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## Living as Christ Crucified: The Cross as a Foundation for Christian Ethics in 1 Corinthians

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*Dr Williams did his research on Paul's use of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians and has maintained his interest in this letter. Equally, if not more, important for understanding the letter is Paul's understanding of the death of Christ, and he now offers us this survey of its significance in the ethical teaching in the letter.*

**Key words:** Bible; New Testament; 1 Corinthians; Paul; cross; ethics.

Nobody doubts the centrality of the cross to Christianity and its importance for Christian doctrine. Many theologians have made memorable statements about its importance for the Christian faith throughout the centuries, further underscoring value of the cross.<sup>1</sup> Despite its importance, less attention has been paid to its centrality for Christian ethics.

Recently, some scholars have begun to recognize that the cross does play an important role in Christian ethics. For example, Richard Hays in his work, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, finds the cross to be one of three focal images by which New Testament ethics can be evaluated. According to Hays, an image such as the cross 'can serve to focus and guide our readings and rereadings of the New Testament.'<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang

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- 1 E.g. P. T. Forsyth, the English Congregationalist states, 'You do not understand Christ until you understand his cross'; P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross* (London, 1909), 44-45. Stephen Neill, an Anglican scholar, wrote, 'In the Christian theology of history, the death of Christ is the central point of history; here all the roads of the past converge; hence all the roads of the future diverge'; S. Neill, 'Jesus and History', in *The Truth of God Incarnate* (London, 1977), 80. Note other statements by A. McGrath and R. P. Martin. See A. McGrath, 'Theology of the Cross', in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester, 1993), 192-193; R. P. Martin, 'Center of Paul's Theology', in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester, 1993), 92-95.
  - 2 San Francisco, 1996, 195. See also pages 193-205. The other focal images that Hays proposes are the community and the new creation.

Schrage has also stated the importance of the cross for ethics in his work, *The Ethics of the New Testament*. In this volume Schrage states, 'God's saving eschatological act in Jesus Christ is the basis and root of Pauline ethics.'<sup>3</sup> These works by Hays and Schrage focus on the importance of the cross for the ethical conduct of believers.<sup>4</sup>

While Hays and Schrage have considered how the cross functions as a general principle by which to view Pauline ethics, more attention ought to be given to specific references to the cross in Paul's ethical instructions. These investigations should focus more on how the cross provides a specific foundation for the commands that Paul gives. Some recent investigations of Pauline ethics have considered more closely how specific motivating factors have influenced Paul's ethics.

For example, V. P. Furnish in his work, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* distinguishes between three different basic motifs that encourage Paul's ethical commands: theological, eschatological, and christological. Within this christological motivation, Furnish sees the work of the cross of Christ contributing to Paul's ethical instructions. Christ's death not only justifies and reconciles people to God but also summons them to service. He sees this in passages like Rom. 6:4 where Christ's death motivates his followers so that they 'might walk in newness of life'. In Phil. 2 Furnish also sees Christ's obedience unto death (Phil. 2:6-11) as providing the ultimate grounds for humble concern for others and for a believer's own obedience (Phil. 2:3-4, 12-13).<sup>5</sup>

E. J. Schnabel has also noticed that various motivating factors provide the basis for Paul's ethics. He distinguishes between five different theological motivations: christological, salvation-historical, pneumatological, ecclesiological, and eschatological. These can be seen to stimulate and support his ethical injunctions in texts such as Gal. 5:13-6:10, Rom. 12-13, 1 Thes. 4:9-12, 1 Cor. 1-4, 6:1-11, 8-10, and Phil. 1-2.<sup>6</sup>

When it comes to the place of the cross of Christ in Paul's ethics,

3 W. Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1988), 137.

4 See also L. Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1965), 260-269. Morris devotes an entire chapter to man's response to the cross in Paul's epistles. According to Morris, as a result of Christ's death, Christians should repent and believe and live a worthy life that accepts suffering in this world.

5 V. P. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville, 1968), 212-224.

6 E. J. Schnabel, 'Wie hat Paulus seine Ethik entwickelt? Motivationen, Normen und Kriterien paulinischer Ethik', *EJT* 1/1 (1992), 63-81. Cf. B. S. Rosner, "That Pattern of Teaching": Issues and Essays in Pauline Ethics', in *Understanding Paul's Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches* (Grand Rapids, 1995), 20-21, 358-359.

