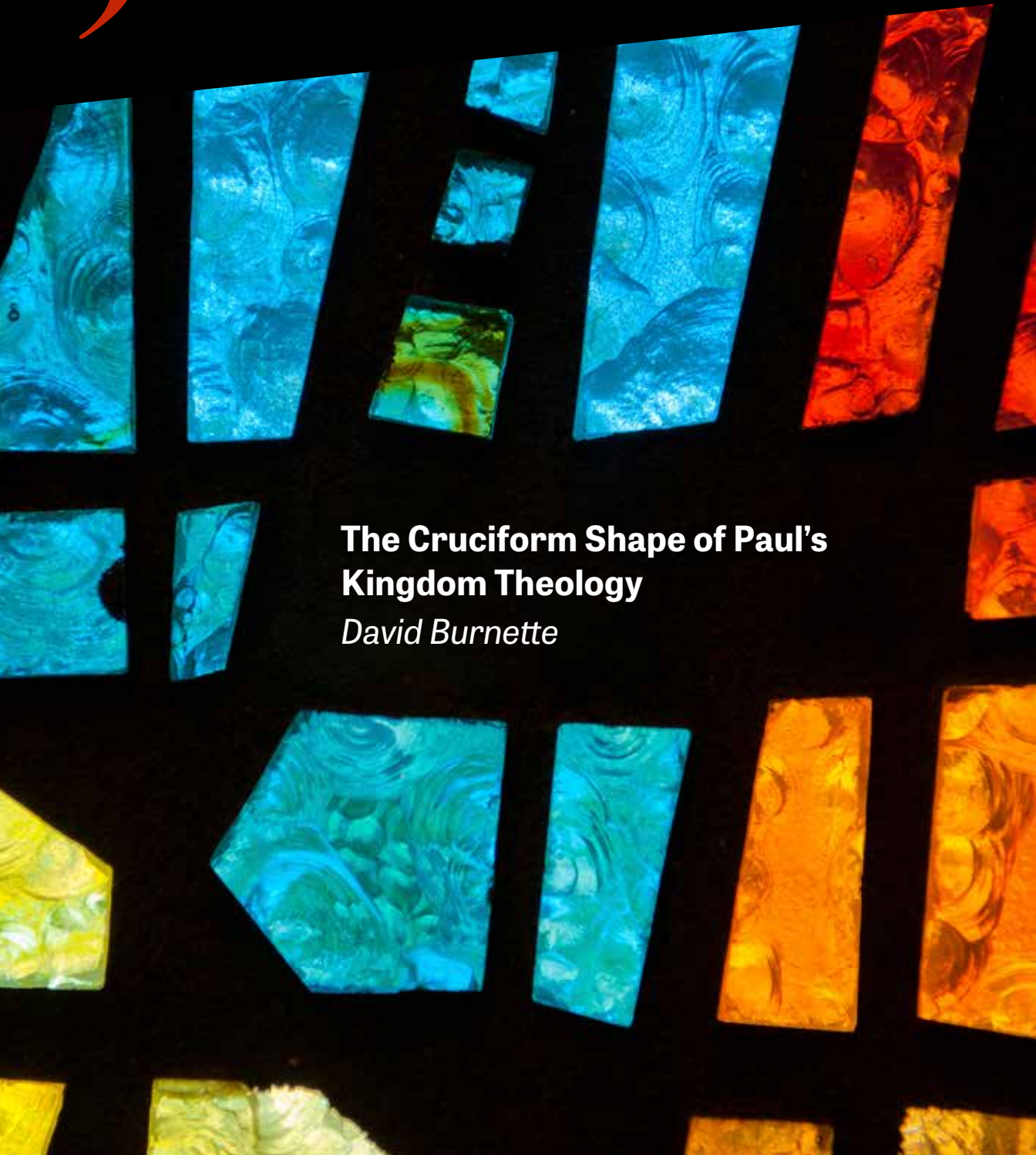


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Kingdom Theology**

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Abstract: Unlike Jesus, Paul is not often associated with the theme of the kingdom of God. While some scholars have claimed that the kingdom is insignificant for Paul, most have simply failed to examine it closely. This article highlights the significance of the kingdom by demonstrating that it is a foundational component of Paul's proclamation of the cross. This thesis is based primarily on a close examination of 1 Corinthians 4:20, a verse in which Paul contrasts the talk of certain leaders in Corinth with the power of the kingdom. Based on the way Paul uses the term power (*δύναμις*, *dynamis*) in 1 Corinthians 1-4, this article contends that the power of the kingdom mentioned in 4:20 is a reference to the power effected through the word of the cross. Other Pauline kingdom references are cited to support this kingdom-cross connection, including Colossians 1:13 and Galatians 5:21. As with the Gospels and Scripture as a whole, Paul's theology of the kingdom is bound up with a message that cuts against the grain of the world's wisdom—the message of Christ crucified.

