

# DIVISIONS OVER LEADERS AND FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS:

THE PARALLEL THEMATIC STRUCTURES OF  
1 CORINTHIANS 4:6-21 AND 8:1-11:1

E. Coye Still, III

## Summary

*How significant is 1 Corinthians 1-4 in the epistle as a whole? Paul approaches specifically the problem of food offered to idols in essentially the same manner as he approaches the problem of divisions over leaders. More precisely, 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 appears to follow closely Paul's pattern of argumentation in the climatic 1 Corinthians 4:6-21. In Paul's remarkably similar approaches to different presenting problems do we have a clue that Paul's own apostolic hardships are a cruciform paradigm for the pastoral counsel throughout 1 Corinthians 5-15?.*

## Introduction

Nils A. Dahl suggests viewing '1 Cor. 1:10-4:21 as an introductory section with a definite purpose within the letter as a whole.'<sup>1</sup> Dahl argues that 'the section 1 Cor. 1:10-4:21 ... prepares for the content of the answers given to the questions raised and indicates the theological basis from which these answers are given.'<sup>2</sup> I am persuaded that careful comparison of 1 Corinthians 1-4 with 8:1-11:1 strongly supports Dahl's analysis.

---

<sup>1</sup> Nils A. Dahl, 'Paul and the Church at Corinth According to 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21' in *Christian History and Interpretation*, ed. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R. R. Niebuhr (Cambridge, Mass.: University Press, 1967): 317.

<sup>2</sup> Dahl, 'Paul and the Church': 333-334.

Various scholars have observed similarities in the presuppositions of Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians 1–4 and 8:1–11:1.<sup>3</sup> It seems to me that in both sections Paul employs a *problem – paradigm – call for imitation* pattern of argumentation. The problem is divisive loyalties to respective leaders in 1 Corinthians 1–4 (see 1:10-12)<sup>4</sup> and food offered to idols and idolatry in 8:1–11:1.<sup>5</sup> Christ's weakness manifested in his death on the cross for others is the paradigm (1:18-25; and 8:11; 11:1) with which Paul's experience is fully consistent (2:1-5; 4:9-13; and 9:1-27). The Corinthians are called to imitation of Paul's own example (4:16; and 11:1); and therefore, to imitation of the paradigm established in Christ's suffering on the cross. Thus, the broad thematic patterns of 1 Corinthians 1–4 and 8:1–11:1 are quite similar.

### Parallel Thematic Structures

More precisely I am persuaded that 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 is in particularly close thematic correspondence with 4:6-21, the climactic

---

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Scott Hafemann, *Suffering and Ministry in the Spirit: Paul's Defense of His Ministry in II Corinthians 2:14–3:3* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans: 1990): 132; Raymond Pickett, *The Cross in Corinth: The Social Significance of the Death of Jesus* (JSNTSup 143; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997): 37-84, 118.

<sup>4</sup> Scholars have variously proposed Gnostic influence, Hellenistic Jewish wisdom teaching or Greco-Roman rhetorical culture as the problem behind the divisions of 1 Cor. 1–4 (see 1:10-12). On Gnostic influence see Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians*, tr. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971): 138-141. On Hellenistic Jewish wisdom teaching see Richard A. Horsley, 'Wisdom of Word and Words of Wisdom in Corinth [1 Corinthians 1–4]', *CBQ* 39 (1977): 224-239; and 'Spiritual Marriage with Sophia', *VC* 33 (1979): 30-54; Birger Pearson, 'Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Paul' in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Wilken (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975): 43-57; James A. Davis, *Wisdom and Spirit: An Investigation of 1 Corinthians 1:18–3:20 against the Background of Jewish Sapiential Traditions in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: University Press of America, 1984): 65-81. On Greco-Roman rhetorical culture see Duane Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1–4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (SNTSMS 79; Cambridge: University Press, 1994); Stephen Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians*, (SBLDS 134; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992); Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists*, (SNTSMS 96; Cambridge: University Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> On the background to 1 Cor. 8:1–11:1 see E. Coye Still, 'The Rationale behind the Pauline Instructions on Food Offered to Idols: A Study of the Relationship between 1 Corinthians 4:6-21 and 8:1–11:1' (Ph.D. dissertation; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000): 55-121.

application of the argument addressing divisions over leaders.<sup>6</sup> In both 1 Corinthians 4:6-21 and 8:1–11:1 Paul develops five primary themes – pride, eschatological presumption, Paul’s pattern of life, imitation, and judgment – in essentially the same sequence.

1 Cor. 4:6-21	Parallel Theme	1 Cor. 8:1–11:1
4:6-7	Pride toward others	8:1-3
4:8	Eschatological presumption	8:4-6
4:9-13	The pattern for imitation	8:7–9:27; esp. 9:12b, 15-18
4:14, 18-21	Warnings of judgment	10:1-22; esp. 10:11, 22
4:15-17	The call to imitation	10:33–11:1

What is the explanation for these parallels? I will briefly suggest answers to this question in my concluding remarks. The primary purpose of the present article is, however, to demonstrate the asserted parallel thematic structures in exegesis of the passages. I shall first deal with 1 Corinthians 4:6-21.

### The Thematic Structure of 1 Corinthians 4:6-21

Having declared that his aim is unity (1 Cor. 1:10), Paul argues in defence of *his own* method of proclamation of the gospel (2:1-5) and unique authority as founder of the Corinthian church (3:6a, 10).<sup>7</sup> The argument is applied in 1 Corinthians 4:6-21 as Paul prescribes imitation of *his own* way of life (4:16-17) as the solution to their problem. Paul does not, however, attempt covertly to unite the Corinthians under the ‘I am of Paul’ slogan. Paul was not in pursuit of the loyalty rightly given only to Christ (3:23), but ‘was convinced that he presented men with Christ crucified both in the gospel he preached and in his own life’ (cf. 1:18–2:5; 4:9-13, 16-17).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, for the Corinthians to follow Paul’s example was for them to apply the message of the cross.

---

<sup>6</sup> K. T. Kleinknecht, *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte: Die alttestamentlich-jüdische Tradition vom ‘leidenden Gerechten’ und ihre Rezeption bei Paulus* (WUNT 2/13; Tübingen: Mohr, 1984): 222, considers 1 Cor. 4:8-13 to be the ‘summarizing high point’ of 1 Cor. 1–4. It is with 4:8-13 that Paul sets forth with great power the contrasts to which he calls attention in the whole of chapters 1–4. These verses are the climax of the section (i.e. 4:6-21) with which Paul concludes and clinches the larger argument.

<sup>7</sup> Dahl, ‘Paul and the Church at Corinth’: 321; Hafemann, *Suffering and Ministry*: 53-54.

<sup>8</sup> Günther Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971): 171.

### *1 Corinthians 4:6-7: Pride Toward Others*

In 1 Corinthians 4:6-7 Paul explicitly censures the Corinthians for the pride underlying their divisions. The particular manifestation of their pride is in favouring one leader over another (4:6b; cf. 1:12; 3:21-22). Paul discloses that he has applied (μετεσχηματίζω)<sup>9</sup> the preceding images (ταῦτα) of the gardener, the builders and the stewards (3:5ff) to himself and Apollos in order to aid the Corinthians in learning proper restraint – Ἴνα ἐν ἧν ἡμῖν μάθητε τὸ μὴ ὑπὲρ ἀγέγραπται.<sup>10</sup> Morna Hooker argues persuasively that γέγραπται refers here to scripture, and more specifically to OT passages already cited in 1 Corinthians 1–3.<sup>11</sup> ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord’ (1:31; cf. Jer. 9:24) gives a clear enough scriptural boundary beyond which the Corinthians should not go in their loyalty to human leaders.

In 1 Corinthians 4:7 Paul penetrates to the root of the problem: loyalty to a *leader* is leverage for *self*-exaltation.<sup>12</sup> Paul has said, ‘You are prideful *in your favoured leader*.’ With the three questions in this verse he says even more basically, ‘You are *prideful*.’ The first question is: ‘who distinguishes (διακρίνει) you?’<sup>13</sup> However interpreted, the question functions to unmask the Corinthian desire to be distinguished from others in the church. The implied answer to the second question – ‘what do you have which you have not received’ – is most certainly ‘nothing,’ for it is contradictory for receivers of grace to

---

<sup>9</sup> For the view that μετεσχηματίζω should be rendered ‘I have applied’, see F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971): 48; D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993): 102; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987): 166-67; Morna Hooker, ‘Beyond the Things Which are Written’, *NTS* 10: 127-132.