Schnabel recognizes the cross as part of Paul's christological motivation. He notes that the atoning death and resurrection of Christ possess power and authority within the ethical dimension of Christian living (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Rom. 6; 14:8-9; 15:30; Phil. 2:5-11; Eph. 5:25). He does not, however, devote exclusive attention to it within Paul's ethics since he includes it as part of his christological category. Other ideas within Schnabel's christological motivation for Pauline ethics include: the resurrection of Christ, the present salvation and lordship of Christ, and the parousia.

This current study will attempt to examine the important role of the cross in Paul's ethics in 1 Corinthians. Rather than broadly stating that the cross is the foundation for Christian ethics (R. B. Hays and W. Schrage) or subsuming the cross under christological motivations for obedience (V. P. Furnish and E. J. Schnabel), it will examine passages where the cross is used explicitly or implicitly to support Paul's ethical injunctions.

This study will confine itself to an examination of the role of the cross in 1 Corinthians. The cross is clearly portrayed at the beginning of the letter, and there are obvious occurrences of the cross throughout the remainder of the epistle. Moreover, 1 Corinthians is filled with a variety of ethical commands. This study will then examine explicit and implicit occurrences of the cross and other places where it exerts influence within 1 Corinthians such as 1 Cor. 1-4; 5; 6; 8-11.<sup>7</sup> Following the examination of specific instances, conclusions will be drawn regarding the role of the cross in 1 Corinthians and its place in Pauline ethics.

## I. 1 Corinthians 1-4

### 1. *Division and Unity*

Paul first introduces the idea of the cross into 1 Corinthians in 1 Cor. 1:17 when he states, 'For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.'<sup>8</sup> Paul inserts these ideas of the cross explicitly following his great concern about division in the Corinthian community (1 Cor. 1:10-13). He is concerned about divisions (*schismata*) and quarrels (*eris*) that are present amongst them.

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7 Other places where the cross may exert influence, but its presence is less obvious or unrelated to ethics include: 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 7:1-5, 17-24; 12:26; 13:4-7; 14:1; 15:3, 54-55.

8 All cited Biblical texts are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

He has heard of party divisions in the community where each person is saying, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' Since Paul perceives that each of the Corinthians is saying such things, it is likely that division seen in party allegiances is wide spread in Corinth.

Paul perceives all of these party allegiances as divisive. Even the Paul party and the Christ party are divisive in his mind. This is suggested by the way that Paul reacts to all four party groups by dismissing them quickly. He does not identify with any of them, including the Paul party or the Christ party. Moreover, when Paul returns to the party names later in his discourse, he condemns this party spirit in general in 1 Cor. 3:1-4. These parties are noted to be full of strife (*eris*) and divisive, picking up the same vocabulary and ideas as earlier in the letter (cf. 1 Cor. 1:11). These party allegiances suggest that the Corinthians are functioning as immature 'babes in Christ', 'people of the flesh', and as 'merely human'.

When Paul later speaks of party allegiances in 1 Cor. 3:22, he once again does not support them. Paul dismisses all of the party names and refers to all things being in Christ and not associated with the Paul party or Christ party. Since Paul does not refer to the Christ party in each of these sections, it is likely that even the Christ party is not exemplary in his mind. The Christ party designation is most likely from Pauline rhetoric,<sup>9</sup> and all party allegiances in 1 Corinthians are divisive in his mind.

Paul's concern about party allegiances, division, and unity dominates the opening portion of 1 Corinthians. Besides being found in 1 Cor. 1:17-25, 3:3, 22, the concern about division and unity is wide spread in 1 Cor. 1-3 and continues well into the fourth chapter. For example, in 1 Cor. 1:26-29 Paul reminds the Corinthians that they have one calling that is theirs in Christ. In 1 Cor. 3:6-9 Paul argues for Christian unity when he likens the Corinthian community to a field. The workers such as Apollos and Paul may have watered and planted, but it is God who is the one causing the growth. Later in 1 Cor. 3:16-17 Paul argues for Christian unity when he reminds the Corinthians that they are all God's temple and have the Spirit dwelling amongst them. Division and unity are also further apparent in 1 Cor. 4:6 when Paul applies 'all this to Apollos and myself . . . so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, "Nothing beyond what is writ-

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9 W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther. Teilband 1: 1 Kor 1,1-6,11* (EKK 7. Zuurich, 1991), 148. See also M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville, 1992), 114. For further descriptions of the enigmatic 'Christ party' see W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 1:146-148.

ten", so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another.' Thus, the volume of texts dealing with division and unity strongly suggests that this is a great concern for Paul, particularly in 1 Cor. 1-4.<sup>10</sup>