Key Words: kingdom, cross, Paul, power, and 1 Corinthians.

Introduction

Few themes in Scripture have received as much scholarly attention as the kingdom of God.¹ This preoccupation with the kingdom is understandable, as both John the Baptist and Jesus began their respective public ministries by announcing the kingdom's arrival (Matt 3:2; 4:17) and the kingdom continues to feature prominently throughout the Synoptic Gospels. When we turn to Paul's letters, on the other hand, the kingdom seems less conspicuous. Scholars have given various explanations for this

1. Over ten thousand publications related to the kingdom of God have been appeared in the last century alone. Leslaw Daniel Chrupcala, *The Kingdom of God: A Bibliography of 20th Century Research* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2007), cited in Robert Yarborough, "The Kingdom of God in the New Testament: Matthew and Revelation," in *The Kingdom of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 95.

phenomenon, including the idea that Paul intentionally avoided the topic or that he supplanted the kingdom with other emphases.² Bultmann claimed that the kingdom “lost its dominant position in Paul,”³ while Walter goes so far as to say that Paul shows “no trace of the influence of the theologically central affirmations of Jesus’ preaching, in particular of his characteristic ‘Jesuanic’ interpretation of the kingdom of God.”⁴ It is fair to say that the kingdom has not been a key theme in Pauline studies.

Connecting the Kingdom and the Cross

Many scholars today reject the idea that Jesus and Paul had completely different messages—a view that used to surface more in the older Jesus versus Paul comparisons. Relatively few scholars, however, have examined Paul’s view of the kingdom in a detailed, exegetical manner, which could be taken to imply that the kingdom is not a significant theme in the apostle’s writings.⁵ In response, I believe there are multiple lines of evidence to suggest that scholars have underestimated this theme in Paul’s writings.⁶ One way to make this case is by demonstrating the relationship between the kingdom and other central Pauline themes, many of which revolve around God’s saving work in Christ.⁷ In this article I will be focusing specifically on the relationship between the kingdom and the cross, as this latter theme is universally recognized to be a signature theme in Paul’s letters. More specifically, I will examine 1 Corinthians 4:20, along with other supporting examples, in order to demonstrate that the kingdom of God is a foundational aspect of Paul’s proclamation of the cross.

Before moving to exegesis, it is worth noting several reasons why 1 Corinthians 4:20 is well suited to my thesis. First, as I intend to demonstrate below, Paul binds the kingdom and the cross inseparably in this verse. Second, while the kingdom is

2. For more on the various explanations concerning Paul’s lack of emphasis on the kingdom, see my survey in Samuel D. Burnette, “The Kingdom in 1 Corinthians: Reevaluating an Underestimated Pauline Theme” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 6-14. It has been claimed that Paul supplanted the kingdom with themes such as righteousness, the Spirit, and Christ.

3. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:189. This shift in emphasis is for Bultmann part of a larger pattern in Paul’s theology. The apostle’s teaching is not a recapitulation or further development of Jesus’ own preaching, but rather a “new structure” suited to a new Hellenized context (189). Lüdemann also questions the significance of the kingdom for Paul, calling it “marginal.” Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul, the Founder of Christianity* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 194.

4. Nikolaus Walter, “Paul and the Early Christian Jesus-Tradition,” in *Paul and Jesus: Collected Essays*, ed. A. J. M. Wedderburn, JSNTSup 37 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 63.

5. For a thorough treatment of the Pauline conception of the kingdom, see the wide-ranging study of Gary Shogren, “The Pauline Proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Christ Within Its New Testament Setting” (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1986).

6. I have made a case for the significance of the kingdom in 1 Corinthians in Burnette, “The Kingdom in 1 Corinthians: Reevaluating an Underestimated Pauline Theme.”

7. Thielman lists several proposed centers for Pauline theology by various scholars, most of which revolve around some aspect of God’s salvation in Christ. Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 231.

