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THE MIND OF CHRIST: THE INTELLECTUAL VIRTUE OF  
ΦΡΟΝΗΣΙΣ IN PAUL'S LETTERS

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the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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by  
Mathew Cole Feix  
December 2021

**APPROVAL SHEET**

THE MIND OF CHRIST: THE INTELLECTUAL VIRTUE OF  
ΦΡΟΝΗΣΙΣ IN PAUL'S LETTERS

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BDAG Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- LCL The Loeb Classical Library
- LS Long, A.A., and D. N. Sedley, eds. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. 2 vols. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- LSJ Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- LXX Septuagint
- SVF *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmentum*. Edited by H. von Arnim. 4 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1903-24.
- TDNT Kittel, Gerhard, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–.



## PREFACE

In the greatest commandment, Jesus calls us to love God with everything we have; heart, soul, mind, and strength. One of the driving passions that I have, and one that has driven me through this dissertation, is to understand what it means to love God fully and completely. Loving God with our minds often takes a back seat to loving God with our hearts, or the way we conceive of them. And this is not for lack of material, there are thousands of wonderful books on theology and the Christian life, but they all miss their mark if we believe that our duty of love is fulfilled by getting our theological facts straight. God has called us to believe certain things about him, but even more importantly, he's called us to know him, to have a relationship with him. He's called us to become new kinds of knowers, people who think like Christ.

There are too many people to thank for their encouragement, love, and support as I've worked on this project. Thank you to Douglas Blount and Timothy Paul Jones for advising me and guiding me through the dissertation process, to the faculty and staff of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and to the president R. Albert Mohler, Jr. It has been a great joy to get to be a part of the program at SBTS.

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privilege of working at a church pursuing the love of God and the love of others. Brian Key, Mark Crowe, and the staff at Redeemer Fellowship in Kansas City, thanks for showing me what it looks like to love God completely and holistically. To the guys in Theology Lunch, over ten years, you've all sharpened me in ways I could never repay. To Ben Williams, Kali Gibson, and the team at So We Speak, thanks for making me a better reader, writer, and thinker. To my new church family in Carlton Landing and to the wonderful team of elders, thank you all for the privilege of pastoring and serving CLCC.

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There has been no one more important in this project than my family. Mom and Dad, Carson, Rachel, Marigold and Jack, Tucker, Holly, and Claire, thank you all for loving me, encouraging me, sacrificing for me, and keeping me going.

Laura, I love you more than I can ever say. Thank you for doing this PhD with me, for taking it on in the easy and tough times. I couldn't have done it without you and wouldn't have wanted to. I dedicate this dissertation to you.

Cole Feix

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The greatest of all the commandments, Jesus said, is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). While it's commonplace to reduce this list down to a simple short-hand: love God truly and completely, something gets lost in translation. What does it mean to love God with each of these aspects of our person? What effects do each of these aspects have on the whole?

Loving God with heart, mind, soul, and strength requires transformation. If Christians are united and transformed into the image of Christ, it only seems to follow that this change should be comprehensive. In the same way that the greatest commandment demands the full extension of our love, the transformation of the Spirit reaches to every part of our being. The transformation will be total, perfect, and complete.

It's the transformation of the mind that is the focus of this dissertation. What does Paul mean when he writes to the Romans saying, "be transformed by the renewing of your minds?" What is he getting at when he asserts to the Corinthians that "we have the mind of Christ?" It's clear from Paul's statements across his letters that one of his central goals was the moral and epistemological formation of the Christians in his churches.<sup>1</sup> He envisions Christians living differently, counterculturally, from nonbelievers. As James Thompson puts it, "those who are being transformed practice a distinctive morality."<sup>2</sup> The corpus of Paul's letters bears this out with constant instruction

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<sup>1</sup> Rom 1:5-6, 8:29, 12:1-3, 15:18; Phil 3:21; 2 Cor 11:2.

<sup>2</sup> James W. Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul: The Context and Coherence of Pauline Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 4.

and exhortation, but to what extent is this true about their minds? Should Christians think any differently than anyone else?

A common response to this question is to say that they do not think differently, but they have different information at their disposal. Indeed, it is possible and many commentators have read passages like Romans 6:11 to mean just that. Orient your life around the new knowledge that you have of Christ's death and resurrection. But is that all Paul is saying?

### **Thesis**

My thesis is that in Paul's letters there is an epistemic difference between those who are in Christ and those who are not, characterized by the uniquely Christian practice of the intellectual virtue of *φρόνησις*, or practical wisdom. Over the course of his letters, Paul defines the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom as a part of the broader transformation of sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Practical wisdom is a quality of the mind of Christ, and since only Christians have the mind of Christ, only Christians can practice the virtue of practical wisdom. In a way similar to the Greco-Roman philosophers, Paul views practical wisdom as the exercise of discernment. Like many modern epistemologists, Paul holds up virtuous exemplars as a way to grow in virtue. Christians are called to imitate other Christians who exemplify practical wisdom.

Seen distinctly in the argument of Romans, and most prominently in Paul's stunning declaration that "we have the mind of Christ," in 1 Corinthians 2:16, the intellectual virtues that believers practice come from two sources, union with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. With the radical transformation that Paul describes in places like 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Romans 12:1-3, it would be conspicuous for there not to be significant changes in the mind. The epistemic difference is one of type, not of degree. Though there are aspects of the mind that stay the same or increase in effect after conversions, the practice of *φρόνησις* is exclusive to those who are in Christ. Nowhere in

Paul's letters are unbelievers credited with the virtue of practical wisdom, nor does Paul acknowledge that anyone who is not in Christ can discern God's will and do the right thing.

Paul makes it clear that unbelievers can know some of God's invisible attributes (Rom 1:20), general moral principles (Rom 2:12-15; 1 Cor 5:1), and it's safe to assume that Paul believes they have the same abilities of sensory input, knowledge of historical propositions, scientific facts, and other common areas of knowledge. They cannot know the will of God (Rom 1:18-32), the significance of the cross (1 Cor 1:18), the Christological meaning of Scripture (2 Cor 3:15-16), or the voice of God in the gifts of tongues and prophecy (1 Cor 14:20-25). What emerges in the letters is that those who are not in Christ do not practice the same virtues as those who are in Christ. Practical wisdom is a new virtue, practiced by those who are in Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Practicing these virtues is part of Christian sanctification, the process of being conformed to the image of Christ. Believers must conform to his thinking, as well as his actions. More than that, believers do not just think Christ's thoughts after him by assenting to the same propositions that he would. It is not just the content of Christ's mind that believers access – believers do not know the sum of Christ's thoughts – but the virtues that he perfectly employs. Simply put, “they can access knowledge of God's will for their daily lives.”<sup>3</sup>

### **History of Research**

*Defining Intellectual Virtue.* Intellectual virtue is a branch of epistemology, the study of what we know and how we know it. Epistemology is commonly divided into groups according to the different methods of acquiring and verifying knowledge. One

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<sup>3</sup> David M. Hay, “Paul's Understanding of Faith as Participation,” in *Paul and His Theology*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Boston: Brill, 2006), 54.

typical definition among analytic philosophers is “justified true belief,” each of these words having been subjected to vigorous scrutiny.<sup>4</sup> Under this heading, there are several divisions over the nature of truth and process of attaining it.<sup>5</sup> Each of these epistemic theories is in some way concerned with justified true belief and warrant for believing propositions. Many theories rely on a version of foundationalism, the belief that knowledge is derived from either provable or axiomatic principles coupled with a system of logic that allows the generation of true beliefs. Reliabilism examines the epistemic or logical faculties used to acquire knowledge. Coherentism measures knowledge by consistency. Correspondence theory regards knowledge as that which corresponds to reality, however that might be defined.<sup>6</sup>

Virtue theory comes to knowledge from a slightly different angle.<sup>7</sup> Instead of

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<sup>4</sup> For extensive treatments of this definition in the analytic literature, see Plantinga’s work, Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Laurence BonJour and Ernest Sosa, *Epistemic Justification: Internalism vs. Externalism, Foundations vs. Virtues* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003). For summaries of the various analytic positions in epistemology, see especially, Ernest Sosa, *Epistemology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010); John L. Pollock and Joseph Cruz, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999). For a theory of justification that focuses on the content of beliefs more than Plantinga’s proper function model, see Richard Swinburne, *Epistemic Justification* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2001). In addition, Jonathan Kvanvig bridges the gap between warrant and virtue, Jonathan L. Kvanvig, ed., *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> For overviews of these major positions, see Audi, *Epistemology*; Laurence BonJour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009). Sosa, *Epistemology*; Swinburne, *Epistemic Justification*; Pollock and Cruz, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*.

<sup>6</sup> Marian David’s work is a foundational example of correspondence theory. Marian David, *Correspondence and Disquotation: An Essay on the Nature of Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Marian David, “Don’t Forget About the Correspondence Theory of Truth,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 82, no. 1 (2004): 42–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/713659802>; For a different version of realist correspondence theory, see Richard Fumerton, *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002). For a modal correspondence theory, see Trenton Merricks, *Truth and Ontology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). An important critique of correspondence theory is found in Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Virtue Epistemologies do overlap with these categories. For example, Plantinga’s reformed epistemology is not a VE but shares many similarities with other reliabilist theories like Ernest Sosa’s. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*; Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, vol. 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ernest Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, vol. 2* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Kvanvig, Meek, Zagzebski and others advocate for versions of virtue epistemology that fall under the heading of correspondence theory. Kvanvig argues that VE in its most basic form seeks to connect the mind and the

beginning with the content of what is known, virtue epistemology begins with the knower. Mirroring the difference between virtue ethics and deontological and pragmatic theories of ethics, virtue epistemology evaluates truth by the intellectual qualities a person practices. For example, Linda Zagzebski has argued that virtue epistemology is to epistemology as virtue ethics is to ethics.<sup>8</sup> For other virtue theorists, this analogy is not quite so precise.<sup>9</sup>

If Zagzebski is correct about the relationship between virtue epistemology and other traditional systems, virtue epistemology examines the qualities that a virtuous person employs in knowledge acquisition. Instead of evaluating the justification of propositions, virtue theory examines the practices and excellencies of morally praiseworthy actors as they pursue knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Cultivating virtuous qualities ensures knowledge. Zagzebski defines knowledge as “a state of belief arising out of acts of intellectual virtue.”<sup>11</sup> This conception of virtue epistemology is not new. In fact, during the first century CE it was the most common form of epistemology.

*Ancient Intellectual Virtue.* The Greeks first developed a system of virtue, and within that system, intellectual virtue. Aristotle was the first to develop virtue ethics as a discipline.<sup>12</sup> In *Nicomachean Ethics*, he sought to systematically answer the question,

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world. Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Rationality and Reflection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 9. Esther L. Meek, *Contact with Reality* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017); Esther L. Meek, *Loving to Know: Introducing Covenant Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011); Linda Trinkhaus Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Linda Trinkhaus Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> This is a controversial claim. For a response to Zagzebski, see Christoph Kelp’s introduction in Christoph Kelp and John Greco, eds., *Virtue-Theoretic Epistemology: New Methods and Approaches* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1–15.

<sup>10</sup> Wood’s definition of virtue epistemology falls in this category; “The question is whether we do not do better to try to understand the relevant character traits, such as perceptual acuity, intellectual insight, and logical rigor by appeal to non-virtue-theoretic accounts of justification and knowledge, rather than proceed in the other direction, trying to understand justification and knowledge in terms of intellectual character.” W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 270–71.

<sup>12</sup> Brad Inwood, *Ethics After Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 2.

what is the good? He concluded, εὐδαιμονία.<sup>13</sup> Everything has a natural end, and this is the end for humanity. Aristotle divided his moral philosophy into theoretical and practical aspects of the good. In book II, he sets the course for the *Nicomachean Ethics*,

As then our present study, unlike the other branches of philosophy, has a practical aim (for we are not investigating the nature of virtue for the sake of knowing what it is, but in order that we may become good, without which our investigation would be of no use), we have consequently to carry our enquiry into the region of conduct, and to ask how we are to act rightly.<sup>14</sup>

Virtue is not just concerned with attaining knowledge of what is good, but with actually doing it. Virtue epistemology, then, is not just a theoretical discipline but a way of living. The bridge between knowing the good and doing it is φρόνησις.

The Stoics continued Aristotle's search for the good life through practical wisdom.<sup>15</sup> Even more than Aristotle, the Stoics viewed philosophy as a practical matter, learning how to live in everyday life.<sup>16</sup> In Stoic philosophy, reason and practical wisdom became dominant, not just in the domain of intellectual virtue, but in the broader scope of moral virtue. The characteristic act of the Stoic sage is to rightly choose between

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The question might be asked, why start with Aristotle rather than Plato? Certainly, Plato's influence was widespread in the first century, however, Aristotle, not Plato, focused explicitly on the virtues and on φρόνησις. Additionally, see Broadie for a comparison between the two ethical systems, "Aristotle's supreme good is the well-functioning of the human being qua human... Plato, by contrast, writes in *The Republic* as if that harmonious internal state which he calls 'justice' were something good and beautiful by itself apart from the external actions through which it is expressed." This focus in Aristotle provides significant overlap with which to discuss Paul's vision of the good for those who are in Christ. Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 57.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Harris Rackham, LCL 73 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 1103b.

<sup>15</sup> It is not known how much influence Aristotle's works had on the early Stoics. Various Stoic teachers continued lines of inquiry similar to those of Aristotle and they are downstream in the philosophical tradition. Sandbach argues that they were not aware of Aristotle's work. *Aristotle and the Stoics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Philological Society, 1985). Inwood argues that they did, citing the similarities between Aristotle and Chrysippus, review of *Aristotle and the Stoics*, by F. H. Sandbach, *The Philosophical Review* 95, no. 3 (1986): 470–73. Striker believes the early Stoics sounded similar to Aristotle because they both traced their intellectual lineage back to Socrates, review of *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, by Brad Inwood, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (1989): 91–100. By the 1st Century, the Stoic authors had access to Aristotle's works. This question, while important, only applies to the Stoics in the century following Aristotle.

<sup>16</sup> To this point, "There were technical terms and various developed ideas, but 'philosophy' in general was a much more street-level activity than it would be for us." N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 204.



competing propositions, knowing what is virtuous, what is vicious, and what is indifferent.<sup>17</sup> Broadly speaking, while the two groups disagree in the technical details, they agree on the simple premise that “the practically wise man will always know the right thing to do.”<sup>18</sup> As Paul’s letters show, this is a bond of similarity between his understanding of φρόνησις and the philosophers’.

*Modern Intellectual Virtue.* From Paul’s time until now, virtue theory has become embedded in Christian theology, largely stemming from the early attempts to see similarities between Christian theology and Greek philosophy in the church fathers, and especially in the work of Augustine and Aquinas.<sup>19</sup> Presently, much of the scholarship within the virtue tradition is done by Catholic theologians and students of Aquinas.

One of the most important contemporary theories of intellectual virtue is found in Linda Zagzebski’s book, *Virtues of the Mind*.<sup>20</sup> Unlike some virtue accounts, Sosa most notably, Zagzebski sees her theory as a continuation of the Aristotelian tradition, making it very useful as a scaffolding for examining the contours of Paul’s epistemology.<sup>21</sup> Intellectual virtue is not juxtaposed to virtue ethics as much as it is a subset. Zagzebski defines a virtue as, “a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a

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<sup>17</sup> For an overview of Stoic epistemology, Stoic sages, and right actions (κατορθώματα), see R. J. Hankinson, “Stoic Epistemology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59–84. Frede also offers a thorough introduction, focusing on the similarities and differences between the Stoics and Aristotle. Michael Frede, “Stoic Epistemology,” in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, ed. Keimpe Algra et al. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 295–322.

<sup>18</sup> Frede, “Stoic Epistemology,” 321.

<sup>19</sup> For an excellent example and bibliography of works on this topic, see Giles Emery and Matthew Levering, eds., *Aristotle in Aquinas’s Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 137–97.

<sup>21</sup> According to most accounts, intellectual virtues are different than intellectual faculties, talents, temperaments, or skills. For an exception to this norm, see Sosa, *Epistemology*; For the argument on this topic, see the essays by Crisp and Hurka in Heather Battaly, ed., *Virtue and Vice, Moral and Epistemic* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). One of the reasons is that intellectual virtues can be developed and practiced over time. They resemble skills most closely, but Baehr observes that intellectual virtues often have “certain admirable and distinctively intellectual motives.” Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 30–32. In other words, intellectual virtues have a moral component that skills usually do not. Aristotle makes this distinction in Book II of *Nicomachean Ethics* between τέχνη and ἀρετή.

person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a desired end and reliable success on bringing about that end.”<sup>22</sup> As virtue ethics explains a way of being in the world, intellectual virtue explains and characterizes a way of knowing in the world.<sup>23</sup> We can combine the definitions; an intellectual virtue is an acquired personal excellence involving the desire for knowledge and success in acquiring it.<sup>24</sup>

Virtue ethics offers a theory of formation as well, for as the person does what a virtuous person would do, they become more virtuous. The cycle of formation is dependent on and produces virtue, whether because of moral education, one of the formative mechanisms the Greeks recognized, or by the admiration and emulation of moral exemplars, Zagzebski’s preferred theory of moral development.<sup>25</sup>

*Studies of Intellectual Virtue in Paul*. Even religious epistemologists like Linda Zagzebski and Esther Meek, for example, draw no fundamental epistemic distinctions between those who are in Christ and those who are not.<sup>26</sup> One of the difficulties in

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<sup>22</sup> Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 137; In Jason Baehr’s primer on virtue epistemology, he points out that like many virtue ethicists, Zagzebski believes that her system of virtue should play a central role in traditional epistemology. Evidence of this can be found in Zagzebski’s treatment of Gettier problems, for example. He calls this Strong Conservative VE. Others, like Baehr believe that VE should play a small augmenting role within traditional epistemology. This is Weak Conservative VE. Another category of virtue epistemologists believe that VE has no role within traditional epistemology and should replace it. He calls this Autonomous VE. It also has strong and weak varieties. For Strong Autonomous VE, see Jonathan Kvanvig’s work; Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 12; Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Intellectual Virtues and the Life of the Mind: On the Place of the Virtues in Epistemology* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 1992); For a version of Weak Autonomous VE, see Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Wood, *Epistemology*.