Into this divisive situation, Paul sets forth the message of the cross of Christ as the first antidote (1 Cor. 1:17-18). The gospel message of the cross of Christ is the first item of Christian understanding that he uses to build Christian unity. It makes a strong contrast between those who are saved and those who are perishing in 1 Cor. 1:18. This division provided by the message of the cross is a more profound and different division from the party divisions occurring in the congregation. This message of the cross also helps them focus on an item that they as Christians all have in common. This is the power of God (*dunamis theou*), a sign of God for all Christians (cf. Rom.1:16-17).<sup>11</sup>

In the succeeding verses, the message of the cross is used to promote unity. In 1 Cor. 1:26-31, Paul shows how all of the Corinthians, regardless of their wisdom, power, and wealth are saved by the message of the cross and can only boast in it. This message of the cross also draws the divided Corinthians' attention to their one calling that they have in Christ (1 Cor. 1:24, 26). Thus, the message of the cross cuts across divisions based upon worldly claims of wisdom, power, and wealth and treats everyone the same in saving them. In 1 Cor. 2:1-5, the message of the cross also functions as a unifying factor. It helps to unify the Corinthians, by causing them to focus on the one message that Paul preached as their founding father (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 4:14-15). In these ways Paul uses the cross to create unity amongst a very divided situation.<sup>12</sup>

Besides providing unity, Paul's use of the cross in 1 Cor. 1 also speaks of future hope. The presentation of the cross in this situation contains an eschatological element. This is primarily seen by what is found in connection with Paul's explicit mention of the cross in 1 Cor. 1:17-25. The future hope is found in 1 Cor. 1:20 where Paul proclaims, 'Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?' The wisdom and power of the world have been reduced to nothing by God's action in using the weak and foolish message of the cross to bring salvation. Thus, current human power and wisdom will

10 One scholar sees the problem of division as an overarching principle in 1 Corinthians. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 301-303.

11 W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 1:174.

12 Note how this use of the cross in 1 Corinthians functions in agreement with other sections of his writing. In passages like Eph. 2:15-18 and Col. 1:19-20, Paul also portrays the cross as a unifying force that unites Jews and Gentiles and reconciles all things in heaven and on earth to God.

be seen to be irrelevant.

A triumphant tone can be further perceived when 1 Cor. 1:20 is compared with 1 Cor. 15:54-57 and the triumphant tone present in that chapter.<sup>13</sup> There is reason to connect 1 Cor. 1:20 with 1 Cor. 15 due to syntax and vocabulary. The repeated questions of 1 Cor. 15:55, 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' are similar to the repeated questions of 1 Cor. 1:20. The word 'where' (*pou*) is also found in both passages. Since this word appears rarely in Paul's writing, this further strengthens the connection between 1 Cor. 1:20 and 1 Cor. 15:54-57.<sup>14</sup>

Future hope and victory are found within 1 Cor. 15:54-57. This passage contains one of the few appearances of victory language in all of Paul's writing. The word *nikos* appears in Paul's writing only in 1 Cor. 15:54-55, 57. In 1 Cor. 15 triumph is found in association with Paul's discussion of the return and final victory of Christ (1 Cor. 15:55; cf. 15:54, 57). All oppressors, even death, will be absent then in the future. Thus, when 1 Cor. 1:20 is heard in conjunction with the ideas in 1 Cor. 15, future hope can be heard in connection with the cross of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

A further support to the eschatological nature of 1 Cor. 1:20 can be heard when an echo to Isa. 33:18 is heard within 1 Cor. 1:20. Scholars have noticed the presence of this Scripture reference from Isaiah in Paul's thinking. A. Robertson and A. Plummer have noticed the strong connection that Isa. 33:18 has with 1 Cor. 1:20 claiming that it is, 'a very free citation from the general sense of Isa. 33:18'.<sup>16</sup> G. Fee also suggests that 1 Cor. 1:20 is, 'after the manner of Isa. 33:18'. While a citation is unlikely, there are good reasons why a reference to Isa. 33:18 can be heard. Both Isa. 33:18 and 1 Cor. 1:20 contain three questions that all begin with the word *pou*. Within all of the LXX and the New Testament, these are the only two texts where a threefold repetition of the question 'where' occurs. There are also thematic agreements between Isa. 33:18 and 1 Cor. 1:20. Both texts also refer to the ineffectiveness of worldly power to oppose God's people. The questions that both texts propose imply the same answer 'Nowhere'.

13 Cf. A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the first epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh, 1911), 19.