David Burnette: *The Cruciform Shape of Paul's Kingdom Theology* often related to ethics, to the Spirit, and even to themes like the resurrection⁸ in Paul's theology, the cross seems to be on the periphery of such discussions. I do not intend to downplay these other themes nor do I think they can be separated from the cross, but it is worth examining how the kingdom relates (specifically) to a central Pauline theme like the cross. Third, the relationship between the kingdom and the cross in 1 Corinthians 4:20 may not be immediately obvious to all readers given that the term cross (σταυρός, *stauros*) does not appear in this verse. I intend to show that the term is implied in the immediate context. Finally, 1 Corinthians 4:20 is a prime example of the role the kingdom plays in Paul's theology. It is my contention, which I cannot defend in the space of this article, that the kingdom serves not as *the* center of Paul's theology, nor even that Paul frequently features it as the subjection of discussion, but rather that it functions like a strong but unobtrusive foundation that supports more prominent structures, structures such as the cross of Christ.⁹ Yarbrough makes a similar observation, comparing the kingdom to "an invisible software program running at all times in the background as Paul ministers and from time to time composes his letters."¹⁰ This less conspicuous role for the kingdom may be one reason that scholars have typically underestimated its significance in Paul's writings.

Examining 1 Corinthians 4:20

In 1 Corinthians 4:20 Paul declares, "For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power." In order to demonstrate the connection between the kingdom and the cross in this verse, a brief look at the wider context of 1 Corinthians 1-4 will be instructive. After his opening greeting and prayer of thanksgiving (1:1-9), Paul admonishes the Corinthians for their divisiveness. Some believers in Corinth were apparently clamoring for spiritual status by identifying with prominent church leaders

8. Beale argues that throughout Paul's letters Christ's resurrection establishes the "inaugurated end-time new-creational kingdom." G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 249. See pp. 249-97 for Beale's exegesis of the relevant texts related to the resurrection as the inaugural eschatological event in Paul's letters.

9. I have identified several ways in which the kingdom is foundational to God's saving work in Christ in 1 Corinthians in Burnette, "The Kingdom in 1 Corinthians: Reevaluating an Underestimated Pauline Theme."

10. Robert Yarbrough, "The Kingdom of God in the New Testament: Mark through the Epistles," in *The Kingdom of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 148.

like Paul and Apollos (1:10-17).¹¹ Paul responds to this jockeying by highlighting the word of the cross in 1:18ff, for those who have believed in a crucified Messiah should eschew the world's views of power and wisdom. True wisdom is revealed by the Spirit and it hails from the age to come (2:6-13), thus making it folly to the "natural person" (2:14). The issue of divisiveness over leaders continues to surface in 3:1-5, leading Paul to remind the Corinthians that he and Apollos were merely servants who watered. God is responsible for the growth, i.e., effectiveness in ministry (3:5-7). In chapter 4 the imagery shifts slightly, but the general topic is the same. Paul and Apollos are now described as stewards of God's mysteries, and while stewards must be found faithful, it is God's judgment (and not that of the Corinthians) that counts in such matters (4:1-5). In 4:6-7 Paul confronts the arrogance of the Corinthians by reminding them that any distinctions or gifts they possess are from God. Moreover, the very apostles the Corinthians were elevating had become "a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men" (v. 9). Paul thus sets the pride and posturing of the Corinthians in sharp contrast to the suffering and ridicule experienced by the apostles (4:8-13). The fact that the apostles looked unimpressive to the world helps set the stage for Paul's comments about the kingdom in 4:20.

Paul admonishes the Corinthians in 4:14-21 concerning their "countless guides in Christ" (v. 15).¹² Some in Corinth became arrogant in Paul's absence, supposing the apostle would not come to correct them (v.18). However, Paul did respond to these arrogant persons in verses 19-20, citing the power of the kingdom to make his case. With this broader context in mind, Paul's reference to the "power" (δύναμις,

11. Mitchell takes 1:10 to be the thesis statement for the overall argument of 1 Corinthians, which is an argument for ecclesial unity. M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 1. Likewise Collins claims that Paul's warning against divisions in 1:10 "makes a statement that defines the rest of the letter." Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 69. Ciampa and Rosner argue that while disunity is a major theme in the letter, there are other "equally important concerns." Roy E. Ciampa and Brian Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 73. Ciampa and Rosner note, "... Paul must seek not only to unify the Corinthian Christians but, just as importantly, to rid them of pagan influences other than disunity, in particular sexual immorality (cf. 6:18), idolatry (cf. 10:14), and greed. Paul's task is to seek the Corinthians' transformation by the renewing of their mind, so that they might live lives that are holy (1 Cor. 1:2) and pleasing to God (Rom 12:2; Titus 2:11-13)" (74).

