

Why Did Paul Preach "Christ Crucified" in Corinth? A New Answer to an Old Question from an Unexpected Place

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In 1 Cor 1:18-31, Paul juxtaposes the wisdom of the world with its eloquent speech on the one hand with the wisdom of God revealed through the word of the cross on the other. The apostle then maintains in 1 Cor 2:1-5 that his proclamation of the gospel when in Corinth was not characterized by "lofty words or wisdom" (2:1).¹ On the contrary, Paul propounds in v. 2 that when he came there he "determined to know nothing among [the Corinthians] except Jesus Christ and him having been crucified (ἐσταυρωμένον)." The apostle continues in 2:3-5 by acknowledging that it was "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" that he came to their bustling city and by contending that his *logos* and *kērygma* "were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, in order that [their] faith might not rest in human wisdom but in God's power."

The purpose of this article is to probe Paul's arresting, if hyperbolic, contention that he decided not to know anything among the Corinthians spare Jesus Christ and his crucifixion. Turning the apostle's assertion into a question, we will enter into dialogue with other scholars who have sought to ascertain why Paul would, or at least would claim to, preach Christ in this manner. This conversation will lead in turn to my modest contribution to the ongoing discussion, namely, that Paul's emphasis upon Christ crucified in Corinth was occasioned, at least in part, by the Thessalonians' fascination with, if not fixation upon, Christ's coming and the deleterious effects their preoccupation with the *parousia* was having upon that congregation. I will argue that Paul thought it pastorally prudent, if not theologically necessary, to reshape his missionary message so as to place less stress on Christ's coming and more weight upon Christ's death.

As I proceed I will presuppose what Pauline scholars rightly presume, that is, Paul's initial visit to Corinth was subsequent to his first trip to Thessalonica.² What is more, "We can be reasonably confident . . . that there was only a small interval [of time] between the birth of the church in Thessalonica and the establishment . . . of a Christian community in Corinth."³ In addition, it is altogether likely that Paul composed 1 (and, if authentic, 2) Thessalonians from

¹All scripture translations are my own.

²So, e.g., Victor Paul Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians* (NTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.

³John M. G. Barclay, "Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity," *JSNT* 47 (1992): 49-72.

Corinth not long after he had left Thessalonica.⁴ Paul's mission to Thessalonica and communication with the Thessalonians, then, would have shaped, arguably considerably, his initial ministry in Corinth, which is best dated to ca. 50 C.E.⁵

Explanations of Paul's Claim that He Knew Nothing among the Corinthians except Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified

A Reaction to the Rejection of Paul's Proclamation among the Athenians

F. F. Bruce once suggested, "The idea, popular with many preachers, that [Paul's] determination, when he arrived in Corinth, to 'know nothing' there 'except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor 2:2), was the result of disillusionment with the line of approach he had attempted in Athens, has little to commend it."⁶ While a goodly majority of contemporary scholars would concur with Bruce's assessment for one reason or another,⁷ it is not only ministers who have maintained as much.

For example, in the late nineteenth century, William M. Ramsay wrote the following in his widely circulated *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*: "It would appear that Paul was disappointed and perhaps disillusioned by his experience in Athens. . . . When he went on from Athens to Corinth, he no longer spoke in the philosophic style."⁸ Over one hundred and ten years later, Verlyn D. Verbrugge writes similarly, "It was perhaps his experience in Athens . . . that led Paul to go back to the basics in Corinth and not to repeat what did not seem to have worked in that center of Greek culture, where he tried using polished human rhetoric and 'wise and persuasive words'. . . in order to reach his audience."⁹

Same Proclamation, Different Location

If interpreters such as Ramsey and Verbrugge play-up the purported differences between the so-called Areopagus speech of Acts 17 and Paul's preachment in Corinth as reflected in 1 Cor 2:1-5, other commentators downplay variation in

⁴So also, Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB 32B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 73.

⁵See, e.g., Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 6; and Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (trans. Doug Stott; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 322. Cf. Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (trans. F. Stanley Jones; London: SCM, 1984), 322.

⁶F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 344.

⁷E.g., C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 63; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 92; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 121 n. 3.

⁸William M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1897; repr. 1960), 252.

