

IMITATION OF PAUL AND THE CHURCH'S MISSIONARY ROLE IN 1 CORINTHIANS

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Did Paul want the churches he founded to engage in active missionary work? Though an affirmative response to this question has long been assumed by a majority of scholars,¹ this traditional understanding has recently been seriously questioned.² One point of contention in the debate is

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¹ E.g. see Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours? A Study of the Church in the Four Provinces* (London: Robert Scott, 1912) 125–26; Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (ed. and trans. James Moffatt; 2d ed.; London: Williams and Norgate; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908) 1:73–74; Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Das Volk Gottes: Eine Untersuchung zum Kirchenbewusstsein des Urchristentums* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963) 241; Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (rev. Owen Chadwick; 2d ed.; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1986) 22–23; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979) 2:762–68; J. A. Grassi, *A World to Win: The Missionary Methods of Paul the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY: Maryknoll, 1965) 139; D. M. Schlunk, *Paulus als Missionar* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1937) 45; F. Hahn, *Mission in the New Testament* (trans. Frank Clarke; SBT 47; London: SCM, 1965) 16; E. Best, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 168; J. Knox, "Romans 15:14–33 and Paul's Conception of His Apostolic Mission," *JBL* 83 (1964) 1–11; M. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970) 260–63; O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* (MeyerK 4; 13th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966) 366–67; G. Bornkamm, *Paul* (trans. D. Stalker; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 54; E. Glenn Hinson, *The Early Church: Origins to the Dawn of the Middle Ages* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) 51, 63–64; Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (EKKNT 6; Zurich: Benziger, 1982) 3:119–22; D. Senior and C. Stuhlmüller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983) 333; J. Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (TPI New Testament Commentaries; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989) 343.

² Scholars arguing against the traditional view include: Terence L. Donaldson, "The Absence in Paul's Letters of Any Injunction to Evangelize" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Nashville, TN, November, 2000) 1–14; Paul Bowers, "Church and Mission in Paul," *JSNT* 44 (1991) 89–111; D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991) 138, 168; Hans-Werner Gensichen, *Glaube für die Welt: Theologische Aspekte der Mission* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971) 168–86; Peter Lippert, *Leben als Zeugnis: Die werbende Kraft christlicher Lebensführung nach dem Kirchenverständnis neutestamentlicher Briefe* (SBM 4; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1968) 127–28, 164–65, 175–76; D. Zeller, "Theologie der Mission bei Paulus," in *Mission im neuen Testament* (ed. K. Kertelge; Freiburg: Herder, 1982) 164. Scholars in defense of the traditional view include: Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (NSBT 11; Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001) 191–99; I. Howard Marshall, "Who Were the Evangelists?" in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein; Tübingen: Mohr, 2000) 251–63; O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1995) 83–131; James Patrick Ware, "Holding Forth the Word of Life": Paul and the

the meaning of Paul's commands to imitate him.³ Did Paul in fact expect his readers to imitate him *in evangelism*?⁴ The present study will seek to answer this question by studying the imitation texts in 1 Corinthians. The objective is to discover, according to Paul's explicit indications, whether his commands to imitate him include an evangelistic component.

I. THE BROADER CONTEXT OF PAUL'S IMITATION COMMAND IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11:1

Just as the modern English injunction "imitate me" is inherently ambiguous, only the context of Paul's command clarifies what sort of imitation he expected.⁵ Before turning to the immediate context of Paul's imitation

Mission of the Church in the Letter to the Philippians in the Context of Second Temple Judaism" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1996); idem, "The Thessalonians as a Missionary Congregation: 1 Thessalonians 1, 5–8," *ZNW* 83 (1992) 126–31; Robert Lewis Plummer, "The Church's Missionary Nature: The Apostle Paul and His Churches" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001).

³ Bowers, "Church and Mission" 92–95; O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission* 83–107. Some earlier monographs support an active missionary role for the church on the basis of the Pauline imitation texts, e.g. Odo Haas, *Paulus der Missionar: Ziel, Grundsätze und Methoden der Missionstätigkeit des Apostels Paulus nach seinen eigenen Aussagen* (Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme, 1971) 69–79; Douwe van Swigchem, *Het missionair karakter van de Christelijke gemeente volgens de brieven van Paulus en Petrus* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1955) 109–17.

⁴ Numerous scholars have briefly noted possible evangelistic meanings in the Pauline imitation texts—especially in 1 Cor 11:1 and 1 Thess 1:6–8. For example, see Hans Dieter Betz, *Nachfolge und Nachahmung Jesu Christi im Neuen Testament* (BHT 37; Tübingen: Mohr, 1967) 143–44; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 92 [1 Cor 4:16]; John Howard Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (SNTSMS 26; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 227–29; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 489–90; Adele Reinhartz, "On the meaning of the Pauline exhortation: *mimētai mou ginesthe*—become imitators of me," *SR* 16 (1987) 398–99; Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 54; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Freedom or the Ghetto (*I Cor.*, VIII, 1–13; X, 23–XI, 1)," *RB* 85 (1978) 573; Willis Peter De Boer, *The Imitation of Paul: An Exegetical Study* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1962) 158, 207; David M. Stanley, "'Become Imitators of Me': The Pauline Conception of Apostolic Tradition," *Bib* 40 (1959) 874; Donald Manly Williams, "The Imitation of Christ in Paul with Special Reference to Paul as Teacher," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1967) 241–42, 351–55; Jo-Ann A. Brant, "The place of *mimesis* in Paul's thought," *SR* 22 (1993) 289–92; Linda L. Belleville, "'Imitate Me, Just as I Imitate Christ': Discipleship in the Corinthian Correspondence," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; MNTS; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 126; Derek Newton, *Deity and Diet: The Dilemma of Sacrificial Food at Corinth* (JSNTSup 169; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 380–81; E. J. Tinsley, *The Imitation of God in Christ: An Essay on the Biblical Basis of Christian Spirituality* (London: SCM, 1960) 138; Edwin Judge, "The Teacher as Moral Exemplar in Paul and in the Inscriptions of Ephesus," in *In the Fullness of Time: Biblical Studies in Honour of Archbishop Donald Robinson* (ed. David Peterson and John Pryor; Homebush West, NSW, Australia: Lancer, 1992) 196.