12. On the importance of 1 Cor 4:6-21 for the rest of the epistle, see E. Coye Still, "Divisions Over Leaders and Food Offered to Idols," *Tyndale Bulletin* 55 (2004): 17-41. Although Still focuses primarily on the thematic parallels between 4:6-21 and 8:1-11, he offers support for Dahl's theory that the "theological basis for Paul's answers to the problems of 1 Cor 5-15 is set forth in chapters 1-4, and calls attention especially to 4:6-21 as foundational to Paul's understanding of Christian existence in community" (41). Dahl's theory can be found in Nils A. Dahl, "Paul and the Church at Corinth According to 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21," in *Christian History and Interpretation*, ed. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R.R. Niebuhr (Cambridge, MA: University Press, 1967), 313-35. Ciampa and Rosner are in the minority of commentators in terms of taking 4:18-21 with the next section of this epistle, which stretches from 4:18 to 6:20. (Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 189-91). While this structuring of the passage is certainly plausible, this matter does not significantly affect one's understanding of the kingdom in 4:20.

David Burnette: *The Cruciform Shape of Paul's Kingdom Theology* *dynamis*) of the kingdom and its relationship to the cross in 4:19-20 can now be examined more closely.

The Power of the Kingdom

Paul's claim about the power of the kingdom in 4:20 must be understood in light of his challenge to the arrogant guides in 4:19.¹³ Paul claims in 4:19 that the litmus test for spiritual guides in Corinth would not be their "talk" (λόγον, *logon*) but rather their "power" (δύναμιν, *dynamin*). The reason power serves as the standard is that, according to 4:20, the kingdom consists "in power" (ἐν δυνάμει, *en dynamei*).¹⁴ Paul's point is that an approved ministry must manifest the power of God's kingdom. The terms "talk" (λόγος, *logos*) and "power" (δύναμις, *dynamis*) are contrasted in 4:19 and in 4:20,¹⁵ and it is this contrast that Paul uses to characterize the kingdom of God.¹⁶

Paul's claim that the kingdom does not consist in "talk" (λόγω, *logō*) in 4:19-20 initially seems to run against my argument that the power of the kingdom is manifest through the "word (λόγος, *logos*) of the cross" (1:18). After all, the word of the cross is by definition a *verbal* proclamation and would therefore seem to fall under the category of talk. However, Schrage rightly notes that the immediate and wider context of 1 Corinthians 1-4 makes it clear that Paul is not disparaging verbal proclamation *per se*.¹⁷ In fact, a certain kind of verbal proclamation is indispensable to the apostle's purposes and calling. For example, Paul is a steward of the mysteries of God (4:1), and he has fathered the Corinthian believers "through the gospel" (4:15). The wider context makes this point as well, for Paul speaks of the character and content of his verbal proclamation in 2:1-4. Christ sent him to "preach the gospel" (1:17), and it is the "word (λόγος, *logos*) of the cross" which God uses to save the foolish and the weak among both Jews and Greeks (1:18-31). Furthermore, in 2:13 Paul claims to impart wisdom via "words" (λόγοις, *logois*) that must be taught and interpreted by the Spirit. Clearly, then, the apostle is not denigrating verbal proclamation in an absolute sense.

13. Conzelmann rightly notes that 4:20 is the ground for 4:19. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 93.

14. Paul's statement in 4:20 is elliptical, with the ESV and NASB supplying the verb "consists" to characterize the relationship of the kingdom to "talk" and "power."

15. So Schrage, who seeks to derive the meaning of δύναμις (*dynamis*, power) from this contrast. Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, EKKNT 7 (Zürich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991), 1:362-63.

16. Haufe rightly notes that Paul is not giving a full definition of the kingdom in 4:20 but rather an important feature of it. Haufe, "Reich Gottes bei Paulus," 469. Likewise Donfried has noted that the immediate context in 1 Corinthians has influenced what Paul chose to say about the kingdom: "It [1 Cor 4:20] is concentrating on one dimension of that new reality in light of certain misunderstandings present in the Corinthian congregation. Karl Donfried, "The Kingdom of God in Paul," in *The Kingdom of God in 20th-Century Interpretation*, ed. Wendell L. Willis (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 179.

17. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 1:362-63.

For, as Pogoloff points out, Paul himself uses rhetoric in the very passages in which he rejects its abuse.¹⁸ It still remains, then, to find out specifically what Paul means when he speaks of the “talk” (λόγος, *logos*) of certain persons in Corinth.

