

## THE POWER IN PAUL'S TEACHING (1 COR 4:9-20)

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"But as to my not having come to you, some are arrogant; but I will come quickly to you, if the Lord wills, and I will know not the talk of the ones being arrogant but the power, for not in word is the reign of God but in power. What do you wish? With a rod shall I come to you? Or in love and with a spirit of gentleness?" (1 Cor 4:18-21).

The pivotal word in understanding the significance of 1 Corinthians 4 seems to be *dynamis*, "power." Paul contrasts "talk" with "power," a power he will test in his opponents, a power in which is the reign of God. But when commentators have sought to explain exactly what "power" means in this passage, they have fallen out with a myriad of differing explanations.

In contrast to the variety of traditional explanations I will show that the immediate context suggests that power in 1 Cor 4:19 is Paul sharing in Christ's sufferings.

### I. ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

C. K. Barrett sees the phrase "the power of the kingdom of God" in an eschatological sense and referring to the Holy Spirit:

The Kingdom of God is an expression much less common in Paul than in the Synoptic gospels. . . . It is always an eschatological concept (though sometimes brought forward into the present), and the *power* with which it works is the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom xiv.17), by which God's purpose is put into effect and the future anticipated in the present. In contrast, *eloquence* (*logos*) is often though not always the human art of speech.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (HNTC; New York: Harper, 1968) 118 (italics his). M. E. Thrall also sees "power" as "the power of the Spirit of God," which "alone made the apostles' preaching effective (2:4-5)," *The First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1965) 38. See also F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971) 37, 52; C. T. Craig, *1 Corinthians* (IB; Nashville: Abingdon, 1953) 58; W. F. Orr and J. A. Walthur, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1976) 179; J. B. Polhill, "The Wisdom of God and Factionalism: I Corinthians 1-4," *RevExp* 3 (1983) 338. These readings have been adapted to "spiritual power" in exegetes as diverse as J. Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth, 1962) 33, and H. J. Schonfield, *The Original New Testament* (San Francisco:

John Calvin suggests that the power of God's kingdom is a matter of words—empowered, inspired words. According to Calvin, “the *word* of the Kingdom of God is for anyone to have skill to prate eloquently, while he has nothing but empty tinkling: . . . while the *power* of which Paul here speaks is like the soul.” This inward majesty

shows itself, when a minister strives by means of *power* rather than of *speech*—that is, when he does not place confidence in his own intellect, or eloquence, but, furnished with spiritual armour, consisting of zeal for maintaining the Lord's honour—eagerness for the raising up of Christ's Kingdom—a desire to edify—the fear of the Lord—an invincible constancy—purity of conscience, and other necessary endowments, he applies himself diligently to the Lord's work. Without this, preaching is dead.<sup>2</sup>

Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer agree that Paul's “power” here is his “spiritual power” of “winning men over to a Christian life.”<sup>3</sup> Although Paul does not discredit all preaching, in this verse he tells us about the power of the kingdom of God. That power, however, is not contained in words. As does Calvin, many other scholars see the power of the kingdom of God as an inward state. For instance, W. Simon writes: “It is the inward reality which permeates and gives meaning to the external reality of the Christian Church, the community where God's writ runs, through the indwelling of the Spirit.”<sup>4</sup> John Ruef insists it is not deeds but the gospel:

The contrast is between the verbal bickering which has been going on in Corinth and the power of the Gospel to turn men to Christ. . . . Paul is not concerned here to set words over against deeds. He is rather concerned with the effect of the words and the deeds.<sup>5</sup>

Deeds and words are effective when empowered by the Holy Spirit. E. F. Brown sees in the expression “kingdom of God” present spiritual blessings upon Paul by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit

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Harper, 1985). J. Wimber and K. Springer, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1986), see in Scripture a power confrontation of dramatic charismatic occurrences, “a demonstration of the Spirit's power” (p. 58). In some ways they follow F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), and Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (London: Ward, Lock, n.d.), 6. 1027.

<sup>2</sup> J. Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960) 101 (italics his).

<sup>3</sup> A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911) 92.