⁵ Of course, the semantic ranges of μιμέομαι and μιμητής do not overlap exactly with their modern English counterparts, e.g. note the Greek philosophical and artistic usage of μιμέομαι (Michaelis, "μιμέομαι κτλ.," *TDNT* 4:659–63); Jo-Ann Brant unconvincingly tries to impose this specialized philosophical meaning of μιμέομαι on Paul's usage (Brant, "*mimesis*" 285–300). It should be noted that the English word "imitation" does perhaps more commonly carry negative

command in 1 Cor 11:1, we first need to investigate its broader epistolary setting. 1 Cor 11:1 appears at the close of Paul's response to the Corinthians' division over eating εἰδωλόθυτον, "idol meat" (chaps. 8–10).⁶ Certain "strong"⁷ members of the Corinthian community are eating meat sacrificed to idols (8:1–9) and attending "non-religious" banquets that gather in pagan temples (8:10–11).⁸ "Weak" members of the community, however, view such activities as having religious significance and are themselves being incited to partake in such meals. From the weak members' viewpoint, when they "give in" and partake of questionable food, they engage in idolatrous syncretism. Thus, the weak are being led to sin against their own consciences by participating in what they consider idolatry, and if they persist, will be "destroyed" (ἀπόλλυται; 1 Cor 8:11–13). While Paul agrees with the strong Corinthians' assessment of meat sacrificed to idols in theory (i.e. it has no ultimate spiritual significance), he argues that the principle of self-denial for the good of the other takes priority. Paul avers, "Therefore, if food causes

connotations of "mimicry" than its Greek counterpart (see E. Larsson, "μιμέομαι κτλ.," *EDNT* 2:428–30; Louw and Nida §41.44; §41.45; De Boer, *The Imitation of Paul* 211). For all Pauline uses of μιμέομαι or (συμ-) μιμητής, see: 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 2 Thess 3:7, 9; Eph 5:1. Outside of Paul, the only other NT occurrences of μιμέομαι (or cognates) are found in Heb 6:12; 13:7; and 3 John 11. The concept of imitation is also frequently present in Paul, e.g. see 1 Cor 7:6–7; 10:31–11:1; Gal 4:12–20; Phil 4:9; 1 Tim 1:15–17; 2 Tim 1:13; 2:2; 3:10; cf. Acts 20:35. It is commonly noted that Paul does not mention imitation of himself in letters to churches which he did not found (e.g. in Romans or Colossians). Though few ancient speakers or writers prescribe imitation of themselves, there seems to be no conceptual difference between Paul's injunctions and others' frequent appeals to imitate a third party (e.g. *T. Benj.* 3.1; 4.1; Seneca *Epistulae Morales* 6.5–6; 7.6–9; 11.8–10; Dio Chrysostom *Discourse* 55.4–5; for first-person appeals, see 2 Macc 6:27–28; 4 Macc 9:23; cf. Josephus *Ant.* 1.109). So Ernest Best (*Paul and His Converts* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988] 68–70); contra Adele Reinhartz ("On the meaning of the Pauline exhortation" 395–96). Paul can be so bold because of his confidence in the gospel to shape the communities he founded, his apostolic authority, and his ultimate dependence upon Christ (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 1:5–6; 1 Thess 1:4–8). Cf. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians* 58.

⁶ 1 Cor 8:1–11:1 should be read as a unity. See the arguments of John C. Brunt, "Love, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility: The Contribution of I Cor. 8–10 to an Understanding of Paul's Ethical Thinking," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1981 Seminar Papers* (ed. Kent Harold Richards; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981) 19–21; Fee, *Corinthians* 487. Contra Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (KEK; 9th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910) XL–XLIII; Walter Schmithals, *Die Gnosis in Korinth: Eine Untersuchung zu den Korintherbriefen* (3d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969) 89; Jean Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock; London: Epworth, 1962) xii–xiv.

⁷ Though Paul does not use the term "strong" in 1 Corinthians, we will adopt this designation for the believers who favored eating idol meat (cf. Rom 15:1).

⁸ Wedding and funeral banquets, as well as other social meetings, were commonly held within the precincts of a temple. See Peter D. Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8–10 in Its Context* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 5; Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993) 1–46; Wendell Lee Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) 63, n. 234; Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 36–42; Franz Poland, *Geschichte des griechischen Vereinswesens* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1909) 503–13. Gordon Fee thinks the issue throughout 1 Cor 8:1–10:22 is "the eating of sacrificial food at the cultic meals in the pagan temples," but such a reading does not seem to account for Paul's accommodating attitude in chapter 8 (Fee, *Corinthians* 359–60).

my brother to fall, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause my brother to fall" (1 Cor 8:13, my translation).⁹ Just as Paul gives up his right to receive financial support or take along a believing wife so that no stumbling block will be put in the way of his evangelistic ministry (1 Cor 9:1–27), the strong Corinthians should give up their right to eat meat sacrificed to idols, if that action proves spiritually harmful to their weak brothers.

In chapter 10, Paul shifts from discussing the principle of self-denial to denouncing idolatry as unfaithfulness. Paul cites examples from the OT as to how God deals with the unfaithful. Indeed, the Lord's destruction of the Israelites, even after he had rescued them from Egypt, stands as a warning against presumption and unfaithfulness (10:1–13). An example of similar presumption in Paul's own day would be partaking in an idolatrous religious ceremony (10:14–22).¹⁰ Even in cases where idolatry is not involved (e.g. meat from the market or "non-religious" banquets in a pagan temple), if another's conscience is in danger, one should refrain from eating (10:23–30).¹¹

II. THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF PAUL'S IMITATION COMMAND IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11:1

Paul indicates to the reader that he is concluding this discussion on debated eating practices with the inferential οὖν and a general summarizing tone (εἴτε οὖν ἐσθίετε εἴτε πίνετε εἴτε τι ποιεῖτε . . . ; 10:31). It is here that Paul instructs his converts to imitate him, and as we noted in the introduction to this essay, only the context of this command will clarify the kind of imitation expected. Keeping in mind the broader context outlined above, it is instructive to look particularly at 1 Cor 10:31–11:1. The text reads:

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.¹²

In this concluding paragraph to the lengthy discussion on idol meat, Paul emphasizes the salvific intentions of his accommodating behavior (something he has already highlighted in 9:19–23). The σύμφορον (good, advantage, benefit) which Paul seeks for all persons is none other than their

⁹ The term "brothers" for Paul obviously includes both male and female members of the congregation, and for ease of expression, we will use the term in this way as well.

¹⁰ See Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* 177; John C. Brunt, "Rejected, Ignored, or Misunderstood? The Fate of Paul's Approach to the Problem of Food Offered to Idols in Early Christianity," *NTS* 31 (1985) 114.

¹¹ Note the argument's structure: (A) idol meat issue, (B) apostolic paradigm and OT example, (A¹) idol meat issue. Hopper claims that Paul employs epideictic discourse in 1 Corinthians, whereby he introduces an issue, digresses, and then returns to the main issue (Mark Edward Hopper, "The Pauline Concept of Imitation" [Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1983] 128). This ABA pattern of argumentation has been noted by others (e.g. Fee, *Corinthians* 16; John J. Collins, "Chiasmus, the 'ABA' Pattern, and the Text of Paul," in *Studiosorum Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus 1961* (AnBib 17–18; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1963) 2:575–83).

¹² All English Bible quotations will come from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

salvation (ἵνα σωθῶσιν). The question, then, is whether Paul expects the Corinthians to exercise this same concern for others' salvation. Or, is the apostle's self-denial simply an analogy for the Corinthian Christians' behavior towards one another?

Paul answers this question by signifying that the strong brothers' accommodation also has salvific intentions. Paul says that if the weak brothers persist in sinning against their own conscience, they will be destroyed (ἀπόλλυται γὰρ ὁ ἀσθενῶν; 1 Cor 8:11).¹³ Paul's other uses of ἀπόλλυμι make clear that this destruction refers to the weak brothers' ultimate state.¹⁴ The strong brothers' self-denial is meant to prevent the weak brothers from sinning against their consciences in idolatry, for no idolater will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9–11). Does the strong brothers' salvific concern, however, extend beyond those presently identified with the Christian community?