⁹Verlyn D. Verbrugge, "1 Corinthians" in *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans-Galatians* (ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland; vol. 11; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 274.

the apostle's proclamation from one location to another. C. K. Barrett's comments are representative:

[I]t is often supposed that after an attempt to marry the Gospel to Greek philosophy in his Areopagus speech (Acts xvii. 22-31), which was attended with indifferent success (Acts xvii. 32ff.), [Paul] determined to change his tactics and preach nothing but the cross. For this imaginative picture there is no evidence whatever. Acts may or may not contain an accurate account of what Paul said in Athens, but we may be confident that Luke did not intend to describe a lapse on the part of his hero, and there is nothing in Paul's own words in 1 Corinthians to suggest a change of plan; rather he intends to describe his normal practice, though this normal was bound to appear the more striking in such a place as Corinth. He is not contrasting his evangelistic method in Corinth with that he employed elsewhere, but with that which others employed in Corinth.¹⁰

David E. Garland concurs, "It [i.e., preaching Christ crucified] was not a new development arising from some previous failure (cf. Acts 17:22-31) but his standard procedure everywhere (cf. 1 Thess 2:1-10; Gal 3:1)."¹¹ Likewise, F. F. Bruce suggests that by the time that Paul arrived in Corinth he "was no novice in Gentile evangelization, experimenting with this approach and that to discover which was most effective. It is probable that Paul's decision ['to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified'] at Corinth was based on his assessment of the situation there."¹²

Location and Locution

Bruce's suggestion, however, begs the question that we are exploring in this essay—What circumstances, if any, prompted Paul to preach Christ crucified in Corinth? A number of scholars have supposed that the tack and content of the apostle's proclamation in Corinth are explicable in large part as his measured response to and determined refutation of those he thought to value rhetorical style over theological substance.¹³ Whether these polished preachers and their erstwhile supporters were "on the ground" when Paul was in Corinth or arose at a time after his departure is difficult to determine from the evidence we have to hand. It is clear, however, not least in 2 Cor 10-13, that Paul was neither professionally trained nor particularly gifted in speech.¹⁴ Indeed, the apostle reports that his Corinthian detractors judged his speech to be contemptible (ὁ λόγος

¹⁰Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 63-64.

¹¹David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 84.

¹²F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), 246.

¹³See further Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 124, who notes a number of interpretive options on offer regarding Paul's use of rhetoric in 1 Cor 2:1-5. Duane Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (SNTSMS 79; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 207, maintains that in 1 Cor 2:1-5 "Paul repudiates entirely the dynamic of rhetoric for the purposes of preaching and opts instead for its diametrical opposite."

¹⁴Timothy H. Lim, "Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom, but in the Demonstration of the Spirit and Power," *NovT* 29 (1987): 140.

ἐξουθενημένος, 2 Cor 10:10) and on one occasion acknowledges, if we can take this remark more or less at face value, that he is ἰδιώτης τῷ λόγῳ (2 Cor 11:6).

If Paul's Corinthian opponents regarded his inexperienced speech to be a ministerial impediment, especially when coupled with his less-than-impressive appearance (2 Cor 10:10), the apostle countered by contending "the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power" (1 Cor 4:20). The contrast between human rhetoric and pneumatic empowerment, which recurs in 1 Cor 1–4, is present in 1 Cor 2:4–5, where Paul is at pains to impress upon the assembly that his proclamation in their midst, replete with weakness, fear, and trembling (1 Cor 2:3), was not ἐν σοφίᾳ ἀνθρώπων but ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ (1 Cor 2:5).

As it happens, Paul's rhetoric in 1 Cor 2:1–5 has been read as polemic, whereby Paul is seen "to be contrasting himself to other Corinthian preachers."¹⁵ Thus, Timothy H. Lim maintains,

The preeminent speech and wisdom, which Paul disclaims in 2:1, are much like, if not identical to, the persuasive eloquence of the Corinthian preachers. And the weakness, fear and much trembling (2:3) are in direct opposition to the self-confident and boastful stance of the other proclaimers of the Gospel in Corinth. It would seem that Paul, in knowing nothing except Christ crucified (2:2), is refusing to adopt practices which are similar to those found among the Corinthian preachers.¹⁶

"Christ Crucified" as Rhetorical Shorthand

Another explanation of Paul's contention in 1 Cor 2:2, and the final one we will probe in this paper, is that of Margaret M. Mitchell. In an article entitled "Rhetorical Shorthand in Pauline Argumentation: The Functions of 'The Gospel' in the Corinthian Correspondence," Mitchell argues that the apostle "accesses 'the gospel' in his letters" by employing three forms of rhetorical shorthand: βραχυλογία ("brevity"), συνεκδοχή ("synecdoche"), and μεταφορά ("metaphor").¹⁷

With respect to 1 Cor 2:2, Mitchell posits the presence of the rhetorical trope synecdoche.¹⁸ Even though Paul highlights a single component of the gospel narrative in this verse ("Christ crucified"), Mitchell maintains that Paul has the entire story in view. She writes,

The choice of which part [of the gospel to which Paul refers] depends in each case on Paul's particular argument. Here [i.e., 1 Cor 1.17–2.5], where Paul seeks to combat Corinthian self-aggrandizement, he turns to the gospel and its preaching as the standard for the Christian life and in so doing elevates the foolish, utterly defeated-looking crucifixion to set

¹⁵Ibid., 147.