<sup>23</sup> Montmarquet has made the strongest case that virtue epistemology is not necessarily truth seeking. *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Christoph Kelp makes the helpful point that εὐδαιμονία can be considered another telos, undermining the virtue project and converting VE back into a form of teleological ethics. One of the differences between normative ethics and virtue ethics is that the virtues are valuable in and of themselves, not just because they lead to truth or to εὐδαιμονία. For Kelp, this undermines VE as a complete epistemology, so he proposes, “Virtue-Theoretic Epistemology” as a more modest claim to knowledge. As I will show in an analysis of Paul’s epistles, the imitation of Christ preserves the value of the virtues like discernment and practical wisdom. They are the excellencies that Christ practices, not means to justify an end. This reading is closer to Zagzebski’s VE than to Kelp’s. Kelp and Greco, *Virtue-Theoretic Epistemology*, 1–15; Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority*.

<sup>25</sup> Linda Trinkhaus Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> The most curious case of this trend is Esther Meek’s covenant epistemology. One might expect Meek to have limited the scope of her theory, but she applies it universally. It’s puzzling how this

constructing an epistemic system that incorporates the difference between these two groups is that many philosophers are reticent to engage with specific Scriptural texts.

A few Pauline scholars have considered epistemology from Paul's letters. Among this group, virtue theory has not played a prominent role. J. Louis Martyn's article "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages," proposes an apocalyptic epistemology based on 2 Corinthians 5:16-17, describing "faith that is active in love in the community."<sup>27</sup> Martyn's comments on epistemology in Paul's letters are brief and relegated to an apocalyptic reading of Paul's theology.<sup>28</sup> The outcome is that the epistemic difference lies in new information that believers are acting on, rather than anything inherently epistemic. Ian Scott's work is overtly skeptical to any Greek influence on Paul's thinking and surveys Paul's conception of rationality.<sup>29</sup> He goes as far as saying that Paul was not concerned with epistemology and remained "untouched by epistemological currents" of his day.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to Scott, but using a framework similar to Scott's narrative "emplotment," N. T. Wright is sensitive to Paul's worldview contexts,

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conception of love rooted in relationship would work the same way for believers and non-believers. In an article entitled, "A Polanyian Interpretation of Calvin's Sensus Divinitatis," Meek addresses this issue. She argues that the sensus divinitatis allows for believers and non-believers to be grouped together epistemically. The sensus is a God given awareness of divinity, that can be found in all human beings apart from teaching. Combining the work of Polanyi with Calvin, she creates the following synthesis, "I would like to suggest that the universal awareness of God can be construed as a subsidiary awareness of the intimation of a hidden coherence, of a set of particulars, curious and explainable in light of a presently empty focus... Thus human awareness of God amounts to a person's perhaps still-hidden disturbance resulting from things about the universe and about himself that can only be explained in terms of God." She concludes that the Holy Spirit is involved in every act of knowing. Esther L. Meek, "A Polanyian Interpretation of Calvin's Sensus Divinitatis," *Presbyterion* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 18; Plantinga, alternatively, limits his theory to a defense for Christians. He does not generalize his reformed epistemology outside of Christians, but poses it as a defeater against attacks on traditional theism. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*.

<sup>27</sup> J. Louis Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages," in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 109.

<sup>28</sup> Wright offers a thorough criticism of this reading in N. T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (London: Fortress Press, 2015), 167–219.

<sup>29</sup> Ian W. Scott, *Implicit Epistemology in the Letters of Paul: Story, Experience and the Spirit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); Ian W. Scott, *Paul's Way of Knowing: Story, Experience, and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Ian W. Scott, "'Your Reasoning Worship': ΛΟΓΙΚΟΣ in Romans 12:1 and Paul's Ethics of Rational Deliberation," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 69, no. 2 (2018): 500–532.

<sup>30</sup> Scott, *Implicit Epistemology in the Letters of Paul: Story, Experience and the Spirit*, 4.

giving attention to Paul’s Jewish, Greek, and Roman contexts, but also allows room for engagement with the philosophical schools and incorporates a version of virtue theory into his understanding of Paul’s epistemology.<sup>31</sup> Craig Keener works through Paul’s epistles to show that the Spirit works through the mind, not apart from or outside of it.<sup>32</sup> This work is particularly important for the way Paul describes the gifts of tongues and prophecy in 1 Cor. 12-14. In each of these cases, intellectual virtue plays only a tangential role in assessing Paul’s epistemic claims.

Grant Macaskill has recently published an examination of the intellectual virtue of humility in Scripture.<sup>33</sup> He examines the nature of humility through the Old and New Testaments as well as how the Bible approaches the acquisition and practice of humility. He goes one step further and makes the intriguing point that reading and studying the Bible actually develops humility in readers. This study is a promising development for the study of intellectual virtues in the New Testament but does not focus on Paul or the virtue of φρόνησις.

Andre Munzinger’s monograph, *Discerning the Spirits*, is the most significant study of a single intellectual virtue in the Pauline corpus. He examines discernment in 1 Corinthians, concluding that Christians can discern in the way that Paul describes only

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<sup>31</sup> From a theological standpoint, Wright’s work is closest to this project, the only shortcoming being the brevity with which Wright is allowed to deal with epistemology in the much broader project he has undertaken. On a broad level, this project will expand on Wright’s reading of Paul’s epistemology. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1354–1408.

<sup>32</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul’s Approach to Transformed Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016); Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); Craig S. Keener, “‘Fleshly’ Versus Spirit Perspectives in Romans 8:5-8,” in *Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, *Pauline Studies* 5 (Boston: Brill, 2008), 211–30.

<sup>33</sup> Macaskill’s account focuses on the relationship of virtue to the self and to the Christologically determined telos which virtue moves toward. In the New Testament, he focuses on Christ’s humility, especially in Philippians 2:5-11 and the implications for Christology. He argues that Christians should imitate Christ’s humility by participating in the practices and sacraments of the church. Grant Macaskill, *The New Testament and Intellectual Humility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

when they have been transformed by the Spirit. Munzinger's thesis is limited to discernment, but very similar to this project:

Consequently, in both 1 Cor. 2.16 and Rom. 12:2 Paul's argument is the same: It is possible to discern God's will. And, significantly, this knowledge is not found in scripture or in apostolic authority or even transcendent wisdom. It can be found in the renewed νοῦς (or in its equivalent, 'the mind of Christ' (1 Cor. 2.16)). Discernment becomes anthropologically centered. True wisdom is now accessible for all (in Christ). However, and this is the key, the affirmation in both passages is linked to the transformation of those involved.<sup>34</sup>

One limiting factor for Munzinger's project is that discernment may not have been considered a separate intellectual virtue in Paul's day. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle treats discernment as a part of the process of φρόνησις. Munzinger's insightful treatment of discernment can be strengthened in conjunction with this study as a part of the broader virtue of φρόνησις.

Intellectual virtue has not played a significant role in commentaries on Paul's letters. Both because of the relatively recent resurgence of epistemic virtue in philosophy and because of resistance to read too much influence of first century Stoicism into Paul's letters, even those who have a strong appreciation for ancient virtue theory have neglected to use it as a tool for interpreting Paul.<sup>35</sup> Work in participation theology has

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<sup>34</sup> André Munzinger, *Discerning the Spirits: Theological and Ethical Hermeneutics in Paul* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 40–41.

<sup>35</sup> Commentators have argued about the role of Stoic influence in Paul's letters. Dunn makes frequent use of Stowers' and Engberg-Pedersen's works on Paul and the Stoics and pays close attention to the relationship Romans in particular might have to the Stoic influences within Hellenistic Judaism. Other commentators have minimized or overlooked the similarities between Paul and the Stoics, and consequently, their commentaries miss the important role that virtue, particularly intellectual virtue, plays in understanding Paul's argument in Romans 1-12 and the implications for Pauline theology. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary 38A (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1988); James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1988); Stanley K. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Society of Biblical Literature, Dissertation Series 57 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981); Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); Stanley K. Stowers, "Does Pauline Christianity Resemble a Hellenistic Philosophy?," in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 81–102; Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Setting the Scene: Stoicism and Platonism in the Transitional Period in Ancient Philosophy," in *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 1–14; Niko Huttunen, "Stoic Law in Paul?," in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, ed. Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Ismo Dunderberg (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 39–58.

explored these themes more fully, but there have been few attempts to bring this theology to bear in fresh readings of Paul's arguments about the mind in Paul's letters.<sup>36</sup>

### Significance

The work of modern virtue epistemology combined with Paul's first century philosophical context provides an exceptionally helpful interpretive tool with which to understand the epistemic transformation that takes place in believers. Paul asserts that believers' minds are renewed by the Spirit in Romans. He explains what it means to have the mind of Christ in 1 Corinthians and demonstrates this virtue in that letter. He shows the power of moral exemplars in Philippians. While commentators and theologians have understood Paul's argument in Romans to mean that a change is brought about in the minds of those who are in Christ, few have employed virtue theory to construct a description, and consequently, the practical applications of the new mind, most notably the ability to understand the will of God and to discern the voice of the Spirit in the prophetic gifts have received little attention.

### Methodology

In order to understand Paul's epistemic categories, I will be using virtue theory as a framework to interpret portions of Paul's arguments that deal with the minds and intellectual virtues of those who are in Christ. Then I will construct the outline of a

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<sup>36</sup> The emerging field of participation in Paul has already made an impact in Pauline theology, as a continuation of E. P. Sanders' work and influence. Participation as justification is still a contested and underdeveloped issue in Pauline theology, but participation as sanctification seems to have garnered some consensus. Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Constantine R. Campbell, eds., *"In Christ" in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018) is an example of the breadth of scholarship stemming from participation. Specific foundational works like Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) in Pauline exegesis and; Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009) in theology have opened new opportunities to explore the ways in which participation should shape and reshape Pauline studies. As two additional works that inform participation as sanctification, I will look at Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) to more clearly define the Spirit's work in the life of believers. Finally, Ben C. Blackwell, *Christosis: Engaging Paul's Soteriology with His Patristic Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016) draws some much-needed contours on the doctrine of theosis, or "christosis," within the bounds of orthodox understandings of the creature/Creator distinction.

Pauline epistemology based on the intellectual virtue of  $\phi\rho\acute{o}\nu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ , showing the epistemic difference between unbelievers and believers.

On a general level, I will adapt an approach used in analytic theology, which combines the tools of analytic theology with the content of systematic theology, by bringing the tools of virtue philosophy to the content of biblical theology and exegesis. Analytic philosophers interested in the problems of philosophical and systematic theology like Alvin Plantinga, William Alston, and Richard Swinburne have given way to an even more finely tuned discipline of analytic theology, characterized by the work of Thomas McCall, Michael Rea, and Oliver Crisp, among many others.<sup>37</sup> Analytic theologians look at doctrines and texts in systematic theology using analytic philosophy to clarify existing doctrines and to construct new ones.

Additionally, virtue theorists like Esther Meek, Eleonore Stump, and Linda Zagzebski have investigated issues in philosophical theology like the character of God, religious epistemology, and the problem of evil.<sup>38</sup> James K. A. Smith's work in Pentecostal epistemology charts a course for the appropriate and productive use of philosophical concepts to interpret and explain the nature of the prophetic gifts.<sup>39</sup> Finally,

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<sup>37</sup> For an introduction to this discipline, see Thomas H. McCall, *An Invitation to Analytic Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015); For constructive work in analytic theology, see Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*; Plantinga, *Warrant*; Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*; William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Thomas McCall and Michael Rea, eds., *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Swinburne, *Epistemic Justification*; Crisp has become the premier example of analytic theology, taking the definitional and logical tools of analytic philosophy and applying them to concepts in systematic theology like the atonement and the incarnation. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, eds., *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Oliver D. Crisp, *Approaching the Atonement: The Reconciling Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020); Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Oliver D. Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Meek, *Loving to Know*; Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority*; Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*; Linda Trinkhaus Zagzebski, "Authority in Religious Communities," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, ed. William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 97–110.

<sup>39</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

biblical scholars have begun to do fascinating work on the subject of epistemology. Dru Johnson and Jonathan Pennington have both published on the subjects of biblical and virtue epistemology using the material and techniques of biblical studies.<sup>40</sup>

This dissertation will mirror these strategies with a different combination: bringing the tools of virtue epistemology to bear in Pauline exegesis and theology, showing the power of intellectual virtue, both ancient and modern conceptions, as an explanatory tool.<sup>41</sup> Drawing from recent work in participation theology, I will argue that Christians' participation in Christ is a key part of sanctification. One neglected aspect of this participation is the practice of Christ's intellectual virtues. In the same way that believers grow into the image of Christ by acting like him, they also conform to his image by thinking like him. Virtue theory provides a linguistic and conceptual framework to examine these themes in Paul.

### **On Method and Historical Comparison**

In light of the excellent and ongoing discussions of historical comparison, it is imprudent to begin an inquiry like this one without a few considerations on method.<sup>42</sup> Is historical comparison possible? In *Drudgery Divine*, Jonathan Z. Smith gives one of the most trenchant critiques of historical comparison. He argues that all comparisons are the creations of scholars. Comparisons do not exist in abstraction, but only in the minds of

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<sup>40</sup> Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018); Dru Johnson, *Biblical Knowing: A Scriptural Epistemology of Error* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013); Dru Johnson, *Epistemology and Biblical Theology: From the Pentateuch to Mark's Gospel* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>41</sup> Comparing Paul with his contemporaries is a difficult task. For significant work on this topic, see John M. G. Barclay and Benjamin G. White, eds., *The New Testament in Comparison: Validity, Method, and Purpose in Comparing Traditions* (London: T&T Clark, 2020); C. Kavin Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016); Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993); Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); John T. Fitzgerald, Thomas H. Olbricht, and L. Michael White, eds., *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> For a concise history of the search for parallels, see L. Michael White and John T. Fitzgerald, "Quod Est Comparandum: The Problem of Parallels," in *Early Christianity and Classic Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald, Thomas Olbricht, and L. Michael White (Boston: Brill, 2003), 13–27.



their creators and they serve the purposes they devise. Smith's work limits the prospects of historical comparison, since there will always be an unavoidable level of arbitrariness to any scholarly construction.

In *One True Life*, C. Kavin Rowe takes this caution even further.<sup>43</sup> Building on Alasdair MacIntyre's work in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, Rowe argues that rival ways of life are incommensurable.<sup>44</sup> It is impossible for a person of one way of life to understand another way of life in its entirety. To prove this point, he sketches the worldviews of three prominent Stoics: Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, and three Christians, Paul, John, and Justin Martyr. In the final section of the book Rowe opts for "juxtaposition" as opposed to comparison, setting two traditions next to each other.

These two books and many others have sparked a conversation about the extent to which New Testament scholars and theologians can use comparison to discuss ancient Christianity. The volume, *The New Testament in Comparison*, edited by John Barclay and B.G. White consists almost entirely of papers delivered at a 2017 conference in Durham surrounding Rowe's work, *One True Life*.<sup>45</sup> The responses fall into two broad categories, those for and against Rowe's work, each providing added nuance.<sup>46</sup> The

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<sup>43</sup> Rowe, *One True Life*.

<sup>44</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

<sup>45</sup> Barclay and White, *The New Testament in Comparison*.

<sup>46</sup> The most spirited response to Rowe's work comes from Margaret Mitchell, who gives twelve theses for comparison derived from Clement's *Protreptikos*. She considers Rowe's work not to be one of historical scholarship but a "protreptikos" itself, a call to "embrace the one true path of life." She opposes Rowe on nearly every point, specifically on the impossibility of historical comparison; "One True Life should not be taken as a contribution to method in comparison in the study of New Testament and ancient Christianity, but as a rhetorical tour de force meant to bring the enterprise to a close with the sweeping and tautologically formulated claim that Christianity and Stoicism are simply incomparable and incommensurable." Margaret M. Mitchell, "On Comparing and Calling the Question," in *The New Testament in Comparison: Validity, Method, and Purpose in Comparing Traditions*, ed. John M. G. Barclay and Benjamin G. White (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 111, 122; Engberg-Pedersen, who is one of Rowe's main targets in *One True Life*, offers a very different kind of critique. Tracing Rowe's same influences, Smith and MacIntyre, Engberg-Pedersen distinguishes two kinds of comparison; "parallel comparison" exemplified by Abraham Malherbe's work, which takes two works on tandem, and "heuristic comparison," a variation on the "lex Malherbe" exemplified in the work of Wayne Meeks, which utilizes comparison to understand one of the worldviews in question. Engberg-Pedersen advocates for a fully heuristic understanding of comparison, following Meeks and exemplified in his own work, particularly his new study of John's gospel, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *John and Philosophy: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "The Past Is a Foreign

collection also includes a response from Rowe against his critics.

