

## First Epistle to the Corinthians

### 4 – Essay One: The Cross and Unity – Wisdom of the Cross (1.2)

#### Discussion 2 of 2

1 Corinthians 1:17-2:2

#### 1. Bailey's Outline<sup>1</sup>

- a. **A. The Problem: Divisions, Baptism, and the Cross (1:10-16)**
  - i. "I follow \_\_\_" is not a valid statement of identity for Christians – it divides
  - ii. "Our Lord Jesus Christ died for us" is the source of Christian community – it unites
  - iii. The cross is God's gift; baptism is the believer's receiving of God's gift
- b. **B. The Wisdom and Power of God: The Cross (1:17-2:2)**
- c. **B. The Wisdom of God: Revealed Through the Spirit (2:3-16)**
- d. **A. Christian Unity: Paul, Apollos, and Cephas as One (3:1-4:16)**

#### 2. 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:2<sup>2</sup>

- a. Simultaneous interweaving of three structures –
  - i. Ring Composition – brief review
    1. Foolishness and weakness (according to flesh) is the cross of Christ
    2. Wisdom and power (according to Spirit) is the cross of Christ
    3. Foolishness and wisdom, in this context, has nothing to do with general knowledge, reasoning, rhetoric, etc. – Paul is not anti-intellectual
      - a. Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians refutes any kind of anti-intellectualism
      - b. Paul did not change his rhetoric to the Corinthians because of his "failure" in Athens (as some interpreters have suggested)
    4. Paul does not praise the Corinthians for their foolishness and weakness according to the world
      - a. Paul does not write that God is using the Corinthians to shame the wise and powerful
      - b. Paul writes that the cross of Christ is the foolish and weak thing that shames the world's wise and powerful
    5. God does the calling; humans respond by believing
      - a. God calls ALL to salvation – it is in this calling that ALL can recognize the cross of Christ
      - b. Human choice renders the cross as either weakness or strength
    6. Paul critiques the power structures of this world and sees it as wanting
      - a. The power of Christ and power of the world are mutually exclusive
      - b. The Church cannot employ worldly means and remain spiritual
    7. Paul continues to work through the problem of division in the church
      - a. Asserting who I follow and what teachings are important, divides
      - b. By coming to the cross, reminding ourselves about Jesus' self-sacrificing love, unites
  - ii. Parallel to Isaiah 50:5-11 (Servant Song #3)
  - iii. Greek funeral oratory (Pericles)

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*; Kindle ed., location 679

<sup>2</sup> Bailey, loc. 742

### 3. Second ring composition and parallels to Isaiah 50:5-11

Table 1: from Figure 1.2(7); Bailey, loc. 959

The Cross	Acceptance and Rejection	Opponents Fail
1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.		
	18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."	
		20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?
		21a For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom...,
	21b It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom...,	
23a but we preach Christ crucified...,		
	23b a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.	
		25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
		26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are...,
	29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."	
2:1 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (ESV)		

- a. Structure
  - i. Double ring-composition: A-B-C-C-B=A=B-C-C-B-A
  - ii. A double “sandwich” where the “bread” layers are the “A” sections. The middle A closes the top layer and begins the bottom layer.
  - iii. Three main themes (top header)
- b. Structure of Isaiah 50:5-11

Table 2: From Figure 1.2(8); Bailey, loc. 964

Verses	Theme	Notes
<b>A</b> 5-6	Persecutors / Torment the servant	6 lines, A-B-A
<b>B</b> 7a	Servant / helped – not shamed (disgraced)	
<b>C</b> 7b	Parable of flint	
<b>B</b> 7c-8a	Servant / vindicated (not shamed)	
<b>A</b> 8b	Persecutors and the servant	4 lines, a-b-a-b
<b>B</b> 9a	Servant / helped – not condemned (guilty)	
<b>C</b> 9b	Parable of moth/garment	
<b>B</b> 10	Servant / is obeyed	6 lines, A-B-A
<b>A</b> 11	Persecutors / are in torment	6 lines, A-B-C

- i. Double ring and sandwich
- ii. Three main themes
  - 1. Servant and his persecutors
  - 2. Servant and God
  - 3. Metaphor/Parable
- iii. Three messages<sup>3</sup>
  - 1. **A**: The servant willingly suffers at the hands of persecutors—and does not retaliate
  - 2. **B**: A series of contrasts that relate the servant to God
    - a. God helps the servant and the servant is not disgraced, shamed, or condemned
    - b. Those fear God obey the servant
  - 3. **C**: The servant is like flint while his persecutors are like a moth-eaten garment
- c. Comparisons
  - i. Both center around a unique person who suffers, and whose suffering is significant for others
  - ii. Paul does not refer to persecutors, but focuses those who believe vs. those who reject the cross
  - iii. Paul does not insert parables but refers to the greatest sign and a historical event, the cross
  - iv. Whereas the persecutors are destroyed at the end of the text in Isaiah, Paul shows the opponents of the cross being made foolish in the “C” sections of 1 Cor.