Examining the term λόγος (*logos*). In order to understand how Paul is using the term λόγος (*logos*) in 4:19-20, a distinction must be made between the two uses of the term in 1 Corinthians 1-4. In 1:18, for example, the λόγος (*logos*, word) of the cross is said to be the “power of God” to those who are being saved. This use of λόγος (*logos*) is close to the English concepts of message and proclamation, terms that carry no necessary negative connotations for Paul. On the other hand, Paul uses the term with a negative connotation in 4:19-20, which may help explain why this is the only place in 1 Corinthians 1-4 that the ESV translates the term as “talk” rather than “word.” Another example of a negative use of λόγος (*logos*, word) occurs in 1:17, where Paul says he was not sent to preach the gospel with “words of eloquent wisdom” (ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου, *en sophia logu*). Ciampa and Rosner correctly note that Paul is contrasting “mere words or rhetorical artistry, and the power of God to change lives and destinies.”¹⁹ This conclusion is supported by Pogoloff’s study on the role of rhetoric in the Corinthian context.²⁰ There is, therefore, good reason to believe that in 4:19-20 Paul uses the term λόγον (*logon*) to refer to talk or rhetoric that is characterized by worldly wisdom and eloquence. Such talk, Paul says, has nothing to do with the power of the kingdom.

Examining the term δύναμις (*dynamis*). If Paul’s use of the term λόγος (*logos*) in 4:19-20 refers to the kind of eloquent wisdom prized by the world, then there are significant implications for the meaning of the term δύναμις (*dynamis*) and the kind of power that characterizes the kingdom. Marshall claims that it was common for the term δύναμις (*dynamis*) to be associated with rhetoric in a first-century Greco-Roman context to denote “strength, power, influence.”²¹ Such an association would add

18. Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians*, SBLDS 134 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 121.

19. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 195. A similar contrast appears in 2:4-5, where “plausible words of wisdom” are contrasted with the “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (v.4).

20. See Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians*. Pogoloff examines how rhetoric and eloquence are linked with status in Paul’s Greco-Roman context, claiming that Paul has “radically reversed” these cultural narratives. “What persuades is speech about what is ordinarily unfit for contemplation: not a life which is cultured, wise, and powerful, but one marked by the worst shame and the lowest possible status. Paul’s rhetoric of the cross thus opposes the cultural values surrounding eloquence” (Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 120). Litfin examines Paul’s proclamation in light of Greco-Roman rhetoric and comes to a similar conclusion. Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, 244–62.

21. Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul’s Relations with the Corinthians*, WUNT 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 387.

rhetorical force to the contrast Paul draws between the δύναμις (*dynamis*) of God's kingdom and that of traditional Greek rhetoric, the latter being implied in the phrases "lofty speech or wisdom" (2:1) and "plausible words of wisdom" (2:4).²² Nevertheless, commentators have not always agreed on what Paul means by the term δύναμις (*dynamis*) in this context.²³

The idea that God's power in 4:20 is a reference to Spirit-produced signs goes back at least as far as Chrysostom.²⁴ Similarly, Donfried understands the term to refer to "the powerful deeds which accompanied his [Paul's] apostolic preaching."²⁵ Several Pauline passages are cited to support this understanding, including 1 Corinthians 2:4.²⁶ Hays speculates that God may need to "unleash some manifestation of the power of the Spirit," something on the order of Elijah's triumph over the prophets of Baal, in order to silence the arrogant in Corinth.²⁷ The power of the kingdom in 4:20 would thus be akin to God's powerful deeds in the history of Israel. Such interpretations of δύναμις (*dynamis*) in 4:20 are certainly plausible, particularly given the way Paul uses the term in later in 1 Corinthians (6:14; 15:43).²⁸ However, Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians 1-4 on the counter-intuitive manner in which God works through weakness and through a foolish message makes it more likely that the power Paul refers to in 4:20 is related to the proclamation of the cross. I will attempt to demonstrate this point below by examining Paul's previous uses of the term δύναμις (*dynamis*) in 1 Corinthians 1-4.

Prior to 4:19-20, the term δύναμις (*dynamis*) is used five times in 1 Corinthians 1-4: 1:17, 1:18, 1:24, 2:4, and 2:5. In each instance the term is related to the cross. In 1:17 the connection between the cross and power is explicit: relying on "words of eloquent wisdom" means that the cross will be "emptied of its power δύναμις (*dynamis*)." Then in 1:18 Paul says that while the word of the cross is "folly" in the world's estimation, it

22. Ibid., 388.

23. For a list of several interpretations offered by scholars concerning Paul's use of the term "power" in 4:20, see William David Spencer, "The Power in Paul's Teaching (1 Cor 4:9-10)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32 (1989): 51-61. Spencer argues that Paul's power is his "display of his life of suffering as an imitation of Christ" (54), which is closer to the position in this work insofar as it distances God's power from worldly conceptions of the concept.