For this present study, the issue of comparison is important but only tangential to the thesis. Utilizing the writing of Aristotle, the Stoics, and Paul's first century contemporaries, falls somewhere between Rowe's notions of friendship and juxtaposition and his critics tempering responses.<sup>47</sup> One notable voice missing from this volume is N. T. Wright's. His recent book, *History and Eschatology*, presents another important factor in historical comparison, the epistemology of love. In building what he calls a critical realist historical approach, Wright suggests a historical hermeneutic guided by love.<sup>48</sup> This means taking historical sources on their own terms at first pass. Indeed, it is impossible to advocate for any genuine kind of historic understanding without practicing this kind of intellectual humility. Having the charity to understand what is being said, albeit with the limitations that distance imposes, on its own terms should guide historical scholarship of every kind. Only then can scholars move on to argue, compare, contrast, or apply modern ideological lenses. Against many who have given up on ascertaining the meaning of ancient texts, Wright provides a rejuvenating goal for historical work.

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Country: On the Shape and Purposes of Comparison in New Testament Scholarship," in *The New Testament in Comparison: Validity, Method, and Purpose in Comparing Traditions*, ed. John M. G. Barclay and Benjamin G. White (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 41–62; For other critiques, see Matthew V. Novenson, "Beyond Compare, or: Some Recent Strategies for Not Comparing Early Christianity with Other Things," in *The New Testament in Comparison: Validity, Method, and Purpose in Comparing Traditions*, ed. John M. G. Barclay and Benjamin G. White (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 79–94; Dale B. Martin, "The Possibility of Comparison, the Necessity of Anachronism and the Dangers of Purity," in *The New Testament in Comparison: Validity, Method, and Purpose in Comparing Traditions*, ed. John M. G. Barclay and Benjamin G. White (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 63–78.

<sup>47</sup> One of the most important points in this debate is the necessity of selection in comparing ancient texts. In *The Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, Margaret Mitchell offers five principles for approaching ancient rhetoric and comparing it with 1 Corinthians; (1) treat comparing ancient sources as a historical discipline, (2) use examples of rhetoric, not just rhetorical handbooks, (3) do not assume the rhetorical function of a text without proving it, (4) show an appropriate connection between form and content, and (5) consider the text as a whole. In terms of this study of 1 Corinthians, principles 1, 3, and 4 are the most relevant, and Mitchell's own analysis is convincing as it pertains to deliberative rhetoric and the message of 1 Corinthians. *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 6.

<sup>48</sup> "Critical realism engages determinedly in a many-sided conversation, both with the data itself and with others (including scholars) who are also engaging with it. This conversation aims, not of course at an unattainable 'objectivity', but at truth none the less, the truth in which the words we use and the stories we tell increasingly approximate to the reality of another world, in the historian's case the world of the past." Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 51; For an extended discussion of Wright's version of critical realism, see N. T. Wright, *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 88–128.

Using different terminology, Wright is, in fact, calling for something very similar to what Rowe advocates for when he says New Testament scholars should seek to approach ancient sources, and ways of life, in “friendship,” but Wright carries far more optimism.

Put another way, the epistemological terminology and the systems of virtue discussed here serve to create a plausibility structure within which Paul’s own notions of epistemic virtue can be discussed. What did terms like φρόνησις and δοκιμάζω mean in the first century? Of course, it’s impossible to give a definitive answer, but in the course of determining what Paul meant it is helpful to explore his philosophical and semantic milieu. That is the way these other authors serve this project. It is unlikely that Paul was directly interacting with any of the Greek philosophers, and as a minimum case, it’s safe to assume that similarities fall into what Simon Gathercole has called “comparisons for resemblance” not “comparisons of relation.”<sup>49</sup> As will become clear, there is evidence of a more substantial comparison of relation, the degree to which is an ongoing question developed in the following chapters.

Troels Engberg-Pedersen’s terminology is a helpful description of the method employed here. In his response to Rowe, he distinguishes between two kinds of comparison; parallel, which consists of examining two ancient sources or ways of life side by side. He calls this the “*lex Malherbe*: each worldview must be investigated on its own premises, without any bias of interest in one of the other of the comparanda.” The other is heuristic, which obeys the “*lex Meeks*: the aim of the comparison lies in elucidating the one worldview that is being investigated.”<sup>50</sup> Rowe’s work in *One True Life*, parts 1-2 fit the parallel approach, and from this construction, Engberg-Pedersen

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<sup>49</sup> Simon Gathercole, “Resemblance and Relation: Comparing the Gospels of Mark, John, and Thomas,” in *The New Testament in Comparison: Validity, Method, and Purpose in Comparing Traditions*, ed. John M. G. Barclay and Benjamin G. White (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 172–92.

<sup>50</sup> Engberg-Pedersen, “The Past as a Foreign Country,” 56–57.

argues, Rowe moves from the incommensurability to unintelligibility. For his part, and to avoid this misstep, Engberg-Pedersen employs a fully heuristic comparison in his latest book on John's gospel and the Stoics; "I have employed some important Stoic ideas as a reading lens, trying to see in a fully heuristic comparison whether they throw new and convincing comprehensive light on John."<sup>51</sup> It is this same style of approach that will be utilized here with Paul.

### **Argument**

In Chapter 2, I will discuss some of Paul's contemporary virtue theorists and the virtues they describe. In the ancient world, Greeks and Jews both would have advanced conceptions of the virtuous life, and among the Greeks, the Stoics in particular had a robust vision of virtuous rationality. By setting Paul against the backdrop of Stoic conceptions of intellectual virtue, the similarities and contrasts come into focus. Though Paul may never have read any of the Stoic primary sources, he does argue along some of the same lines, and the terminological similarities in Romans indicate that whether consciously or not, Paul diagnoses the human condition in a way similar to the Stoics and offers an alternative solution.

The letter to the Romans presents the clearest and most detailed version of Paul's characterization of the mind of the Spirit in the Pauline epistles, and will serve as the main text for this inquiry. Chapter 3 will cover the first seven chapters of Romans and look at the mind under the control of the flesh. Chapter 4 will contrast the mind of the flesh with the mind of the Spirit in Romans 8-12. Paul describes a contrast between the mind of the flesh and the mind of the Spirit. In Romans 1, Paul describes the universal sinful condition of those who are outside of Christ, and the resulting consequences that God gives them over to; impure desires, dishonorable passions, and debased minds. It is my contention that because of their sinful suppression of the truth, those who are not in

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<sup>51</sup> Engberg-Pedersen, 61.

Christ have not simply suppressed the knowledge of God, but are not able to practice the intellectual virtues of Christ. This assertion reflects both a knowledge of and a reaction to Stoic philosophy and first century Jewish polemics against the Gentiles. Paul is arguing that the path to the virtuous life cannot be found in the pursuit of rational virtue or in the study of Torah but only by being united with Christ by the Spirit.

Romans 2 follows a similar argument with different conditions.<sup>52</sup> Those who know the law expect that the law will provide the ability to know the will of God. While the law is able to impart some content of the will of God, it only acts externally on the mind. While the law is of value, it does not produce an effect of the mind to differentiate Jews who know the law from pagans who do not, in terms of their intellectual and spiritual capabilities. In other words, it brings people no closer to being able to practice the intellectual virtues of Christ.

Then in 2:12-16, he turns to a discussion of the law. There are important implications, especially in verses 14-15 about the role of the conscience in non-believers who though they do not have the law, do what the law requires and “becoming a law to themselves... show that the work of the law is written on their hearts.”

In Romans 2:17-20, Paul addresses an interlocutor who calls himself a Jew and claims to know the law. Based on the exegetical and rhetorical features of this pericope, combined with the logical and theological flow of Paul’s argument, I will show that Paul does not believe that either of these claims are true.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Keener offers a helpful insight framing this first section and situating it with respect to Paul’s moral assessment throughout the letter; “Thus while Paul is focusing on God’s ethnic impartiality rather than on believers here, when he later addresses such issues, he seems to assume that it is believers in Jesus who are able to fulfill the role of the righteous. Christ comes not merely to forgive unrighteousness but to empower for righteous living.” Craig S. Keener, *Romans*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 45; Longenecker is definitive on this point as well; “Clearly universal guilt and divine impartiality are Paul’s central concerns in ch. 2.” Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 269.

<sup>53</sup> Stanley Stowers’ dissertation is an especially important source here. The first half of Stowers dissertation assesses and critiques Bultmann’s work. The second half makes a constructive case for Paul’s use of the diatribe in Romans, looking specifically at 2:1-5; 2:17-24; 9:19-21; 11:17-24; 14:4, 10. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul’s Letter to the Romans*; Dunn’s commentary is also especially sensitive to Paul’s use of the diatribe. Dunn, *Romans*, 1988; Dunn, *Romans*, 1988.

In the next section of Paul's argument, chapters 8-12, he describes the mind of the Spirit. Using the common Greek concept of φρόνησις, Paul contrasts the mind of the flesh with the mind of the Spirit (8:5-9) and ultimately claims that a mark of those who are in Christ is a "ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς" in order to "δοκιμάζειν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ" and to "φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν" (12:1-3). As Paul makes clear in chapter 8, the mind of the Spirit imitates Christ, and it can only come about by the work of the Spirit as a part of being conformed to the image of Christ. The implications are helpfully summarized in Romans 12:1-3 as Paul describes the new ability of believers to discern the will of God and to think with sober judgment.

This same conclusion is demonstrated personally and practically in Paul's discussion of wisdom in 1 Corinthians 2. In chapter 5, I will look at the epistemic Paul both embodies and describes in 1 Corinthians, particularly the difference between earthly and godly wisdom in chapters 1-2, the issue of lawsuits among believers in 6:1-11, and the gifts of prophecy and tongues in chapters 12-14. 1 Corinthians is a look at Paul in action, applying the wisdom of Christ to everyday life in the churches.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the project Paul undertakes in writing 1 Corinthians is a demonstration of Christian intellectual virtue. It's precisely this activity of "doing theology" that displays the unique practice of intellectual virtue that Paul possesses and encourages the Corinthians to practice with him.

This means 1 Corinthians should be read with two perspectives; first, as a letter exhorting the Corinthians to think and act wisely, because they have the mind of Christ (2:16; 6:1-8; 12-14), and second, as an example to follow of acting wisely from someone

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<sup>54</sup> 1 Corinthians is a more practical letter than Romans in the sense that it deals with immediately pressing issues for the recipients. As several commentators point out, 1 Corinthians was probably written before Romans and thus Romans can be used as a theoretical expansion on similar topics from 1 Cor. in a similar time period during Paul's ministry. So Conzelmann, "The statements in 1 Corinthians are thoroughly practical, those in Romans more thematic. The latter gives the impression in these sections of being a theoretical further development of the former." He also includes a list of comparable passages between the two letters that highlight this relationship. *First Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 5.

who is thinking with the mind of Christ (2:1-5; 11:1). The crises in Corinth actually point to the new epistemic reality Paul described theologically in Romans. Paul's opening response to the situation in Corinth is the central theme and exhortation of the letter: agree in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:10).<sup>55</sup> How could disunity be such an acute problem and how could Paul so monolithically denounce it if not for a certain conviction that God expected and had provided a better way for his people?

The Corinthians, then, have both the content of what Paul writes to them and the example of the kind of thinking he practiced in doing so. Practicing these virtues, by the power of the Spirit, will result in more than godly wisdom applied to the questions they have posed; it will knit them together in the unity of their minds and their reasoning.

Paul contrasts worldly and godly wisdom, culminating in the magnificent statement, "but we have the mind of Christ" (2:16). It is my contention that this means believers have the ability to practice the intellectual virtues of Christ – not just to access the content of the mind of God, but to practice the kind of intellectual virtue that Christ practiced, specifically by discerning the will and voice of God. It's not only clear that Paul has this in mind pertaining to the discernment of true and false teaching in the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians, but that he also demonstrates the virtue of φρόνησις as he addresses the Corinthians' questions in the body of the letter and in the way he expects Christians to discern court cases in 6:1-8 and the voice of the Holy Spirit in the gifts of prophecy and tongues in chapters 12-14.

In chapter 7, I will look at the letter to the Philippians and discuss Paul's model of virtue formation, moral exemplarism. In this letter and others, Paul holds Jesus Christ

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<sup>55</sup> Margaret Mitchell's work is decisive on this point. 1:10 is the binding theme of the letter, the propositio, and summarizes the content, the deliberative genre, and the rhetorical style Paul employs. *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 1; Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 69; Thiselton agrees that 1:10 is the proposition of the letter but disagrees with Mitchell that it is deliberative. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 49; Schnelle and Conzelmann both resist claiming a single purpose or theme for the letter. Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 195; Conzelmann considers 1:10-17 to be an overview of the disparate issues Paul will deal with in the letter. Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 30–31.

us as the ultimate and enabling exemplar for Christians to follow and imitate (2:1-11; 1:27; 3:10-11, 14-16). Building on Linda Zagzebski's theory of moral exemplarism, I will argue that the Spirit causes believers to admire Christ and because of that to seek to imitate him. This is another example of the way that Christians demonstrate an epistemic distinction from the rest of the world. While Christ might be admired by non-Christians, Paul is very clear that the world does not see Christ or admire him the way that Christians do (Phil 3:8-11; 1 Cor 1:18-2:16). In addition, Paul holds up other Christ-like mentors, particularly Timothy (2:19-24) and Epaphroditus (2:25-30). Most frequently, Paul tells Christians to follow his example, as he follows Christ (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 1:11-14, 25-26; 3:4-21; 4:9). Philippians, along with the other epistles, presents a model for the practice of intellectual virtue through Christian moral exemplars.

In the conclusion, I will summarize my thesis and research and point to future avenues for research.



## CHAPTER 2

### PAUL AND VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

#### Introduction

One of the notoriously difficult things about placing Paul in his intellectual context is identifying his intellectual influences. Did he have any formal rabbinic training?<sup>1</sup> Did he have any philosophical training?<sup>2</sup> Because of the tenuous nature of both of these claims, it's difficult, and possibly futile, to build a case for Paul's own individual formation. But as Paul was a product of his environment, broadly construed, an overview of the epistemological options available to a Hellenistic Jew in the first century can serve

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<sup>1</sup> For a current overview of the question of Paul's education, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *Constructing Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 50–53, 137–139. With regard to these questions, Johnson gives a responsible conclusion based on what can be known, “The probability is that Paul went to Jerusalem as a young man, joined the Pharisees, studied Torah there, and because of his zeal became a persecutor of the nascent church there,” 52. There seems to be no reason to doubt Paul's own claim that he was a Pharisee (Phil 3:5) or that his writing demonstrates Pharisaical theology and hermeneutical techniques. For the tenets N. T. Wright considers to be pillars of the theology of a Pharisee, see N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 179–196. As a summary, “To move through the different concentric circles: the Pharisaic worldview was about the whole business of being human; of being a Jewish human; of living in a Jewish community; of living in a threatened Jewish community; of living with wisdom, integrity and hope in a threatened Jewish community; of living with zeal for Torah, the covenant and above all Israel's faithful God within a threatened Jewish community,” 196.

<sup>2</sup> Of the two, this is the more consequential question for this study, and the more difficult to answer with any amount of specificity. Again, Johnson provides a summary of several positions; Johnson, *Constructing Paul*, 171–74, 180–185. He concludes; “Paul's letters provide no evidence that he was any more educated formally in philosophy than he was in rhetoric,” but that, “For the doctrines of Stoicism, as for those of the other Greek philosophical schools, the best that can be said is that Paul picked up and chose what was useful, or, perhaps better, made use of what he had picked up here and there,” 182, 184. Schellenberg is also in this camp. If Paul did have any rhetorical education, he breaks many of the rules in his letters. Ryan S. Schellenberg, *Rethinking Paul's Rhetorical Education: Comparative Rhetoric and 2 Corinthians 10-13* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 260. See also, James W. Thompson, *Apostle of Persuasion: Theology and Rhetoric in the Pauline Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 20–28; Others have been more optimistic about the prospects of Paul's philosophical education. See, Abraham J. Malherbe, “The Beasts at Ephesus,” in *Light from the Gentiles: Hellenistic Philosophy and Early Christianity*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald et al. (Boston: Brill, 2014), 41–52; Edgar Krentz, “Logos or Sophia: The Pauline Use of the Ancient Dispute Between Rhetoric and Philosophy,” in *Early Christianity and Classic Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald, Thomas Olbricht, and L. Michael White (Boston: Brill, 2003), 275–90; Schnelle believes that Paul was well educated in both respects; “He had received both a Greek and a Jewish education, and the linguistic and intellectual power of his letters (cf. 2 Cor. 10:10; 2 Pet. 3:15–16), alongside his Roman citizenship and his global activity, indicate that Paul belonged to the urban middle class.” Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 63.

as a heuristic within which Paul's letters can be considered and Paul's own epistemic statements can be understood.