¹⁶Ibid., 147–48.

¹⁷Margaret M. Mitchell, "Rhetorical Shorthand in Pauline Argumentation: The Functions of 'The Gospel' in the Corinthian Correspondence," in *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker* (ed. L. Ann Jervis and Peter Richardson; JSNTSup 108; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 65.

¹⁸Ibid., 70–71.

the “worldly standards” (which the Corinthians are emulating) on their heads.¹⁹

Assessment and Argument

The intention of this investigation is *not* to make monopolistic claims by denying or refuting the plausibility of the suggestions surveyed above. Indeed, it is altogether likely that the puzzling statement Paul makes in 1 Cor 2:2 was spawned by any number of factors and influences. I, for one, think it highly probable that Jesus’ death featured in Paul’s missionary proclamation from the beginning. Additionally, it would strain against credulity, not to mention the literary evidence, to argue that the apostle preached in a vacuum while in Corinth. There were clearly forces in that city that shaped his preaching, not least in retrospect. Furthermore, it would be wrong-headed and foolhardy to posit that Paul proclaimed a gospel in Corinth that focused exclusively upon the crucifixion (note 1 Cor 15:1-11).

Be that as it may, it is not special pleading to note Paul’s insistence in 1 Cor 2.1-5 that he gave Christ’s crucifixion prominence, indeed preeminence, when proclaiming the gospel in Corinth. In commenting upon v. 2 in particular, Duane Litfin remarks,

Paul resolved . . . that he would put aside all else except the καταγγέλλειν of Christ, καὶ τοῦτον ἐσταυρωμένον (2.2). He would eschew all λόγοι and σοφία calculated to impress, concentrating instead on the straightforward and, therefore, unimpressive announcing of the Gospel of the cross. This would constitute the single, central, unchanging essence of his preaching.²⁰

In 1 Cor 2:1-5, then, one finds, according to Litfin, “the clearest and most detailed statement—both positive and negative—of the Apostle’s manner of preaching to be found anywhere in his writings.”²¹ Not only that, one encounters in 1 Cor 1:17–2:16 a concentration of “cross” terminology that is unparalleled elsewhere in Paul.²² To be precise, four of the eight occurrences of σταυροῦν in Paul appear in this passage.²³ Additionally, two of the ten usages of σταυρός in the Pauline Letters occur in these verses.²⁴ *Prima facie* literary evidence, therefore, strongly suggests that the apostle emphasized the cross when proclaiming the gospel in Corinth.²⁵ There is, as we have seen above, no

¹⁹Ibid., 71.

²⁰Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology*, 206.

²¹Ibid., 204.

²²Cf. Corin Mihaila, *The Paul-Apollos Relationship and Paul’s Stance toward Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (LNTS 402; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 17.

²³Note 1 Cor 1:13, 23; 2:2, 8. See further 2 Cor 13:4; Gal 3:1; 5:24; 6:14.

²⁴Note 1 Cor 1:17, 18. Cf. Gal 5:11; 6:12, 14; Eph 2:16; Phil 2:8; 3:18; Col 1:20; 2:14.

²⁵J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1895; repr. 1995), 171, comments that in Corinth the apostle did not preach Christ in his glory but in his humiliation “that the foolishness of preaching might be doubly foolish and the weakness doubly weak. The Incarnation was in itself a stumbling-block; the Crucifixion was much more than this.”

shortage of scholarly suggestions as to why Paul concentrated upon Christ's crucifixion when preaching to the Corinthians. Such proposals notwithstanding, I would like to expend the balance of this essay exploring another possible contributing factor, namely, Paul's instruction of and interaction with the Thessalonian congregation.

What Has Thessalonica to Do with Corinth?

A Tell of Two Cities

When coupled with Phil 4:16, 1 Thess 2:2 indicates beyond reasonable doubt that Paul's initial ministry in Thessalonica was subsequent to his founding visit in Philippi. The year was roughly 49 C.E.²⁶ Paul's untimely departure from both cities was marked by conflict.²⁷ Having been "orphaned" from the Thessalonian assembly (1 Thess 2:17; cf. 2:15; Acts 17:5-9), it appears that the apostle journeyed to Athens, seemingly by way of Berea (1 Thess 3:1; Acts 17:10-15). From there, Paul (and Silvanus?) sent his (their) "trusted envoy Timothy . . . to Thessalonica on a reconnaissance and (possibly) recovery mission. . . ."²⁸ When Timothy returns to Paul (and Silvanus?) with the good news that the Thessalonians were flourishing, not flagging, in the faith (1 Thess 3:6), he likely travels to Corinth, where Paul had begun to minister and from where the apostle, along with Silvanus and Timothy, wrote the letter known to us as 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:1; cf. Acts 18:1).