24. Chrysostom, *1 Corinthians Homily 14.2*, trans. A. Roberts and W.H. Rambaut, ANF, American ed., vol. 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 1: 448.

25. Donfried, "The Kingdom of God in Paul," 180; so Youngmo Cho, *Spirit and Kingdom in the Writings of Luke and Paul: An Attempt to Reconcile These Concepts*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Waynesboro, GA; Paternoster, 2005), 58.

26. Donfried, "The Kingdom of God in Paul," 180. See also Rom 15:19; 2 Cor 12:12; 1 Thess 1:5.

27. Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 75.

28. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2000), 376.

is “the power δύναμις (*dynamis*) of God” to those who are being saved.²⁹ Paul’s third use of the term δύναμις (*dynamis*) occurs in 1:24, where Christ himself is referred to as the θεοῦ δύνάμιν (*theu dynamin*, power of God). Paul’s use of δύναμις (*dynamis*) in 1:24 should be understood in light of the reference to “Christ crucified” in 1:23, which again connects power to the message of the cross.³⁰ The final two occurrences of δύναμις (*dynamis*) in 1 Corinthians 1-4 are in 2:4 and 2:5 respectively. In 2:4 Paul claims that his speech was “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (δυνάμεως, *dynameōs*)”³¹ and then in 2:5 he says he wants the Corinthians’ faith to rest “in the power (δύναμις, *dynamis*) of God.” Given that Paul’s demonstration of the Spirit and power took place through his proclamation of “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:1-2), it is natural to understand the power of the Spirit as being integrally connected to the message of the cross.³² In conclusion, each of Paul’s five uses of the term δύναμις (*dynamis*) prior to 4:19-20 is related to the message of the cross.

Conclusions on the Power of The Kingdom

The exegesis above demonstrates that Paul’s use of the term δύναμις (*dynamis*) in 1 Corinthians 1-4 is integrally related to the word of the cross. Though δύναμις

29. Garland understands power in 1:18 to refer to “the effectiveness of the cross to make God known to humankind, to accomplish salvation, to defeat evil, and to transform lives and values.” David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 62.

30. Similarly, in Romans 1:16 Paul refers to the gospel as the “power” (δύναμις, *dynamis*) of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” Like the word of the cross in 1 Corinthians 1-4, the gospel in Romans 1:16 is God’s powerful means of bringing about his saving purposes. Moo also draws this parallel between Romans 1:16 and 1 Corinthians 1:18, with both verses connecting the gospel to God’s saving power. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 66. Moo cites 1 Cor 4:19-20 as evidence of the relationship between δύναμις (*dynamis*, power) and the word of the gospel (66 n14), presumably drawing a very close connection between the kingdom and the gospel. Schreiner draws essentially the same connection between Rom 1:16 and 1 Cor 1:18, noting, “The succeeding context of 1 Cor 1 clarifies that the power of the gospel lies in its effective work in calling believers to salvation (1 Cor 1:23-24, 26-29),” (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998], 60).

31. Commentators differ over how to understand the phrase “of the Spirit and power” (πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως, *pneumatos kai dynameōs*)—whether subjectively (Paul’s message was itself a demonstration of the Spirit), objectively (the Spirit’s presence was demonstrated through Paul’s message), or both—and while a decision is difficult, the meaning of the verse is not affected significantly. Taking the genitives to be objective (ESV and NASB) may be preferable, resulting in a translation such as “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” Regardless of how one understands these genitives, it is the close relationship between the Spirit and power that is significant. The Spirit is closely associated with power elsewhere in Paul’s epistles. For example, see Rom 1:4; 15:13, 19; 1 Thess 1:5. Fee takes the terms “Spirit” and “power” to be close to a hendiadys given their close association in Paul’s writings. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 95. Garland rightly grasps the main point: “What is clear is that Paul attributes the Corinthians’ conversion to the powerful intervention of the Spirit.” Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 87.

32. Paul’s grouping of the same concepts—the Spirit and power—in connection with the gospel in 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 adds support to this conclusion.