<sup>3</sup> Bailey, loc. 990

- v. Isaiah promises light to those who obey the servant. Paul promises salvation to those who believe.
  - d. What is Paul saying to his Jewish readers, by his allusion to the Servant Song?<sup>4</sup>
    - i. Servant Song – reminder of Messiah
    - ii. A unique suffering servant, who willingly suffers and does not retaliate
    - iii. The servant is vindicated while his persecutors self-destruct like a moth-eaten garment and lie down in torment
    - iv. Notice that victory is found through the suffering
      - v. This pattern appears in the life of Jesus, who was crucified
      - vi. The point is not that of Pilate or those who called on Jesus to be crucified
      - vii. Reflect upon the historical event of the cross and God’s wisdom and power that was seen through it
    - viii. This wisdom shames human wisdom
    - ix. It is the power of salvation to those who believe
      - x. This wisdom goes utterly against common tradition and worldly expectations
      - xi. But see how it was spoken of by Isaiah
      - xii. What I, Paul, proclaim does not go against our traditions, but fulfills them
4. Funeral oratory (*epitphios*) of Pericles<sup>5</sup>
- a. Greeks had custom of publicly honoring the fallen of war
  - b. The law required one to be given each year
  - c. Pericles was requested to deliver a speech in 430 BC following the first year of the Peloponnesian war, praising the Athenians who saved Athens from Sparta
  - d. It is finely crafted and emotionally moving
  - e. Summary of Pericles’ oratory (quite long)<sup>6</sup>
    - i. His unworthiness of speech to match the courage of the fallen. But custom and law require that someone speak at the funeral, so he shall endeavor to do so.
    - ii. Praise of their history and distant ancestors, moving to their fathers who added to and improved the empire. There are many examples of valor, but as they are familiar to most, he will not go over them in this speech. Rather he will speak about their form of government and traditions that have brought so much to them, and then speak about the most immediate heroes that have fallen.
    - iii. Praise for their form of democratic government – something they invented and others seek to copy. Praise for the egalitarianism and freedom that the law provides. They do not seek to be aggressors but will defend any injuries caused on them.
    - iv. Praise for their cultural pursuits: sporting games, religion, leisure pursuits.
    - v. Praise for their openness and tolerance toward outsiders. A veiled criticism of Spartan military methods and policy. While Athenians defended themselves alone, their invaders had to call in help from other nations. Criticizes propaganda of the other nations that inflate their victories over Athenians, and dismiss defeats suffered. Enemies may criticize them for their lack of discipline and training, but Athenians will prevail because they are not slaves to discipline and training.

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<sup>4</sup> Bailey, loc. 1002

<sup>5</sup> Full text of oration: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/pericles-funeralspeech.asp>

<sup>6</sup> Bailey (loc. 1015) writes that historians believe the Gettysburg Addresses of Everett and Lincoln were patterned after Pericles. (Lincoln’s address: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gettysburg\\_address](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gettysburg_address).) Everett’s address ran two-hours. Lincoln’s just ten sentences. Coincidentally, Lincoln’s address is 272 words; Paul’s hymn, 273 words.