14 The word occurs in only seven verses within his writing (Rom. 3:27; 4:19; 1 Cor. 1:20; 12:17, 19; 15:55; Gal. 4:15).

15 Indeed, the cross is used by Paul to not only speak of the present but also to speak of the future and the resurrection at the ultimate triumph of Christ. Note the other places in Paul's writing where eschatology is connected with the cross. J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Edinburgh, 1980), 211. Cf. Rom. 4:24-25; 6:1-10; 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:1-8, 14-17; 2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Thess. 4:14.

16 A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the first epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh, 1911), 19.

If one hears the context of Isa. 33:18 or Jewish ideas that may be related to it, a view to the future can also be perceived. Isa. 33:18 refers to the time when the former terror from the oppressors of God's people is gone, when the leaders of the people who oppressed Israel will be gone.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the entire chapter of Isa. 33 refers to the overthrow of the oppressors of God's people (Isa. 33:1, 3-4) and the righteous reign of the Lord's rule (Isa. 33:5-6, 17). Jewish ideas that are similar to Isa. 33:18 also speak of the future when the Lord's people are free from oppressors (cf. Bar. 33:16-20; 4 Ezz. 11-12; 2 Bar. 39:5-40:4; *Test. Mos.* 10; *Tg. Is.* 33:17-19).<sup>18</sup> Thus, when this echo is heard, it reinforces that future hope is very much in Paul's thinking as he composed 1 Cor. 1:17-25 and spoke about the cross. The future is an important element present when Paul uses the cross as an antidote for division amongst the Corinthians.

## 2. Christian Stewards

Paul continues to use the cross as a foundation for ethics within 1 Cor. 4. In 1 Cor. 4 the cross is used to encourage the way a Christian steward acts. The conduct of a Christian servant was an issue within 1 Corinthians. Recent studies by scholars such as A. D. Clarke, D. Litfin, and B. Winter have noted that secular practices of the day have infiltrated the Corinthian church and affected the leadership of the church at Corinth.<sup>19</sup> The practices of a Christian servant were of concern to Paul, and thus, he addresses these concerns in 1 Cor. 4.

While the cross is not mentioned explicitly within 1 Cor. 4, its presence can be seen clearly, nonetheless. A number of scholars have noticed that the cross plays a great role in Paul's presentation as a steward of the gospel in 1 Cor. 4.<sup>20</sup> In this chapter Paul declares his

17 J. D. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC 24; Waco, 1985), 428.

18 For a further development of these ideas see H. H. Drake Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise: the presence and function of Scripture within 1 Cor. 1:18-3:23* (AGJU 49; Leiden, 2001), 58-59, 73-81.

19 A. D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical & Exegetical Study of I Corinthians 1-6* (AGAJU 18; Leiden, 1993); D. Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (SNTSMS 79; Cambridge, 1994); B. W. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: A Hellenistic-Jewish and a Christian Response* (SNTMS 96; Cambridge, 1996).

20 E.g., G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, 1987), 166; R. Pickett, *The Cross in Corinth* (JSNTSup 143; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 83; J. T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardship in the Corinthian Correspondence* (SBLDS 99; Atlanta, 1988), 122; K. Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* (SBLSS; Atlanta, 1987), 13-57; W. Schrage, 'Leid, Kreuz, und Eschaton. Die Peristasenkataloge als Merkmale paulinischer theologia crucis und Eschatologie', *EvT* 34 (1974), 141-175; W. Marxsen, *New Testament Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Minneapolis, 1993), 203.

own weakness, using the same word for weakness (*astheneia*) that he spoke about earlier in the weakness of God displayed at the cross (1 Cor. 1:25; 4:9-13). He also describes himself as 'sentenced to death' and perceives himself to be a 'spectacle to the world'. These descriptions signify an agreement with the message of the cross that he preached (1 Cor. 1:17f; 2:1-5).

When the ideas of 1 Cor. 4 are compared with 2 Cor. 4, the death of Christ can be further seen in 1 Cor. 4. The connection between 1 Cor. 4 and 2 Cor. 4 can be seen in the ideas that both share. In both passages Paul mentions a persecution and death experience that he is feeling (1 Cor. 4:9, 12; 2 Cor. 4:9-10). As in 1 Cor. 4:8ff, Paul's point in 2 Cor. 4 is that the power of God is made known through or by means of Paul's suffering with its different manifestations (cf. 1 Cor. 4:12f and 2 Cor. 4:8-9). Also, in both passages Paul portrays his suffering as a divinely arranged death, which performs a revelatory function (1 Cor. 4:9; 2 Cor. 4:10-11).<sup>21</sup>