A more promising strategy might be to leave the question of Paul's intellectual formation open and instead look at Paul against the various backgrounds of his day. This approach also risks some potential pitfalls. How precisely can the background be reconstructed? Although the background for a study of epistemology in Paul admittedly skews Greco-Roman, it's worth considering how Jews in Paul's day may have approached questions of epistemology in order to set a few helpful plausibility markers in place to aid in interpreting Paul.

### **Epistemology in the Hebrew Scriptures**

There have been some intriguing studies on epistemology in the Hebrew Scriptures recently, an excellent example being Dru Johnson's two books on epistemology and error from the Pentateuch through the gospel of Mark.<sup>3</sup> The fundamental point Johnson makes in terms of epistemology is that the Hebrew Scriptures present a model of listening to authoritative voices. He argues that the Scriptures do have coherent epistemological structures, and that the example found in the biblical narratives present a process of hearing, seeing, and knowing.<sup>4</sup> The structures he proposes do not rely on propositionalist or foundationalist epistemologies; take the example of Adam meeting his wife Eve in Genesis 2, "I will not argue, for instance that the man of Eden knows proposition P, a believe of which he can justify the veridicality. Rather he has *come to know* something about his relatedness to reality which Genesis reveals to the reader in the man's declarative statement: 'At last, bone of my bones.'"<sup>5</sup> This reading could fit within a virtue framework.

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<sup>3</sup> Dru Johnson, *Biblical Knowing: A Scriptural Epistemology of Error* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013); *Epistemology and Biblical Theology: From the Pentateuch to Mark's Gospel* (New York: Routledge, 2018); *Knowledge by Ritual* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, *Epistemology and Biblical Theology*, 1–10.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, 18.

Another interesting feature of his analysis is that he regards epistemology in the Hebrew Scriptures to be largely concerned with avoiding error. The goal of the epistemically virtuous person is to avoid listening to the wrong voices and believing the wrong things. This will lead to wrong actions.<sup>6</sup> The “virtuous” Israelites, although he might not use that word, know which voices to listen to, whether that be the word of God directly spoken, written down, or through the prophets.<sup>7</sup> The image he constructs of the Scriptures acting like a docent is a powerful appropriation of work done in social epistemology. The work of Esther Meek is a prevalent influence for Johnson.<sup>8</sup> She too approaches the Biblical text through the lens of virtue, specifically an epistemology of care and relationship. Meek calls this covenant epistemology.

In the conclusion of *Epistemology and Biblical Theology*, Johnson poses an interesting objection to those who would try to establish a biblical theology of epistemology:

Contemporary philosophical epistemologies must be kept at bay for any attempt at understanding a biblical theology of epistemology. Though current strands of philosophy may be commensurable with what we find in the biblical literature, no reason compels us to pursue such a thesis without being compelled to do so from the texts themselves. The dangers of reading epistemologies into the biblical texts are great. This would be especially true of epistemologies that are essentially Hellenistic in origin or a reaction to Greek thought.<sup>9</sup>

To single out the Greeks is a curious choice in a book that ends in the gospel of Mark. He’s right to caution philosophers who would impose epistemological systems upon the text, and there has certainly been warrant for this kind of warning. But is it possible, particularly for those biblical authors living in a Hellenized world, that Johnson has overcorrected?

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<sup>6</sup> Johnson, *Biblical Knowing: A Scriptural Epistemology of Error*.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, *Epistemology and Biblical Theology*, 21–24.

<sup>8</sup> Esther L. Meek, *Loving to Know: Introducing Covenant Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, *Epistemology and Biblical Theology*, 149.

In Johnson's conclusion, he offers further rationale for excluding contemporary epistemology from biblical theology; "Concerning methodology, contemporary philosophical epistemologies must be kept at bay for any attempt at understanding a biblical theology of epistemology."<sup>10</sup> Why would this necessarily be so? He reasons; "Though current strands of philosophy may be commensurable with what we find in the biblical literature, no reason compels us to pursue such a thesis without being compelled to do so from the texts themselves."<sup>11</sup>

Johnson's most recent work is more sympathetic to the intersection between Hebraic and Hellenistic philosophy. In *Biblical Philosophy*, he sets out to construct a Hebraic philosophy by comparing the philosophy of the Christian Scriptures with other philosophical styles.<sup>12</sup> Though he concludes that Hellenistic philosophy is still markedly different than the Hebraic philosophy of the Bible, Israel's philosophical style is far closer to those of Greece and Rome than to those of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Paul, for example, is a Hebraic thinker in "Stoic garments," using Greco-Roman rhetoric to explain his decidedly Hebraic philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Johnson, *Epistemology and Biblical Theology*, 148. The lack of engagement with any significant epistemologists is an peculiar feature of Johnson's work. He follows Polanyi's proposal of subsidiary focal integration and Esther Meek's covenant epistemology (Meek is also a Polanyi disciple). This makes clear that it is not epistemology per se that Johnson wants to avoid but the classical analytic epistemologies. He groups contemporary epistemologists together and dismisses them on the opening page, "Generally, the term 'epistemology' applies to descriptions about and analyses of structures of knowledge. Who knows something? Is that something true? How does she justify such knowledge? The analytic tradition of epistemology currently owns the market share of scholarly discussion on knowledge. Accordingly, those three questions about justified true beliefs stem from a particular view of anthropology, humanity, and knowledge - a view that some ancient Semites might not have shared, even up through the period of Hellenistic Judaism," 1. Unfortunately, this is an overly simplistic caricature of epistemology. These questions do not limit the discussion of epistemology to "justified true belief," and if they did, there are large portions of modern epistemology outside of that specific inquiry. Unfortunately, because of this summary dismissal, Johnson does not interact with others who have covered similar terrain. In the end, he has written a book on epistemology that fits well within the virtue tradition without engaging any virtue epistemologists (with the exception of Meek).

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, *Epistemology and Biblical Theology*, 149.

<sup>12</sup> Dru Johnson, *Biblical Philosophy: A Hebraic Approach to the Old and New Testaments* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> See Johnson's full argument in chapter 7, "Paul in Stoic Garments," in *Biblical Philosophy*, 203-223. His conclusion there will be implicitly challenged in the following chapters, but that does not take away from the thought-provoking and exploratory he provides.

In one aspect, Johnson's work sets the table for a discussion of Paul and Greco-Roman virtue. He takes seriously the surrounding Hellenistic context into which the biblical authors were writing and at the same time points out differences between Paul and his contemporaries. The New Testament texts reside in the world of philosophies of virtue. That must be accounted for in any assessment of Paul's own thinking. On the other hand, there is nothing in Johnson's work that shows a virtue framework would be an aberration from his Hebraic worldview. Instead, Johnson challenges not the existence, but the role and prevalence Greco-Roman virtues might have played in Paul's thinking.

N. T. Wright's approach in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* is also a framework for understanding the sources for Paul's worldview.<sup>14</sup> Wright construes Paul's worldview as anchored in the story world of the Torah but influenced by his Greco-Roman surroundings.

One of Wright's most valuable contributions to Pauline epistemology is his assertion that Paul invented a new discipline of theology specifically developed to carry the load of epistemic sanctification in the first century churches he planted and led. Theology served as a wisdom catalyst for early Christians. They followed Paul's example of forming, or reforming, their worldview around the new reality of the Messiah. One of Paul's central goals, the formation and holiness of his converts, depended on the fact that they could learn to think like the Messiah.<sup>15</sup> Wright goes as far as saying this is the central burden that led Paul to think and speak theologically, "*it is precisely because of the major restructuring of Paul's symbolic world that 'theology' comes to have a different, much larger and more important place in his worldview, and thereafter in the*

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<sup>14</sup> Wright opts for an examination of Paul's worldview; "The model I have adopted proposes that we should ask about praxis and symbol and story and question, and should allow each of those microscopes to sweep and swoop around the territory, opening up the husks of history to discover the smooth marvels of worldview-ingredients within." Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 351.

<sup>15</sup> "Wisdom, prior to this a luxury for the leisured, was now offered to the slave, the shopkeeper, the housewife." Wright, 404.

*Christian church, than ever it had in either Judaism or paganism.*”<sup>16</sup> Theology holds worldview in place; “in order for the worldview to remain in place Paul believed it was necessary for the Messiah’s people constantly to explore and think through the actual object of their faith, in other words, God himself, his purposes and his promises.”<sup>17</sup>

It will become clear shortly that this resembles the philosophical tasks the Greeks were engaged in, particularly in that they sought to grow in the virtue of φρόνησις in order to find the good life. Wright stops short of equating Paul’s theological task with intellectual virtue in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. However, he makes an important connection between being conformed to the image of Christ and the Greek virtue tradition. While Christians are not attempting to train for the battlefield or the Roman senate, they are trying by the power of the Spirit to be like Christ. Christian character development is very similar to practicing the virtues.<sup>18</sup>

These two accounts are far from exhaustive, but they provide enough evidence to begin an investigation into intellectual virtue in Paul. Johnson and Wright provide enough evidence to establish the heuristic that there is nothing Paul’s Jewish background or in the Hebrew Scriptures that would prohibit him from considering practical wisdom to be a distinctly Christian virtue. Both of these sources actually show that this construal of Paul’s epistemology may be more common to the Jewish way of thinking about knowledge than might be expected.

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<sup>16</sup> Wright, 403. Emphasis original.

<sup>17</sup> Wright, 404.

<sup>18</sup> Here Wright does make a direct correlation, “Paul, then, insists that the Messiah’s followers have to learn to live in the ‘not yet’ as well as the ‘now’. This is not, to repeat, a matter of merely marking time. The interval has a Messiah-shaped purpose. This emerges in particular when we consider the centre of Paul’s ethics, which I have elsewhere argued to be a kind of Christian transformation of the ancient traditions of virtue, of character-development. This, indeed, is the point at which his ethical teaching is at the same time closest to, and most interestingly distinguished from, that of the world around.” Wright, 1115; Wright perceives the connection between Christian ethics and the Greco-Roman virtue tradition to be more similar than he discusses in his writings specifically on Paul. In his more popular books, he envisions the Christian life as a pursuit of uniquely Christian virtues. N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2012); The same book in the UK was intriguingly titled, *Virtue Reborn: The Transformation of the Christian Mind* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2010).

## **“I Perceive You Are Very Religious:” Paul and the Greeks**

Paul’s engagement with the Greco-Roman philosophers and their influence on his thinking has received a lot of attention. Wayne Meeks and Abraham Malherbe have both made substantial contributions on this subject.<sup>19</sup> Their work serves as an upper bound for Paul’s interaction with the philosophers. Malherbe argues that Paul was well aware of Greek philosophy and engaged with it in his preaching and in his letters.<sup>20</sup> In “Paul: Hellenistic Philosopher or Christian Pastor,” he clarifies that Paul was a pastor who used Greek philosophy for that end. He considers it a settled issue that Paul was well informed on the various Greek sects, and conversant enough to challenge the philosophers in his teaching; “there is no longer any doubt that Paul was thoroughly familiar with the teaching, method of operation, and style of argumentation of the philosophers of the period, all of which he adopted and adapted to his own purposes.”<sup>21</sup> This is not a common position among modern scholars, but it wasn’t uncommon in the ancient world, where a dialogue between Paul and Seneca circulated widely and early Christian commentators considered Paul and the Stoics to be in agreement on many topics.<sup>22</sup> In *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care*,

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<sup>19</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1986); Abraham J. Malherbe, *Light from the Gentiles: Hellenistic Philosophy and Early Christianity*, ed. Carl R. Holladay et al. (Boston: Brill, 2015); Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophical Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); Abraham J. Malherbe, “Paul: Hellenistic Philosopher or Christian Pastor?,” in *Light from the Gentiles: Hellenistic Philosophy and Early Christianity*, ed. Carl R. Holladay et al. (Boston: Brill, 2013), 197–208; Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Malherbe, *Light from the Gentiles*.

<sup>21</sup> Malherbe, “Paul: Hellenistic Philosopher or Christian Pastor?,” 198.

<sup>22</sup> It’s uncommon for modern scholars to view Paul and Seneca as being as similar as ancient authors and Christian writers did - Augustine being the main exception. Torre suspects that the two were grouped together more because they were in the same place at the same time than that they espoused the same ideas. “Seneca and the Christian Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Seneca*, ed. Shadi Bartsch and Alessandro Schiesaro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 267; For an imaginative modern conception of what a conversation between Paul and Seneca, see Joshua Richards, “Epilogue: The Stoic and the Saint,” in *Paul and Seneca in Dialogue*, ed. David E. Briones and Joseph R. Dodson (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 307–14.

Malherbe draws on parallels between Paul and Seneca and the similarities cited between the two in Tertullian and Jerome, as well as the differences between Paul and the philosophers. James Thompson has stressed the presence of Greek rhetorical techniques in Paul's writing and the influence the philosophical schools may have had on his worldview.<sup>23</sup>

### **Paul and Greco-Roman Epistemology**

Paul's connection with the Greeks is more than temporal, though. At a minimum, he was acquainted with a street-level understanding of the philosophies of the day.<sup>24</sup> Beyond that, regardless of his familiarity, he was interested in answering very similar questions.<sup>25</sup> One of the fundamental questions of ancient philosophy was what is the good life? This is also an important question for Paul. While Paul and the philosophers were posing this question in different ways, they both thought they knew the way to the good life. The life of virtue was the center of the Greeks from the time of Plato and Aristotle through the time of Seneca and beyond. What is the good? What does it mean to be happy? The Greeks also had very practical interests stemming from these philosophical questions: can virtue be taught? This may be the oldest question in moral philosophy.<sup>26</sup>

Modern virtue ethics descends from Aristotle's pursuit of becoming good. The three foundational concepts he explores in *Nicomachean Ethics*, have become the center

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<sup>23</sup> Thompson, *Apostle of Persuasion; Moral Formation According to Paul: The Context and Coherence of Pauline Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> At a minimum, Paul is engaging in what Jaco Gericke has called, "folk philosophy," an understanding of core concepts but not an academic understanding or familiarity with primary philosophical texts. See, Jaco Gericke, *The Hebrew Bible and Philosophy of Religion* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 157f.

<sup>25</sup> Conzelmann represents a more common belief that Paul probably had no formal training in philosophy and likely had no exposure to primary texts. He learned philosophy through the organic interactions he had in Greek cities. Hans Conzelmann, *First Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 10.

<sup>26</sup> M. F. Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 69.



of gravity for virtue ethics. Rosalyn Hursthouse summarizes these three points; “But although modern virtue ethics does not have to take the form known as ‘neo-Aristotelian,’ almost any modern version still shows that its roots are in ancient Greek philosophy by the employment of three concepts derived from it. There are *aretē* (excellence or virtue), *phronesis* (practical or moral wisdom), and *eudaimonia* (usually translated as happiness or flourishing).”<sup>27</sup> Virtue epistemology is the study of this chief intellectual virtue, *φρόνησις*, which is Aristotle’s focus in Book VI of *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>28</sup>

Virtue epistemology can be construed as a subset of Aristotelian virtue ethics concerned with the chief intellectual virtue, *φρόνησις*, with a few key differences. First, Aristotle does not assign intellectual virtue the same criterion he does moral virtue. Intellectual virtue is not a mean between deficiency and excess. It is this basic point, the desire for practical wisdom, living and thinking the right way, that connects Paul to the Greek philosophers (Acts 17:16-21).<sup>29</sup>

In Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, intellectual virtues and moral virtues are construed differently. In Book VI, Aristotle establishes that *φρόνησις* is the most important intellectual virtue, and consequently, one of the important questions in current

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<sup>27</sup> Rosalyn Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove, “Virtue Ethics,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/ethics-virtue/>; Quoted in Brad Inwood, *Ethics After Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>28</sup> Christoph Kelp makes the helpful point that *εὐδαιμονία* can be considered another telos, undermining the virtue project and converting VE back into a form of teleological ethics. One of the differences between normative ethics and virtue ethics is that the virtues are valuable in and of themselves, not just because they lead to truth or to *εὐδαιμονία*. For Kelp, this undermines VE as a complete epistemology, so he proposes, “Virtue-Theoretic Epistemology” as a more modest claim to knowledge. As I will show in an analysis of Paul’s epistles, the imitation of Christ preserves the value of the virtues like discernment and practical wisdom. They are the excellencies that Christ practices, not means to justify an end. This reading is closer to Zagzebski’s VE than to Kelp’s. Christoph Kelp and John Greco, eds., *Virtue-Theoretic Epistemology: New Methods and Approaches* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1–15; Linda Trinkhaus Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> N. T. Wright’s work displays the careful line between the similarity of the questions Paul and the Greeks were asking and the different ways they went about answering them. He summarizes the similarities between the philosophical schools; “Behind all the divergence of the schools, the bright-eyed challenge remained: to see in the dark, to discern how the world really was, as opposed to how most people, misled by false impressions or the cunning of deceitful rhetoric, imagined it to be.” The conceptual parallels to Paul’s own task are obvious. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 233.

studies of intellectual virtue is the role that *φρόνησις* should play.<sup>30</sup> If virtues are the mean between two extremes, then somehow the virtuous person must decide what the extremes are and where the median lies. Therefore, *φρόνησις*, though not a mean itself, plays the mediatorial role in knowing what to do in each circumstance. It's not always easy to tell when to be righteously indignant and when to be friendly. For this reason, *φρόνησις* and the other intellectual virtues are not seen as being a mean between excess and deficiency. This is an important difference between moral and intellectual virtues, and between the way *φρόνησις*, which is the supreme intellectual virtue, functions in comparison with justice or greatness of soul, virtues which Aristotle argues encompass the rest of the virtues.

