actions.

Within their imitation is the willingness of believers to endure suffering and persecution. This too is something they imitate from the example of Paul, Christ, and other churches. Since, suffering is a natural part of being a believer in Christ, believers must imitate the example of those who have gone before them and persevere in the face of suffering. Their suffering can take many forms including suffering through persecution and suffering that is a part of forgoing one’s own needs for others.

Paul emphasizes the purpose of creating this new set of communal relationships when he discusses the need for unity within the communities. Believers create this new set of relationships in order to create a unified community in which all believers can stand together. By imitating the humility they see in the example of Paul and Christ they will help to build up the community. This unity is crucial for two reasons. First, it helps believers to endure the suffering that is a necessary part of being a believer. Second, it is necessary because, for Paul, salvation, which is the goal of their imitation, is a communal event.
The overall goal of this imitation is the salvation of all believers. If believers hope to attain this goal they must adopt the attitude of humility that they see in Paul’s example. As a consequence of their proper imitation they will attain the fullness of salvation at the parousia. Paul wants to emphasize however that the salvation of all believers is at stake. Those who do not imitate the example they have in Paul endanger their own salvation, and potentially the salvation of others. Therefore, it is crucial that believers imitate the example of humility, create a unified community, and help build up other believers, so that at the parousia all believers will share in salvation.
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