Several factors would seem to indicate that it does. First, the salutation of 1 Corinthians shows that Paul understands the teaching of this letter as applying beyond the concerns that occasioned it. The letter is not addressed simply to the Corinthians, but also to "all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁵ Undoubtedly, Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians is a profoundly occasional letter. Specific issues at Corinth prompted Paul to write this letter, and the Corinthians are the primary addressees. Yet, if Paul writes with the broader church also in view, he surely intends the underlying principles of his specific advice to extend beyond the issues addressed. Second, in 1 Cor 10:31, Paul signifies that his concluding

¹³ Paul's reference to a person as an ἀδελφός can pertain to the person's outward relationship to the Christian community rather than his or her spiritual state (e.g. 1 Cor 1:11; 5:11; Rom 14:15, 21; cf. Matt 18:15–17; Acts 20:30; 1 John 5:16). Also, Paul's remark that the brother is one δι' ὃν Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν (1 Cor 8:11) does not indicate that Paul views that person as definitively saved. Cf. Rom 14:15; 2 Peter 2:1, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. *They will even deny the Master who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves*" (emphasis added).

¹⁴ E.g. see 1 Cor 1:18, 19; Rom 2:12; 14:15; 2 Cor 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess 2:10.

¹⁵ 1 Cor 1:2; cf. 1 Cor 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33. Weiss's proposal that this universal address is a later interpolation has no manuscript support (Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* 4). Grammatically, the phrase cannot be understood as referring to κλητοῖς ἁγίοις (J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on Epistles of St Paul from Unpublished Commentaries* [London: MacMillan, 1895] 145; contra Georg Heinrich, *Kritisch Exegetisches Handbuch über den ersten Brief an die Korinther* [MeyerK; 6th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1881] 13; Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977] 45; Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* [ICC; 2d ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914] 3; cf. 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1). Furthermore, the words ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ are too general to be restricted to believers in the province of Achaia (contra Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980] 5; Francis Baudraz, *Les Épîtres aux Corinthiens: Commentaire* [Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1965] 20; cf. 2 Cor 1:1). It appears Paul wrote with a consciousness that his letters, though occasional, would circulate (Col 4:16; 2 Pet 3:15–16); other attempts to explain 1 Cor 1:2 are not convincing. For example, see Manuel Guerra, who argues that πάντες οἱ ἐπικαλούμενοι το ὄνομα του κυρίου are leaders of the Christian community at Corinth ("Los 'epikaloumenoi' de 1 Cor 1,2, directores y sacerdotes de la comunidad cristiana en Corinto," *Scripta Theologica* 17 [1985] 11–72) or Ulrich Wickert, who claims that Paul presents the universal church as somehow joining in the writing of this epistle ("Einheit und Eintracht der Kirche im Präskript des ersten Korintherbriefes," *ZNW* 50 [1959] 73–82).

remarks on the food issue have implications beyond the Corinthians' current situation. He writes, "So, whether you eat or drink, or *whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God*" (10:31; emphasis added).¹⁶ Third, after broadening the scope of his conclusion with this introductory remark, Paul follows in 10:32 with a command that extends explicitly beyond the Christian community. The apostle writes, "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God." Thus, Paul instructs the Corinthians to consider the repercussions of their actions not only for persons identified with the church, but also for those outside the church—both non-believing Jews and Greeks.¹⁷ Christians are to be blameless or inoffensive in their relationship to such outsiders (ἀπόσκοποι . . . γίνεσθε).¹⁸ Such behavior should not be misunderstood as avoiding offense at any cost for the sake of politeness or civil peace.¹⁹ A Christian is to avoid offense in *adiaphora* for the sake of the gospel and its progress.²⁰ This point is clarified by Paul's elaboration of what it means for Christians to be blameless in relation to others. He explains that their behavior should be parallel to his own: "just as (καθώς) I try to please (ἀρέσκω)²¹ everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved" (1 Cor 10:33). This explicit parallel between Paul's salvation-oriented activity and the "blamelessness" of his addressees demonstrates that the term ἀπόσκοποι connotes an active missionary role for the congregation.²² The Corinthian Christians must not only regulate their behavior to avoid offense; they must

¹⁶ Also, see Paul's earlier statement in 10:23–24, "All things are lawful," but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up (οικοδομεῖ). Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other (τοῦ ἑτέρου)." Bowers acknowledges that the term "other" here is so general that it must be understood as including unbelievers (such as the non-Christian dinner host of 10:27; Bowers, "Church and Mission" 94, n. 1). "Building up" for Paul means both the maturation and multiplication of the church, as we will see in our discussion of 1 Cor 14:23–25.

¹⁷ Cf. Col 4:5–6; 1 Thess 4:11–12.

¹⁸ Cf. Acts 24:16; Phil 1:10.

¹⁹ We do not find here an early form of *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* (Dibelius).

²⁰ Robertson and Plummer comment, "An ill-advised exhibition of Christian freedom might shock Jews and an ill-advised rigor about matters indifferent might excite the derision of Greeks, and thus those who might have been won over would be alienated" (*Corinthians* 224).

²¹ A conative present (BDF §319). Here, ἀρέσκω does not mean "to please" in the sense of "doing or believing what others dictate" (Gal 1:10; cf. Matt 14:6; Mark 6:22), but connotes "serving in the interests of others" (P. Richardson and P. W. Gooch, "Accommodation Ethics," *TynBul* 29 [1978] 113). See J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930; reprint, 1982) s.v.

²² Murphy-O'Connor writes, "Paul has dedicated himself to 'seeking the advantage of many in order that they may be saved' (x, 33). It is not enough that the Corinthians avoid creating stumbling-blocks, they must positively empower the conversion of Jews and Gentiles and the continuing growth of their fellow Christians" ("Freedom or the Ghetto" 573). Richardson and Gooch comment, "[Let us address] a question about the effectiveness of accommodating one's behaviour for the good of others. Where their 'good' means not just their feeling comfortable but instead their ultimate salvation, accommodation has to be accompanied by additional procedures whereby the others are moved away from their present way of life and brought into the freedom of the gospel. Otherwise accommodation will only be the confirmation of their way of life ('If you're living like us our life must be acceptable')." ("Accommodation Ethics" 115).

actively work for the “building up” of the church—that is, both the maturation or multiplication of the church (10:23; 14:3; 14:24–25).²³

In the final sentence of this concluding paragraph on the idol meat issue, Paul injects the imperative, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (11:1).²⁴ Standing alone, this command is ambiguous, but the preceding verses make clear that we should understand it as a restatement of Paul’s exhortation to evangelistically-motivated self-denial. The appeal to imitate Paul flows as a natural reiteration of the previous discussion, but the concluding reference to Christ is somewhat more enigmatic. Given the immediate context (i.e. the preceding verse), Paul seems to be saying that Christ was a model for him in that Christ did not seek his own advantage, but that of others—for their salvation. This understanding of Christ as selflessly giving himself for others’ salvation corresponds with Paul’s presentation of Christ in his other letters, as well as agreeing with the Gospel traditions.²⁵

Paul’s mention of his (and Christ’s) salvation-oriented self-denial, along with the triple reference to the “Jews, Greeks, and church of God” in 10:32, points us back to a passage which closely parallels the current one. In 9:12, 19–23, Paul discusses the same three groups with evangelistic intentions.²⁶ A closer look at this passage will help us understand the accommodating behavior Paul urges the Corinthians to imitate in 1 Cor 11:1. Paul writes:

Nevertheless, we [Paul and Barnabas] have not made use of this right [to material benefit], but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. . . . For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order that I might win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I might be

²³ See below for a more detailed discussion of “building up.”