The goal of practical wisdom is truth in agreement with right desire (*ἀλήθεια ὁμολόγως ἔχουσα τῆ ὀρέξει τῆ ὀρθῆ*).<sup>31</sup> The virtuous person desires what they discern to be true. Practical wisdom is the virtue that deals with what is good and true, and the virtue that mediates the other; deliberation is ability to know how to pursue the good in action.<sup>32</sup> Later in Book VI, Aristotle connects deliberation and practical wisdom formally. Practically wise people deliberate well. They correctly discern what is useful toward the end. Deliberation is a means toward practical wisdom and will be a part of any exercise of practical wisdom. Aristotle concludes his discussion of *φρόνησις* this way; “If therefore to have deliberated well (*τὸ εὖ βεβουλευῆσθαι*) is a characteristic of prudent men (*φρόνιμοι*), Deliberative Excellence must be correctness of deliberation with regard to what is expedient as a measure to the end, a true conception of which constitutes

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<sup>30</sup> Zagzebski points out that in Book II, Aristotle says “no one can have the moral virtues without *phronesis* and anyone with *phronesis* has the moral virtues.” See Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 4.13.1144b30-1. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 211.

<sup>31</sup> *Nic. Eth.* 1139a31-32.

<sup>32</sup> “The person unqualifiedly good at deliberation is the one who tends to aim, in accordance with his calculation, at the best of the goods for a human being that are achievable in action.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Roger Crisp, Revised ed, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1141b12-14.

prudence (φρόνησις).”<sup>33</sup> This relationship between practical wisdom and deliberation will prove to be the closest conceptual parallel to the way Paul conceives of the Christian virtue of φρόνησις.<sup>34</sup>

### **Paul and the Stoics**

Later Greek philosophy is very different from the world of Aristotle, even if it has come down in a relatively neat taxonomy.<sup>35</sup> The development of the four major schools should not be seen as a neat and continuous process. A brief sketch of the philosophical landscape in the time between Aristotle and Paul will show that during the first century the Stoics were the ascendant group and likely had the most significant influence on the greater populace, even if indirectly. Secondly, the other schools, despite their resurgence in years shortly following Paul’s death, were in a comparative lull, so that the influence of Aristotle’s work was likely the second most influential philosophy in the Greco-Roman world because of the thematic resonances in the work of Seneca and Cicero. These two philosophers and the philosophies they espoused deserve consideration for two reasons. First, the logical and temporal progression of intellectual time connecting Aristotle’s time with Paul’s. Second, they were so popular in the first century that even if Paul was not familiar with their work, many of the people in Paul’s churches would have been familiar with their thinking on a popular or colloquial level.

After the death of Theophrastus, Aristotle’s successor at the school in Athens,

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<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Harris Rackham, LCL 73 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 1142b33-35.

<sup>34</sup> In Book VI, Aristotle also discusses the difference between wisdom, “σοφία,” and practical wisdom, “φρόνησις.” Though he considers them both to be virtues, only φρόνησις has to do with human action. He writes, “Virtue ensures the rightness of the end we aim at, Prudence ensures the rightness of the means we adopt to gain that end,” 1144a8-10. Wisdom, then, is synonymous in this passage with virtue. Practical wisdom is going about living in view of and practicing what is virtuous.

<sup>35</sup> “If Aristotle could have returned to Athens in 272 B.C., on the fiftieth anniversary of his death, he would hardly have recognized it as the intellectual milieu in which he had taught and researched for much of his life. He would have found there new philosophies far more diverse and more self-consciously systematic than those on offer in his own day.” A.A. Long and D. N. Sedley, eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1.

the philosophical scene grew quickly and diversified. Zeno of Citium, his successor Cleanthes and the greatest Stoic, Chrysippus, would establish the Stoa as the most influential of the philosophical schools for the next two centuries. The head of the Academy at the time, Arcesilaus, was a committed Platonist. The most famous school of Athens had departed from Aristotle's teaching and had experienced a decline in the proliferation of other movements. The "New Academy" reached a second height under Carneades and Philo of Larissa in the mid-2nd Century. During the end of this period, Cicero sat under Philo's teaching. Although it would continue to challenge the Stoics through the second century, by the first century the Academy declined, "finally falling apart in doctrinal disarray" shortly after it was left in physical disarray during the first Mithridatic war in 86 BCE.<sup>36</sup> Epicurus established the Garden in 306/7 BCE and remained in Athens until his death in 270 BCE. The Epicureans and the Stoics were opposed on nearly every point and grew to become the two major philosophical schools alongside the followers of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>37</sup>

By the first century, the philosophical atmosphere was composed of four major philosophical schools: Epicureanism, Stoicism, Aristotelianism, and Dogmatic Platonism.<sup>38</sup> Cynicism and Skepticism were influential but remained along the margins as

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<sup>36</sup> A.A. Long and D. N. Sedley, eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 5. Cicero saw Arcesilaus and the move toward skepticism as the harbinger of the fall of the Academy. See his scathing assessment of Arcesilaus, "So Arcesilaus was in the practice of denying that anything could be known, not even the one thing Socrates left for himself - the knowledge that he knew nothing: such was the extent of the obscurity in which everything lurked, on his assessment, and there was nothing which could be discerned or understood." Cicero, *Academica*, 1.43-45; Diogenes Laertius writes that he was viewed by all of Athens with unparalleled good will, but that he lost pupils to the Epicurean school. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 4.6.43-44. During this period, until the time of Carneades in the 2nd Century, Arcesilaus took Socrates' teaching to the extreme so that the Academy was indistinguishable from the philosophy of the Skeptics. Plutarch, *Against Colotes*, 1121e; Cicero, *On Ends*, 5.10.

<sup>37</sup> "Stoicism and Epicureanism appear to have developed in polar opposition to each other." Long and Sedley, 1:5.

<sup>38</sup> This period is notoriously difficult to analyze. Engberg-Pedersen calls the first century a "transitional period in Ancient Philosophy," 2. Despite that fact, there are several significant clues as to the common strains of thought during Paul's lifetime. One example that supports this summary of four major philosophies would be Marcus Aurelius' installation of four chairs in philosophy in the city of Athens roughly sixty years after Paul's death. This reflects the philosophical norm in the time leading up to Aurelius. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Setting the Scene: Stoicism and Platonism in the Transitional Period

a challenge to the major schools. Although Platonism had the strongest effect on Christian thought in the centuries after the apostolic age, Engberg-Pedersen and others argue that Stoicism was the most influential current of Greco-Roman thought in the middle of the first century.<sup>39</sup> This does not entail that all four philosophies were distinct and clearly defined, rather they functioned more like four suits in a shuffled deck of cards, intermingled and appearing suited and in combination across the hands of major players in the first century.<sup>40</sup>

During Paul's lifetime, Stoicism filled a void formed during transitional periods in the other philosophical schools. The Academy had declined in the second century BCE, but so had the Epicurean school. In 155 BCE, the Athenians sent a philosophical embassy to the Roman Senate, comprised of Carneades, the head of the New Academy, Critolaus, and Aristotelian, and Diogenes the Stoic. It's instructive that during that time, no Epicurean was chosen to join the delegation.<sup>41</sup>

Additionally, in the first century, Stoic philosophers were among some of the most famous and influential men in the Empire. Cicero, born a century before Paul, summarized the views of the Stoics and brought the Greek philosophical tradition into

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in Ancient Philosophy," in *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 4.

<sup>39</sup> Engberg-Pedersen makes this point in several places. See, Engberg-Pedersen, 12; Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); Wright considers Epicureanism and Stoicism primarily, and he cites Stoicism as the primary philosophical system of the day; "Whereas the default mode of most modern westerners is some kind of Epicureanism, the default mode for many of Paul's hearers was some kind of Stoicism," Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 213; For a classic treatment of Stoicism, see A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1974), 107.

<sup>40</sup> Credit to N. T. Wright for this wonderful analogy, "If we think of the major schools of the day as being like the four suits in a pack of cards, what one meets on the street is not all four neatly laid out in a row, but the philosophical equivalent of a disorderly heap of cards on a table, some of which look very like others. The two of spades and the two of clubs appear to have more in common than either might do with their respective kings or queens. The four 'suits' might then stand for the four main philosophical schools of Paul's day: the Academy (a development from Plato's 'Academy', but with some fresh emphases); the Lyceum (a development from Aristotle's 'Peripatetic' school); the Stoics; and the Epicureans." Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 206.

<sup>41</sup> Inwood notices the absence of the Epicureans during the delegation; "from that point on Epicureans were the philosophical outsiders," *Ethics After Aristotle*, 77; For a general overview of the embassy and the Greco-Roman sources, see J. G. F. Powell, "The Embassy of the Three Philosophers to Rome in 155 BC," in *Hellenistic Oratory: Continuity and Change*, ed. Kathryn Tempest and Christos Kremmydas (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 219–47.

Latin.<sup>42</sup> Seneca, almost an exact contemporary of Paul's, was one of the most famous men in the empire and advanced a popular and Roman version of Stoicism for the masses. Even between these two towering figures, the philosophical scene was changing rapidly.<sup>43</sup> Toward the end of Paul's life, Musonius Rufus taught Stoicism in Rome during Nero's reign until he was exiled in 65 CE. He later returned as a philosopher in the court of Vespasian, during which time he taught Epictetus, the most influential Stoic of the first and second centuries. Whether or not Paul ever came into contact with the work of Cicero or Seneca, or whether he might have heard about the teaching of Rufus during his time in Rome, it's likely that their teaching was beginning to pervade the Roman Empire and the Greek-speaking world as Paul was travelling.

Although the audience for the letter to the Romans is disputed, it wouldn't have been unlikely for some in his audience to be familiar with Stoic teaching, and even more likely that some among the men of Athens would have been familiar with Cicero's work or that of Zeno of Citium and Chrysippus from the earlier generation of Stoic teachers. Paul, too, may have been aware of these figures. Two of the most famous Stoic philosophers of the second century BCE, Zeno of Tarsus and Antipater, were from his hometown.<sup>44</sup> He was certainly in the right places to have been familiar with Stoic philosophy, even if only at a cursory level.

Some commentators have picked up this theme and read Paul's letter to the church in Rome in comparison with the philosophers. Notably, Bultmann argued for

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<sup>42</sup> Brad Inwood, "Seneca in His Philosophical Milieu," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 97, no. 1 (1995): 63–76.

<sup>43</sup> For shorter introductions to the changes taking place between Cicero and Seneca, see Inwood, "Seneca in His Philosophical Milieu." For a full treatment of Seneca and the philosophical world into which he was writing, see Brad Inwood, *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> On the importance of Tarsus in the philosophical world and the impact this may have played in Paul's upbringing, see Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, 58–60. "Saul of Tarsus was born into a world where eight hundred years of Hellenic culture was alive and well, and where, in particular, the philosophies of four centuries earlier were making a considerable come-back." Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 211.

Paul's use of the diatribe, a rhetorical form common among the moral philosophers, as have Stowers and Malherbe, suggesting that Paul may have had a good deal of rhetorical education.<sup>45</sup> Drawing mainly on the writing of Epictetus, Bultmann and Stowers noticed Paul's use of the diatribe in Romans. Some commentators have moved away from this interpretation, although Dunn and Jewett preserve the spirit of what Butlmann and Stowers were doing, if not all of the details.<sup>46</sup>

Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Craig Keener have made significant contributions to the study of Paul against the Greek philosophical background and their work will be engaged at length through the exegetical chapters of this dissertation. A brief introduction will serve as a preface for those interactions. Engberg-Pedersen's book *Paul and the Stoics* remains the landmark study of Paul and the Stoic philosophers.<sup>47</sup> He compares Paul's letters and his thinking to earlier and contemporaneous Stoics, especially Cicero's summary of Stoicism in the third book of *On Ends*. Like Malherbe, he too recognizes that Paul was not developing a philosophical system, but that he was probably familiar with the contours of Stoic teaching. Against some who have denied Paul's "philosophical impulse," Engberg-Pedersen argues, "It is true that Paul wrote occasional pieces. It is also true that he was not a philosopher. Indeed, he would never have accepted that kind of designation for a whole number of reasons... But it is false to deny him a

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<sup>45</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Der Stil Der Paulinischen Predigt Und Die Kynisch-Stoische Diatribe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910); Stanley K. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Society of Biblical Literature, Dissertation Series 57 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981); Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Abraham J. Malherbe, "Mē Genoiō in the Diatribe and Paul," in *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 25–35.

<sup>46</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary 38A (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1988); Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

<sup>47</sup> Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*; See also, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Tuomas Rasimus, and Ismo Dunderberg, *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); "Paul, Virtues, and Vices," in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 608–33; "Setting the Scene"; "Discovering the Good: Oikeiosis and Kathekonta in Stoic Ethics," in *The Norms of Nature*, ed. Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 145–84.

‘thinker’s impulse towards developing a coherent picture of the world in which he now found himself.’<sup>48</sup> This is a world, which he argues, was dominated by Stoic philosophy.

The Stoics continued Aristotle’s search for the good life through practical wisdom.<sup>49</sup> Even more than Aristotle, the Stoics viewed philosophy as a practical matter, learning how to live in everyday life.<sup>50</sup> The fundamental difference was that the Stoics saw virtue as the exclusive deliverance of reason. Whereas Aristotle saw reason as a single, but complex, capacity, the Stoics did not. They saw reason pervading the entire pursuit of virtue.<sup>51</sup> While Aristotle thought that the desires could be habituated toward virtue, the Stoics honed the development of virtue down to the development of the ability to reason correctly.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, the Stoics focused even more than Aristotle had on mastering the passions.<sup>53</sup> Stoic sages were expected to be free of the passions, rationally judging what to do in every circumstance. Cicero proclaimed that the Wise Man has the greatest title of all because he is master of his own soul. The wise man has restrained his desires because “reason has proved that moral worth is the sole good,” and so the wise man is always

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<sup>48</sup> Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 15.

<sup>49</sup> It is not known how much influence Aristotle’s works had on the early Stoics. Various Stoic teachers continued lines of inquiry similar to those of Aristotle and they are downstream in the philosophical tradition. Sandbach argues that early Stoics, including Chrysippus, were not aware of Aristotle’s work. *Aristotle and the Stoics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Philological Society, 1985); Inwood argues that they were, citing the similarities between Aristotle and Chrysippus, review of *Aristotle and the Stoics*, by F. H. Sandbach, *The Philosophical Review* 95, no. 3 (1986): 470–73; Striker believes the early Stoics sounded similar to Aristotle because they both traced their intellectual lineage back to Socrates, review of *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, by Brad Inwood, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (1989): 91–100. By the 1st Century, the Stoic authors had access to Aristotle’s works. This question, while important, only applies to the Stoics in the century following Aristotle.

<sup>50</sup> To this point, “There were technical terms and various developed ideas, but ‘philosophy’ in general was a much more street-level activity than it would be for us.” Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 204.

<sup>51</sup> See Cooper’s discussion, John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 84–85.

<sup>52</sup> See Brüllman’s discussion on the difference in Aristotelian and Stoic natural law traditions; Philipp Brüllman, “The Stoics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Natural Law Ethics*, ed. Tom Angier (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 16.

<sup>53</sup> Malherbe, “The Beasts at Ephesus.”



happy (*beautus*) and he is always to be praised,

Rightly will he be said to own all things, who alone knows how to use all things; rightly also will he be styled beautiful, for the beauty of the soul is fairer than that of the body; rightly the one and only free man, as subject to no man's authority, and slave of no appetite; rightly unconquerable, for though his body be thrown into fetters, no bondage can enchain his soul.<sup>54</sup>

It's easy to see some of the parallels with the way Paul describes Christians. In 2 Corinthians 6:10, he writes, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything." Or, in Romans 6:17-18, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness," and later in Romans 8:37-39, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." These are more than just verbal similarities. Like the virtue philosophers of Greece, Paul also presented a way to change the passions and live the good life.

Despite some of these general similarities in ethics, Paul stood diametrically opposed to the philosophers on the nature of God. It might be an overstatement to say that Paul had no overlap with the Greek and Roman conceptions of the gods, but just slightly. Paul was a monotheist who believed that the Creator and the creation are separate, that God is triune, and that God took on flesh in Jesus Christ. Paul's shared vocabulary and the ideas he holds in common with the Greeks lie in the areas of ethics and epistemology more than in theology proper.