<sup>10</sup> A literal rendering of Paul’s Greek is, ‘that you may learn the not beyond what is written.’

<sup>11</sup> Hooker, ‘Beyond the Things Written’: 129-130. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (HNTC; New York: Harper and Row, 1968): 106-107 agrees. The Old Testament citations include 1 Cor. 1:19 (=Isa. 29:14); 1:31 (=Jer. 9:24); 2:9 (=Isa. 64:4); 2:16 (=Isa. 40:13); 3:19 (=Job 5:13) and 3:20 (=Ps. 94:11).

<sup>12</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985): 75, writes, ‘What is party spirit other than oneself writ large?’

<sup>13</sup> What kind of distinction is in view? If the use of διακρίνω in Acts 15:9 sheds light on the matter, then Paul’s point is that there are no distinctions among the Corinthians. The stress in this case is on the σε – who distinguishes *you* (from anyone else before God)? The implied answer is ‘no one.’ If, on the other hand the idea of spiritual gifts is in view, then the fact of distinctions is to be acknowledged (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7-10) and the stress is on the τίς – *who* distinguishes you? The implied answer is then ‘*God* does – so why are *you* puffed up?’ This second option seems more likely because the succeeding question – τί δὲ ἔχεις ὃ οὐκ ἔλαβες (1 Cor. 4:7) – implies reception of gift[s].

engage in boasting in anything other than the Lord (cf. Eph. 2:8-9).<sup>14</sup> The effect of the third question – ‘why do you boast as if you had not received’ – should, therefore, be to leave the Corinthians speechless, exposed as unjustifiably prideful toward others.

### *1 Corinthians 4:8: Eschatological Presumption*

Paul previously affirmed that the Corinthians have been enriched in Christ (1 Cor. 1:5), but describes (or caricatures) them in 1 Corinthians 4:8 as rich, filled, and reigning – persons who have arrived fully at the goal of Christian existence. The Corinthians’ self-perception has been attributed to Gnosticism,<sup>15</sup> Stoicism,<sup>16</sup> Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom speculation<sup>17</sup> and admiration of ‘the high-status figures of this world’,<sup>18</sup> as well as to over-realized eschatology.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of the precise roots of their self-perception, one thing seems sure: Paul assesses the Corinthians from the eschatological perspective. The double occurrence of ἤδη (‘already’) in the emphatic position, the use of the ingressive aorists, and Paul’s presently unfulfilled desire to reign (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 5:17) betray that Paul’s caricature of the Corinthians assumes an ‘already – not yet’ eschatological tension. Karl Donfried calls 1 Corinthians 4:8 ‘the apostle’s sarcastic paraphrase of the Corinthian misunderstanding of the Christian life ... [as] that of eschatological fulfilment.’<sup>20</sup> Although fulfilment, riches and

---

<sup>14</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*: 171.

<sup>15</sup> Schmithals, *Gnosticism*: 180-181.

<sup>16</sup> James Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (MNTC; New York: Harper, n.d.): 49; Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*: 115-117, who emphasizes particularly Stoic wise speech.

<sup>17</sup> Horsley, ‘Wisdom of Word’: 233-234; and ‘Spiritual Marriage’: 46-47.

<sup>18</sup> Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*: 233.

<sup>19</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*, tr. W. J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969): 128; Barrett, *First Corinthians*: 109; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*: 49; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, tr. J. W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975): 88; Brian Dodd, *Paul’s Paradigmatic ‘I’: Personal Example as Literary Strategy* (JSNTSup 177; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1999): 58; Fee, *First Corinthians*: 172-173; A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; New York: Scribner, 1925): 84; John H. Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (SNTSMS 26; Cambridge: University Press, 1975): 203; Niels Willert, ‘Catalogues of Hardships in the Pauline Correspondence: Background and Function’ in *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism*, ed. P. Borgen and S. Giverson: 234. Anthony Thiselton, ‘Realized Eschatology at Corinth’, *NTS* 24 (1978): 510-526, has argued the position thoroughly.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Donfried, ‘The Kingdom of God in Paul’ in *The Kingdom of God in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Interpretation*, ed. W. Willis (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987): 177.

participation in the reign of Christ lie ahead for the believer, Paul himself has not arrived at such status – ‘apart from us you have become kings’. Thus God’s particularly chosen and sent apostle is left behind as the Corinthians presume to occupy positions to be assumed only in the eschatological fulfilment. To eschatologically presumptuous Corinthians the sufferings fitting for present Christian existence are to be set forth.

### *1 Corinthians 4:9-13: The Pattern for Imitation*

Paul employs a so-called hardship catalogue<sup>21</sup> in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 to describe his own<sup>22</sup> experience as a despised sufferer and set the stage for the call to imitation.<sup>23</sup> I will allow two questions to occupy me in consideration of these verses. First, how prominently does manual labour figure in the catalogue?<sup>24</sup> Second, how do Paul and the Corinthians measure up against the standard of the message of the cross (1:17–2:5)?

How significant is Paul’s reference to manual labour (4:12a) in the catalogue? Has Paul strategically placed the reference as a prominent component of the list or is it merely incidental?<sup>25</sup> Paul certainly saw his work as an artisan as integral to his ministry as an apostle.<sup>26</sup> Ronald

<sup>21</sup> I say ‘so-called’ because G. H. R. Horsley, in a review of *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* by John Fitzgerald in *ABR* 37 (1989): 82-87, questions the very existence of a consciously developed literary sub-genre which can be referred to as a hardship catalogue. He points out that the general difficulty of life in antiquity, rather than literary convention, may account for the theme of hardships frequently appearing in the sources. Horsley raises excellent objections regarding some passages’ classification as ‘catalogues’ of hardships. Horsley accurately charges that Fitzgerald uses the ‘omnium gatherum’ approach (p. 84). It seems to me, however, both practical and accurate to speak of the hardship catalogue as a literary form.

<sup>22</sup> It seems highly likely that the plurals of 4:9-13 are literary or epistolary conventions with which Paul actually refers to himself only. See the argument by Hafemann, *Suffering and Ministry*: 12-16, which is in reference to 2 Cor. 2:14–3:3. He proves in principle that Paul does use the plural as a literary convention and demonstrates conclusively, I think, that Paul is using the plural to refer to himself alone in 2 Cor. 2:14ff. Also, Hafemann demonstrates that 1 Cor. 4:9 is parallel to 2 Cor. 2:14 (pp. 57-58). At any rate, 1 Cor. 4:16 clarifies that the Corinthians are called to imitate him specifically.

<sup>23</sup> See my note 38.

<sup>24</sup> I pose this question with a forward look at the prominence of manual labour in 1 Cor. 9.

<sup>25</sup> M. L. Barré, ‘Paul as “Eschatologic Person”’: A New Look at 2 Cor. 11:29’, *CBQ* 37 (1975): 521, thinks it is merely incidental.

<sup>26</sup> Ronald Hock, *The Social Context of Paul’s Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980): 67-68.

Hock suggests that much of Paul's suffering – the subject of 4:9-13 – was attendant to his self-support through manual labour.<sup>27</sup> Because Paul's choice to support himself through work rather than receive support from the Corinthians is such a major issue between Paul and this church (1 Cor. 9:1-19; 2 Cor. 11:7-15, 27; 12:13-16a), it is unlikely that Paul would toss in an incidental reference to his manual labour.

Further, structural indicators point to the prominence of Paul's manual labour in the hardship catalogue. The time references – ἄχρι τῆς ἄρτι ὥρας and ἕως ἄρτι – bracket 1 Corinthians 4:11-13 and set this section off as a sub-unit of 4:9-13. In this sub-unit attention is directed to ἐργαζόμενοι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν ('working with our own hands') as one of the unit's two most prominent phrases.