²⁴ For a brief survey of major commentators’ views on this verse, see Belleville, “‘Imitate Me’” 122–25.

²⁵ E.g. Rom 15:1–7; 2 Cor 8:9; Eph 5:1–2; Phil 2:5–11; Mark 8:31–35; 10:45; Luke 19:10. See Peter T. O’Brien, “The Gospel and Godly Models in Philippians,” in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph P. Martin* (ed. Michael J. Wilkins and Terence Paige; JSNTSup 87; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) 273–84; L. W. Hurtado, “Jesus as Lordly Example in Philippians 2:5–11,” in *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honour of Francis Wright Beare* (ed. Peter Richardson and John C. Hurd; Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984) 113–26. Also see Richardson’s presentation of Jesus’ pattern of accommodation in the Synoptic Gospels (Richardson and Gooch, “Accommodation Ethics” 131–40).

²⁶ In chap. 9, Paul calls these groups “the Jews” or “those under the law” (Jewish non-believers), “those outside the law” (Greek non-believers), and “the weak” (persons in the church with inadequate or hesitating faith). Paul uses the term “win” loosely—applying it to both non-believers and “the weak.” One should not understand “the weak” as an outright non-Christian category, as does Karl Heim, *Die Gemeinde des Auferstandenen: Tübinger Vorlesungen über den 1. Korintherbrief* (ed. Friso Melzer; Munich: Neubau, 1949) 120. Cf. Rom 5:6.

a fellow sharer in proclaiming it [NRSV: share in its blessings] (1 Cor 9:12, 19–23).²⁷

Here one gets a clearer picture of what Paul means by his attempts to “please” all people (1 Cor 10:33). The apostle adjusts his behavior in inconsequential matters so as not to put an unnecessary barrier between a non-believer (or person of questionable faith) and the gospel. In the church’s relationship with the same groups (Jews, Greeks, the weak), it is also to exercise the principle of self-denial in striving for the other’s salvation (10:32–11:1).

The concluding verse of the passage quoted above (v. 23) is especially important for gaining a greater understanding of Paul’s mission and the mission of the church. The text, 1 Cor 9:23, reads: πάντα δὲ ποιῶ διὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, ἵνα συγκοινωνός αὐτοῦ γένωμαι. The most debated words here are συγκοινωνός αὐτοῦ. There are three main ways of understanding them: (1) “partner/sharer in [the blessings/benefits of] the gospel”;²⁸ (2) “partner/sharer in [the work/proclamation of] the gospel”;²⁹ or (3) “partner of the gospel [in the common task of saving people].”³⁰ Each option has various advocates, but most commentators and translators have favored option (1). For example, the NRSV reads: “I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.” Yet, understanding εὐαγγέλιον as “blessings”

²⁷ For the rabbinic background of “win” as a missionary term see David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1956) 352–61. Daube thinks that Paul is following his rabbinic heritage in his missionary accommodation (336–46), but Carson convincingly argues that some fundamental differences remain (D. A. Carson, “Pauline Inconsistency: Reflections on I Corinthians 9.19–23 and Galatians 2.11–14,” *Churchman* 100 [1986] 9–10). Carson (16–45) also demonstrates that Paul’s account of his confrontation with Peter in Antioch (Galatians 2) can be reconciled with his principle of accommodation (1 Corinthians 9). Carson is responding mainly to Peter Richardson, “Pauline Inconsistency: I Corinthians 9:19–23 and Galatians 2:11–14,” *NTS* 26 (1979–80) 347–62. Also see P. Richardson and P. W. Gooch, “Accommodation Ethics” 89–142; cf. Günther Bornkamm, “The Missionary Stance of Paul in I Corinthians 9 and in Acts,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn; Nashville: Abingdon, 1966) 194–207.

²⁸ Hodge, *Corinthians* 166; Fee, *Corinthians* 431–33; Robertson and Plummer, *Corinthians* 193; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 216; Conzelmann, *I Corinthians* 161; Victor C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature* (NovTSup 16; Leiden: Brill, 1967) 85.

²⁹ NEB: “All this I do for the sake of the Gospel, to bear my part in proclaiming it.” Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (SP 7; Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1999) 356; Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* 51–53; R. St John Parry, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916) 99; Kümmel is wrong to say, “Die Übersetzung ‘Mitarbeiter am Evangelium’ ist unmöglich; συγκοινωνός heisst niemals ‘aktiver Teilnehmer’” (D. Hans Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I–II* [rev. W. G. Kümmel; HNT 9; 5th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1969] 180). For example, see Rev 1:9; cf. 2 Cor 8:23; Gal 6:6; Phil 1:5; 1 Tim 5:22; 2 John 1:11; Esth 8:12.

³⁰ Morna D. Hooker, “A Partner in the Gospel: Paul’s Understanding of His Ministry,” in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Victor Paul Furnish* (ed. Eugene H. Lovering, Jr. and Jerry L. Sumney; Abingdon: Nashville, 1996) 88–89; Judith M. Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance: Staying in and Falling Away* (Tübingen: Mohr; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990) 247–54; Einar Molland, *Das Paulinische Evangelium: Das Wort und die Sache* (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1934) 53–54; cf. Ragnar Asting, *Die Verkündigung des Wortes im Urchristentum dargestellt an den Begriffen ‘Wort Gottes,’ ‘Evangelium’ und ‘Zeugnis’* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1939) 385–86.

or “benefits” of the gospel is unlikely. In fact, if εὐαγγέλιον denotes “blessings” of the gospel in 1 Cor 9:23, it is the only example of this meaning in the NT.³¹

In spite of this semantic improbability, “blessings of the gospel” continues to be the translation of choice for many scholars. The primary reason given for this translation is the context following 9:23—especially verses 24–27. It is assumed that verse 27 is a clearer restatement of Paul’s thought in verse 23. That is, in verse 23, Paul says that he faithfully fulfills his apostolic ministry in order to share in the gospel’s blessings (23). And, in verse 27, he forthrightly states that his own salvation is somehow contingent on the faithful completion of his Christian labors (27). While it is true that 9:24–27 should be read along with 9:23,³² an interpretation which puts Paul’s salvation in question is unlikely on several counts. First, Paul has given indication elsewhere in Corinthians that Christian laborers will lose rewards for unfaithful service, but their salvation is not in question (1 Cor 3:15; 4:5; cf. 5:5).³³ Second, Paul speaks confidently of his ultimate salvation in other places (Phil 1:21–23; cf. 1 Cor 1:8–9, 30); it seems improbable that he is here voicing some hidden fears. Third, in all other places where Paul applies the term ἀδόκιμος (9:27) or its cognates to himself, he is concerned with the Lord’s approval of his apostolic ministry.³⁴ So, if 9:24–27 does not refer to Paul’s concern for his ultimate salvation, how does the passage function in the letter?