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<sup>54</sup> Cicero, *On Ends*, trans. Harris Rackham, LCL 40 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 3.22.75.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato conceived of a demiurge who created the world, but was one among the pantheon of gods.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, he mocks those who believe in the gods of Homer in the *Republic*.<sup>56</sup> Epicurus conceived of the gods as a projection of the moral ideal, made in the self-image of man, and not interfering in the world. Whether or not he and his followers believed the gods were “real” in any sense is debated, but he did find the concept useful.<sup>57</sup> The person who finds happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*) has a rightly constructed view of the gods. Describing the Epicureans, Sextus Empiricus makes this etymological argument explicitly, “But according to them happiness (*eudaimonia*) was a divine (*daimonia*) and godly nature, and the word ‘happy’ (*eudaimōn*) was applied to someone who had his deity (*daimōn*) disposed well (*eu*).”<sup>58</sup> The Skeptics criticized both the Epicureans and the Stoics on the grounds of inconsistency in their theology.<sup>59</sup>

These differences in theology lead to significant differences in epistemology. By Paul’s time, the Stoics had become the most influential of the philosophical schools, but even if they were not, broadly speaking, they pose for the most potent comparison with Paul. While the Epicureans believed that the gods were distant and disinterested, the Stoics believed that the entire universe was pulsing with the divine.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Plato first mentions the demiurge in Plato, *Timaeus*, 28a He describes the creator as benevolent, eternal, and rational (29a), creator of the other gods (40c-42e), the divine cause of all things (68e), though not the creator of humanity (69c), whom he also refers to as “demiurges” (75b).

<sup>56</sup> Socrates discusses the gods in Book II, and especially as religion pertains to education in Plato, *The Republic*, 376cf.

<sup>57</sup> See the section included in Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:139–49 They subscribe to the view that Epicurus regarded the gods as self-projections, even though Epicurus speaks as though the gods exist, (Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus*, 76-77; Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, 1.43-49). This is a subtle position, and remarkable in the ancient world; “His inspired suggestion that god is a projection of man’s own ethical ideal can be ranked with the most impressive theological theories of antiquity,” 147.

<sup>58</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors*, 9.43-47. Included in A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 143.

<sup>59</sup> Long’s chapter, “Skepticism about Gods” is an excellent summary, particularly of Sextus Empiricus’ criticism of the Epicurean and Stoic systems. A. A. Long, *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2006), 114–27.

<sup>60</sup> For the difference between the Stoics and Epicureans, see Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 211–29; On the Epicurean vision of history and its connection to Deism, see N. T. Wright, *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019).

The fundamental tenet of Stoic ethics was that the good is rational. This why they claim that the inferior man is not just lazy, but insane. Epictetus captures the essence of Stoic ethics as the union between right judgment and right desires:

There are three fields of study in which the man who is going to be good and excellent must first have been trained, The first has to do with desires and aversions, that he may never fail to get what he desires, nor fall into what he avoids; the second with cases of choice and of refusal, and, in general, with duty, that he may act in an orderly fashion, upon good reasons, and not carelessly; the third with the avoidance of error and rashness in judgment, and in general, about cases of assent.<sup>61</sup>

Stoicism offers *εὐδαιμονία* as the product of a moral life, and they believed that the wise man was always good, and thus, always happy. Seneca wrote, “There is no good except where there is a place for reason,” speaking both of the relationship between the good and the rational, but also that the capacity for good is predicated on the capacity to reason.<sup>62</sup> Morality was a matter of nature and rationality. The Stoic sage always acts rationally, according to nature, and always for his good.<sup>63</sup>

Where his ends are similar, his means are often very different. Paul does not share the underlying framework of the philosophers, as his letters show, but he does offer a competing vision of what it means to find *εὐδαιμονία*, and how to practice *φρόνησις*.

### **Paul and Modern Epistemology**

The distance between ancient and modern virtue epistemologists is shorter than it seems. Among the modern theories of intellectual virtue, Zagzebski’s follows Aristotle

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<sup>61</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses, Books 3-4*, trans. W. A. Oldfather, LCL 218 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 3.2.1-2.

<sup>62</sup> The full quote is illustrative; “But the good can in no way fall to a dumb animal. It belongs to a happier and superior nature. There is no good except where there is a place for reason. Of these four natures, tree, animal, man and god, the last two, which are rational, have the same nature; they differ by the fact that one is immortal, the other mortal. The good of one of them, god’s of course, is perfect by nature, the other’s, man’s, by practice.” Seneca, *Letters*, 124.13. Translated in A.A. Long and D. N. Sedley, eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 371.

<sup>63</sup> Long and Sedley offer a nice summary of this Stoic doctrine. Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:345 See also, Cleanthes' vision of the good, “Well-ordered, just, holy, pious, self-controlled, useful, honorable, due, austere, candid, always useful, fearless, undistressed, profitable, unpaired, beneficial, contented, secure, friendly, precious... consistent, fair-famed, unpretentious, caring, gentle, keen, patient, faultless, permanent.” in Clement, *Protrepticus*, 6.72.2, in Long and Sedley, 373.

most closely, assigning φρόνησις a mediatorial role above the other intellectual virtues.<sup>64</sup> There are two features of Zagzebski's explanation of intellectual virtue that are important in understanding Paul.

First, Aristotle believed that φρόνησις is necessary for developing the other virtues. As we've seen, Aristotle defines φρόνησις as "a truth-attaining rational quality, concerned with action in relation to things that are good and bad for human beings." In *Virtues of the Mind*, Zagzebski makes two additions to Aristotle's virtue of φρόνησις. First, she rejects the division of the soul into the rational and the irrational.<sup>65</sup> The irrational soul is also divided in two. The first, the nutritive part of the soul, is common to all living things, causes nutrition and growth, is most active during sleep, and contains no peculiar human excellencies. The second part of the irrational soul is more complicated. It is the seat of appetites and desires and it participates with the rational soul, but it also fights against it. Because of this complicated relationship, Aristotle is ambiguous as to whether this should really be considered rational or irrational.<sup>66</sup> So whether the rational or irrational part of the soul is divided, there are two divisions, one of appetites and desires and one of reason, and the two relate to and influence each other. The virtues are split along this same line. The intellectual virtues of wisdom (σοφία), understanding (σύνεσις) and practical wisdom, or prudence (φρόνησις), correspond to the rational part of the soul. The moral virtues of freedom (ἐλευθεριότης) and temperance (σωφροσύνη) correspond to the second division of the irrational part of the soul.

Against this division, Zagzebski suggests that φρόνησις is easier to understand if it's relationship to the soul and to the moral virtues is construed slightly differently.

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<sup>64</sup> Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 220–22.

<sup>65</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.13.1102a-1103a.

<sup>66</sup> "If the other hand it be more correct to speak of the appetitive part of the soul also as rational, in that case it is the rational part which, as well as the whole soul, is divided into two, the one division having rational principle in the proper sense and in itself, the other obedient to it as a child to its father." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1934, 1.13.1103a.1.

Perhaps Aristotle's own ambiguity over the divisions of the soul make this an obvious critique. Zagzebski objects to this division of the soul over the uses of the intellect. In Book VI, Aristotle introduces a divide in the rational soul, between the speculative and the practical, between finding out what is the case and what to do about it. The virtues of the first section are wisdom (σοφία), reason (νοῦς), and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη); of the second, art (τέχνη) and practical wisdom (φρόνησις).<sup>67</sup> The intellectual virtues do not fit neatly into either of these categories, though, because they regulate intellectual inquiry itself. In Zagzebski's terms, the intellectual virtues grasp what is contingent.<sup>68</sup>

There is a clear connection between the intellectual virtues and the moral virtues; the moral virtues are governed in a sense by φρόνησις.<sup>69</sup> Zagzebski refines this notion by placing φρόνησις above the other virtues and by connecting it with a truth-seeking desire.<sup>70</sup>

Taking Zagzebski's objection in mind, the motivation behind the division of the rational soul and the appetites and desires is important to preserve. Some modern psychologists have also pointed to this division and the struggle that goes on between these two factions of the soul. In *The Righteous Mind*, Jonathan Haidt calls these two forces the rider and the elephant.<sup>71</sup> The rider is roughly equivalent to the rational mind,

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<sup>67</sup> For this division and Zagzebski's objection, see *Virtues of the Mind*, 212–15.

<sup>68</sup> This is a crucial point in the larger conversations about epistemology. Zagzebski is not offering an augmented version of Aristotle and Aquinas, she is developing a self-sufficient epistemology and needs to deal with assessing the truth of contingent claims. "Some of these virtues may ultimately lead the believer to necessary truths, but that would not be typical; in any case, it is not part of their definition. I am not even denying the possibility that there are intellectual virtues that are uniquely equipped to lead their possessors to necessary truths. I am merely claiming that not all of the ones that do not lead to making or acting in that category. Granted, to Aristotle and Aquinas the range of the necessary was considerably broader than it is to us, having included virtually all of the natural sciences, but even so, the lack of a set of virtues dealing with belief about contingent matters is a serious omission from the point of view of contemporary investigation into the nature of intellectual virtue." Zagzebski, 214–15.

<sup>69</sup> Aquinas also believed prudentia was a governing intellectual virtue over the other virtues. ST I-II, q. 65, a., quoted in Zagzebski, 212-213. In Zagzebski's own system she deviates from this point. She rejects Aristotle's division of the intellect, something Aquinas also adopts. She posits that Aristotle's division of the soul is problematic for Christian theology. She may indeed be right about this point, but it does not change the way her epistemology can be used to examine Paul's teaching on intellectual virtue.

<sup>70</sup> Zagzebski, 228–30.

<sup>71</sup> Haidt first formulated this idea in Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding*

consisting of the controlled processes and reasoning. The elephant is the seat of intuition, emotion, and passion. Haidt's point is easy to understand. The elephant is the one in charge. Intuitions precede judgment and reasoning without regard for evidence or intellectually virtuous processes. Then the rider attempts to guide and explain these impulses using reason and reflection. This constitutes what Haidt calls the "social intuitionist model of moral judgment."<sup>72</sup>

Haidt developed this metaphor after one in Plato's *Phaedrus*. This phenomenon was well-known in the ancient world. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato describes the soul as a chariot rider holding the reins to two horses, one good and one bad. The good horse is "a friend of honor joined with temperance and modesty, and a follower of true glory; he needs no whip, but is guided only by the word of command and by reason," but the bad horse is "is the friend of insolence and pride, is shaggy-eared and deaf, hardly obedient to whip and spurs."<sup>73</sup> This makes for difficult driving. The charioteer grips the reins and struggles to force the bad horse toward along the beatific path of wisdom. Eventually the horses learn to pull in unison.

Aristotle may have been correcting Plato's division of the soul in his own account, but he's adopted the heart of the chariot metaphor. In each of these systems, the rational mind is responsive to the irrational mind and the irrational mind is trained by – and also responds to – the rational mind. Reason, desire, appetite, and intuition cannot be completely divided. There is an intellectual component in moral virtue, and at the same

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*Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 2–5; He develops the idea more fully in Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 52–56; Daniel Kahneman also makes a similar point with his System 1/System 2 structure in *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: FSG Books, 2011).

<sup>72</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 56.

<sup>73</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Harold N. Fowler, LCL 36 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), 253d-e.

time, the passions and desires precede the intellect.<sup>74</sup> So even if Aristotle's division is not preserved, this impulse in Book II of *Nicomachean Ethics* is correct.

This leads to Zagzebski's second point. Because the intellectual virtues deal with contingencies, *φρόνησις* plays a regulatory role among the other virtues, including the intellectual virtues. This is not in total contradiction of Aristotle but provides some clarity for the role of *φρόνησις* in *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>75</sup> In short, she concludes, "the proper way for us to conduct ourselves cognitively is exactly the same as the proper way for us to conduct ourselves in more overt forms of behavior, namely, by acting the way a person with practical wisdom would act."<sup>76</sup> This connection may be the most important for understanding Paul's conception of intellectual virtue. Christians are seeking to be conformed to Christ, and that means doing and thinking what Christ would do in their situation. Virtue theory is redefined around imitating not just any good person, but Christ and those who imitate him.<sup>77</sup>

There's one more aspect of *φρόνησις* to be investigated. Since it is an intellectual virtue it's reasonable to ask what epistemic purchase it has. While Aristotle does not explicitly pursue this line of thinking, the later Stoics did. By the first century, the Stoics had developed a version of intellectual virtue in which the wise man was measured by what he assented to, not just what he did, for assent precedes action in the

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<sup>74</sup> Although she does not agree with Aristotle's division of the soul, Zagzebski sees merit in the purpose behind this division, "On the one hand, Aristotle recognized the need for a cognitive element in moral goodness since no one acts without thought." *Virtues of the Mind*, 216; Other commentators on Aristotle have noticed the value in this division and the necessity of preserving the role of the intellect in moral formation and the practice of virtue. See Richard Sorabji, "Aristotle on the Role of the Intellect in Virtue," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 201–20.

<sup>75</sup> Zagzebski points out that in Book II, Aristotle says "no one can have the moral virtues without *phronesis* and anyone with *phronesis* has the moral virtues." See Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 4.13.1144b30-1. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 211.

<sup>76</sup> Zagzebski, 230.

<sup>77</sup> This point will become especially clear in the subsequent chapter on Philippians and intellectual formation.

Stoic model. Zagzebski goes this direction as well. Φρόνησις should be seen as playing the same kind of mediatorial role in epistemology as it does in ethics; “A person needs to know at what point to make an intellectual commitment just as much as she needs to know when to make a moral or personal commitment.”<sup>78</sup> There is no distinction between what is moral and what is true.

So φρόνησις becomes a higher-order virtue. Practical wisdom governs the capacity to act in accordance with knowledge in pursuit of the good. Or to put it another way, the wise person thinks and acts in the way that a person with φρόνησις would act.<sup>79</sup>

Zagzebski’s model of φρόνησις is helpful for understanding what Paul says about epistemic virtue. She shows that the concept of φρόνησις is not conceptually tied to Aristotle’s understanding of the soul, something Paul does not share. She also shows that φρόνησις plays a mediatorial role over contingencies. Aristotle understood φρόνησις in a similar way, but Zagzebski has shown that φρόνησις is an essential virtue for practicing any of the other virtues, intellectual or moral. This point is crucial for the way Paul describes the uniquely Christian practice of φρόνησις.

Φρόνησις being defined this way, a simple theological argument emerges. Jesus perfectly embodies φρόνησις. He always discerns what is right and does it. Christians have been called to imitate him, both in his thinking and in his acting. Therefore, Christians must learn to practice φρόνησις as well. What this argument does not establish is that φρόνησις is reserved for Christians. This is a point the texts will bear out.

## Conclusion

Paul was not a Stoic or an Aristotelian. The following survey of his letters will

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<sup>78</sup> Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 223.

<sup>79</sup> Zagzebski traces the path from right acts governed by φρόνησις, “A right act, all things considered, is what a person with *phronesis* might do in like circumstances,” to a justified belief as a product of φρόνησις, “A justified belief, all things considered, is what a person with *phronesis* might believe in like circumstances.” (Emphasis original) Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 239, 246.



show that he does not use many of the technical terms found in the philosophy of either group. It's also clear Paul was not attempting to do technical philosophy. Even the more popular writers like Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius approach morality and character formation very differently. Paul is simply not interested in this level of precision and detail. Theology, especially as defined by N. T. Wright, is not the same as philosophy.

There are conceptual parallels between Paul and his contemporaries, specifically as it pertains to intellectual virtue. Paul shares the concerns of the philosophers that the virtue should lead to action. As Kavin Rowe has established in his incisive study of Paul and the Stoics, both Paul and the philosophers saw their teaching as an entire way of life.<sup>80</sup>

In fact, he explicitly says he's engaging with the philosophies in the world, whether by warning the Colossians, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit," or by exhorting the Corinthians, "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ."<sup>81</sup>

Second, and even more importantly, Paul believed he was preaching the truth about Christ and about the world. This truth could only be comprehended in and through Christ. While Paul challenges the content of the philosophical schools in his letters to the churches, even more emphatically, he challenges the way they conceive of knowledge itself. Unlike the philosophical schools, Paul is not claiming that Christians need to be

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<sup>80</sup> This fundamental claim enlightens the study of Paul and the Stoics, even if Rowe's point about incommensurability must be nuanced; "The human condition is such that you have to choose how to live from among options that rule one another out. The path from birth to death is simultaneously, therefore, a path of lived affirmation and of negation, and not one without the other. It is this intersection between the existential necessity of lived affirmation/negation and the claim to a true way of life that lies at the center of the conflict among rival traditions." C. Kavin Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>81</sup> Col 2:8; 2 Cor 10:5. Wright suggests that these phrases reflect a long running theme in Paul's life connected to the Greek philosophy in his hometown. "I regard it as highly probable that it was in this early time in Tarsus that he began to acquire the art of 'tearing down clever arguments, and every proud notion that sets itself up against the knowledge of God', resulting in his project of 'taking every thought prisoner and making it obey the Messiah.'" Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 206.

taught new information and habits, he is claiming that “*the act of knowing* itself has been transformed.”<sup>82</sup>

As this survey of Paul’s philosophical world shows, intellectual virtue was popular and reasonably well-defined on a conceptual level in the ancient world. Philosophers taught that φρόνησις, the cardinal intellectual virtue encompassed the process of knowing what to do in every situation. Through a process of discernment, the sage or the wise person determines how to act, how to resist the pull of the passions, and how to become virtuous.