<sup>4</sup> W. Simon, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: SCM, 1959) 77. Simon agrees with C. Hodge that “God's reign, his dominion in the heart, or true religion, does not consist in professions, but in reality” (*An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [New York: Robert Carter, 1857] 79).

<sup>5</sup> J. Ruef, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 36–37. Many commentators conclude that by “power” Paul means effectiveness toward others, especially in communication. R. E. Davies gives the phrase a somewhat unique understanding when he proposes that Paul means “power for the destruction of evil . . . the power which they evince in their lives for destroying the evil which is in the world” (*Studies in 1 Corinthians* [London: Epworth, 1962] 47).

does not necessarily endow Christians with gifts of eloquence, but He strengthens their character and enables them to have a strong influence on those around them.<sup>6</sup>

J. A. Beet also sees it as the ability to affect others.<sup>7</sup> To C. F. Kling the kingdom of God is a life devoted to God.<sup>8</sup> Raymond O. Zorn, along with John Colet and Geoffrey B. Wilson, seems to be closer to the truth when he suggests that the power of God's kingdom is manifested in works, not merely words.<sup>9</sup> But what works would Paul have in mind? Is E.-B. Allo correct in following Chrysostom: "Le Regne de Dieu (futur) *s'établit, se prépare*, non par des discours, mais par des oeuvres de puissance"?<sup>10</sup> Does Paul here allude to the "signs" of an apostle (2 Cor 12:12), mighty works or miracles? Eugen Walter brings together the contrast between word and deed when he concludes that by "power" Paul has in mind deeds that perform the verbal desire to obey God, as in Matt 7:21.<sup>11</sup> Thus some think that "power" in 1 Cor 4:19 is the miraculous activity of the Holy Spirit. Others contend it is the effect of a genuine Christian life. Still others conclude it is inspired words, zeal, even the gospel itself. Readers of the great scholastic divine J. J. Lias were informed in 1878 that "of what the Apostle meant by *power*, we are scarcely fit judges,"<sup>12</sup> and a contemporary student might be tempted to agree with him—to judge by the conflict within the literature.

One reason commentators have not agreed on the significance of the "power" Paul has in mind is because v 20 is one point in the text at which they have generally abandoned the context (chap. 4) to interpret the verse. Most move back to 2:1 ff. and interpret this passage in the light of that one. While using the larger context to shed light on a passage is certainly a proper exegetical procedure, doing so at the expense of the immediate context is certainly not. Possibly the immediate context (chap. 4) is ignored or supplanted because it moves the reader to propose an interpretation that is both startling and difficult to accept. What did Paul mean when he assured the Corinthians that "not in word is the reign of God but in power"?

<sup>6</sup> E. F. Brown, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (London: Diocesan, 1923) 79.

<sup>7</sup> J. A. Beet writes that "power" is "ability, given by God, to produce spiritual results in the hearts of men by means of the gospel" (*A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895] 85).

<sup>8</sup> According to C. F. Kling the kingdom of God is "a life in communion with God" or "a social state pervaded and regulated by the Divine will" (*The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* [New York: Scribner's, 1868] 105).

<sup>9</sup> R. O. Zorn, *Church and Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962) 52; J. Colet, *An Exposition of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Bell, 1874) 36; G. B. Wilson, *I Corinthians* (London: Banner of Truth, 1971) 76–77. See also Grosheide, *Commentary* 115.

<sup>10</sup> E.-B. Allo, *Saint Paul Première Épître aux Corinthiens* (EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1934) 80 (italics his).

<sup>11</sup> E. Walter, *Der Erste Brief an Die Korinther* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1969) 82.

<sup>12</sup> J. J. Lias, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1878) 56 (italics his).

Paul's display of his life of suffering as an imitation of Christ is his power, a power that is lacking in others who merely talk rather than share in Christ's sufferings. Such an understanding of "power" is evident in the light of the immediate context (vv 11-21) and the larger context (Paul's other letters). To delve into Paul's understanding of the power of the kingdom of God is to understand a central aspect of his perception of the nature of God's reign.