(De)briefing with Timothy and Silvanus

Timothy's *euangelia* regarding the Thessalonians' continuation in the faith and affection for their apostles occasions 1 Thessalonians. Among other things, the letter offers Paul and his coworkers the opportunity to rehearse and reinforce their *kerygma* with the congregation.²⁹ From all indications, the Lord's *parousia* featured in the missionaries' proclamation. Paul not only takes up this topic in 4:13-5:11, wherein he both presupposes and expands upon previous instruction (note esp. 4:13-14; 5:1-2), but he also weaves the subject throughout the entire letter. In 1.9-10 he indicates that the Thessalonians' turning to God entailed their waiting "for his Son from heaven," namely, "Jesus who delivers us [i.e., believers] from the wrath to come." Furthermore, Paul concludes chs. 2, 3, and 5 respectively with reference to the Lord's coming (see 2:19; 3:13; 5:23). It appears that the apostles declared to the Thessalonians that Jesus would soon come "like a thief in the night" (5:2), bringing salvation to believers (1:10; 5:8-9) and sudden, inescapable destruction to outsiders (5:3; cf. 1:10; 5:9). Whereas the "day of the Lord" would catch unbelievers espousing "peace and security" off-guard, those of the light would not be surprised by that day (5:4-5).

²⁶See Todd D. Still, "Paul and the Macedonian Believers," in *The Blackwell Companion to Paul* (ed. Stephen Westerholm; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 31.

²⁷Idem, *Conflict in Thessalonica: A Pauline Church and its Neighbours* (JSNTSup 198; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); idem, *Philippians & Philemon* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary 27B; Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 9.

²⁸Margaret M. Mitchell, "1 and 2 Thessalonians," in *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 54.

²⁹So similarly *ibid.*, 56.

An emphasis upon the *parousia*, then, is evident in 1 Thessalonians and was presumably no less prevalent in the gospel that the apostles proclaimed during their sojourn in Thessalonica. Does this suggest, in turn, that the missionaries neglected to give adequate attention to Jesus' death and resurrection as they promulgated their message? Put otherwise, did their focus upon Christ's coming at the end of time cause them to give shorter shrift to the Son's advent in the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4)? Perhaps, and the Thessalonians' enthusiastic reception of Paul's apocalyptic gospel might have tipped the balance all the more.

Although there are clear, epistolary indications that Jesus' death and resurrection were part and parcel of the missionaries' original proclamation and subsequent instruction in Thessalonica (see esp. 1 Thess 1:10; 2:15; 4:14), it is no less clear in 1 Thessalonians, not to mention 2 Thessalonians, that eschatological confusion on the one hand and end-time preoccupation on the other were rife in the fellowship. Ostensibly, Paul had learned as much from Christian news networks (see 1 Thess 1:9) and from Timothy upon his return to him in Corinth. Relative to Thessalonica, instruction, consolation, reiteration, and correction regarding last things were required (note 1 Thess 4:13–5:11; cf. 2 Thess 1:3–2:15; 3:6–15). Relative to Corinth, Paul "decided to know nothing among [them] except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

Paul's Proclamation of Christ's Crucifixion in Corinth as Adaptation

Even as Jesus' death and resurrection were not absent from Paul's proclamation in Thessalonica, neither were Jesus' resurrection and return missing from the apostle's preaching in Corinth. The resurrection of Christ and Christians, of course, features in 1 Corinthians 15.³⁰ Furthermore, Paul's multiple references to the "day (of the Lord)"³¹ and to the Lord's coming³² in 1 Corinthians without additional explication indicate that the apostle had instructed the assembly, at least to some extent, regarding the *parousia*.

That being said, Christ's *parousia* and its presumed proximity do not feature in 1 Corinthians as they do in 1 Thessalonians, even though 1 Corinthians is roughly five times longer than 1 Thessalonians. What is true of these pastoral letters to those assemblies was no less true, one gathers, of Paul's missionary preaching in these two locales. Whereas Paul iterated Christ's return in Thessalonica, he focused upon Christ's death in Corinth.