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<sup>82</sup> Wright, 1356. Emphasis original.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE MIND OF THE FLESH: ROMANS 1-7

#### **Introduction**

In the letter to the Romans, Paul lays out the clearest argument for the epistemic differences between believers and nonbelievers by contrasting the mind of the flesh (1:18-32; 2:17-23; 7:22-25) with the mind of the Spirit (8:5-9; 12:1-3).<sup>1</sup> Romans can be considered the “plumb line” of the epistles and can be treated as a starting point into Paul’s thought.<sup>2</sup>

The first seven chapters of Romans paint a bleak picture of humanity’s epistemic situation outside of Christ. In the first three chapters, Paul indicts all of humanity and returns a guilty verdict; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (3:23). In the course of this indictment, though, Paul expands on the effects of sin including the intellectual (noetic) effects of sin. Humanity has been rendered foolish by sin, unable to know and do the right thing and unable to discern the will of God. This includes both the Jews and the Gentiles.

After explaining that humanity can only be made right with God through faith (5:1), Paul explains the details and implications of being reconciled to God through Christ and the changes that take place in the desires, and in each person’s ability to live in

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<sup>1</sup> This is not the major theme of Romans, nor is it the most prominent thread of Paul’s argument, but it is significant and well-defined nonetheless. What the main argument, or the center of Paul’s argument, in Romans is has been a matter of debate among the commentators, and this inquiry does not make a claim on solving that dispute. However, because one of the prominent themes in Romans is salvation through faith in Christ and the implications of being in Christ, the epistemic abilities of those who are in Christ and those who are not are well-defined and consonant with the major contours of Paul’s argument. For a summary of the various approaches, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018); James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, 38A (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 25–26.

Christ. In 7:22-25, he returns to the intellectual effects of sin and describes the futility of trying to discern the will of God and practice practical wisdom without the aid of the Spirit. By the end of this chapter, Paul has proven that humanity is hopeless without Christ with respect to intellectual virtue. Outside of Christ is it impossible to discern the will of God and to exercise the practical wisdom necessary to do his will. The following exegesis will show that Paul does not believe anyone outside of Christ can truly practice φρόνησις.

### **Romans 1:18-32: The Mind Under Wrath**

In Romans 1, Paul describes the revelation of God's wrath against the whole world outside of Christ, specifically addressed to Greeks and Gentiles. This indictment carries an epistemic component. Paul describes the inability of sinful humanity to think properly about God and about morality. This is the state of sinful humanity and as Paul goes on to show, it is inescapable outside of Christ. Paul describes a lack of φρόνησις, the inability to properly deliberate, or discern, about the world and thus, the inability to know the truth as an essential part of the sinful human condition.

In this first section of Romans after his thesis (1:16-17), Paul begins his argument with a statement of the human dilemma (1:18) and a series of proofs, examples, and implications (1:19-32) of this core problem. The central thesis of this section can be found in 1:18; God has revealed his wrath from heaven against those who have suppressed the truth.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to 1:17 where Paul states that the righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) of God is revealed (ἀποκαλύπτεται), 1:18 declares that the wrath (ὀργή) of God is being revealed (ἀποκαλύπτεται). While God's righteousness is revealed from faith for faith, his wrath is revealed ungodliness and unrighteousness. While human ἀσέβεια

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<sup>3</sup> See Moo's arrangement of this section around the thesis in 1:18. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 104–6. See also, Frank J. Matera, *Romans*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 48.

and ἀδικία are the targets of divine wrath, there is an even more fundamental charge, “what the gospel reveals is the ongoing human effort to suppress the truth.”<sup>4</sup>

The clear emphasis of Paul’s description of the human dilemma is that the wrath of God is being revealed on account of humanity’s unrighteous suppression of the truth.<sup>5</sup> The passage can be divided into five sections. The first two, 1:18-19 and 1:20-23, explain the nature of suppression. In the first case, 1:19, Paul says what can be known about God is plain to humanity.<sup>6</sup> In the second, 1:21, he uses the same introductory phrase to say that in spite of his manifest qualities, humanity has refused to honor him. The final three sections describe the results of suppressing the truth, each one introduced by the aorist indicative, παρέδωκεν, in vs. 24, 26, and 28.<sup>7</sup>

In the first section (1:18-19), Paul states that what can be known about God is φανερόν, justifying Paul’s claim that the people are not simply ignorant of the truth but actively suppressing the truth, and later he says, without excuse.<sup>8</sup> Several commentators

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 153.

<sup>5</sup> It’s important to highlight that Paul is not citing ignorance as the root cause of idolatry, as many Jewish polemics did, but suppression. Gaca points out the unique portion of this otherwise typical argument against pagan idolatry. Gaca concludes that these pagans are not considered, “egregiously aberrant insiders.” This might be a step too far. Paul makes it clear that they have knowledge of God, but does not attribute salvific knowledge or even knowledge of the law to this group. This distinction will be made clear and Gaca’s position will be implicitly critiqued in the later section on Romans 2. Regardless, her observations about the uniqueness of Paul’s charge are valuable. Kathy L. Gaca, “Paul’s Uncommon Declaration in Romans 1:18-32 and Its Problematic Legacy for Pagan and Christian Relations,” in *Early Patristic Readings of Romans*, ed. Kathy L. Gaca and L. L. Welborn, Romans Through History and Cultures (New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 1–33.

<sup>6</sup> Harvey describes this phrase as providing loose subordination; “Why something just stated can reasonably be considered valid.” John D. Harvey, *Romans*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017), 35; See the entry on διότι in, Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 251.

<sup>7</sup> Jewett discusses the various attempts to divide the passage. Overall, commentators agree that 1:18-32 is a single unit, several agree with Jewett that the passage divides before vs. 24, including Matera, but others divide the passage at vs. 22 (Klostermann, Jeremias, Dupont), vs. 25 (Wilckens and Cranfield), and vs. 26 (Dunn). Jewett, *Romans*, 149–50; Matera, *Romans*, 48.

<sup>8</sup> Moo links the words φανερώω and ἀποκαλύπτω in this passage, showing both words refer to God’s revelation, not human faculties. Even what is plain must first have been revealed. Moo, *Romans*, 104.

point out the Stoic language in this first subsection.<sup>9</sup> Paul is pushing back against the notion that God cannot be known, in agreement with the Stoics.<sup>10</sup> It's important to note that this statement also complicates things regarding the Jewish understanding of knowledge. Paul is making a universal statement about human knowledge, and argues that every person can know certain things about God. Jews often believed the Gentiles could not know God at all.<sup>11</sup> The base level of what can be known about God, for Jews and Gentiles, is a result of God's own manifestation, and can be seen in the things he has made.

The second section (1:21-23) describes the way in which humans suppress the truth, beginning again with the same phrase that began vs. 19. Based on the knowledge available, humanity should have glorified God and given him thanks, but their minds became futile and their hearts were darkened. Even though they thought they were wise, they became foolish, and they continued to refuse to honor God, instead they exchanged his glory for the fool's glory of created things. What's interesting here is that the data sets in 1:20 and 1:23 are the same. They should have seen created things and worshipped God, but instead they looked at created things and worshipped them. They were not able to look beyond creation to the creator. This is a crisis of understanding and doxastic faculties.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 153. Craig S. Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016); Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Stanley K. Stowers, "Paul and Self-Mastery," in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 524–50.

<sup>10</sup> Jewett quotes Epictetus' argument against the skeptic who claims nothing is knowable. In *Discourses*, 2.20, Epictetus argues that just because one cannot know everything does not mean one cannot know anything. Against the Academic Skeptics, who doubted the senses, he pointed out that they trusted their senses to eat, walk around, and conduct their business. Thus, they apparently could trust the senses for some things. Paul's arguments here make a similar epistemic point about humanity broadly. Jewett, *Romans*, 153n51.

<sup>11</sup> Jewett quotes the Wisdom of Solomon 13:1 as do others, "Μάταιοι μὲν γὰρ πάντες ἄνθρωποι φύσει, οἷς παρὴν θεοῦ ἀγνωσία καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὀρωμένων ἀγαθῶν οὐκ ἴσχυσαν εἰδέναι τὸν ὄντα οὔτε τοῖς ἔργοις προσέχοντες ἐπέγνωσαν τὸν τεχνίτην." Jewett, 154; Matera, *Romans*, 49.

<sup>12</sup> "When people act sinfully, rebelling against God's just rule, they fail to embrace the truth and so suppress it." Moo, *Romans*, 114. N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 432. "Pagans, who conduct themselves in

The final three sections (1:24-25, 1:26-27, and 1:28-32) begin with the phrase, παρέδωκεν αὐτοῦς ὁ θεός. These three statements catalogue the results of the wrath of God on fallen humanity and represent both the force of Paul's indictment and the resulting condition of humanity outside of Christ and without the Spirit.

### **The Indictment**

The epistemic results of God's wrath are described in three parallel phrases beginning with παρέδωκεν. Here, he does not limit the truth the people have suppressed to intellectual assent. The truth is not only something that is believed, but it determines the way human beings act in the world. Suppressing the truth can be seen as easily in actions as it can be in intellectual beliefs. They exchanged the glory of God for idols, God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts (1:22-24), because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, God gave them up to dishonorable passions (1:26), and because they did not discern to have true knowledge of God, he gave them up to an undiscerning mind (1:28).

Each of these charges carries an epistemological element, further reinforcing the unity between thinking and doing. Paul connects the failure of humanity to rightly think and reason about God with their sinful behavior.

### **Claiming to Be Wise (1:22-24)**

The first exchange follows an extrapolation of suppressing the truth (1:18). What can be known about God is plain, seen in his invisible attributes, so that humanity is without excuse for not knowing him and worshipping him (1:19-20). Again, Paul makes clear this is not a matter of ignorance, but of suppression. Though people do have this limited knowledge of God, they have not honored or given thanks to him. This is an extremely important passage for the development of natural theology and the nature of

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wickedness, are seen to rebel against God and the truth about him. Consequently, they hold that truth captive and in effect stifle it." Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 278.

salvific knowledge.<sup>13</sup> On the subject of intellectual virtue, this passage has slightly different significance. To whatever extent people could know about God, their minds are now futile and their hearts are darkened. Paul expands on a common theme in the Hebrew Scriptures in which idolatry leads people to become like what they worship. G.K. Beale argues that in 1:23, the phrase, “ἠλλαξαν τὴν δόξαν” alludes to Psalm 106:19-20 and Jeremiah 2:11, passages that describe Israel forsaking the Lord for impotent idols.<sup>14</sup> Combined with the following verse, the conclusion is inescapable that outside of Christ it is impossible to know God in a way that leads to honoring and thanking him, to be wise, or to turn away from idolatry.

In the next phrase, Paul condemns their claims to be wise. In fact, in claiming to be wise, they have demonstrated their own foolishness. This may be one of the more overt polemical statements against the supposed wisdom of the philosophers, echoing the argument Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 1-4.<sup>15</sup> There and here, Paul makes clear that those who are wise in the sight of the world may actually not be wise at all in the sight of God.

From this first condemnation, it is clear that the way of wisdom cannot be found in suppressing the truth, exchanging the glory of God for idols, or claiming to be wise in the ways of the world. Moreover, those who do these things have been rendered incapable of practicing the intellectual virtues because of their suppression of the truth.

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<sup>13</sup> For an overview of the exegetical positions, see Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 221–22; Moo, *Romans*, 117–19; Schreiner, *Romans*, 93-97. See the following section on 2:1-16 for a fuller discussion of natural theology.

<sup>14</sup> G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 373-374. For a more comprehensive version of this argument, see G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Many of the commentators hear an echo of Paul’s condemnation in 1 Corinthians. There and here, Paul’s use of σοφός is overwhelmingly, but not exclusively, negative. See Rom 1:14; 1 Cor 1:19, 20, 25, 26, 27, 3:18, 19, 20. Moo, *Romans*, 118; It’s also possible that Adam’s fall is in the background in this verse. See Dunn’s treatment of the Adam Christology in this verse. Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 60; Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Calvin dismisses the idea that this is a reference to the philosophers. Quoted in and joined by Cranfield. *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 119.



## Exchanging the Truth about God (1:26)

The question of how to tame and overcome the passions is one of the classic philosophical arguments. In the second exchange, Paul explains that certain dishonorable passions arise from God's wrath, a response to humanity exchanging the truth for a lie. Continuing from the first exchange, this mention of truth also captures a holistic conception picture of life with respect to God, not just intellectual assent.

Discussing passion and desires in relationship with truth is a recognizable characteristic of the Hellenistic philosophies, particularly the Stoics.<sup>16</sup> The Stoic writer Zeno wrote an entire work, "Concerning the Passions." Passions were viewed as even more controlling than desires among the philosophers, and one of the most fundamental claims of the Stoics was that passions caused humans to behave irrationally, and that the wise person abstained from their passions. It's crucial to note that the Jews also believed in "taming the passions" as well.<sup>17</sup> James Thompson argues in an analysis of the ethics of 4 Maccabees that Hellenized Jews believed that God had granted them the ability to restrain the passions; "Reason does not destroy the emotions but provides the means so that no one will give way to them."<sup>18</sup> Later, the author of 4 Maccabees makes another important connection; "paideia in the law is the source of virtue (cf. 13:22)."<sup>19</sup> These texts indicate that many Greeks and some Hellenistic Jews likely shared the belief that practicing virtue was the way to restrict unwise passions.

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<sup>16</sup> Commentators are divided on whether or not Paul is referring to any Stoic doctrines when he mentions desires. Jewett argues against it citing Paul's plural use of *ἐπιθυμία* as an indication that he does not share the Stoic understanding of desire. Jewett, *Romans*, 168. Engberg-Pedersen views Paul's use of *ἐπιθυμία* as an indication that he agrees with the Stoic conception of self-directedness as a damaging desire. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 210. Regardless of whether this is a nod to Stoic understandings of *ἐπιθυμία*, these desires are impure and hold humanity hostage.

<sup>17</sup> For this discussion, see Jewett, *Romans*, 152-153. Jewett reads a narrow version of the passions, limited to Paul's example of sexual immorality.

<sup>18</sup> See 4 Macc 1:7 and the discussion in James W. Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul: The Context and Coherence of Pauline Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 25-29, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, 25-29.

Some Jews believed that outside of Torah, passions were impossible to overcome.<sup>20</sup> The language Paul uses here is similar to other Hellenistic Jewish texts, most similarly, 4 Maccabees 1:17-19 and Wisdom 13-14.<sup>21</sup> Stowers argues that both the Jews and the Greeks believed in some level of fixed nature concerning the desires and passions.<sup>22</sup> Based on what Paul says later in Romans (7:1-20) the Torah contains everything necessary for virtue.<sup>23</sup> Reading Torah is important and instructive, but ultimately insufficient for restraining the passions and practicing virtue.

From the Gentile perspective, many of the Greek philosophies saw passions as something to be overcome, particularly within the Stoic tradition.<sup>24</sup> Keener summarizes, “Despite differences among particular schools, most intellectuals agreed that one must use reason, guided by virtue, to control the passions.”<sup>25</sup> This was one of the central themes of Greek philosophy. The wise man was not susceptible to his passions, outside of those which are in accordance with nature.<sup>26</sup> The passions were often described as beasts in the ancient world, and taming the passions as taming wild beasts, especially among the Cynics.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:19 reads, “κυριωτάτη δὲ πάντων ἡ φρόνησις, ἐξ ἧς δὴ τῶν παθῶν ὁ λογισμὸς ἐπικρατεῖ.” Φρόνησις is the leading intellectual virtue according to the author, governing all reason and judgment.

<sup>22</sup> “Only identification with Christ... can bring about sinlessness and self-mastery.” Stowers, “Paul and Self-Mastery,” 536; Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 82; Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 19.

<sup>23</sup> On the importance but insufficiency of the Torah for Christian living, see N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1095–1101. For a classic treatment of Pauline ethics and Torah, see Furnish, “The Law is by no means irrelevant to the Christian’s practical conduct, and the apostle himself appeals to the binding force of the law’s commandment in the Christian’s life (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal 5:14). But the believer understands the content and force of the law in a new way, within the perspective of his new life in Christ.” Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, The New Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 228.

<sup>24</sup> Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 19; Keener references Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Paul, Virtues, and Vices,” in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 612–13. See also, Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*.

<sup>25</sup> Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 21.

<sup>26</sup> Cicero, *On Ends*, trans. Harris Rackham, LCL 40 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), Bk 3.