## II. THE LIST OF SUFFERINGS (4:11-13)

Particularly moving in Paul's Corinthian correspondence is the listing of sufferings first catalogued in 1 Cor 4:11-13 and then made the subject of allusion throughout the epistles until they are particularly heightened in emphasis toward the close of 2 Corinthians. Indeed the listing of sufferings seems to be a common characteristic throughout all of Paul's epistles, even finding a way into the pastorals, particularly into 2 Timothy. Meditation upon Paul's sufferings and their inclusion in his letters leads to the discovery of a kaleidoscopic variety of didactic tasks they might serve within Paul's teaching method. In fact, the listening and references to suffering appear to be a chief didactic tool that Paul employs.

Paul's words in 1 Cor 4:11-13 are a personal record of the suffering he underwent, physically and socially. As Geoffrey Wilson notes:

The present participles denote the habitual treatment meted out to the apostles by their enemies, while the verbs which follow them indicate their habitual response to these cruel acts.<sup>13</sup>

And what an appalling list of cruel acts is presented! The apostle and his coworkers are hungry, thirsty, insufficiently clothed, beaten, homeless, working hard with their own hands, insulted, persecuted, slandered—in other words, made "the refuse of the world." Why did Paul include the list? In the verses encasing vv 11-13 we can detect some of the reasons. In the preceding words to the catalogue of sufferings Paul writes: "For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all." In Paul the concept of being "the one sent with a commission," even "the one sent with a special commission from Jesus as a reference to the twelve and their few additions," is inexorably tied up with suffering. It seems to establish his authority.

Ruef recognizes in the list the establishment of a basis for Paul's authoritative teachings to come:

This kind of patient forbearance demonstrated by the apostles is brought in at this point, partly by way of contrast with the Corinthians' own proud attitude, and partly to serve as a basis for Paul's admonition to imitation.<sup>14</sup>

Heinrich Meyer, however, sees a quite opposite effect. He feels Paul has been reduced to a state wherein he must plead for mercy:

<sup>13</sup> Wilson, *I Corinthians* 73.

<sup>14</sup> Ruef, *Paul's First Letter* 34.

The picture of the ignominious condition of the apostles is continued, and its effect heightened by the contrast of their demeanour. We are so utterly empty and void of all honour with others, that as respects those who revile . . . , persecute, and slander us . . . , we do not in any wise defend ourselves or seek vengeance against them (as men do who have honour to vindicate and maintain); but on the contrary, *wish good* to our revilers, *remain quiet and patient* towards any persecutors, and *give beseeching words* to our slanderers.<sup>15</sup>

Meyer misses the point of what Paul is trying to say and certainly leaves us mystified to explain the Paul who several verses later speaks with great authority from his apostolic vantage point, reproving and correcting.

Paul establishes his authority by the testimony of sufferings throughout 1 Corinthians and his other writings. In 1 Cor 2:1-5, coming in "weakness" and "fear and trembling," his message was not in "plausible words of wisdom" but in "demonstration of the Spirit and power." In 2 Cor 11:23-29 he is more blunt. Herein he seeks to establish by his list of sufferings that he is a "better" servant of Christ than the false apostles (particularly in 11:23). His assurance is that his behavior is not determined by earthly wisdom but by God's grace (1 Cor 1:12). And elsewhere in Paul's writings we can see this technique at work. Persecution proves he is preaching the cross (Gal 5:11). Because he bears the marks of Jesus he says, "Let no one trouble me" (6:18). He can demand that Epaphroditus be received by the Philippians because he nearly died for the work of Christ (Phil 2:29-30). His power is proved by afflictions (1 Thess 1:5-6). Affliction proves he is trying to please God, not humans (2:1-6), and it establishes his apostleship (2 Tim 1:11-13).

Suffering means much for Paul all throughout his writing. Suffering is that which brings about his spiritual growth. He pummels and subdues his body lest he should be disqualified from salvation (1 Cor 9:27). Through it he hopes to find his own resurrection from the dead (15:30-31). It makes him rely on God rather than upon himself (3:11; 9:11). It makes him know that Christ's grace is sufficient for him (2 Cor 12:9b-10). And it assures him that he worked harder than anyone else at the task of the gospel (1 Cor 15:10). Parallel passages are Phil 3:8-11; 2 Tim 2:8-13.