- [A] ἄχρι τῆς ἄρτι ὥρας  
 [B] καὶ πεινώμεν καὶ διψῶμεν καὶ γυμνιτεύομεν καὶ κολαφιζόμεθα καὶ ἄστατοῦμεν  
 [C] καὶ κοπιῶμεν ἐργαζόμενοι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν  
 [B] λοιδορούμενοι εὐλογοῦμεν, διωκόμενοι ἀνεχόμεθα, δυσφημούμενοι παρακαλοῦμεν  
 [C] ὡς περικαθάρματα τοῦ κόσμου ἐγενήθημεν, πάντων περίψημα  
 [A] ἕως ἄρτι

The sub-section contains two compact series, one with five (or six<sup>28</sup>) finite verbs (4:11-12a) and another with six words arranged into three participle-verb combinations (4:12b-13). Each series leads up to a lengthier phrase. These two phrases stand as dual goals toward which the list in 4:11-13 progresses. The phrase καὶ κοπιῶμεν ἐργαζόμενοι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν gives a non-figurative description of the apostle's activity. The second prominent phrase of 1 Corinthians 4:11-13 – ὡς περικαθάρματα τοῦ κόσμου ἐγενήθημεν, πάντων περίψημα ('we have become like the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things') – stands as an evocative figurative expression of the apostle's

<sup>27</sup> Ronald Hock, *Social Context*: 35.

<sup>28</sup> Barrett, *First Corinthians*: 111-112, takes κοπιῶμεν as a reference to Paul's toil in preaching, teaching, etc. and what follows as alone referring to his 'secular' employment. This division makes for six finite verbs followed by a free standing participial phrase. M. L. Barré, 'Paul as an "Eschatologic Person": A New Look at 2 Cor. 11:29', *CBQ* 37 (1975): 121, arranges 1 Cor. 4:11-13 as a chiasm and the verbs of 4:11-12a into a triad of pairs. The pairs of verbs in 1 Cor. 4:11b-12a correspond to the participle-verb pairs of 4:12b-13a. In such an arrangement it would be reasonable to view ἐργαζόμενοι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν as the goal to and from which the chiasm progresses. Fitzgerald, *Cracks*: 131-132, also sees chiasmic qualities in 1 Cor. 4:11-13, but not along the same lines as Barré. In fact, Fitzgerald is persuaded that the verbs of 4:11b-12a cannot be paired without forcing combinations (p. 132, n. 38).

experience as a despised sufferer.<sup>29</sup> These two phrases appear to be parallel structurally: A-BCBC-A.

Are the two phrases different ways of saying the same thing? Two factors suggest that with the phrase ὡς περικαθάρματα τοῦ κόσμου ἐγενήθημεν, πάντων περίψημα Paul is describing figuratively his concrete experience of ἐργαζόμενοι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν. One factor is that the time reference brackets (ἄχρι τῆς ἄρτι ὥρας and ἕως ἄρτι) would seem to include everything inside them as current and ongoing. Paul's manual labour is a consistently present component of his apostolic ministry.<sup>30</sup> A second factor is that ὡς περικαθάρματα τοῦ κόσμου ἐγενήθημεν, πάντων περίψημα is a fitting figure to express a common view of the impoverished (cf. 4:11) artisans of the Greek world.<sup>31</sup> As an impoverished craftsman Paul claimed authoritative leadership of the entire Corinthian church (4:14-21; cf. 9:1-2). Savage points out that 'an impoverished leader was a contradiction in terms.'<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> It is universally agreed that with the figure in 1 Cor. 4:13 Paul is portraying himself quite unflatteringly, as a man without status in the eyes of the world. He is like a shred of cloth used to cleanse the off-scourings from a vessel and fit to be discarded. Some go further and maintain that the figure has sacrificial overtones. See Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970 [1910]): 113-114; Jean HBring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, tr. A. W. Heathcote & P. J. Allcock (London: The Epworth Press, 1962): 30; J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul from Unpublished Commentaries* (London: Macmillan, 1904): 200-201; Friedrich Hauck, 'περικαθάρμα', *TDNT* 3: 430-431. See Prov. 21:18 (LXX) for use of περικαθάρματα as ransom.

<sup>30</sup> Paul had plied his trade in Thessalonica (2 Thess. 2:7-9), in Corinth and, according to Luke (see Acts 20:34), was doing so in Ephesus as he wrote 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:8). On the other hand persecution in response to his preaching appears to have been a frequent, but not constant component of Paul's experience. Likewise, his travels featured hardships but they were not constant.

<sup>31</sup> Hock, *Tentmaking*: 36, has concluded that 'artisans ... were frequently reviled or abused, often victimized ... never accorded status.' Perceptions of manual labour in the ancient world were, however, varied. The Rabbinic literature and the Old Testament suggest that the Jews viewed work as honourable (*T. Qidd.* 1.11; *m. 'Abot* 2.2; Deut. 11:10-15; 16:14-15). See also Lightfoot, *Notes*: 27; F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977): 108. Literary evidence suggests, however, that at least the Greek upper class viewed tradesmen with derision (Cic. *Pro Flacco* 18; *Off.* 1.150; Sen. *Ep.* 88.21, 23; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 7.110; Luc. *Somm.* 9; Juv. *Sat.* 9.140). Still the picture is not simple. Probably at least some of the Corinthians were upper class (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26) but not many. The downward views of the upper class cannot be uncritically identified with the horizontal views of the tradesmen. Timothy B. Savage, *Power Through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians* (SNTSMS 86; Cambridge: University Press, 1996): 85, argues that tombstone inscriptions attest to the pride craftsmen felt in their trade (see *ILS* 7427-29; 7682-84; 7682-84; 7422; 7539).

<sup>32</sup> Savage, *Power through Weakness*: 87, argues that it was the combination of impoverishment as a manual labourer and leadership of the church that was probably



As an impoverished artisan claiming authority over the church, Paul was quite likely despised by many.<sup>33</sup> It is reasonable, therefore, to identify 4:12a and 4:13b as two ways, non-figurative and figurative, of saying the same thing.

Now we are in position to respond to the question: how prominent is the reference to manual labour in Paul's list of hardships? Certainly more than incidental, it appears to be the most prominent component of at least the second section (4:11-13) of the hardship catalogue.

Now for the second question in reference to 4:9-13: how do Paul and the Corinthians respectively measure up against the message of the cross upon which the entire argument of 1 Corinthians 1-4 is based? Striking similarity is apparent between, on the one hand Paul's self-description in 4:9-13 and on the other hand his exposition of the message of the cross and his *modus operandi* in preaching (1:17-2:5). The message of the cross is considered foolishness (1:18, 21, 23) and Paul is a fool for Christ (4:10). The power of God is manifested in the weakness of the cross (1:23-25) and the calling of the weak (1:26-27). Likewise, Paul is weak (4:10). God's choice was for the lowly, despised things (1:28). Paul is dishonoured (4:10). Paul's presence 'in weakness and fear and with much trembling' (2:3) parallels the foolishness and weakness of the gospel (1:18-25) and 4:11-13 provides the detailed description of the condition in which he as a preacher of the gospel lived among the Corinthians. Thus, 4:9-13 describes the concrete manifestation in the manually labouring apostle's life experience of the message he preached – 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5.<sup>34</sup> Paul's life conforms to the message of the cross and is a fitting pattern for imitation.

What can be said of the Corinthians? Although unnamed in 1 Corinthians 4:11-13, they are neither far from view nor commended in the implied contrast.<sup>35</sup> The Corinthians' present occupation of

---

strikingly unattractive to the Corinthians. See Plin. *Ep.* 1.14; Juv. 1.137-40; *P. Oxy.* 3273.

<sup>33</sup> Brian K. Peterson, *Eloquence and the Proclamation of the Gospel in Corinth* (SBLDS 163; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998): 68, n. 114, cautions against assuming that even Corinthians from lower social levels appreciated Paul's manual labour – 'they may have valued their own work, and yet considered it inappropriate for their preacher.'

<sup>34</sup> John H. Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (SNTSMS 26; Cambridge: University Press, 1975): 203; Pickett, *Cross in Corinth*, 83.

<sup>35</sup> The apostle's description of his own hardships has been crafted under the influence of his earlier description of the Corinthians – e.g. hungry and thirsty (4:11) are in

positions of wisdom, strength and honour gives them a certain disturbing likeness to the figures of this age (1 Cor. 1:20-25) whom God has not chosen.<sup>36</sup>

### ***1 Corinthians 4:14: The Warning of Judgment***

The Corinthians are in Christ (1 Cor. 4:10; cf. 1:4-9), but are not behaving as such. They are far from conformity to the message of the cross, having assumed a position of exaltation over their apostle whose weakness is precisely 'for Christ'. Paul undertakes, therefore to warn<sup>37</sup> (νουθετῶν) the Corinthians as a conscientious father would his own children (cf. Eph. 6:4). The warning theme is developed further in 1 Corinthians 4:18-21, but first the course for avoidance of judgment and remedy of the rift in Corinth is prescribed.