David Burnette: *The Cruciform Shape of Paul's Kingdom Theology* (*dynamis*) could refer to a visible demonstration of power in the form of Spirit-produced signs and wonders, Conzelmann's interpretation fits better with the immediate context: "[Paul] has not forgotten that δύναμις appears in weakness. The power in virtue of which he will put them to the test is no other than the power indicated in 2:1ff."³³ According to 2:4-5, the Spirit is involved in this manifestation of kingdom power through the proclamation of the cross. Thus, to say that the kingdom of God consists in power (rather than talk) is to say that the kingdom is manifest where God's purposes are effected through the proclamation of the cross.³⁴ Paul is speaking of "effectiveness in life as against mere rhetoric."³⁵

Other Cross-Related Kingdom Texts

One objection to the connection I have drawn between the kingdom and the cross is that 1 Corinthians 4:20 is merely an anomaly in Paul's letters. However, other Pauline kingdom references could be used to make a similar point. In Colossians 1:13, for example, Paul says that the Colossian believers have been transferred to "the kingdom of his [God's] beloved Son," a transfer that involves "redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:14).³⁶ These latter concepts, redemption and forgiveness, clearly imply that Paul has in mind Christ's work on the cross, a connection that is made explicit in the near context by the reference to the "blood of his [Christ's] cross" (v.20). To be transferred into the kingdom, then, is to experience the redemption that comes through Christ's work on the cross. This kingdom-cross connection in Colossians 1:13 is consistent with the idea in 1 Corinthians 4:20 that the power of the kingdom is manifest through the preaching of the cross.

A less obvious connection between the kingdom and the cross occurs in some of Paul's kingdom-inheritance sayings. In Galatians 5:19-21, for example, Paul

33. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 93.

34. Schrage defines power similarly in this context by using the term *Durchschlagskraft*, a reference to the effectiveness of something. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 1:362-63. Schreiner strikes a similar note regarding the parallel passage in Rom 1:16-17 noted above. The gospel is the "power (δύναμις, *dynamis*) of God for salvation" (v. 16). The word "for" (εἰς, *eis*) here indicates a result, so that the gospel is God's power resulting in salvation. Schreiner observes, "The δύναμις θεοῦ (*dynamis theu*) in the gospel signifies the effective and transforming power that accompanies the preaching of the gospel." As it relates to 1 Cor 1:18, Schreiner notes that the context of 1 Cor 1:23-24; 26-29 "clarifies that the power of the gospel lies in its effective work in calling believers to salvation" (Schreiner, *Romans*, 60).

35. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 376.

36. Yarbrough notes that this kingdom reference in Col 1:13 serves as a "hinge" connecting the opening sections of the letter (1:3-12 and 15-24), for it "points to the centrality of Paul's kingdom conviction, not only in his understanding but in the outlook of the recently planted Gentile churches. . . . Given the literary placement of Colossians 1:13, it could be argued that the rest of Colossians is a commentary on the meaning of 'kingdom' for the Colossian readers." Yarbrough, "The Kingdom of God in the New Testament: Mark through the Epistles," 147. On the significance of the kingdom in the context of Col 1, see pp.146-47.

lists the “works of the flesh” (v.19) and he says that those who practice such works “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (v.21). The works of the flesh are then contrasted with the fruit of the Spirit (vv.22-23), leading commentators to note the ethics that characterize the kingdom as well as the Spirit’s integral role in empowering such righteous conduct.³⁷ The role of the cross, on the other hand, is less often noticed. But Vickers is right that we should not read Galatians 5:19-21 apart from the previous five chapters, chapters that emphasize faith in Christ’s cross-work over against the works of the law. Vickers notes, “Paul’s soteriology provides the backdrop for what he has to say about the lives of those who inherit the kingdom in chapter 5.”³⁸ Even in the immediate context the cross is present: those whom the Spirit works through are said to have “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (v.24). The term “crucified” has in view Christ’s death and, more specifically, the believer’s participation in Christ’s death whereby the sinful desires of the flesh have been overcome (see also Gal 2:20).³⁹ The cross is therefore the means by which believers are enabled to inherit the kingdom, a kingdom whose citizens are characterized by Spirit-produced virtues. In addition to the two examples mentioned above, connections between the kingdom and the cross can also be observed in other Pauline kingdom texts.⁴⁰ It is also worth noting that Paul’s kingdom theology should not be restricted to his use of the noun “kingdom” (βασιλεία, *basileia*). More space could be devoted to the ways in which the cross is related to other kingdom-related concepts, such as the reign of Christ and the reign of believers.⁴¹

37. Vickers notes that the fruit of the Spirit may appropriately be called the “fruit of the kingdom.” Brian J. Vickers, “The Kingdom of God in Paul’s Gospel,” *SBJT* (Spring 2008): 58.