The athletic metaphor of 9:24–27 serves to underscore the teaching of 9:19–23, that is, one must exercise self-discipline and temporary hardship for a greater ultimate goal. To apply the metaphor in Paul’s and the Corinthians’ case, the self-discipline is accommodation in *adiaphora*, and the greater goal is the “winning” of more persons. Paul and the Corinthians undergo such hardship to gain an “imperishable crown” (9:25). While this crown is frequently interpreted as a symbol for salvation, it is more likely a reference to converts, as in all other occurrences of στέφανος in Paul’s

³¹ Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance* 248. Gundry Volf comments, “In 1 Corinthians 9 [εὐαγγέλιον] denotes the divine power of salvation which Paul preaches (9:12, 14a, 18b) or the activity itself of preaching the gospel (9:14b, 18c).”

³² Verse 24 introduces an explanatory metaphor with the formula οὐκ οἴδατε, as did 9:13 (Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif* 83–84; cf. Werner Straub, *Die Bildersprache des Apostels Paulus* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1937] 106). While some have argued that the γάρ in 10:1 functions to link 9:24–27 closely with 10:1–13, the grammar does not demand this close association. The γάρ can function as a loose connective, as it seems to here (so Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* [trans. Joseph Smith; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1963] §473; Kümmel, *An die Korinther I–II* 44; I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away* [London: Epworth, 1969; reprint, Minneapolis: Bethany, 1975] 121 [page citations are from the reprint edition]; Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif* 83; Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance* 239; contra Robertson and Plummer, *Corinthians* 199). Weiss says that the discontinuity between 9:27 and 10:1 is due to the beginning of a different letter fragment in 10:1 (Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* 249). The construction “Οὐ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν . . .” can function to introduce a new or loosely related idea (cf. 1 Cor 12:1; 1 Thess 4:13; 2 Clem. 14:2).

³³ Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance* 242.

³⁴ 1 Cor 3:13; 2 Cor 10:18; 13:6–7; 1 Thess 2:4; cf. Gal 6:4; 1 Tim 3:10; 2 Tim 2:15 (Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance* 236).

undisputed letters.³⁵ Paul's converts are his crown—the ultimate authentication of his faithful service and his grounds of boasting before the Lord (cf. 1 Cor 3:14). In 9:24–27, where Paul's concern is with the Lord's approval of his apostolic ministry and the “winning” of more people through his self-denial, it is not surprising to find a reference to converts as a crown. We note, however, that unlike Paul's other references to a crown, he includes his addressees in this quest for the Lord's approval through “winning” more converts.³⁶ Thus, a proper understanding of 9:24–27 does not support reading 9:23 as Paul's desire to share in the “blessings of the gospel.” The disputed verse must refer to Paul's partnership with others in proclaiming the gospel (option 2) or Paul's partnership with the gospel in saving persons (option 3).

The immediately preceding context also favors these interpretations. Paul has just finished speaking about the renunciation of his rights among various groups for the ultimate purpose (ἵνα) of “winning” or “saving” them. Note the repeated “in order that I might win/save” (vv. 19, 20 [2x], 21, 22 [2x]). When we arrive at the final sentence of this section, we expect a parallel thought. Paul anticipates the reader's question, “Paul, why have you not demanded your personal and apostolic rights?” Paul responds, “[Not because I am a lesser apostle, or because I am not ultimately free to act according to my own conscience. No! Rather,] all of these things I do because of the gospel, in order that I . . .” At this point, the reader expects the sentence to be completed in parallel fashion with the preceding six ἵνα clauses, e.g. “in order that I might save more people, win more to Christ, or proclaim the gospel more effectively.” Translation options (2) and (3) lie within the parameters of this expected conclusion. In fact, it would be extremely odd for Paul to conclude this discussion of his self-denial for the sake of others with a self-centered motive (i.e. “I do all of these [apparently selfless] things because of my ultimate desire to share personally in the gospel's benefits”). Paul has already said that the only wage he earns as an apostle is the benefit of being able to preach the gospel free of charge (9:18; cf. 10:24).

Thus, the two most likely translations of συγκοινωνός αὐτοῦ are “partner/sharer in [the work/proclamation of] the gospel” or “partner of the gospel” [in the common task of saving people]. The words συγκοινωνός or κοινωνός followed by a genitive are equally likely to mean “partner of” or “partner/sharer in.”³⁷ Nevertheless, in the LXX, NT, and Apostolic Fathers,

³⁵ 1 Thess 2:19; Phil 4:1. In 2 Tim 2:5, the verb στεφανόω refers to the fruits of Timothy's ministry, and in 2 Tim 4:8, the non-evangelistic nature of στέφανος is signified by the addition of a genitive qualifier (ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης στέφανος). Also, see 1 Pet 5:4 where a crown is promised to the elders and is dependent on their faithful oversight. For ἄφρατος as applying to believers, see e.g. 1 Cor 15:42, 50, 52, 53, 54.

³⁶ ἡμεῖς δὲ ἄφρατον [στέφανον] (9:25). Cf. 1 Cor 10:31–11:1; 2 Tim 2:5.

³⁷ “Partner of”: Prov 28:24; Isa 1:23; Matt 23:30; 1 Cor 10:20; Phil 1:7 (μου); Heb 10:33; *Mart. Pol.* 6.2; 17.3; *Herm. Sim.* 5.6.6. “Sharer/Partner in”: Esth 8:12; Mal 2:14; Sir 6:10; Rom 11:17; 1 Cor 10:18; 2 Cor 1:7; Phil 1:7 (τῆς χάριτος); 1 Pet 5:1; 2 Pet 1:4; *Herm. Man.* 4.1.5; *Herm. Sim.* 2.9. The meaning “partner of/with” can be made unambiguously by the use of the pronominal adjective (e.g. 2 Cor 8:23, κοινωνός ἐμός) or the preposition μετά followed by the personal pronoun (*Herm. Sim.* 5.6.6). Συγκοινωνός/Κοινωνός followed by the dative makes the translation “sharer in” more likely, though not definite (Rev 1:9; *Barn.* 19.8; *Did.* 4.8; but note Luke 5:10).

when συγκοινωνός/κοινωνός means “partner of,” a partnership *with persons* is always in view.³⁸ Although the gospel is in some sense personified in Paul’s writing (9:12),³⁹ this personification is not so clear as to prepare the reader for Paul’s calling the gospel his “partner.” When Paul does speak of his status in direct relationship to the gospel, he prefers to speak of himself in subservient fashion, as a διάκονος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the only other place in Paul’s letters where he speaks explicitly of “partnership” and “the gospel” does not entail a partnership *with* the gospel (Phil 1:5).⁴¹ In that case, the Philippian congregation’s partnership in the gospel consists of prayerful and financial support of Paul’s mission, as well as an active proclamation of the gospel from the congregation itself (Phil 1:7, 2:15–16; 4:15; cf. 1 Cor 16:6).⁴² The term “partnership in the gospel” in Philippians thus is a summary of all facets of the Philippians’ participation in the gospel’s advance.⁴³ Likewise, in 1 Cor 9:23, εὐαγγέλιον refers to a partnership in the work/proclamation of the gospel. Indeed, εὐαγγέλιον frequently refers to the proclamation of the gospel when the word is not serving as the object of a verb (as in 1 Cor 9:23).⁴⁴

While it is wrong, then, to understand the gospel as Paul’s “partner” in 1 Corinthians, it is important to note that the apostle does speak of himself as having “partner[s]” in [proclaiming] the gospel. Paul’s description of himself as a συγκοινωνός calls attention to the fact that he is not alone in his “gospel work.” While the word κοινωνός alone would make this point, the συν- prefix further emphasizes this meaning. Who, then, are Paul’s partners in proclaiming the gospel? Surely, Paul is referring not only to the other apostles and itinerant missionaries, but also to the Corinthian congregation

³⁸ See the verses listed for “partner of” in the previous footnote, along with 2 Cor 8:23 and Rev 1:9.