The death of Christ is exhibited clearly in 2 Cor. 4:10-12. In this text Paul states that he is, 'always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.' Thus, with the similarities between 1 Cor. 4 and 2 Cor. 4, the cross of Christ can be heard within the ideas of 1 Cor. 4 as well. The cross is not only found in Paul's message (1 Cor. 1:17-18; 2:2), but it is also found in his activities as a Christian leader (cf. Rom. 6:4).<sup>22</sup>

When the cross of Christ is heard within 1 Cor. 4 in Paul's presentation of a true Christian steward, the idea of suffering is present.<sup>23</sup> In 1 Cor. 4:9 Paul declares himself to be a 'spectacle' as one who was 'condemned to die'. When this idea of being a spectacle of death is compared with other tribulation lists in 2 Corinthians, the idea of suffering clearly comes to the fore (cf. 2 Cor. 2:14-16; 4:7-12; 6:1-13).<sup>24</sup> In 1 Cor. 4:10 he calls himself a 'fool, weak, and in disrepute'. In 1 Cor. 4:10 he indicates that he goes hungry, thirsty, in poor clothes,

21 S. J. Hafemann, *Suffering and Ministry in the Spirit: Paul's Defense of his Ministry in II Corinthians 2:14-3:3* (Grand Rapids, 1990), 62-63.

22 See also G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 166.

23 J. T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, 117-148; K. Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction*, 13-57; W. Schrage, 'Leid, Kreuz, und Eschaton', 141-175. For a survey of different views on the catalog of afflictions see A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGCT; Grand Rapids, 2000), 365-368.

24 S. J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit: An exegetical study of 2 Cor. 2:14-3:3 within the context of the Corinthian correspondence* (WUNT 2.19; Tuubingen, 1986), 58-83.

homeless'. In 1 Cor. 4:11-13 he states that he is cursed, persecuted, and slandered'. Finally in 1 Cor. 4:13 he calls himself 'the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world'. All of these ideas indicate suffering.

Not only is suffering seen in Paul's description of a Christian steward, but a concern for rightly understanding the future can also be seen within 1 Cor. 4. The Corinthians view themselves already as if the end of time has arrived.<sup>25</sup> They behave as kings and as rich already. By using the Greek word for already (*ἤδη*) two times in 1 Cor. 4:8, Paul emphasizes that the Corinthians seem satisfied at the current time. It is likely that Paul sees them living in premature triumphalism and not in anticipation of their future reign with Christ.<sup>26</sup> C. K. Barrett rightly states this when he comments on 1 Cor. 4:8, 'The Corinthians are behaving as if the age to come were already consummated, as if the saints had already taken over the kingdom (Dn. 7:18); for them there is no 'not yet' to qualify the 'already of realized eschatology'.<sup>27</sup> Their conduct betrays a secular Greco-Roman mindset that is not in agreement with proper ways of Christian stewardship (1 Cor. 4:8-10; cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-29).<sup>28</sup>

Instead of glorying in this present age, Paul corrects their understanding of the present and the future. He warns the Corinthians not to glory in this present age. They should see the future properly and thus yearn for the day when all believers will be kings as Paul and his cohorts do (1 Cor. 4:10).

Besides suffering and future hope, the aspect of unity can also be heard in association with the cross found within 1 Cor. 4. In 1 Cor. 4:15-16 Paul uses the image of a family to bring unity. He is their father, and the Corinthians are his children. He is also the one person that he calls the Corinthians to imitate. While some see this as paternal authoritarianism,<sup>29</sup> it seems best to see his call for imitation in line with his message of the cross, especially considering the suffering that he has presented.<sup>30</sup> His apostolic existence of suffering is

25 R. M. Grant, *An Historical Introduction to the NT* (London, 1963), 204.

26 W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 1:338; A. C. Thiselton, 'Realized Eschatology at Corinth', *NTS* 24 (1978), 523-525.

27 C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC; London, 1968), 109.

28 A. D. Clarke, "'Be Imitators of Me": Paul's Model of Leadership' *Tyn Bull* 49.2 (1998), 344. See also A. D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical & Exegetical Study of I Corinthians 1-6* (AGJU 18; Leiden, 1993), 41-45, 57.

29 E. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville, 1991), 101.

30 R. Pickett, *The Cross of Christ: The Social Significance of the Death of Jesus*, 83. Cf. J. T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, 122.

the praiseworthy paradigm that he calls the Corinthians to follow.<sup>31</sup> Paul's cruciform example is the rallying point for Christian unity for his Corinthian children (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1).