### ***1 Corinthians 4:15-17: The Call for Imitation***

Imitation is the theme of 1 Corinthians 4:15-17. What are the Corinthians urged to imitate? Most commentators emphasize imitation as following Paul's personal example and hold that 4:9-13 supplies the primary content of his example.<sup>38</sup> Paul's way of life is consistent with

---

contrast to filled (4:8). One effect of 4:11-13 is, therefore, to highlight further the dramatic disparity between the apostle's lowliness and the Corinthians' self-exaltation. They are moving in different directions.

<sup>36</sup> The Corinthians are wise. 'Greeks look for wisdom' (1:22), through which God is not known. The Corinthians are strong. 'Jews demand miraculous signs' (1:22), displays of strength. The Corinthians are honoured. The noble or honourable are not characteristically objects of God's choice (1:26-29). The rulers of this age (2:6, 8) have not understood God's wisdom manifested in Christ and the Corinthians do not understand that same wisdom manifested in the suffering of the apostle.

<sup>37</sup> See J. Behm, 'νουθετέω', *TDNT* 4: 1019-22.

<sup>38</sup> Willis de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul: An Exegetical Study* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1962): 146-152; Fee, *First Corinthians*: 186-187; Hbring, *1 Corinthians*: 32; Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*: 234; Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*: 90; D. M. Stanley, 'Become Imitators of Me', *Bib* 40 (1959): 872; Winter, *Philo and Paul*: 200; Pickett, *Cross in Corinth*: 81. W. Michaelis, 'μυμέομαι, μιμητής, συμμιμητής' in *TDNT* 4: 668, however, takes the phrase καθὼς πανταχοῦ ἐν πάσῃ ἐκκλησίᾳ διδάσκω to indicate that imitation of Paul here means obedience to the apostle's teaching. (See also Weiss, *Erste Korintherbrief*: 120.) Is this an either/or choice? Because Paul's call for imitation is based upon the father-child relationship (1 Cor. 4:14) authority is emphasized. See Eva Maria Lassen, 'The Use of the Father Image in Imperial Propaganda and 1 Corinthians 4:14-21', *TynBul* 42.1 (1991): 136; Elizabeth Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991): 100-102; and for the Jewish background, *b. Sanh.* 19b; 2 Kgs 2:12; 5:13; 13:14-15. Thus, to exclude Michaelis' emphasis on authoritative teaching is imprudent. De Boer, *Imitation of Paul*: 150, suggests that 'when Paul speaks about the teaching of his ways, he may have in mind the comprehensive process by which he sought to lead the Corinthians to

his message and manner of proclaiming it (1:18–2:5) and is, therefore, a fitting pattern for imitation.

This is not to suggest that imitation of Paul means becoming manually labouring, itinerate apostles. Rather, Paul summons the Corinthians to apply the message of the cross to existence in the community. Just as the message of the cross is embodied in the proclaimer's life experience so the message of the cross is to be embodied in the believers' life experience.<sup>39</sup> Paul's aim is no less than to establish the cross as the centre of Christian existence in Corinth. The cross will stand at the centre of Corinthian Christianity when the cruciform life exemplified by Paul is embraced as normative. Imitation of the apostle is the path to this goal.

### *1 Corinthians 4:18-21: Warning of Judgement*

In 1 Corinthians 4:18-21 Paul entertains the possibility that his call to imitation will not be heeded by all in Corinth. Paul alerts the persistently arrogant that there will be a test of their power.<sup>40</sup> What is the power to which Paul refers? How will the apostle demonstrate his

---

the Christian faith and into a way of life appropriate to such an allegiance.' It seems reasonable to suppose Paul places his example before the Corinthians for their imitation as a form of authoritative teaching. Hafemann, *Suffering and Ministry*: 61, has the balance right in arguing that Paul exerts his authority in his claim to describe authentic Christian living – 'it is *his* [i.e., Paul's] "way", i.e. the way of the cross, that is to be imitated (4:16, cf. 11:1).'

<sup>39</sup> This raises the question of the uniqueness of Paul's suffering as an apostle. His suffering is unique in two ways when compared to the suffering the Corinthians are called to embrace. First, his specific suffering (e.g. labouring in the workshop or occasionally being persecuted as a result of public proclamation of the gospel) is not to be duplicated. The Corinthians are not specifically called to be itinerant missionaries supporting themselves as tentmakers (cf. 1 Cor. 7:20-24). Second, and related to the first, his suffering is suffering *as an apostle*. Not all are apostles (12:27-31). At the centre of Paul's apostolic ministry is his *preaching* of the crucified messiah. Hafemann, *Suffering and Ministry*: 46-47, identifies the *revelatory* function of Paul's sufferings: 'Against this background [i.e. 1 Cor. 2:1-5], 1 Cor. 4:8-13 functions as the needed explanation of *how* it is that Paul's "weakness", in its various expressions, actually functions to support his message of the cross' (p. 56). Hence, Paul's suffering 'cannot be separated from his call to *preach the word of God*' (p. 47). See also David A. Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness: Astheneia and its Cognates in the Pauline Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984): 106. The same cannot be said of every Corinthian believer, for not every one is to preach the word of God. On the other hand the experience of the Corinthians as imitators of Paul will necessarily be revelatory. Their lives will be a revelation of the word of the cross which they have received.

<sup>40</sup> Although the Corinthians are in no position to judge Paul (1 Cor. 4:4b), he is in position to test opponents (4:19-20) and administer discipline (4:21).

own possession of it?<sup>41</sup> Presumably we may associate the power (4:19-20) with the image of the rod (ῥάβδος, 4:21). Those who persist in arrogance will have their power tested and found wanting when Paul arrives to wield the rod.<sup>42</sup> Although Paul does not make explicit in 4:21 how the rod will fall upon the arrogant, the threat of judgment is clear.

### Summary

The following thematic structure of 4:6-21 has been demonstrated:

1 Cor. 4:6-21	Themes
4:6-7	<i>Pride</i> (in a favored leader) toward others
4:8	The Corinthians' self-perception addressed as <i>eschatological presumption</i>
4:9-13	Paul's <i>hardships</i> as the pattern for imitation
4:15-17	The call for <i>imitation</i>
4:14, 18-21	The <i>warning</i> of judgment/discipline

<sup>41</sup> John Calvin, *The First Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians*, tr. J. W. Fraser (Cambridge: University Press): 1: 100, suggests the power is true 'evangelical preaching', but Paul's preaching is already well known in Corinth and more of it is unlikely to convince those still arrogant in the face of 1 Corinthians 1-4. Robertson-Plummer, *1 Corinthians*: 92; William D. Spencer, 'The Power in Paul's Teaching (1 Cor. 4:9-20)', *JETS* 32.1 (1989): 51-54; and De Boer, *Imitation of Paul*: 143-144, suggest the reference is to the Spirit's power to effect new life with clearly attesting evidence, but if 1 Corinthians 1-4 has not won acceptance of the premise that Christian lives should conform to the message of the cross, Paul pointing out failure to produce such would have little impact.

<sup>42</sup> Carl Schneider, 'ῥάβδος, ῥαβδίζω, ῥαβδοῦχος' in *TDNT* 6: 968, maintains that the 'Greek schoolmaster or pedagogue' (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15) handles Paul's rod. David Daube, 'Paul a Hellenistic Schoolmaster?' in *Studies in Rationalism, Judaism and Universalism*, ed. R. Loewe (New York: Humanities, 1966): 67-73, shows, however, that the background is not at all exclusively in Hellenism. Further, we should note that Paul does *not* claim to be a guardian (1 Cor. 4:14-15), therefore, the background to ῥάβδος should be sought neither in the schoolroom nor the guardian-child relationship. Although the image of the rod may be familiar enough in any culture to have meaning, we should seek understanding of Paul's use of the rod image from the Old Testament. Frequently ῥάβδος is employed in the LXX. Moses' rod is used to perform mighty deeds, often as expressions of God's wrath or judgment (see Exod. 7:9-20; 8:5, 17; 10:13; 14:16; 17:5, 9; Num 20:8-11; Judg. 6:21). Paul is depicted as a worker of miracles and may expect to discipline through some mighty deed (cf. Acts 13:8-12; see 2 Cor. 12:12; 1 Cor. 2:4[?]; cf. Acts 14:8-10; 16:18; 19:11-12; 20:7-12). Thomas L. Brodie, 'The Systematic Use of the Pentateuch in 1 Corinthians' in *The Corinthian Correspondence*, ed. R. Bieringer (Leuven: University Press, 1996): 446-447, 457, points out that Aaron's rod is used in confirmation of God's appointed leaders (Num. 17:1-13) after Korah and his followers grumbled against Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:41; cf. 1 Cor. 4:3; 9:3). The rod is frequently an instrument of discipline, used either by an earthly father to train his child (Prov. 23:13-14) or by God to discipline or judge (see 2 Sam. 7:14; Job 9:34; Ps. 2:9; 88 [89]:32; 109 [110]:2; Mic. 5:1; Isa. 10:5; 28:26-27; Lam. 3:1).