- vi. Praise for other aspects of their culture and government. Praise for their generosity and liberality.
  - vii. No other state can match Athens. No one else can produce a man as great and versatile as an Athenian. Athenians leave their mark and monuments behind wherever they go. This is the Athens for which their soldiers have died and all left alive willingly will follow, if necessary.
  - viii. Much words have been expended on describing the character of the city because the stakes for Athenians are much higher than for anyone else. Defending the honor of the city was the greatest gift these soldiers could offer. They chose to die in freedom, rather than living in submission and dishonor.
  - ix. These soldiers died as true Athenians. To those who remain alive, consider (reflect upon) what they died for. By offering up their lives they received something greater: immortality in the hearts and minds of all who live and will live as their stories are celebrated. Happiness is the fruit of freedom and valor, if necessary, facing war and death. Conversely, misery is a fruit of cowardice of valuing present life above honor.
  - x. Offering comfort, not condolences, to the parents of the dead. Deaths of sons are a cause for private mourning, but they are cause for public glory and honor. Those who are still of age have a responsibility to bear more children: to assuage the grief, but to also strengthen the state. Those beyond childbearing years must take comfort that their years were good and join in the honor of those who have passed. Honor is the one thing that does not grow old and remains forever true.
  - xi. Brothers and sons of the dead exhorted to follow the example of the dead. Widows exhorted to maintain their good characters, to not go about making a name for themselves, good or bad.
  - xii. Pericles stating he has fulfilled the law to the best of his ability. Concludes: “for the rest, their children will be brought up till manhood at the public expense: the state thus offers a valuable prize, as the garland of victory in this race of valour, for the reward both of those who have fallen and their survivors. And where the rewards for merit are greatest, there are found the best citizens. And now that you have brought to a close your lamentations for your relatives, you may depart.”
- f. Expected elements not included in Paul’s *hymn of the cross*
    - i. Praise of noble birth; nurture and education; noble actions that demonstrate them worthy of their education<sup>7</sup>
  - g. Points of comparison and contrast<sup>8</sup>

	Pericles	Paul
<b>Remembrance and reflection on the saving significance of a death</b>	Athenian soldiers who died to save the city. Plato writes, “They gave their death in exchange for the salvation of the living.”	Christ crucified to save all who believe. Christ’s death was not glorious, however, in terms of worldly vision. <sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Bailey, loc. 1036

<sup>8</sup> Bailey, loc. 1039

<sup>9</sup> Bailey adds that some Christian preachers may have been tempted to discount or eliminate the kind of death Jesus died in order to fit the standard *epitaphios* model.

	Pericles	Paul
<b>Compression; i.e., lack of details</b>	Not necessarily about length – Pericles’ is fairly lengthy. He does not go into graphic detail about the war, how the Athenians died, etc.	Paul does not go into details. He uses metaphorical and symbolic language to convey huge swaths of meaning.
<b>Polarities in the situation</b>	e.g., mortal/immortal; Athenians/others; word/deed; age/youth; choice/determinism; life/death	Life/death; noble/not noble; choice/determinism; wisdom/foolishness; power/weakness; being/non-being; boast/in Christ; wise words/word of the cross
<b>Advice for the living</b>	Call for courage and duty	“Consider your calling”
<b>Question of language</b>	Great oratory language adds meaning to the deeds of the dead	Paul disagrees. His words add nothing to the meaning of the cross. <sup>10</sup>
<b>An interplay between “I” and “we”</b>	Begins with “I”, shifts to “we”, and ends with “I”.	“I preach” – “we preach” – “I preach”
<b>Concept of power</b>	Power is found in Athenian military, ethics, and culture	Power is the cross of Christ. Power of the world is foolishness.

## 5. Summary points

- a. The cross is the center of Paul’s Christian theology. Not Jesus’ teachings or his ethics, but the cross. Jesus’ teachings and ethics are an outflow of the power demonstrated by the cross event.
- b. Paul responds to Jewish objections to the cross of Christ by appealing to Isaiah’s servant song: it is not a stumbling block; it is the greatest sign that could be given.
- c. Paul responds to Greek objections to the cross of Christ by structuring his words around an *epitaphios* delivered by Pericles: it is wisdom, not foolishness, to those who believe<sup>11</sup>.
- d. Paul affirms the use of well-crafted rhetoric and eloquence to deliver the gospel.
- e. Paul disavows that any human words or wisdom can add to the power of the cross.
- f. Paul warns against removing the cross from gospel proclamation, as that will remove the source of gospel power.
- g. Paul affirms that ethnic differences can (should) remain and be appreciated and celebrated, but that differences need not be cause for division.
- h. God sends, Paul came. God calls, and people believe. God is the agent of initiation. Human responsibility is to respond appropriately.

Next: Wisdom through the Spirit

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<sup>10</sup> Bailey, loc. 1072, “Paul appears to know the details of Pericles’ speech because in contrast Paul *opens* with a *denial* that he comes ‘with wise words.’”

<sup>11</sup> “In early English, to “believe” was to ‘belove’ something or someone as an act of trust or loyalty. Belief was not an intellectual opinion... In previous centuries, belief had nothing to do with one’s weighing of evidence or intellectual choice... Belief was more like a marriage vow—“I do” as a pledge of faithfulness and loving service to and with the other.” *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, Diana Butler Bass, p117