38. *Ibid.*, 58.

39. Commenting on the relationship between the cross and the kingdom in Galatians (and in particular Gal 2:20), Young notes that “the cross is again related to the winding up of the old order, the bearing of the curse and its annulling, so that the promise of the new can be realized. . . . Thus it relates to the fruits of the Spirit and the inheritance of the kingdom.” Frances Young, “Paul and the Kingdom of God,” in *The Kingdom of God and Human Society*, ed. Robin Barbour (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 250.

40. Vickers notes the relationship between the kingdom and the cross in Ephesians 5:1ff, a text that is parallel with Galatians 5:21ff. Prior to listing sins that will disqualify one from the kingdom, Paul mentions that Christ “loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:1-2). Here Paul’s discussion of the kingdom is “rooted in the cross and resurrection.” Vickers, “The Kingdom of God in Paul’s Gospel,” 59. Commenting on the relationship between the cross and the kingdom in Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians, Young makes some broader theological observations: Like Christ, the Christian is marked by “suffering, affliction, and persecution.” The cross marks the “destruction of the old order” and it “belongs to the process whereby the kingdom comes into being.” Young, “Paul and the Kingdom of God,” 250.

41. To take two examples from 1 Corinthians, Paul refers (sarcastically) to the reign of believers in 4:8 and to the reign of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:25.

Conclusions and Implications

I have attempted to demonstrate the close relationship between the kingdom and the cross in 1 Corinthians 4:20 in order to draw attention to the significance of the kingdom in Paul's theology. The word of the cross is the means by which the power of the kingdom is effected in this present age. This connection between the kingdom and the cross has also been highlighted in other Pauline texts. To enter the kingdom is to experience the redemption and forgiveness that come through the cross (Col 1:13-14). The cross even makes possible the righteous living required to inherit the kingdom, for the believer's fleshly desires have been crucified with Christ (Gal 5:21-24; Eph 5:2). Paul's view of the kingdom, then, is integrally connected to the cross.

In terms of the broader theological implications for my conclusions, space will only allow me to hint at a couple of points. First, while the kingdom is sometimes considered to be a point of discontinuity between Jesus and Paul, my conclusions suggest otherwise. Paul is remarkably consistent with the Gospels in terms of the relationship between the kingdom and the cross. Treat points out that in Mark's Gospel, for instance, the kingdom comes by "way of the cross."⁴² God's power is revealed through the death of the Son of God in much the same way that the power of the kingdom in 1 Corinthians 1-4 is manifested through the message of a crucified Messiah.⁴³ Similar connections are made in the other Gospels.⁴⁴ Second, Paul's cross-shaped view of the kingdom is also consistent with the broader narrative of Scripture. Treat traces the relationship between the kingdom and the cross throughout redemptive history and makes the following observation:

Although the idea of a 'Messiah crucified' seems an oxymoron, in the wisdom of God the promised anointed one of Israel has established God's kingdom by means of the cross. Paul uses power and wisdom, which are traditionally royal characteristics (Ps 145:11; Dan 2:37), to define the message of the cross. In fact, Paul uses "power" to describe both the cross (1 Cor 1:18) and the kingdom (4:20). In a similar way, in the book of Revelation the slain Lamb is praised for his power and his wisdom (Rev 5:12). The kingdom of God comes in power, but the power of the gospel is Christ crucified.⁴⁵

God has a pattern of carrying out his purposes in ways that turn the world's wisdom on its head. It should not be a great surprise, then, that for Paul the kingdom has

42. Jeremy R. Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 110. For Treat's argument that the kingdom is established by the cross in Mark's Gospel, see pp. 87-110.

43. *Ibid.*, 111. For Treat's argument that the kingdom is established by the cross in Mark's Gospel, see pp. 87-110.

44. *Ibid.*, 111.

45. *Ibid.*, 144.

a “cruciform shape.”⁴⁶ Whenever the apostle speaks of the cross and its effects and implications, as he so often does, it should be remembered that the power of the kingdom is close at hand.

46. The phrase “cruciform shape” is borrowed from Vickers, “The Kingdom of God in Paul’s Gospel,” 63. Vickers goes further, arguing not only that there is a cruciform shape to Paul’s *teaching*, but also to Paul’s *life* (cf. 1 Thess 2; 2 Thess 1; 2 Tim 4).