³⁹ So Hooker, “A Partner in the Gospel” 89.

⁴⁰ Cf. Col 1:23; Eph 3:6–7. It is likely best to understand Paul’s description of himself as a “minister/servant of the gospel” as an abbreviated way of describing his service to Christ by proclaiming the gospel. Although Paul describes others as “co-workers of God,” this is different from being a “partner of the gospel” (1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:1; 1 Thess 3:2). One can only be a partner or co-worker of a person.

⁴¹ Phil 1:5, ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον . . . Also note Phil 1:7.

⁴² James Patrick Ware has convincingly shown that “holding forth” is the correct translation of ἐπέχοντες in Philippians 2:16. That is, the Philippians are expected to “hold forth the word of life”—to preach the gospel to outsiders (Ware, “‘Holding Forth the Word of Life’” 289–303).

⁴³ Κοινωνία followed by εἰς and the accusative denotes *active* participation (Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 9:13; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991] 62). Lightfoot remarks, “. . . here [in Phil 1:5], as the context shows, [κοινωνία] denotes cooperation in the widest sense, [the Philippians’] participation with the Apostle whether in sympathy or in suffering or in active labour or in any other way. At the same time their almsgiving was a signal instance of this cooperation, and seems to have been foremost in the Apostle’s mind” (J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* [London: Macmillan, 1913; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953] 83 [page citations are to the reprint edition]). A similar view is adopted by O’Brien, Hawthorne, and Gniska (O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* 61–63; Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* [WBC 43; Waco, TX: Word, 1983] 19; Joachim Gniska, *Der Philipperbrief* [HTKNT 10.3; 2d ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1976] 44–45).

⁴⁴ E.g. Rom 1:1, 9; 2 Cor 2:12; 10:14; Gal 2:7; Phil 2:22; 4:15. When εὐαγγέλιον is used as the object of a verb, it normally refers to the content of the gospel (Hooker, “A Partner in the Gospel” 87, n. 9).

which is laboring to advance the gospel.⁴⁵ Thus, when translating 9:23, the word *συγκοινωνός* should be rendered “fellow partner/sharer” to bring out this sense.

1 Corinthians 9 further elucidates Paul’s imitation command by clarifying the relationship between the apostle’s exemplary evangelistic self-denial and the nature of the gospel. In 9:12, Paul describes the gospel as a dynamic force which he does not want to hinder through his insistence upon apostolic rights (9:12). The gospel is in some sense depicted as an independent power which inevitably accomplishes God’s will; one may hinder or further its advance, but its ultimate effectiveness is guaranteed.⁴⁶ Ascertaining this dynamic nature of the gospel is important for understanding why Paul expects his converts to reproduce his self-sacrificial behavior for others’ salvation (10:31–11:1). Once the gospel becomes effective in its hearers, they, too, are included in its dynamic advance. They are either fellow partners with Paul or stumbling blocks; there is no middle ground.⁴⁷ Each person, according to his or her situation and giftedness, is a partner in the work of the gospel. Ultimately, it is the nature of the gospel that provides the theological basis for Paul’s expectations of his churches’ evangelistic activity in imitation of his own (1 Thess 1:5–8).

III. IMITATION OF PAUL IN 1 CORINTHIANS 4:14–18

Let us now consider the only other overt “imitation text” from 1 Corinthians. In 4:14–18, Paul writes,

I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers.⁴⁸ Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. For this reason

⁴⁵ 1 Cor 3:6–7, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

⁴⁶ See Rom 1:16, 1 Cor 1:18, 21; 4:15; 14:36; 15:1; Phil 1:12; Col 1:5–6; 1 Thess 1:5–8; 2 Thess 2:13–14; 3:1; 2 Tim 2:9. Also see Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* 51–52; Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance* 251; O’Brien, *Gospel and Mission* 138. The OT background of the effective “word of the Lord” has certainly influenced Paul’s thinking (e.g. Isa 55:11). John Howard Schütz comments, “What does Paul understand by a ‘gospel’ which could be ‘hindered’? He cannot be speaking about hindering the *content* of the gospel. Nor can he mean that he will refrain from damaging his own *delivery* of it. To grasp the metaphors here we must imagine the gospel as a force or agency able to accomplish something, having a purpose toward which it proceeds. Paul will do nothing to thwart that thrust of the gospel toward its own goal. The renunciation of his apostolic ‘right’ seems to him a small price to pay to assure this” (*Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* 52).

⁴⁷ Matt 12:30, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”

⁴⁸ Paul’s understanding of himself as his converts’ spiritual father provides a basis for his appeals to imitation. See 2 Cor 6:13; 12:14; Gal 4:19; Phil 2:22; 1 Thess 2:7, 11; 1 Tim 1:2, 18; 2 Tim 1:2; 2:1; Titus 1:4; Phlm 10; cf. John 5:19; 8:39, 44; b. *Sanh.* 19b. Also see Pedro Gutiérrez, *La Paternité spirituelle selon Saint Paul* (Ébib; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1968) 179–81; Best, *Paul and His Converts* 29–58; Benjamin Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles* (AnBib 105; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1986) 325–26, n. 27; Williams, “Imitation of Christ” 165; Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (LCBI; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991) 100–101.

I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

This short passage is so general in tone that it is difficult to delimit further what sort of imitative behavior is expected.⁴⁹ The broader context, however, does give some indication. Paul has just finished chiding the Corinthians for their undue adulation of certain leaders, celebration of worldly wisdom, and triumphalism (1:10–4:13).⁵⁰ In contrast to the Corinthians, the apostles are threatened, viewed as fools, mocked as weak, persecuted, and even considered “the rubbish of the world” (4:8–13).⁵¹ It is this correct embodiment of Christian leadership and existence, as typified in the apostles’ acceptance of worldly disapproval and suffering, that Paul hopes his converts will imitate. Humility and the way of the cross are diametrically opposed to the triumphalism of the Corinthians.⁵² Paul thus aptly terms his “gospel-lifestyle” as his “ways in Christ Jesus,” since the Lord who suffered and died on behalf of humanity is in some sense pictured in them (1 Cor 1:23–24; 2:2).⁵³

It is noteworthy that the persecutions which the apostles endure result from speaking openly “the foolishness of the cross” (1:18; 4:8–13). For Paul, opposition and suffering are almost always related to his proclamation of the gospel.⁵⁴ If the Corinthians are to imitate Paul by enduring suffering,

⁴⁹ Referring to the passage, Boykin Sanders remarks, “. . . Paul offers almost no guidance that would enable us to ascertain specifically what aspects of his life are to be imitated. The lack of specificity on Paul’s part has vexed many interpreters of 1 Cor 4:16” (B. Sanders, “Imitating Paul: 1 Cor 4:16,” *HTR* 74 [1981] 353). Castelli, drawing on Foucault, argues that Paul’s vagueness is intentional and furthers his exercising of power to enforce sameness (*Imitating Paul* 110). See Belleville for a concise presentation of the views held by major commentators as to what Paul meant by “be imitators of me” in 1 Cor 4:16 (Belleville, “‘Imitate Me’” 122–23). Also see the history of interpretation section in E. Coye Still, III, “The Function of 1 Corinthians 4:6–17 in its Epistolary Context” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, forthcoming).