## The Thematic Structure of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 Compared with 1 Corinthians 4:6-21

Now I will explore exegetically 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 to demonstrate that its key themes run parallel to those of 1 Corinthians 4:6-21.

### *1 Corinthians 8:1-3: The Knowers' Pride toward Others*

After the introductory *περὶ δὲ* ('now concerning', cf. 7:1; 7:25; 12:1; 16:1; 16:12) Paul includes what is widely viewed as a quote from the Corinthian knowers.<sup>43</sup> The majority opinion is that the quote consists of πάντες γινώσκουσιν ἔχομεν.<sup>44</sup> Willis argues, however, for a longer quote – οἴδαμεν ὅτι πάντες γινώσκουσιν ἔχομεν.<sup>45</sup> If this is the case, the slogan – 'we know that we all possess knowledge' – should be viewed as an emphatic statement by the knowers of what sets them apart. They are defending their ground by emphasizing what distinguishes them: 'We are distinguished by our knowledge and authorized to act freely in regard to εἰδωλοθύτα.'

Paul's critique of the knowers' claim exposes the effect of enthroning knowledge itself as the determining factor for behaviour in

---

<sup>43</sup> John C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York: Seabury, 1965): 68.

<sup>44</sup> 'We all have knowledge'. See, for example, Barrett, *First Corinthians*: 189; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*: 140; Fee, *First Corinthians*: 365; and J. F. M. Smit, '1 Cor. 8:1-6: A Rhetorical *Partitio*: A Contribution to the Coherence of 1 Cor. 8:1–11:1' in *The Corinthian Correspondence*, ed. R. Bieringer (Leuven: University Press, 1996): 583. In this case either οἴδαμεν ὅτι is used 'to introduce a well known fact that is generally accepted' (*BAG*, 558) or ὅτι has its common function of introducing a quote.

<sup>45</sup> 'We know that we all have knowledge'. Willis, *Idol Meat*: 68-70, following Walter Lock, '1 Corinthians viii.1-9, A Suggestion', *The Expositor* 6 (1897): 65-74. Paul D. Gardner, *The Gifts of God and the Authentication of a Christian: An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 8–11:1* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994): 23, agrees with Willis. I do as well, primarily for two reasons. First, if οἴδαμεν ὅτι (1 Cor. 8:1) is Paul's agreement with a Corinthian claim that all have knowledge, then he appears to contradict himself in 8:7. The tension would be resolved if the 'all' of 8:1 referred not to all Corinthian believers, but narrowly to 'all' the knowers and Paul, as maintained by Smit, 'A Rhetorical *Partitio*': 583; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*: 140; and Roger Omanson, 'Acknowledging Paul's Quotations', *BT* 43.2 (1992): 209. But secondly, it seems peculiar for Paul to align himself overtly with the knowers (as he does if οἴδαμεν ὅτι is his own introduction of a quote) in 1 Cor. 8:1 and then distance himself in 8:9 by referring to 'this authority *of yours*'. Presumably knowledge and authority are in a direct relationship. If Paul claims the knowledge overtly in 8:1, he could well be expected to say 'this authority *of ours*' in 8:9. If οἴδαμεν ὅτι is assigned to the knowers, then Paul has simply stated their claim without committing himself. Although it is not possible to identify beyond question the extent of Paul's quotations, it seems best to me for οἴδαμεν ὅτι to be included in Paul's quote of the knowers.

the church – ἡ γνώσις φυσιοῦ (8:1; cf. 4:6). Is the pride directed toward God (cf. 8:3) or toward others in the community of believers? Because the implied object of οἰκοδομεῖ in the directly contrasting statement must be ‘a/the brother/s’ and the concrete situation in which pride is expressed (8:10) results in the destruction of the weaker brother (8:11-12), κατὰ ἀδελφοῦ must be the implied conclusion of ἡ γνώσις φυσιοῦ. Thus, the complete thought is ἡ γνώσις φυσιοῦ [κατὰ ἀδελφοῦ]. In 1 Corinthians 4:6c Paul reveals that the reason he has applied the foregoing images to teach adherence to the boundaries of the scriptures is that the Corinthians μη ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἐνὸς φυσιοῦσθε κατὰ τοῦ ἐτέρου.<sup>46</sup> Knowledge applied without love (8:1) results in the same evil against which Paul warns in 4:6: ἡ γνώσις φυσιοῦ [κατὰ ἀδελφοῦ] (8:1) is parallel to μὴ εἶς ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἐνὸς φυσιοῦσθε κατὰ τοῦ ἐτέρου (4:6). The theme is pridefulness toward others in the community of believers.

Then in both 1 Corinthians 8:2 and 4:7 Paul rhetorically deflates the prideful Corinthians: if anyone thinks he knows anything, he has not come to know (ingressive aorist) as he ought to know (8:2); and who distinguishes you (4:7)? The idea carried by διακρίνω (4:7) appears to be present also in 8:2. Paul has emphasized the knowers’ pride *over against others* (ἡ γνώσις φυσιοῦ), thus the knowledge is construed as a distinguishing possession.<sup>47</sup> In 4:7 Paul asks who distinguishes the Corinthians. Because the immediately succeeding question (τί δὲ ἔχεις ὃ οὐκ ἔλαβες, 4:7) suggests reception of gifts, it is perhaps best to suppose that the distinguishing in view in 1 Corinthians 4:7 is at God’s initiative in the bestowal of gifts.<sup>48</sup> Thus the implied answer to the rhetorical question is something like ‘God makes distinctions in giftedness and these distinctions are, therefore, no grounds for pride.’ In both 1 Corinthians 8:2 and 4:7 Paul says in effect, ‘If you think there is something to be held pridefully as a distinguishing gift, you are wrong.’

In 1 Corinthians 8:3 and 4:7b,c Paul employs the parallel themes of God’s initiative in election (8:3) and God’s initiative in the bestowal of gifts (4:7b,c). In 8:3 he writes of love toward God and being known by

<sup>46</sup> Hooker, ‘Beyond the Things Written’: 129-130.

<sup>47</sup> Gardner, *Gifts of God*: 32-33, argues that the Corinthian γνώσις was ‘flaunted by certain Corinthians as that which demonstrated that they were known by God.’

<sup>48</sup> See my note 13.

God.<sup>49</sup> One might expect Paul to write, ‘If anyone loves his brother,’ as a way to develop further the earlier phrase, ‘love builds up’ (8:1) but he turns now to love toward God to emphasize the source and manner of receipt of γνῶσις to its puffed up possessors. The one who ἀγαπᾷ God (present active indicative) ἔγνωσται by God (perfect passive indicative). The present lover of God has been and is still known by God.<sup>50</sup> God exercises the initiative. His knowing of the believer is prior to and foundational for the believer’s love toward God (cf. Gal. 4:9; Rom. 8:28; 2 Tim. 2:19). As Bultmann observes, ‘This knowledge of God is his election of grace.’<sup>51</sup> Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 4:7b,c Paul’s repeated use of λαμβάνω emphasizes that whatever the Corinthians have has come to them as gift from God. There is, therefore, no basis for boasting.

First Corinthians 8:1-3 is now seen to employ themes parallel to those of 4:6-7:

1 Cor. 8:1-3

Knowledge puffs up [against a brother]

If anyone thinks [he is distinguished because] he knows something, he has not known as he ought to know.

If anyone loves God, this one is known by him [as the object of God’s electing grace].

1 Cor. 4:6-7

. . . that you may not be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.

What distinguishes you?

What do you have that you did not receive? [Nothing, for all is by grace.] If indeed you received, why do you boast as if you did not receive?

As 4:6-7 exposes the pride of the Corinthians toward others in divisive loyalty to favoured leaders, so 8:1-3 exposes the pride of the Corinthian knowers toward weaker brothers in unloving application of knowledge.