## II. 1 Corinthians 5-16

While the cross is most clearly on display in 1 Cor. 1-4, the cross also functions as a motivating principle for many of the ethical injunctions throughout the remainder of the letter.<sup>32</sup> Although the word *stauros* does not appear within 1 Cor. 5-16, ideas concerning the cross from Paul's discussion in 1 Cor. 1-4 can be seen in Paul's exhortations in the remainder of the epistle. The following section will examine a few places within 1 Cor. 5-16 where ideas from the cross are presented as a motivation for proper conduct.

### 1. Community Exclusion

1 Cor. 5 concerns Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians, since they have done nothing about the man caught in incest amongst them. While Paul rebukes the Corinthians with a great deal of Jewish argumentation in 1 Cor. 5,<sup>33</sup> a reference to the cross of Christ is found in the midst of this Jewish argumentation. In 1 Cor. 5:7 Paul writes, 'Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.' The grounding for community exclusion from 1 Cor. 5:7 can be seen to be Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. While the first part of 1 Cor. 5:7 has clear parallels to Jewish tradition (cf. Ex. 12:15; 13:7), the latter part, that Christ the paschal lamb has been sacrificed, is an extended simile indicating that the cross is in view. 1 Cor. 5:7 then provides the basis for Paul's exhortation for community exclusion, casting out the old yeast that is amongst the Corinthians, which is the man caught in incest.

As in 1 Cor. 1-4, the cross appears in connection with similar ideas of unity, future expectation, and sacrifice. Unity is found in 1 Cor. 5 in that the entire Corinthian church is corporately identified as pure and unleavened bread. Since the man caught in incest is impure, the Corinthians must be pure and cast out the impure element that is

31 B. Sanders, 'Imitating Paul: 1 Cor. 4:16', *HTR* 74 (1981), 553-563.

32 Note how Dahl and Pickett see the ideas in 1 Cor. 1-4 influencing the remainder of 1 Corinthians. N. Dahl, 'Paul and the Church at Corinth according to 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21' in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (Cambridge, 1967), 313-335, 60; R. Pickett, *The Cross in Corinth*, 86.

33 For a further development of the Jewish argumentation in 1 Cor. 5 see B. S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics* (Leiden, 1994), 61-93.

infecting them.<sup>34</sup>

A regard for the future is also present within 1 Cor. 5 and is recognized by scholars.<sup>35</sup> This is seen in that the Corinthians are to conduct themselves as if they are totally cleaned out and new, even though they live in this corrupt world. J. Jeremias notices this in his comment on this verse. He states, 'The unleavened bread is interpreted eschatologically . . . as the purity and truth which characterize the new world, and as new dough they symbolize the redeemed community (1 Cor. 5:7a).'<sup>36</sup> The Corinthians are also called upon to anticipate the festival (1 Cor. 5:8), further suggesting that the future is in view in connection with sacrificial death of Jesus in 1 Cor. 5.

Besides a view of the future and the concern for unity, the idea of self-sacrifice is present in these exhortations for community exclusion influenced by the cross. The very idea of a community excluding members suggests self-sacrifice. If this person is a wealthy or influential patron who has perhaps materially influenced the Corinthian community for a long period of time,<sup>37</sup> ridding the person from the church will take much sacrifice indeed.

## 2. Civil Litigation

Besides community exclusion, the cross also appears as a motivating principle in 1 Cor. 6:1-11 and the concern over civil litigation. In the midst of Paul's argument against civil litigation between Christian brothers, Paul states in 1 Cor. 6:7, 'Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?' These questions recall Paul's example of disregarding himself in 1 Cor. 4:11-13, a passage that concerned Christian leadership in the light of the cross. One scholar has noted the connection between 1 Cor. 6:7-8 and 1 Cor. 4:11-13 from the theme of the righteous sufferer which he sees in both texts.<sup>38</sup> Since Paul called the Corinthians to imitate cross like behavior (cf. 1 Cor. 4:16), it is likely that echoes of the cross can be heard in this text in 1 Cor. 6:7.<sup>39</sup>

There are a number of ideas that can be heard in relation to the cross in this passage. Firstly, ideas from the cross function as the basis for self-sacrifice. Rather than choosing the ways of Greco-Roman sec-

34 R. Pickett, *The Cross in Corinth*, 110.

35 O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (London, 1951), 72; W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 1:380-382.

36 J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London, 1966), 59.

37 J. K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A study of Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield, 1992), 130-141; A. D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership at Corinth* (Leiden, 1993), 73-88.