⁵⁰ 1 Cor 1:10–4:21 is best understood as a single unit, with 4:14–21 as the concluding paragraph. This understanding of the 1 Corinthians’ structure is widely accepted. E.g. see Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* 30; Barrett, *Corinthians* 28; Fee, *Corinthians* 183; Collins, *First Corinthians* 195. Note the framing brackets: Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς (1:10) . . . παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς (4:16).

⁵¹ Possibly we should view the ταῦτα of 4:14 (i.e. the “things” Paul is writing with which he does not wish to shame the Corinthians) as referring to the entire discussion of Paul’s and Apollo’s servant ministry which begins at 3:5. Boykin Sanders reads the text this way and bases his interpretation largely on the parallel ταῦτα of 1 Cor 4:6 and 4:14 (“Imitating Paul” 353–54). In the end, according to Sanders, Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to have a selfless communal concern which excludes divisiveness (361–63).

⁵² W. D. Spencer advocates a similar reading. He writes, “What has [Paul] 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). It encourages prayer participation in Paul’s ministry (2 Cor 1:11)” (William David Spencer, “The Power in Paul’s Teaching (1 Cor 4:9–20),” *JETS* 32 [1989] 57).

⁵³ B. Sanders, “Imitating Paul” 356.

⁵⁴ Note 1 Cor 16:8–9, “But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” Also see Acts 9:15–16; 20:23–24; Rom

mocking, and persecution, it is not “suffering for suffering’s sake.” For the Corinthians, as for the apostles, their open adherence to and proclamation of the “foolishness of the cross” will result in the world’s disapproval and opposition.⁵⁵

In Paul’s absence, Timothy, by his exemplary conduct and verbal explanation, is to set before the Corinthians the apostle’s ways which correspond with his teaching.⁵⁶ The primary example that Timothy brings to the Corinthians is the same one that his “father in the gospel” models—holding *to* and holding *out* the gospel amidst opposition.⁵⁷

IV. THE CHURCH’S MISSIONARY ROLE IN 1 CORINTHIANS 7:12–16

Looking beyond the imitation texts and their immediate contexts, we find that 1 Corinthians offers corroborating evidence that Paul expected his converts to imitate him through missionary activity. For example, in 7:12–16, Paul makes another call for salvation-motivated self-denial. The apostle exhorts a believing spouse to live at peace with a non-believing one. The ultimate goal of this irenic behavior is not temporal harmony, but eschatological salvation. Paul writes, “Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband for all you know, you might save your wife” (1 Cor 7:16).⁵⁸ In this conjugal relationship, as in other relationships, the evan-

8:36; 1 Cor 15:30–32; 2 Cor 1:8–9; 2:14–3:3; 4:7–12; 6:4–10; 11:23–33; Phil 1:14–18; Col 4:3; 1 Thess 3:2–4; 2 Tim 1:8; 2:3; 3:10–12; 4:5.

⁵⁵ Compare Paul’s descriptions of the Thessalonians, who imitate him, the Lord, and the churches in Judea by their suffering in proclaiming the gospel (1 Thess 1:6–8; 2:14–16; 2 Thess 1:4–10). Brant rightly observes, “The equation of ‘imitation’ with suffering affliction ignores the fact that the Thessalonians were engaged in some activity that incurred the opposition of others” (“*mimesis*” 292). See also John Piper, “The Supremacy of God in Missions Through Suffering,” in *Let the Nations be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 71–112; Scott Hafemann, “‘Because of weakness’ (Galatians 4:13): The role of suffering in the mission of Paul,” in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul’s Mission* (ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000) 131–46.

⁵⁶ Gutiérrez detects an allusion to a common Hebrew idiom here (הלך בדרך) (e.g. see Judg 2:17; 1 Sam 8:3–5; Prov 2:13; 3:23; Gutiérrez, *La Paternité spirituelle* 181, n. 4). De Boer notes, “The Old Testament used the term *way* or *ways* to designate the religious affiliation and commitment which the course and events of one’s life expressed” (*The Imitation of Paul* 148).

⁵⁷ “If Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear among you, for *he is doing the work of the Lord just as I am*” (emphasis added; 1 Cor 16:10). About 1 Cor 4:16, Conzelmann notes, “The summons cannot be separated from Paul’s missionary work” (*1 Corinthians* 92).

⁵⁸ Another translation/interpretation of this verse is: “How do you know, wife, if you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, if you will save your wife?” [So, don’t try to force the non-believing spouse to stay if he or she desires to leave. You have no guarantee that you will bring about his or her salvation, and such intransigence on your part will only bring about strife, but God has called us to peace.] Regardless of whether one favors the “optimistic” or “pessimistic” translation, the significance of the verse remains the same for our study: Paul assumes that the Corinthian Christians desire the salvation of non-believers. In favor of the optimistic translation are: the Greek fathers (Josef Blinzler, “Die ‘Heiligkeit’ der Kinder in der alten Kirche: Zur Auslegung von 1 Kor 7,14,” in *Aus der Welt und Umwelt des Neuen Testaments* [Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1969] 171, n. 46); Joachim Jeremias, “Die missionarische Aufgabe in der Mischehe (1 Cor 7:16),” in *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann zu seinem siebenzigsten Geburtstag* (ed. Walther Eltester; BZNW 21; 2d ed.; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1957) 255–60; C. Burchard,

gelistic concern of believers is assumed. Paul does not write, “[Believing] wife, you must desire, pray, and actively work for your husband’s salvation.” Such active concern is assumed. Paul mentions the possibility of an *already* desired outcome (i.e. the salvation of a non-believing spouse) to encourage the Christian towards peaceful and self-sacrificial behavior.

V. THE CHURCH'S MISSIONARY ROLE IN 1 CORINTHIANS 14:23–25

1 Cor 14:23–25 also reveals Paul’s assumption that the Corinthians are concerned for non-believers’ salvation. The text reads,

If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. After the secrets of the unbeliever’s heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, “God is really among you.”