We should not be surprised, then, that he should mention his sufferings as proof of his own faithfulness and sanctification. What is surprising is the attempt by scholars to reduce his catalogue of suffering to a mere emotional or petulant outburst. William Barclay introduces the section with the words: "And then there comes one of these winged outbursts which meet us ever and again in the letters of Paul."<sup>16</sup> Meyer closes it in a similar manner: "The torrent is at an end; now again we have the gentle stream of fatherly kindness."<sup>17</sup> Arthur P. Stanley even sees Paul as one for whom the very thought of opposition can fling him into rage:

<sup>15</sup> H. A. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians I* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884) 99-100 (italics his).

<sup>16</sup> W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1956) 44.

<sup>17</sup> Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook* 101.

This therefore suddenly breaks off the affectionate strain in which he had been addressing them, and precipitates the introduction of the severe censure of the incestuous Corinthians.<sup>18</sup>

Paul appears to be a distraught man, a bit deranged, with manic-depressive tendencies. Surely he was intense and passionate in his service to God, but more dedication than aberrant emotionalism seems to emerge in Luke's picture of him in Acts.

More profitable is the consideration of the sufferings to be a statement of fact rather than the strident outburst of a puerile grownup. F. Godet has well defended the passion in the passage against such an objection by Ruckert:

Ruckert cannot approve of the sarcastic tone of this passage. He says, frankly (pp. 124, 125): "This passage of Paul's has always produced on me a repulsive impression. . . . There are found in it undeniable traces of wounded personal feeling, of irritation caused him by the loss of the consideration which he enjoyed at Corinth. . . . Everywhere there reigns concern about his own personality. I am pained to have to pass such a judgment on this great man; but he too was human. . . ." This eminent commentator has not considered,—1. that as against proud infatuation, the weapon of ridicule is often the only efficacious one; 2. that the indignation which inspired this passage bore on a state of things which was not only an attack on the apostle's person, but a mortal danger to the spiritual life and the whole future of the Church; 3. that the following words, expressive of incomparable fatherly tenderness and solicitude, do not well agree with those wholly personal feelings, which he ascribes so daringly to the apostle.<sup>19</sup>

Barrett senses there may be more to the mention of suffering, suggesting Paul may have been simply describing his condition as he wrote:

These words may hint at a particularly acute period of suffering at the time of writing. . . . More probably, however, Paul simply means to point out that the apostolic story has no happy ending in this age.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover the effect of mentioning his suffering is a strong tool for Paul, and with it he can wield a heavy weapon for reproof and correction.

In 1 Cor 4:14 he states a specific reason for the list's inclusion in the letter. It is for admonition, the exercise of his authority. Paul explains that he does not include the list of sufferings to cause shame in his readers but to admonish them. This is what the gospel has cost him. The lot of a Christian is to suffer. So they should imitate him. How do their lives match up against his? How do the lives of any dissidents or any other authorities match up against his? There can be no doubt that Paul is suggesting to them that they endure suffering.

Colet captures the effect of this when he explains that Paul's intention is that the Corinthians

<sup>18</sup> A. P. Stanley, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (London: John Murray, 1882) 71.

<sup>19</sup> F. Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1898), 1. 229.

<sup>20</sup> Barrett, *Commentary* 111.

be ashamed of despising the Apostles, their own fathers in Christ, on account of their life of suffering. Rather should they set the life of the Apostles, and of their spiritual father St. Paul, as a pattern before themselves; judging it their first duty to do what the Apostles were in the habit of doing, and to follow in the footsteps of those by whom they had been set in the right path.<sup>21</sup>

Beet does not wish to see this as suffering. Paul wants the Corinthians to be "imitators" of him, but

not necessarily of his sufferings (vv 9-13), but in the spirit Paul manifested therein. Happy are the teachers who can say this to their hearers.<sup>22</sup>