---

<sup>49</sup> *Contra* Fee, *First Corinthians*: 364, 367, and G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles* (London: Oxford, 1953): 31-32, who accept the reading of P<sup>46</sup> and Clement on the argument that the logic of Paul’s thought is preserved by the shorter text. Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: American Bible Society, 1994): 490-491, explains the rationale for retention of τὸν θεόν and ὑπ αὐτοῦ. The text tradition does not support the abbreviation. Further, Fee’s chief objection does not stand: ‘The standard text, it should be pointed out, does indeed reflect Paul’s theology of God’s prior action in our behalf: that our love of God is predicated on God’s prior knowledge of us. The problem is in finding a satisfactory reason for him to have said that here’ (p. 368). The satisfactory reason is that Paul intends to deflate the knowers’ pride and so recalls them to their election by grace.

<sup>50</sup> Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Columbus: Wartburg, 1946): 336.

<sup>51</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, ‘γινώσκω’, *TDNT* 1: 709.

***1 Corinthians 8:4-6: The Knowers' Disregard for Present Realities***

The origins of the apparently confessional material in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 are debated, but need not concern us here. Obviously the confession as it stands has, at the very least, passed through the hands of Paul. It seems reasonable to suppose that both Paul and the Corinthians would affirm the truth of 8:4-6.<sup>52</sup> The larger argument suggests, however, that the apostle and the knowers probably differ on where the emphasis lies in the confession.

The knowers probably emphasize that 'an idol is nothing in the world' (8:4; cf. 10:19), for they apparently admit to no negative effects of food offered to idols. Paul's larger argument (8:1-11:1) confirms that his emphasis is upon the realities faced presently by monotheistic believers who have yet to reach the goal of Christian existence. The confession of 8:6 has a future orientation – ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν. God stands at the beginning of all things (τὰ πάντα) and is the goal toward which distinctly Christian existence (ἡμεῖς) progresses.<sup>53</sup> A similar Pauline construction in Romans 11:36 (εἰς αὐτόν) expresses that God is the eschatological goal of all things.<sup>54</sup> Anthony Thiselton attributes the problem of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 to over realized eschatology.<sup>55</sup> Paul includes correctively that 'there are many gods and many lords' (8:5b). This reference must be read in light of 10:20 and 15:22-28. Paul identifies as a *future* event the full subjugation and destruction of all powers in opposition to the reign of Christ.<sup>56</sup> For Paul this sets into perspective the whole of 8:4-6. Yes, there is one God and there is one Lord, but the unopposed reign is not yet fully realized.<sup>57</sup> The many gods and many lords (8:5b) included in 'all dominion, authority and power' (15:24) are enemies not yet put under the feet of Christ (15:25). Christ does reign now (cf. Eph. 1:15-23), thus he bears the title Lord (1 Cor. 8:6). The perfection of his reign, however, remains a future

---

<sup>52</sup> Although we should assume that the Corinthian knowers would take issue with 1 Cor. 8:5b, or at least dispute an interpretation of it which supported a critique of their practices.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Giblin, 'Three Monotheistic Texts in Paul', *CBQ* 37 (1975): 535; Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*: 168; Fee, *First Corinthians*: 375.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT 6; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998): 619-620.

<sup>55</sup> Thiselton, 'Realized Eschatology': 519-520. Käsemann, *Questions*, 125-126: 'the dominant group in Corinth believed themselves to have reached the goal of salvation already ... This is the root of all that has gone wrong in Corinth.'

<sup>56</sup> Donfried, 'The Kingdom of God in Paul': 177.

<sup>57</sup> Käsemann, *Questions*: 128.



event. Although the many gods and lords do not measure up to the estimation given them by their pagan devotees, they do exist (8:5b) and presently are not fully subjugated. Further, the existence of the many gods and lords (8:5b) is highly relevant for the discussion of food offered to idols, for they exist as demons to whom are offered the sacrifices to idols (10:20). Idol worshippers are in fellowship with demons.

The knowers neglect such present realities which make idolatry a real possibility. The knowers are functioning in the present as if the utterly unopposed reign of Christ has already begun, neglecting the future dimension of eschatology. They have gotten off of God's eschatological schedule. They are eschatologically presumptuous. Paul emphasizes, 'We are unto him' (8:6), and makes clear in his larger argument that we have not yet arrived. The Corinthians have begun their journey but completion is a future event, not guaranteed to the disobedient (10:1-5). The knowers risk prostitution of themselves with demons (10:18-22), disqualification for the prize (9:27) and destruction of their brothers (8:11).

As stated above, the Corinthian presumption of eschatological fulfilment in present experience is evident in 1 Corinthians 4:8. Both 8:4-6 and 4:8 share the themes of authority, the present realities faced in the 'not yet' and the future orientation of eschatology. The modes of address are different. In one case Paul uses mutually affirmed truth (8:4-6, excepting 8:5b); in the other sarcastic description (4:8). In the latter Paul's critique of the Corinthians is sharp and immediately apparent. In the former the critique becomes clear in light of the larger argument. In each case, however, Paul is addressing an improper estimation of authority based on knowledge (8:4-6)<sup>58</sup> or identification with a favoured leader (4:8; cf. 4:6); and a misconception of present reality and appropriate Christian existence in the not yet. In both 8:4-6 and 4:8 Paul faces neglect of the future orientation of eschatology and deals with eschatological presumption.

---

<sup>58</sup> Some are apparently participating in cultic meals (1 Cor. 10:1-22) under the assumption that their absolute monotheism insulates them from idolatry. Hence they presume to 'reign' so fully that they can join a pagan worship event with immunity. 1 Cor. 8:4-5a is a truth *misused* by the knowers.

***1 Corinthians 9:12b, 15-18: The Pattern for Imitation***

We may view 1 Corinthians 8:7–9:27 as one large division of Paul’s argument oriented throughout toward non-use of rights in service of the gospel. The climax of this section comes at 9:12b, 15-18 with Paul’s intense statement of resolve in his non-use of his rights as an apostle. Everything else in 8:7–9:27 leads to or from 9:12b, 15-18.<sup>59</sup>

We shall immediately turn attention to the parallels between 9:12b, 15-18 and 4:9-13. Paul’s manual labour figures prominently in both passages (4:12; 9:12b, cf. 6).<sup>60</sup> Also, the results of Paul’s self-support through manual labour instead of using his right to maintenance are emphasized in both passages: ‘I endure all things’ (9:12b); and ‘we are hungry, thirsty and poorly clothed and roughly treated and homeless’ (4:11).<sup>61</sup> At a deeper level, both passages portray Paul as involuntarily under God’s call, voluntarily not using the right associated with his appointment, and enduring hardship as a result. The prominence of the divine call is apparent in 9:16-17. A necessity (ἀνάγκη) is placed upon Paul. He has, therefore, been entrusted with a stewardship (οἰκονομία) and engages in his preaching ministry involuntarily (ἄκων). The same ideas are present in 4:9-13. God has placed Paul on display (ἀπέδειξεν). This is God’s action. Paul has been made a spectacle (θέατρον ἐγενήθημεν). There is a degree of ignominy *inherent* to preaching properly the message of the cross, for the message is considered foolishness and weakness (1:18-25; 2:1-5).

---

<sup>59</sup> Four observations support this assertion. First, in 8:7-12 the knowers’ rights are acknowledged and the problem is posed to which 9:12b, 15-18 is the solution in the form of Paul’s example. In 8:13 Paul states his willingness to forego a right in the *hypothetical* dilemma of whether to consume meat. Thus the verse (8:13) stands as a bridge from the knowers’ *concrete* dilemma (i.e. the potential for their right in the matter of *food* to offend) to Paul’s *concrete* example of non-use of the right to material support (9:12b, 15-18). Second, in 9:1-14 (excepting 9:12b) Paul’s right to material support is established beyond dispute for the primary purpose of setting into bold relief his non-use of the right (9:12b, 15-18). Third, in 9:19-23 the guiding principle derived from Paul’s actual practice in 9:12b, 15-18 is stated. In this statement the summons is implicitly issued to the knowers to apply the principle in their concrete dilemma – ‘to the weak I became weak’ (9:22). Finally, in 9:24-27 a familiar image is employed to illustrate the self-denial embraced by Paul in his paradigmatic non-use of his right (9:12b, 15-18). Thus, each unit of 8:7–9:27 is directed either prospectively or retrospectively toward the climactic 9:12b, 15-18.

<sup>60</sup> On the prominence of manual labour in 4:9-13 see above.