38 B. S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics*, 116.

39 R. Pickett, *The Cross in Corinth*, 113.

ular society and flaunting their status or social privilege,<sup>40</sup> Paul uses ideas from his understanding of the cross in this passage to encourage the Corinthians to sacrifice their rights. Secondly, this cross like behavior also calls the Corinthians to think of themselves in unity as Christians who are distinct from the world. Paul states in 1 Cor. 6:1, 6 that disputing brothers are to take their argument before all of the saints instead of before the unrighteous and unfaithful. They are to consider themselves as those who will judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2-3), rather than thinking of themselves in opposition to each other. Finally, the ideas from the cross encourage Christians to think of themselves eschatologically, as future rulers (1 Cor. 6:2-3). In the light of the cross and Christ's resurrection, an individual Christian should rather choose to be wronged and focus on what Christ has provided for all believers, namely, their future rule and their unity in Christ as his holy ones (1 Cor. 6:2, 11).

### 3. *Weak and Strong Brothers*

In 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1 Paul addresses the situation of eating meat sacrificed to idols. In relation to this concern, he addresses weak and strong brothers. Here again, Paul uses principles from the cross as a basis for his argument. In 1 Cor. 8:11 he mentions Christ's death when he says, 'So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed.' Since strong brothers were flaunting Christian freedom, it was causing damage to weaker Christians in Corinth. The strong brothers' behavior was an obstacle to Christian sanctification.<sup>41</sup> This harm is diametrically opposed to the purpose of the atonement.<sup>42</sup>

Echoes of the cross are further heard in the concluding comments of this argument. In 1 Cor. 10:32-11:1 he states, '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 many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.' Since the same imitation theme is found at the end of this section, it recalls Paul's prior words of imitation from 1 Cor. 4 and the ideas that were connected with the cross.

Once again with the appearance of the cross, the idea of self-sacrifice is found. In this section self-sacrifice is found in many places. For

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40 Cf. B. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on I and II Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, 1995), 162-163.

41 J. M. Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance: Staying in and Falling Away* (Louisville, 1990), 97.

42 C. L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, 1994), 163.

example, Paul argues against holding too tightly individual freedoms since these freedoms may provide a stumbling block to weaker brothers (1 Cor. 8:9).<sup>43</sup> Paul's encouragement of the strong brother not to eat certain foods in deference to a weaker brother also indicates sacrifice (1 Cor. 8:13). In 1 Cor. 9 Paul illustrates how he laid down his own rights for the benefit of the Corinthians. He denied his rights to certain food and drink, his right to have a believing wife, and his right to receive support from the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:3-12). He refuses to use any of these rights (1 Cor. 9:15). Paul has sacrificed his own good for the good of others (1 Cor. 10:32). In 1 Cor. 10 he also argues that the Corinthians should not seek their own good but the good of others (1 Cor. 10:24). Self-sacrifice can be heard throughout large portions of this discussion of weak and strong brothers.

A concern for unity can also be heard amidst the ideas of self-sacrifice and Christ's death. This can be heard most prominently in the concluding verse of this section in 1 Cor. 11:1 where Paul calls upon the Corinthians to imitate him. While the idea of imitation speaks of suffering,<sup>44</sup> it also speaks of unity since Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to be like he is. Imitation is not self-serving from Paul's description since he is imitating Christ's life, a life of humiliation and death.<sup>45</sup> Instead, imitation calls the Corinthians to unity around Paul and Christ's behavior and to self-sacrifice and mutual responsibility to one another.

#### 4. *The Lord's Supper*

A reference to the cross finally appears in 1 Cor. 11:17-34. In these verses Paul passes along a tradition that he received from the Lord regarding the Lord's Supper. The tradition he speaks of declares Christ's body which was broken and his blood that was shed. The reference to the cross is obvious in these elements of the Lord's Supper, the body and blood of Christ. A reference to the cross also can be heard by the way that Paul introduces the tradition. He states that the tradition that he is handing on is from the night that the Lord was betrayed immediately before his crucifixion (1 Cor. 11:23). Finally, the cross can be heard in 1 Cor. 11:26. This text indicates that by partaking of the elements of the Lord's Supper, Christians are proclaim-

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43 Note that the discussion begun about one's rights in 1 Cor. 8:9 continues into Paul's discussion of his own rights in 1 Cor. 9:4-6, 12, 18.