In this passage, Paul presupposes the Corinthians’ desire for non-Christians to be convicted of sin and turn to the Lord in faith.⁵⁹ To accomplish this desire, Paul explains, communication within the church meeting should be intelligible to a visiting non-believer. While tongues “build up” (οἰκοδομέω) the individual Christians, prophecy “builds up” the church (14:3–5, 12, 17, 26). This description of non-believers coming to faith through prophecy is the primary example Paul gives of how intelligible speech “builds up” the body. Thus “building up” the church obviously includes not only the edification of current believers, but the addition of new members (8:1; 10:23–24, 31–33; 14:23–25; cf. Eph 4:11–16). Paul and Apollos are no longer the only ones building the Corinthian church (3:9–17); they serve as an example of the proper attitude which the now numerous builders should have among themselves (4:6; 14:1–26). As believers admonish one another and mix among outsiders, the church is “built up” through both maturation

“Ei nach einem Ausdruck des Wissens oder Nichtwissens Joh 925, Act 192, I Cor 116, 716,” ZNW 52 (1961) 73–82; John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (trans. John W. Fraser; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960) 150; Lightfoot, *Notes on Epistles of St Paul* 227; Collins, *First Corinthians* 267, 272; Barrett, *Corinthians* 167; Fee, *Corinthians* 305; Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 99–100; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (New Century Bible; London: Oliphants, 1971) 70; cf. 1 Pet 3:1. In favor of the pessimistic translation are: Sakae Kubo, “I Corinthians VII. 16: Optimistic or Pessimistic?” *NTS* 24 (1978) 539–44; Robertson and Plummer, *Corinthians* 144; Héring, *Corinthians* 53; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* 124; Baudraz, *Les Epîtres aux Corinthiens* 62; Godet, *First Corinthians* 350–51; Heinrici, *an die Korinther* 184–85; Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; rev. ed.; Leicester, U.K.: Inter-Varsity; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 108. Orr and Walther suggest that σφύζω in 1 Cor 7:16 could refer to the “healing” of the marriage (William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians* [AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976] 214).

⁵⁹ All commentators are agreed that non-believers are at least included in Paul’s phrase “ἰδιῶται ἢ ἄπιστοι” (14:23). Barrett favors understanding this phrase as descriptive of one group, i.e. “unbelieving outsiders” (Barrett, *Corinthians* 324–25). See Walter Rebell, “Gemeinde als Missionsfaktor im Urchristentum: I Kor 14,24f. als Schlüsselsituation,” *TZ* 44 (1988) 117–34.

and multiplication (1 Cor 5:9–10; 10:23–24; 14:26; Rom 15:1–3, 7–13; cf. Jer 12:16).⁶⁰

Paul's repeated assumption that the Corinthians are concerned for non-believers' salvation is undergirded by the apostle's theological reflection elsewhere in the letter. Non-believers are classed with "the world," which is under God's condemnation (1:21; 11:32). Non-believers are "wrongdoers" (ἄδικοι) who will not inherit the kingdom of God (6:9). They are in need of God's cleansing, sanctification, and justification (6:11). Believers, on the other hand, have been cleansed, forgiven, are victorious over death, and will inherit God's kingdom (1:2; 6:11; 15:3, 50–58). Motivated by love (13:1–13; 16:14), believers must logically desire and work for the salvation of those who do not share in their blessed estate. Paul's addressees' active concern for the lost must have been so self-evident that the apostle chose to focus on practical advice about how to win the lost, rather than instructing his converts that they should desire to do so. Paul advises, "Be accommodating and self-denying in your behavior towards outsiders as you seek their salvation" (10:32).

VI. A PASSIVE OR ACTIVE WITNESS?

In response to the texts presented above, some scholars claim that if Paul envisions an evangelistic role for his church in 1 Corinthians, that role is only passive and behavior-oriented.⁶¹ Against this objection, we can note the following points: (1) In the passages where Paul mentions his own attractive behavior as a witness for the gospel, this witness underlies an assumed verbal proclamation (9:19–23; 10:31–11:1). It seems logical to assume that the congregation's conduct is also the platform for proclamation. (2) The congregation's active concern is conveyed by Paul's depiction of the Corinthian believers themselves as "saving" non-believers—the same way Paul speaks of himself as "winning" and "saving" non-Christians. That is, both Paul and his converts serve as subjects of the verb σώζω, or related verbs.⁶² (3) The social setting of first-century Christianity was much different from modern Western Christianity. Due to early Christians' refusal to participate in social and civil functions which involved idolatry, their religious affiliations were immediately and widely known—more so possibly than if they had preached in the marketplace. Early Christians' networks

⁶⁰ When Jesus says, "I will build my church . . ." (οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν), no one doubts that these words indicate the inclusion of new disciples, as well as the maturing of current ones (Matt 16:18). On the concept of "building up" in Paul's letters, Ridderbos states, "In accordance with the redemptive-historical character of the church this upbuilding must be seen first of all as the continuing work of God with his people (Rom. 14:19, 20), whose temple and dwelling place it is. This continuing and consummating work consists both in the bringing in of those who till now have been without (cf. Rom. 15:20ff.) and in the inner strengthening and perfecting of all who in Christ now belong to it (1 Cor. 14:3; 1 Thess. 5:11, *et al.*)" (Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* [trans. John Richard de Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975] 432).

⁶¹ Bowers, "Church and Mission" 94.

⁶² 1 Cor 7:16; 9:19, 22.

of social relationships were instantaneously affected in such a way as to testify to their new-found allegiance. Discounting such behavior as a “passive witness” reveals a serious misunderstanding of the first-century context.⁶³ (4) Common sense requires that the congregations’ behavioral witness be accompanied by verbal proclamation. For example, in the instance of the salvation of the non-believing spouse, Paul certainly considers it necessary for the non-believer to accept certain propositional truths before that person can be considered saved (15:3–11).⁶⁴ How would the non-believer discover these truths unless his or her spouse articulates them? It is artificial and illogical to assume that Paul envisions a situation where the believing spouse would never take the initiative to discuss the gospel. Such silence would be culpable, given the non-believer’s desperate situation (1:18). Similarly, in 14:23–25, we could ask, how does the non-believer come to be in the church meeting unless he or she has been invited by others? If we restrict ourselves to the passive understanding of the congregations’ witness, we would have to say that the congregation sang so loudly and beautifully that some non-believers were attracted to the meeting—but no one invited them.

Circumstantial evidence also seems to indicate that the Corinthians imitated Paul in his active missionary concern. Priscilla and Aquila, who had resided in Corinth during Paul’s initial evangelistic tour (Acts 18:1–3) are leaders of a congregation in Ephesus at the time of his writing (1 Cor 16:8, 19; Acts 18:18–26). Similarly, it appears that the former synagogue ruler from Corinth, Sosthenes, is now co-laboring in the mission field along with Paul (1 Cor 1:1; Acts 18:17).⁶⁵ Certainly, Paul did not expect the missionary concern of the Christians in Corinth to be expressed in bland uniformity. Some persons would primarily seek the salvation of non-believers in their own home (1 Cor 7:16), others would primarily testify to non-believing neighbors (1 Cor 10:31–11:1; 14:24–25), and others would even travel with the apostle or start churches in new cities (1 Cor 16:19; 1 Cor 1:1; cf. Acts 18:17–26).⁶⁶ While the obligation of gospel dissemination falls upon the church as a whole, an individual believer’s giftedness and life situation determine the manifestation of that obligation (1 Cor 12:12–30).

⁶³ See Peter D. Gooch, *Dangerous Food* 1–46; Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* 36–42.

⁶⁴ J. Christiaan Beker writes, “In 1 Corinthians 15 we have a striking example that the coherence of the gospel for Paul is not simply an experiential reality of the heart or a ‘Word beyond all words’ that permits a translation into a multitude of worldviews” (J. Christiaan Beker, *The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul’s Thought* [trans. Loren T. Stuckenbruck; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990] 76).

⁶⁵ Kümmel suggests this possibility (W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* [trans. Howard Clark Kee; 17th ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975] 279).

⁶⁶ Paul undoubtedly expected apostles and some other persons to be involved in full-time ministry, as distinguished from the majority of the church (1 Cor 9:14; 12:28).