Few of us would really wish to see Paul suggesting others endure similar sufferings either, but Beet ignores Paul's overriding recognition of suffering as the lot of the Christian and a veritable spiritual duty. Paul's understanding seems to be that a Christian's spiritual obligation is to suffer (1 Thess 3:3-4). He urges Timothy to take his share of suffering (2 Tim 1:8; 2:3; 4:5). He promises that those who live godly lives will be persecuted (3:12). Such may be the understanding of even the much-quoted Rom 12:1-2. And he cites his own example, citing his suffering for the gospel in such passages as Col 4:3; Rom 8:36; 2 Tim 3:10-11.

### III. IMITATION OF PAUL'S WAYS (4:16-17)

Having cited his sufferings, Paul encourages the Corinthians to imitate him and informs them that Timothy is coming to remind them of his "ways in Christ." Having reproved them, Paul advises that the best course of action the Corinthians can take is in imitating him. Imitation is again suggested in 11:1 when he writes: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." This is an idea Paul records in passages like Phil 3:17; 4:9; Eph 5:1-2.

What was the content of Paul's message when sending Timothy to remind the Corinthians "of his ways"? He states that his aim in sending Timothy is "to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in the church." What has he just told us are "his ways"? They are the list of sufferings. Paul's suffering is both the content and the methodology of his teaching. By suffering he seeks to remove all obstacles in his hearers' process of learning. Though entitled to material benefits (1 Cor 9:11), he forgoes them if necessary to promote God's reign and undergoes hunger instead (9:12b; 6:3). Indeed, suffering can be substitutionary, taking the place of his learners or providing the payment of the civil price for bringing them the gospel (Eph 3:1, 13; Col 1:24; 2 Tim 2:10). It can be a tool for encouragement, helping the learners to speak more boldly on their own (Phil 1:12-14). And it encourages prayer participation in Paul's ministry (2 Cor 1:11).

<sup>21</sup> Colet, *Exposition* 35.

<sup>22</sup> Beet, *Commentary* 84.

Needless to say, there is scholarly dissent to such an interpretation. Ruef interprets the phrase from Paul's Hebrew background:

Paul has already in his letter given the Corinthians an adequate basis for imitation. His *ways* must refer to something else. The reference is perhaps to the Hebrew *halakah*, which means literally a "way of walking". It is the technical term in Jewish writings for the interpretation by a particular rabbi of a passage of the Law. The "ways" of Paul would then refer to Paul's interpretation of Jewish scripture from the Christian point of view.<sup>23</sup>

Nearer to the immediate context, Hodge sees herein an appeal to authority:

*My ways which be in Christ*, means the ways which I follow in the service of Christ. It was his official conduct as an apostle and teacher which Timothy was to bring to their recollection.<sup>24</sup>

Even closer to the context is Kling:

It was his mode of conduct as a Christian teacher; and this, as it regarded, not so much the subject of his teaching, or its manner, as his demeanor while doing it,—the humility and self-denial with which he discharged his calling.<sup>25</sup>

Paul is confident that the conduct of Timothy would remind the Corinthians of what had been his own manner of life among them. But only because Paul's ways were also those of Christ himself did they become an authoritative pattern for believers to follow (Gal 2:20). Paul's "ways" are his "habits of life," not merely his doctrines, though the two are wedded in Paul's thought and practice. F. F. Bruce seeks to reflect this wedding in his explanation: "Paul's ways are the ethical principles which he practised in his life and enjoined in his teaching."<sup>26</sup> To Barrett, "Paul's ways in Christ Jesus are moral standards, expressed to some extent in recognized patterns of behaviour which can be taught."<sup>27</sup> For Orr and Walthur, "*hodos* was commonly used to refer to the pattern of life adopted by a religious group (e.g. by the Essenes and in Acts). Here the plural seems to point to the range of Paul's practices: his policies as a missionary, his attitudes toward people, and his concern for the moral and spiritual welfare of his congregations."<sup>28</sup> For John Short the reference is to "Paul's own example."<sup>29</sup>

George Findlay suggests that "Paul's *ways* and *teaching* are not the same thing; but the former are regulated by the latter; they will find the same consistency in Timothy."<sup>30</sup> Paul wants the Corinthians to model themselves on Timothy, being reminded by him to model themselves on

<sup>23</sup> Ruef, *Paul's First Letter* 36 (italics his). Other scholars follow this view, among them Héring, *First Epistle* 32.