44 P. de Boer rightly states in his study on imitation that imitation involves, 'humility, self-denial, self-giving, self-sacrifice for the sake of Christ and the salvation of others'. P. De Boer, *The Imitation of Paul: An Exegetical Study* (Kampen, 1962), 207; cf. 154-169

45 A. C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 797.

ing Christ's death on the cross until he comes again (1 Cor. 11:26).<sup>46</sup>

As in previous sections of 1 Corinthians, the cross is used to counter division and encourage unity amongst God's people. Paul mentions division in a few places with regard to the Lord's Supper. When the Corinthians are gathering for this meal, there are divisions and factions which are evident amongst them (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10; 11:18-19). Division is further seen by the way that they are partaking of the meal. They are eating at separate times with some going hungry and others being filled (1 Cor. 11:21).

Unity is also encouraged in this passage. After recounting the tradition of the Lord's supper, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to unity in 1 Cor. 11:33 when he says, 'So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.' Unity is also encouraged when Paul states that the body of Christ is given for the church corporately and not for individuals in the church. This is evidenced since Paul uses the second person personal pronoun in 1 Cor. 11:24.<sup>47</sup> 'This is my body that is for you (plural). Do this in remembrance of me.'

As in previous occurrences of the cross in 1 Corinthians, the future of the believer is also anticipated. Eating the bread and drinking the cup announces the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:26). Many scholars have recognized the eschatological force in this text.<sup>48</sup> This idea is emphasized further by the present tense verb *kataggellete*, which carries with it the continuous idea of preaching publicly and proclaiming. The force of this passage may very well be as A. C. Thiselton has noticed that 'the fellowship gathered around the table of the Lord provisionally and in partial measure constitutes the pledge and preliminary foretaste of the "Supper of the Lamb" of the final consummation to which the Lord's Supper points in promise.'<sup>49</sup>

The idea of sacrifice is also present within the Lord's Supper. This is best seen when the words *eis tēn emēn anamnēsin* in 1 Cor. 11:24 are rightly translated 'do this as my memorial'.<sup>50</sup> As a memorial, each time that Paul and the Corinthians ate the bread and drank the cup at the

46 See B. R. Gaventa, "You Proclaim the Lord's Death": 1 Corinthians 11:26 and Paul's Understanding of Worship', *Rev Exp* 80 (1983), 377-387.

47 V. P. Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge, 1999), 81.

48 Cf. W. Schrage, 'Das Herrenmahl im 1. Korintherbrief' in *The Corinthian Correspondence* (BETL 125; Leuven, 1996), 197; O. Hofius, 'Herrenmahl und Herrenmahlsparadosis. Erwägungen zu 1 Kor 11:23b-25', *ZTK* 85 (1988), 371-408; J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 252-255; A. C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 888.

49 A. C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 887-8.

50 For further development of this idea see F. Chenderlin, *Do This As My Memorial!* (Rome, 1982).

Lord's Supper, they should have recalled the Lord's death and then acted in ways consistent with Christ's self-giving on their behalf.<sup>51</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In summarizing the use of the cross for ethical instructions in 1 Corinthians, a few points can be made. Firstly, the cross is used as a motivation for Christian conduct in a number of places in 1 Corinthians. It is found at the beginning of 1 Corinthians, and its influence extends and echoes throughout the remainder of the epistle. It supports Paul's instructions for unity, Christian stewards, community exclusion, civil litigation, weak and strong brothers, and the proper observance of the Lord's Supper. Thus, the cross that was introduced in 1 Cor. 1:17 does continue to provide a distinct foundation for many of the ethical injunctions contained in 1 Corinthians.

Secondly, as a motivational support for the ethics that Paul encourages, the cross regularly is associated with three ideas in 1 Corinthians. It is connected to Christian unity when Paul addresses division, Christian stewards, community exclusion, civil litigation, weak and strong brothers, and the Lord's Supper. The cross is also connected regularly with ideas of self-sacrifice. This can be seen in Paul's instruction for Christian stewards, community exclusion, civil litigation, weak and strong brothers, and the Lord's Supper. Finally, the cross is connected with the future hope of Christians. This great future is exhibited when Paul gives instructions for Christian unity, community exclusion, civil litigation, weak and strong brothers, and the Lord's Supper. Living as Christ crucified in 1 Corinthians encourages unity, self-sacrifice, and the Christian's future hope.

### **Abstract**

The cross of Christ has been well recognized as providing a foundation for Christian beliefs throughout the ages. The cross is also becoming increasingly recognized as providing a general foundation for Christian ethics. This study explores the specific role that the cross plays for some of Paul's ethical instructions within 1 Corinthians. It notes that the cross plays a recognizable role in Paul's instruction for unity, Christian stewardship, community exclusion, civil litigation, weak and strong brothers, and the Lord's Supper. In these exhortations, the cross is also regularly associated with ideas concerning Christian unity, self-sacrifice, and the Christian's future hope.

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51 C. L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 230.