<sup>61</sup> Hafemann, *Suffering and Ministry*: 134: ‘We endure all things’ (πάντα στέγομεν) is likely a reference to ‘the sufferings and hardships listed by Paul in 1 Cor. 4:11-13 [which] were the common lot of the traveling craftsmen of Paul’s day.’ See also Hock, *Tentmaking*: 35.

Thus, in 4:9-10 and 9:15-18 alike Paul has an ἀνάγκη placed upon him. He neither initiated nor does he presently exercise authority over his participation in gospel preaching, for he is a steward (4:1, οἰκονόμους) of the mystery of God (cf. 9:17). Far from having taken upon himself voluntarily the reproach inherent to gospel preaching, Paul is like a captured enemy involuntarily led in triumphal procession unto death (4:9).<sup>62</sup>

Paul also affirms, however, voluntary abstention from the use of a right in the gospel. This becomes clear in 9:15-18 in which Paul portrays himself as involuntarily preaching, but voluntarily offering the gospel free of charge. He does not depict himself as under compulsion at his point. The discussion in 9:15-18 brings into focus the voluntary dimension of 4:9-13. In light of 9:12b, 15-18, the manual labour of 4:12 must be viewed as a voluntary venture. This venture results in endurance of suffering and deprivation beyond the ignominy inherent to preaching the message of the cross. The hardships which he endures (9:12b) as a result of his self-support through manual labour include those listed in 4:11-13. Other hardships in 4:9-13 – e.g. being viewed as a fool, weak and dishonoured (4:9-10) – are those inherent to the preaching of the cross of Christ (cf. 1:18-25) in which Paul is constrained by God to engage. Therefore, it appears that Paul endures both ordained (4:9-10) and voluntary (4:11-13) hardships as an apostle. The voluntary hardships are those endured as Paul offers the gospel free of charge (9:18) by means of manual labour (4:12; 9:6) in order to avoid hindrance to the gospel (9:12b). The parallels between 9:12b, 15-18 and 4:9-13 are set forth in the following table in the sequence of (1) the involuntary character of Paul's preaching ministry, (2) the voluntary non-use of an apostolic right to support, and (3) the suffering endured as a result of non-use of the right.

**1 Cor. 9:12b, 15-18**

a necessity is placed upon me (9:16)

I have not used this right (9:12b) ...

I have not used any of these (9:15)

I endure all things (9:12b)

**1 Cor. 4:9-13**

God has placed us apostles on display  
... we have been made a spectacle (4:9)

we labour by working with our own  
hands (4:12)

we are hungry and thirsty and poorly  
clothed and roughly treated and  
homeless (4:11)

<sup>62</sup> Hafemann, *Suffering and Ministry*: 57, argues that 1 Cor. 4:9 is parallel to 2 Cor. 2:14, the background to which is the Roman institution of the triumphal procession.

*1 Corinthians 10:11, 22: Warnings of Judgment*

Paul's recitation of the fathers' failings includes episodes from different stages in the Exodus/wilderness journey and portrays the fathers as persistently craving evil things (1 Cor. 10:6).<sup>63</sup> How close are the Corinthians to conforming to that portrait? Paul's argument in 8:1–11:1 suggests that the Corinthians are prideful (8:1-2), overly confident (10:12) and provoking the Lord to jealousy (10:22; cf. Deut. 32:17). Will they persist?

Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 1–4 points in a similar direction and implies the same question. The Corinthians are improperly boasting (1:31; 3:18-21a; 4:7). They are also arrogantly critiquing God's appointed leader (4:3, 18). In the face of similar attitudes in 8:1–11:1 and 1–4 parallel warnings are sounded.

**1 Cor. 10:11**

Now these things happened to them as an example and were written for a warning to us on whom the completion of the ages has arrived.

**1 Cor. 4:14-15**

I do not write these things to shame you, but to warn you as my beloved children. For if you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus through the gospel I became your father.

Differences between the two warnings are apparent. First Corinthians 10:11 is preceded immediately by negative examples from the Old Testament scriptures (10:6-10). The Corinthians should *not* follow their fathers' (i.e. the Israelites') example. First Corinthians 4:14 is preceded by Paul's positive self-presentation in the hardship list (4:9-13). The Corinthians *should* follow their father's (i.e. Paul's) example.

The similarities between the warnings are impressive, however. First, there is the obvious verbal parallelism – *ταῦτα . . . ἐγράφη δὲ πρὸς νοουθεσίαν* (10:11); and *γράφω ταῦτα . . . νοουθετῶ[v]* (4:14). Second, scripture is in view in both cases. The *ταῦτα* of 10:11 refers to the scriptural material of 10:1-10. Scripture is in view in the *ταῦτα* of 4:14 as well. First Corinthians 1–4 contains a wealth of scripture quotations (1:19=Isa. 29:14; 1:31=Jer. 9:24; 2:16=Isa. 40:13; 3:19=Job

---

<sup>63</sup> The Exodus 32 episode (1 Cor. 10:7) occurs soon after the Red Sea crossing, early in the journey toward Canaan. The Numbers 25 episode (1 Cor. 10:8) is set close to the occupation of Canaan. Numbers 14 (1 Cor. 10:10) marks the beginnings of the forty years wilderness period, and Numbers 16 and 21 (1 Cor. 10:9) are from the heart of the wilderness wanderings. Thus, the Israelites are persistently demonstrating throughout the journey arrogant disregard of the laws of the Lord and his appointed leaders as they desire evil things.

5:3; and 3:20=Ps. 94:11). First Corinthians 4:6 is a call to remain within the bounds of scripture.<sup>64</sup> In both cases (10:11; 4:14), therefore, the *ταῦτα* is inclusive of scripture. Third, in 4:8 the Corinthians themselves provide the negative example to match the negative examples of the Israelites in 10:1-10. Finally, both 10:11 and 4:14 look forward to the threat of judgment or discipline (10:22; 4:21).

The threat of judgment in 10:22 follows the command to flee from idolatry (10:14) and an argument regarding the incompatibility of participation in cultic meals with participation in the Lord's Supper based on the *κοινωνία* concept (10:15-21).<sup>65</sup> To urge toward compliance with this prohibition Paul concludes this section of his argument in 10:22 with what Brian Rosner calls 'a frightening threat of judgment upon those Corinthian Christians who provoke God to jealousy.'<sup>66</sup> Rosner persuasively argues that 10:22b – *μὴ ἰσχυρότεροι αὐτοῦ ἔσμεν* – should be 'recognized as a text which deals with the discipline of the church in the 'strongest' terms.'<sup>67</sup> As stated above the same is true for 4:21. These two verses are parallel threats of judgment or discipline.

1 Cor. 10:22

Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

1 Cor. 4:18-21

As though I were not coming to you some have become puffed up. But I will come quickly to you, if the Lord wills, and I will know not the speech of the ones who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in speech, but in power. What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod or in a spirit of gentleness?

<sup>64</sup> See above.

<sup>65</sup> Willis, *Idol Meat*: 166-212, deals at length with the *κοινωνία* concept and concludes that Paul emphasizes covenant alliance with Christ shared by his worshippers in 1 Cor. 10:16. Hence in 10:20 Paul 'prohibits Christians from becoming partners *with their pagan friends* in idolatry' (p. 189). Involvement in pagan meals constitutes 'tacit recognition of supernatural powers opposed to God ... [as] one shows his allegiance by the worship in which he participates' (p. 192). Willis is not wrong to emphasize the horizontal dimension of fellowship in the cultic event. He simply does not acknowledge enough. Gardner, *Gifts*: 155-165, argues similarly that Paul is concerned with believers' covenant allegiance, but critiques the primarily horizontal emphasis of Willis and others as failing to account for the provocation of God to jealousy by expressing loyalty *to demons*.

<sup>66</sup> Brian Rosner, "'Stronger than He?'" The Strength of 1 Corinthians 10:22b', *TynBul* 43 (1992): 179.

<sup>67</sup> Rosner, 'Stronger than He?': 179.

### *1 Corinthians 10:33–11:1: Call to Imitation*

1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1 is a section with three primary purposes: (1) summary of points previously made; (2) instruction for specific scenarios likely to arise in the Corinthian situation; and (3) presentation of the apostle again as a model for imitation. The third of these purposes is my interest presently. First Corinthians 10:33 resembles closely 9:19-23 (esp. 9:22). This resemblance recalls attention to Paul's practice of working rather than using his right to material support from the Corinthians (9:6, 12b, 15-18), the specific practice in which the principle of 9:22 is applied. He then beckons the Corinthians to follow his example as he follows the example of Christ (11:1).<sup>68</sup> They are to sacrifice unto the end that their brothers may be saved – that is, not lost to eschatological destruction (8:9-12).