<sup>24</sup> Hodge, *Exposition* 77.

<sup>25</sup> Kling, *First Epistle* 102.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* 52.

<sup>27</sup> Barrett, *Commentary* 117.

<sup>28</sup> Orr and Walthur, *1 Corinthians* 179.

<sup>29</sup> J. Short in IB, 57. See also B. Sanders, "Imitating Paul: 1 Cor. 4:16," *HTR* 74 (1981) 353-363.

<sup>30</sup> G. G. Findlay, *St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Expositor's Greek Testament; New York: Dodd, Mead, 1900) 805 (italics his). With this position H. Conzelmann disagrees:



Paul, who has modeled himself on Christ. As Dieter Georgi aptly notes: "The present existence of Paul is molded by the true past of Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>31</sup> And here we have a central technique of Paul's teaching and the reason for the list of sufferings being included here. For what is the manner of Paul's life among them but his suffering? Paul teaches by model, and his life as much as his words becomes the visual aid for his learners' right instruction.

All through the words of Paul in his catalogue of sufferings can be heard echoes of Jesus, most reminiscently in the sermon on the mount. As Paul lays his example before the Corinthians he is, in his reflection of Jesus, authenticating his own preaching of the kingdom of God. Jesus challenged his hearers that only the persons who renounced all they had and bore their own cross could be his disciples (e.g. Luke 14:25-33). Similarly Paul explained to the Corinthians that "we preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23), and "I was resolved not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and the crucified Jesus Christ at that" (2:2),<sup>32</sup> and "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" (5:7b). Paul preached not only the fact of Christ's crucifixion but also lived out a life of crucifixion. He is in peril every hour (15:30). The very cross of Christ has power (1:17). Even to take communion is a symbol of a life of participation in the blood and body of Christ (10:16). For even as God raised the Messiah, God would also raise the apostle. Paul's trust was solely rested in the power of God (2:5). "In my life," he is saying, "you can see the teachings of Jesus. Here fleshed out is the evidence of the reign of God. Can others match my life with their catalogues of suffering, or do they just talk against my model?"

Paul uses his own example, his own afflicted body as a didactic model in a number of other places. He carries death in his body so that the life of Jesus can be manifested (2 Cor 4:10). He suffers to bring comfort to the Corinthians so that they might in turn suffer and share in Christ's sufferings (1:5) and become more Christlike (1:5-6). He commends the Philippians for suffering as an example to their opponents (Phil 1:29-30). He commends the Thessalonians for following his example in suffering (1 Thess 1:5-6). Similar teachings can be found in 2 Tim 2:1-13; 3:10-14 (particularly vv 10-12). All his exertions are intentional. As Calvin observes:

When he says he undergoes persecution by enduring it and prays for his slanderers, he means not only that he is brought down and humbled by God through the Cross, but that he is also enslaved with a willingness to be so humbled.<sup>33</sup>

Barrett adds that "the life of an apostle is a particularly clear reflection of Christ crucified."<sup>34</sup> Calvin summarizes the material superbly:

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"Paul's 'ways' are here more especially his *teaching*" (Hermeneia; *I Corinthians* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 92) (italics his).

<sup>31</sup> D. Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

<sup>32</sup> Conzelmann, *I Corinthians* 53.

<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *First Epistle* 95.

<sup>34</sup> Barrett, *Commentary* 116; see also p. 110.

Here the apostle paints a vivid picture of his own circumstances, so that the Corinthians may learn from his example to give up their high-mindedness, and, submissive in heart, embrace the cross of Christ, along with him.<sup>35</sup>

As Paul himself explained so lucidly to the Galatians, his aim is to form Christ in his learners (Gal 4:19).