Whatever else might have shaped Paul's decision to focus his message upon Christ crucified in Corinth, it stands to reason that this determination was influenced by the overly enthusiastic reception of and the ensuing confusion created by his proclamation of the Lord's imminent *parousia* in Thessalonica. During Paul's eighteen-month sojourn in Corinth (Acts 18:18), he was able, as he reflected upon his Thessalonian mission and responded *via* pastoral letter to received reports from the north, to clarify further his apostolic calling and to hone more finely his gospel. Paul concluded, according to 1 Cor 1:17, that

³⁰See 15:4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 29, 32, 35, 42, 43, 44, 52. Cf. 1 Cor 6:4; 2 Cor 4:14; 5:15.

³¹1 Cor 1:8; 3:13; 4:3; 5:5. Cf. 2 Cor 15:23.

³²1 Cor 4:5; 11:26; 13:10; 15:23.

Christ had sent him not "to baptize but to evangelize, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross be emptied of its power."

The other extant Pauline letter where the cross features is, of course, Galatians.³³ If Paul wrote Galatians from Corinth in late 50 or early 51 C.E. as James D. G. Dunn suspects,³⁴ then this arguably strengthens and extends my argument. My thesis, however, does not rise or fall upon the provenance of Galatians.

Concluding Comments

In this essay I have proposed that Paul's determined declaration of Christ crucified in Corinth is explicable, at least in part, as the apostle's theological, missional, and pastoral response to the Thessalonians' all-too-zealous reception of his preaching regarding Christ's soon-to-come *parousia*. To those who have grown accustomed to thinking of Paul as a contextual theologian whose thought was characterized by contingency, coherence, and the interaction of the same, this proposal will appear as anything but novel.³⁵ Interestingly, whether wittingly or not, interpreters have acknowledged J. C. Beker's contingency-coherency schema in Paul's theology when noting that the order of the Pauline triad of virtues runs faith, love, and hope in 1 Thessalonians but faith, hope, and love in 1 Corinthians.

In an important essay published twenty years ago now entitled "Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity," John M. G. Barclay notes,

Unlike the Thessalonians, the Corinthians did not regard their Christian experience as an eager anticipation of a glory ready to be revealed at the coming of Christ. . . . They did not daily look up to heaven to await the coming of the Son who would rescue them from the wrath to come, nor did they eagerly search for signs of their impending vindication.³⁶

To explain the Corinthians' non-eschatological theological framework, Barclay points to their intentional rejection of Paul's sectarian, apocalyptic worldview. Additionally, Barclay doubts "that there was any significant change in Paul's message between Thessalonica and Corinth."³⁷ If by "significant change" one means, as Barclay does,³⁸ Paul's abandonment of "an apocalyptic understanding of the gospel" and a "sectarian view of the church" as he traveled south, then I would concur. If, however, one adjudges Paul's lifting up of one aspect of the gospel in one place and highlighting another facet of the narrative in another place as "significant change," then I would demur. Indeed, this essay suggests that one possible and no less plausible explanation for the Corinthians'

³³See note 23 above.

³⁴James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; London: A&C Black, 1993), 19.

³⁵So J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

³⁶Barclay, "Thessalonica and Corinth," 65.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 67.

³⁸*Ibid.*

non-eschatological theological framework is that their apostle determined to place Christ's cross instead of Christ's coming front and center in his preaching and writing to them. This was Paul's pastoral response to eschatological excesses and congregational exigencies in Thessalonica. Given Paul's apostolic vocation, his work and worries in one place with one congregation informed and impinged upon his industry and anxiety in every place with every assembly (2 Cor 11:28).

Whereas the Thessalonians' reception of Paul's eschatologically-laden gospel was characterized by (too) much enthusiasm and fervor, the Corinthians' response to the apostle's proclamation of the crucified Christ and the cruciformed life was less than wholesale, if not lackluster. As it happened, then, Paul traded one set of troubles in Thessalonica for another collection of challenges in Corinth. Such irony seems endemic to gospel ministry whatever the century. Paul and those who have followed in his train may be forgiven in the midst of adjusting the pastoral pendulum for wondering at times if they are damned if they do or don't.

It was far more than pastoral paranoia, however, that prompted Paul to question whether he, like Job (see Job 9:29) and the Isaianic Servant of old (note Isa 49:4; cf. 65:23), had labored in vain over the Thessalonians (so 1 Thess 3:5; cf. 2:1) and Corinthians (e.g. 1 Cor 15:2, 14; 2 Cor 6:1; cf. 1 Cor 15:10, 58; cf. also Gal 2:2; Phil 2:16). Rather, such soul-wrenching uncertainty was occasioned by the gravity of gospel ministry, which continuously weighed upon the apostle, even as it does upon his heirs.



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