We should observe that the relationship of 11:1 to 4:16 is very close. First, there is the exact verbal parallel – μιμηταί μου γίνεσθε (4:16; 11:1). Second, there are the closely resembling references to Paul's own imitation of Christ – καθώς κἀγὼ χριστοῦ (11:1); τὰς ὁδοὺς μου τὰς ἐν χριστῷ (4:17). Although 11:1 refers more obviously to imitation of Christ than does 4:17, Paul's ways in Christ are the manner of life (cf. 2:1-5; 4:9-13) consistent with the pattern established by Christ

---

<sup>68</sup> Contra Dodd, *Paradigmatic 'I'*: 21-22, 28-29, who disagrees that Christ's example per se is referred to here. His translation of 1 Cor. 11:1 is 'Become imitators of me just as I also belong to Christ' (p. 113). Dodd defends this position on the following grounds: (1) the 'literary problem that Christ's portrayal in 1 Corinthians has to do with suffering on the cross and the events surrounding the resurrection (cf. 1:17-18, 23-24; 3:11; 7:22; 11:23-26; 15:3-12), surely aspects of Christ's life that Paul regards as inimitable' (p. 22, n. 33); and (2) the 'usage of Χριστοῦ in the letter [is] as an identifier of one's Christian status (1:1, 12; 3:23; 4:1; 7:22; 15:23)' (pp. 28-29). Dodd relates 1 Cor. 11:1 to 1:12 and considers the phrase 'I am of Christ' to be polemical in both cases (p. 40). While χριστοῦ makes 'as I belong to Christ' grammatically permissible, Dodd's argument does not stand. First, Christ's suffering on the cross is precisely what Paul finds imitable for both apostle and Christian as 1 Cor. 1:18-25; 2:1-5; 4:9-13, 16 confirm. Second, Dodd's argument requires a forced interpretation of 1:12 where the use of χριστοῦ is indeed polemical, but not correctively so. There is no indication that Paul is reprimanding by saying essentially 'You ought to be of Christ' or identifying yourself as Christ's follower rather than the follower of a human leader. The most natural reading is that some in Corinth are *divisively* claiming allegiance to Christ, as 1 Cor. 1:13a suggests. In 3:23 we do have the corrective to 1:12. Dodd's interpretation nearly equates 1:12 and 11:1. If 1:12 is read as a divisive slogan, which I think it must be, this equation is not at all accurate. Therefore, there is no barrier to retention of the implication of imitation of Christ in 11:1b. As de Boer, *Imitation of Paul*: 158 says, 'It is not surprising that Christ's example should come to Paul's mind when he has been thinking about a person's giving himself in behalf of the salvation of others.' Stanley, 'Become Imitators of Me': 875, rightly observes that the Corinthians are called 'to imitate Paul in whom they possess a concrete realization of the imitation of Christ.'

crucified (1:18-25). The two phrases as used in their present contexts refer, therefore, to the same reality – Paul’s manner of life and ministry which is consistent with Christ’s example.

**1 Cor. 11:1**

Become imitators of me as I am also of Christ.

**1 Cor. 4:15-17**

Therefore I urge you to become imitators of me. For this very reason I sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved child and faithful in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus . . .

Third and already implied, in both 4:16 and 11:1 what is imitable about Paul is his cross-like suffering in imitation of Christ. I argued above that Paul’s experience of hardships (4:9-13) which is consistent with the message of the cross (1:18, 22-25) supplies the concrete content of the model for imitation. Paul’s ministry and life are consistent with the message of the cross he proclaims. Likewise the Corinthians’ behaviour toward one another in the church is to be characterized by self-abasement rather than self-exaltation (cf. 4:6). This is the behaviour which comports with Paul’s ‘ways that are in Christ Jesus’ (4:17). Now Paul’s exemplary behaviour (which must be that of 9:12b, 15-18) is described as consistent with the example of Christ – καθὼς καὶ γὰρ χριστοῦ (11:1).

**Summary**

My exegetical comparison of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 with 4:6-21 demonstrates that the proposed parallel thematic structure indeed supports both Pauline arguments.

<b>1 Cor. 4:6-21</b>	<b>Parallel Theme</b>	<b>1 Cor. 8:1–11:1</b>
4:6-7	Pride toward others	8:1-3
4:8	Eschatological presumption	8:4-6
4:9-13	The pattern for imitation	8:13–9:27; esp. 9:12b, 15-18
4:14, 18-21	Warnings of judgment	10:1-22; esp. 10:11, 22
4:15-17	The call to imitation	10:33–11:1

I should call attention to my alteration of the textual order of 4:9-21 in the above arrangement. In textual order the themes may be set forth as follows.

A	1 Cor. 4:9-13	The pattern for imitation
B	1 Cor. 4:14	Warning
A	1 Cor. 4:15-16	Call to imitation
B	1 Cor. 4:18-21	Warning

On the other hand the themes of 8:13–9:27 appear in the following order.

A	1 Cor. 8:13–9:27; esp. 9:12b, 15-18	The pattern for imitation
B	1 Cor. 10:1-22	Warning
A	1 Cor. 10:33–11:1	Call to imitation

In one case the sequence is ABAB (4:9-21); in the other ABA (8:13–11:1). Most significantly 4:6-21 ends on the note of warning; 8:1–11:1 with the call to imitation. We should not, however, overstate the differences. The warning with which 4:6-21 ends contains Paul's offer of a choice to the Corinthians. One option is for him to come to Corinth with the rod. The section actually concludes, however, with the option for him to come in love and gentleness. Thus, both 8:1–11:1 and 4:6-21 end with Paul presenting the desired outcome – adherence to Paul's example (11:1) and a loving and gentle encounter between apostle and church (4:21). Therefore, although the ending order in one case is imitation-warning and in the other warning-imitation, the difference in the order of themes should not be overly emphasized.

## Conclusion

The table with which the preceding summary section began shows a remarkable correspondence in themes used by Paul in his argumentation and the sequence in which he employs these themes. In fact, it seems that Paul's application of the message of the cross to the problem of divisive loyalty to respective leaders (1 Cor. 4:6-21) supplies the thematic outline for his argument on food offered to idols (8:1–11:1).

Why are these two arguments so remarkably parallel thematically? Because at the most fundamental level both problems are pride problems, both solutions are self-abnegation solutions. Paul's apostolic existence is consciously a reflection of the message of the cross, at the heart of which is the self-abnegation of Christ. Christ's suffering is paradigmatic for Paul's life. Presentation of Paul's life as paradigmatic for the Corinthians supplies the needed self-abnegation solution to both pride problems.

My study supports Dahl's theory that the theological basis for Paul's answers to the problems of 1 Corinthians 5–15 is set forth in chapters



1–4, and calls attention especially to 4:6-21 as foundational to Paul’s understanding of Christian existence in community.

This implies another question: is 4:6-21 in a similar relationship with other sections in 1 Corinthians? On the one hand I hesitate to answer affirmatively because I think the thematic correspondence between 4:6-21 and 8:1–11:1 is extraordinary. On the other hand I think that echoes of 4:6-21 may be heard often in 5–15. Paul’s treatment of lawsuits (6:1-11) provides an example. The themes of brothers competing with brothers (6:1, 8; cf. 4:6; also 3:3-4), the wise man (6:5; cf. 4:10; also 1:26) and eschatology (6:2-3, 9-10; cf. 4:8; also 3:12-15) are present in both 4:6-21 and 6:1-11. But 6:1-11 is especially anchored in 4:9-13. Rosner states that ‘in asking the Corinthians to be wronged and defrauded rather than compromise Christian standards of love Paul is, in effect, urging them to imitate himself. In 4:16 the exhortation to follow his example involves in its immediate context suffering for the sake of Christ (see 4:11-13).’<sup>69</sup> It may prove particularly fruitful to investigate the links of each of the arguments of 1 Corinthians to 4:9-13. Paul may be summoning the Corinthians throughout the epistle to conform their lives to the pattern of Paul’s life – to embody the message of the cross themselves.

---

<sup>70</sup> Brian Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-7* (Leiden: Brill, 1994): 116. See also Pickett, *Cross in Corinth*: 113-114.