How better could he have done it than by forming in himself the suffering life of Christ? We lose much of the understanding of this epistle when we reduce the rehearsal of Paul's sufferings to a mere emotional outburst or a plea for sympathy. Rather, through the recitation of what he has endured, the wounds of the warrior displayed through the humble gown of his life of service, Paul establishes his right to speak, he establishes his Christlike imitation, challenges those who would teach while bearing no marks of Jesus, and he calls his learners to imitation and, through that, into the power of the gospel. How better else could Paul have represented the "man of sorrows" (Isa 53:3), of whom it was said:

Yet on himself he bore our sufferings, our torments he endured, while we counted him smitten by God, struck down by disease and misery, but he was pierced for our transgressions, tortured for our iniquities; the chastisement he bore is health for us and by his scourging we are healed (53:4-5 *NEB*).

#### IV. THE CHALLENGE OF PAUL'S SUFFERINGS (4:18-21)

Paul concludes this pericope with a challenge to others who may oppose him that they match his example with equal catalogues and not with mere talk: "But I will come quickly to you, if the Lord wills, and I will know not the talk of the ones being arrogant but the power, for not in word is the kingdom of God but in power." Does their power match his? For Paul, suffering overcomes evil with good. His example of suffering destroys the false claim that his opponents have worked on the same terms that he did (2 Cor 11:12; Gal 6:12). Like a two-edged sword, such a list can undercut the authority of any opponents by its reproof. In 2 Cor 11:12 Paul suffers in want to explode the claim of the false apostles that they worked on the same terms he did. The same can be seen in Gal 6:12. Rom 12:14-21, which echoes the sermon on the mount, suggests too the idea of overcoming evil with good. As Calvin explains:

In this (undergoing persecution), perhaps, he censures the false apostles, who were so effeminate and soft that they could not bear to be touched even with someone's little finger.<sup>36</sup>

Having reproved them, Paul judges that the best course of action the Corinthians can take is to imitate him.

Paul's display of his life of suffering as an imitation of Christ is his power, a power that is lacking in others who merely talk in place of sharing in Christ's sufferings. Paul catalogues the "power" and proof of

<sup>35</sup> Calvin, *First Epistle* 94.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 95.

his apostleship in 1 Cor 4:11-13. And he calls the Corinthians to imitate his ways in 4:16-17. People could not remain arrogant if they were to compare their own lifestyles with Paul's most difficult life.<sup>37</sup>

The implications for those of us who would teach are obvious. As Paul cautioned Timothy, we must incarnate our teachings in a life of service that may invite or at least will not avoid suffering for the faith and the faithful. If we merely talk, we are no better than the false apostles. We follow a suffering servant whose teaching and life of active service were perfectly wedded. We must never forget that fact. Humility before our Lord's example and before the examples of his stalwart apostles will keep in check our own tendencies to being arrogant and lording it over other Christians. And it will keep us from measuring true Christianity by success in the world's eyes. Paul charges that his distinguished adversaries merely speak words. When Paul arrives at Corinth, however, he will see whether their words and eloquent speech are fleshed out in a life of sufferings for the sake of Christ. That kind of life necessitates and demonstrates the presence of an external strength, and it authenticates the words of the true apostle.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Further support of the present thesis can be seen in Paul's selection of the word "humility" (*prautetos*) to describe his preference in manner of coming, as opposed to the coming of "some who are arrogant" (1 Cor 4:18). Further, in v 19 he will challenge the word of "the arrogant ones" (*pephysiomenōn*). For a further development of Paul's concept of the spiritual person, power and lifestyle in 1 Corinthians 2 and 4 see W. D. Spencer and A. B. Spencer, "The Truly Spiritual in Paul: Biblical Background Paper on I Corinthians 2:6-16," in *Conflict and Context: Hermeneutics in the Americas* (ed. M. L. Branson and C. R. Padilla; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>38</sup> Those who are interested in how Paul continues to use his lists of sufferings as didactic tools in 2 Corinthians are invited to consult A. B. Spencer and W. D. Spencer, *2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989).