<sup>27</sup> Malherbe posits that Paul’s reference to the wild beasts in Ephesus might have been a

One of the flaws in the reasoning of the ancient philosophers was that they believed the passions and the intellect were mutually exclusive. Keener points out that modern psychology has shown this dichotomy to be inaccurate.<sup>28</sup> Without getting too far away from the text, the work of modern philosophers like Linda Zagzebski or Esther Meek can provide helpful language and concepts with which to explain what's going on in these passages. The epistemic virtues of truth-seeking and conscientiousness combine trust in the emotions within an epistemological framework.<sup>29</sup>

Unlike the Stoics, Paul does not want to eradicate desire or passions, especially those that come from the Spirit.<sup>30</sup> While he may share the Aristotelian notion that the desires can be habituated, he does not appear to believe that virtue is the deliverance of human reason alone (1:22). Paul asserts that actions, here ungodliness and idolatry, affect the mind, and in other places, that the mind affects actions. This reverses the anthropology of the Stoics, who believed that the deliverances of the mind, through rationality, controlled actions, but did not see the influence flowing the other way. This is

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reference to human passions. He cites examples of this metaphor in both Plato (Phaedrus, 81e-82b and The Republic 9.588c-590a) and Aristotle (Nicomachean Ethics, 7.1.1-7.5.1) in Abraham J. Malherbe, "The Beasts at Ephesus," in *Light from the Gentiles: Hellenistic Philosophy and Early Christianity*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald et al. (Boston: Brill, 2014), 48–51.

<sup>28</sup> Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> For examples of how to incorporate the emotions into truth seeking, Zagzebski argues, "I suggest that a conscientious person should treat emotion dispositions the same way she treats her epistemic faculties. She does not have a noncircular justification for the reliability of either kind of faculty, but the outputs of both kinds of faculty can survive conscientious self-reflection." Linda Trinkhaus Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 75–98. Meek also emphasizes emotion within the framework of relational or covenantal epistemology. Esther L. Meek, *Loving to Know: Introducing Covenant Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 87–88; For a survey of different approaches to this topic, see Amy Coplan, "Feeling Without Thinking: Lessons from the Ancients on Emotion and Virtue-Acquisition," in *Virtue and Vice, Moral and Epistemic*, ed. Heather Battaly (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 133–52.

<sup>30</sup> "Many believed that the mind and correct beliefs could overcome passion (e.g... Paul rejects mere human mental power [Rom 7:22–23; 8:6], here stressing rather faith in Christ and solidarity with him." Keener cites 1 Cor 7:5.7; 2 Cor 7:5; 11:28; 1 Thess 3:1, 5, Cicero Off. 2.5.18, Leg. 1.23.60, and 4 Macc 1:1, 9 in *The Mind of the Spirit*, 82n11, 39. This also goes along with Zagzebski's argument that the emotions are an important part of self-trust. For Paul, it is not that the emotions should or should not be trusted, but that the right emotions should be trusted. This falls perfectly in line with Zagzebski's model.

why, according to the Stoics, a person could do the “right thing” in every circumstance and not be virtuous.<sup>31</sup> If there is no perfected reason, there is no virtue.

The result of these dishonorable passions is that people began to commit unnatural acts with one another. Here, Paul uses the very significant phrase, *παρὰ φύσιν*, another technical term. It is unclear whether or not Paul was consciously appealing to the Stoics, but most of his Gentile readers would likely have heard this as a familiar phrase.<sup>32</sup> The Jews also believed that homosexuality was *παρὰ φύσιν* because it violated God’s creational design and was explicitly prohibited.<sup>33</sup> Josephus and Philo both use these terms to describe same-sex acts, combining Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions.<sup>34</sup>

Because this phrase is so common among the Greek Stoic philosophers, it is also possible Paul is referencing this Stoic doctrine of what is natural. Living “in accordance with nature” is one of the oldest doctrines in the Stoic tradition. Diogenes Laertius traces the origins back to Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus.<sup>35</sup> The Stoics believed that the wise person always did what was *κατὰ φύσιν*.<sup>36</sup> Here, Paul is drawing on

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<sup>31</sup> For this feature of Stoic ethics, see Jedan’s discussion and citation of Plutarch’s “Against the Stoics on Common Conceptions,” 1037c-d. Christoph Jedan, *Stoic Virtues: Chrysippus and the Religious Character of Stoic Ethics* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2009), 145–48.

<sup>32</sup> Acting *κατὰ φύσιν*, “according to nature” was one of the binding concepts of Stoic anthropology and ethics, prominent in Cicero, Epictetus, Stobaeus, and Plutarch. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 354–65. See also, Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 64.

<sup>33</sup> The literature on this topic is extensive. For overviews, see Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation, A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 379–405; Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2010). Fitzmyer gives the most thorough treatment of the Jewish and Greco-Roman influences that might be behind what Paul is saying here. Given the prominence of this phrase in Greek philosophy and the lack of this language in Jewish texts outside of Hellenized deuterocanonical books, Fitzmyer concludes that this is more likely to be an allusion to the Greek concept. It is unlikely that this phrase is being used purely on the basis of Paul’s reading of the Torah. In other places he uses language found in the specific prohibitions listed in Leviticus 20:13. See 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 where Paul uses *ἀρσενοκοίτης*. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 286–89.

<sup>34</sup> See the discussion in Moo, *Romans*, 125-126. Also, the entry for *φύσις* in TDNT, 9.264-271 includes a comparison of the Stoics, Philo, and Josephus.

<sup>35</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 7.87-8.

<sup>36</sup> Epictetus attributes this belief to Chrysippus; “Therefore Chrysippus was right to say: ‘As long as the future is uncertain to me I always hold to those things which are better adapted to obtaining the things in accordance with nature; for god himself has made me disposed to select these.’” *Discourses* 2.6.9,

this distinction to condemn the sexual immorality common in the Greek and Roman world.<sup>37</sup>

From the standpoint of intellectual virtue, this passage is important for two reasons. First, Paul connects suppressing the truth with dishonorable passions. By doing this, he gives an origin, an explanation, and an extent for immoral sexual passions. Second, he contradicts the prevailing doctrine that the philosophers had the key to restraining the passions. Paul groups these supposed wise men in with the rest of humanity. They too suppress the truth. They too are hopeless to live up to even their own standards.

### **Failing to Discern (1:28)**

The third statement is the most relevant to intellectual virtue. In 1:28, Paul asserts that humans have suppressed the truth for the fifth time in letter (1:18, 21, 23, 25).<sup>38</sup> The first phrase reads, “καθώς οὐκ ἔδοκίμασαν τὸν θεὸν ἔχειν ἐν ἐπιγνώσει,” which is difficult to translate.<sup>39</sup> The word *ἔδοκίμασαν* is crucial to understanding Paul’s argument through the entire book, most locally, it plays an immediate role contrasted with the phrase *ἀδόκιμον νοῦν* later in 1:28. The entire phrase lets on that humanity did not decide that it was fitting give God the recognition that he deserves. In Romans, *δοκιμάζω* is used four times (1:28; 2:18; 12:2; and 14:22) and the noun *δόκιμος* is used twice (14:18 and

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SVF 3.191. Translated in LS, 1.365.

<sup>37</sup> There is some evidence that Greek authors also viewed homoerotic acts as *κατὰ φύσιν*. Jewett mentions Plato’s statement in the *Laws*, “And whether one makes the observation in earnest or in jest, one certainly should not fail to observe that when male unites with female for procreation the pleasure experienced is held to be due to nature, but contrary to nature when male mates with male or female with female, and that those first guilty of such enormities were impelled by their slavery to pleasure.” Plato, *Laws*, trans. R. G. Bury, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 363c; His reference to Plutarch, *Moralia* IX, 761e-f is suspect. The acts Plutarch refers to have to do with war not sexual acts. He mentions that Philo employs similar terminology in his condemnations of pederasty. Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus*, 3.39.2. Jewett, *Romans*, 175–76.

<sup>38</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 66; Jewett, *Romans*, 181.

<sup>39</sup> Jewett, “They did not see fit to hold God in knowledge,” Jewett, *Romans*, 163; Matera, “They did not see fit to have a true knowledge of God,” Matera, *Romans*, 53; Witherington, “And just as they did not put to the test the knowledge of God they had,” Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 62.

16:10) and the negative *ἀδόκιμος* is used once in 1:28. Within these passages, the verb is used every time to mean approve or discern. The major contrast for 1:28 is 12:2 where Paul concludes that with the mind of the Spirit, Christians can discern the will of God, a similar phrase to the one Paul uses in Ephesians 5:10.

This final charge is the most difficult to construe and it is notoriously difficult to translate. There may be no English equivalent to express what Paul means with the phrase, “οὐκ ἔδοκίμασαν τὸν θεὸν ἔχειν ἐν ἐπιγνώσει” in vs. 28. Schreiner translates this phrase as, “And just as they did not think God was fit to be known, God handed them over to an unfit mind so they did things that are not fitting.”<sup>40</sup> Other English translations obscure the similarity between the action of not “seeing fit” to know God and God handing them over to an “unfit” mind.<sup>41</sup>

Dunn implies that the unbelievers made God the subject of a test, presumably relying on the translation of *δοκιμάζω*, which does involve testing.<sup>42</sup> Middendorf follows Dunn, explaining that the origin of *δοκιμάζω* had to do with testing metals or approving a person for office. Since these people did not approve of God, he reads Paul as saying God gave them over to minds that also did not pass the test.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 100.

<sup>41</sup> The ESV reads, “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.” The NET, “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what should not be done.” The NIV, “just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.” The NKJV, “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.” The NASB, “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.” Some commentators also obscure this point, “As they did not see fit to acknowledge God, he delivered them over to a base mentality and to improper conduct.” Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 269.

<sup>42</sup> In BDAG, *δοκιμάζω* includes making a critical examination of something, determining the genuineness of something, as in 1 Thess. 5:21, or to work from the results of an examination in 1 Cor. 16:3 and 2 Cor. 8:22. Indeed this is probably the sense in 2:18 and 12:2. The use in 1:28 has an affinity with this second use, and as it is conceptually paired with 12:2 it probably shares a similar sense. Bauer, *BDAG*, 255.

<sup>43</sup> Middendorf takes the entire phrase in 1:28 to refer to theological knowledge. Michael P. Middendorf, *Romans 1-8*, Concordia Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 123.

Because of the similarity with the following phrase, God gave them over to an “*ἀδόκιμον νοῦν*,” it’s clear Paul is playing on the root of the verb *δοκιμάζω* and the noun *ἀδόκιμος*. In other contexts, *δοκιμάζω* means to test something or to assay it.<sup>44</sup> However, in this context, and others in combination with an infinitive, *δοκιμάζω* can mean “see fit.”<sup>45</sup> Combined, they reflect minds that have failed to properly appraise God. Cranfield captures the sense of this phrase; this means “to know God in the sense of acknowledging Him, reckoning with Him, taking Him into account in the practical affairs of one’s life.”<sup>46</sup> They have not found it a fitting thing to know God. So, the result is that God has given them minds that are incapable of determining fitness more generally.

The second half of this first phrase in 1:28, “*ἔχειν ἐν ἐπιγνώσει*,” refers to the failure to properly acknowledge God. The question is whether or not to acknowledge God, *ἔχειν ἐν ἐπιγνώσει*, and humans discerned, *δοκιμάζω*, that it was not fitting to acknowledge him. Jewett cites the use of this phrase in Epictetus and concludes that the fault is not ignorance about God, but the blatant refusal to give him his due acknowledgment. This fits the ongoing theme of suppression in this passage and the result that humans worship things other than God as a result. As a result of not using the knowledge and discernment that they do have, God gave them over to an *ἀδόκιμον νοῦν*. Now they have a mind that is unable to test and discern. The final phrase of the verse resonates with Stoic tones. Philosophers often used the word *καθήκω* to mean that which is fitting or suitable in accordance with nature.<sup>47</sup> Because humanity did not see fit to

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<sup>44</sup> BDAG and LSJ both list this as the predominant meaning for this verb in various contexts. The sense is that this testing determines whether or not something is qualified or worthy. LSJ gives the sense of testing a person for office or judging their character. This is the way the word is used in 2 Cor 13:5-7. The second word, *ἀδόκιμος*, has a similar use. It can mean worthless or unqualified. The TDNT adds that this can describe a soldier unfit for battle.

<sup>45</sup> Moo and Cranfield both make this point. Moo, *Romans*, 127–28; Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:127–28; Fitzmyer gives a sense more similar to remembrance. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 288; Wright gives an interesting sense, “they did not see fit to have true knowledge of God.” Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” 434.

<sup>46</sup> Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:128.

<sup>47</sup> Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromley, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 438; Jewett also points out that Epictetus included

acknowledge God, God gave them over to a mind that does not even see fit to approve of the most basic and universal duties, and as the following verses show, humanity is given over to vice and approves of those doing things that are wrong. Paul uses another term, *συνευδοκέω*, in 1:32 to describe those who approve of things deserving of death, used only there in Romans, but carrying a similar meaning to *δοκιμάζω* earlier in the passage.

The meaning is further nuanced by the word *καθήκοντα* later in the verse. As a Stoic technical term this is sometimes translated as “fitting” or “proper.” It invokes a criterion of judgment.<sup>48</sup> Combined with *δοκιμάζω* there is a strong sense that this phrase is describing people who have been rendered incapable of knowing and doing the right thing. Their minds have been made unable to discern, in Aristotle’s sense, the right thing to do. This condition previews the resolution Paul offers in Rom 12:1-3. Only the Holy Spirit can overcome this blindness that has resulted from suppressing the truth.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Extent of Paul’s Indictment**

To summarize the effects of Paul’s indictment, the first question that needs to be answered is who is Paul describing? Is this Gentiles only? Is this a universal feature of sinful humanity or the characteristic of a particular group of people? Commentators are loosely split among two categories, some arguing that Romans 1:18-32 describes all of humanity outside of Christ and others that he has in mind only the Greeks and Gentiles.<sup>50</sup>

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basic civic obligations under this category. This was also the understanding among Hellenistic Jews. Jewett, *Romans*, 182–83.

<sup>48</sup> See LSJ for the classical uses of this term, “to be meet, fit, proper,” and the moral component of duty, particularly in Stoic texts. The TDNT gives an even stronger statement of the moral quality of this word related to the Stoic use, “As actions, *καθήκοντα* are *κατόρθωμα* (full duties) for the wise, who alone can properly fulfil them.”

<sup>49</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 128.

<sup>50</sup> Dunn and Schreiner give overviews of the different positions and serve as examples of the mainstream view on each side. Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 50; Schreiner, *Romans*, 84–86; Douglas Campbell takes the critique in Romans 1 to be a Jewish Christian persona that Paul is using, but not Paul’s own point of view. Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); See Schreiner, *Romans*, 90–91 for a summary of the arguments against Campbell’s reading of Romans 1 and N. T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (London: Fortress Press, 2015), 195, 204f.



While it is important to identify the group Paul is describing in chapter 1, it becomes less significant when paired with chapter 2, because after chapter 2 it becomes clear that everyone is included in Paul's indictment of those who are outside of Christ – and that every person bears the consequences of suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, even if there are slight differences in the consequences between Jews and Gentiles. Against those who limit Paul's indictment only to the Gentiles or only to the Jews, Moo points out the universality of Paul's language; all of humanity is under the wrath of God (1:18), all humanity is without excuse (1:18-32), and all humanity is sinful and unable to change their situation. In short, "all are under sin's power to such a degree that only God's power, unleashed in the good news of Jesus Christ, can rescue them."<sup>51</sup>

The first group of commentators take the particular indictment in 1:18-32 to be universal.<sup>52</sup> If the wrath of God is being revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness, then that would include unrighteousness and ungodliness found in all groups of people, for the Jews, Greeks, and Gentiles. There are three arguments in support of this reading. First, there is no indication in the text that Paul is limiting his scope. From both a literary and rhetorical perspective, 1:18-32 is the anticipation of Paul's statements in 3:21-26 and 5:12-20. While it becomes clear in 2:1 that Paul may have had in mind non-Jews in chapter 1, at no point within chapter 1 does he make an attempt or clarification to limit the scope of his diagnosis.<sup>53</sup> The universality of Paul's indictments in 1:18-3:9 rests on two bookending universal statements; in the beginning, "all ungodliness" (1:18) and in the end, "all have sinned" (3:23). Unrighteous sinfulness is the problem for Jews and Gentiles.

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<sup>51</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 103. Moo believes that Paul is especially concerned with demonstrating the sinfulness of the Jews in the first three chapters.

<sup>52</sup> For representative arguments for this view, see Jewett, *Romans*, 152; Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 50; Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:106; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 278.

<sup>53</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 270.

Second, the terms Paul employs may also shed light on who he is speaking about. Paul writes that the wrath of God is being revealed against ungodliness and unrighteousness, two terms that may indicate an attempt to pinpoint Gentile and Jewish suppression of the truth, respectively. The accusations of ἀσέβεια and ἀδικία land on both Gentiles and Jews. In particular, the charge of impiety was the cardinal Roman sin, “failure to respect deity,” and the charge of unrighteousness would have been an affront to the Jews, and if this rigid division is blurry, the two charges probably both fall on both groups.<sup>54</sup> Fitzmyer also takes this view, arguing that this pair “[sums] up the total sinfulness and rampant unrighteousness of pagan humanity: the wrong relationship with their creator.”<sup>55</sup>

Third, the use of widely known Stoic categories evidences a global view in Paul’s assessment of the human condition. Dunn sees these categories as supporting the universality of Paul’s description; “The use of more widely known Stoic categories, particularly in vv. 19-20, 23, and 28... would increase the universal appeal of the argument.”<sup>56</sup>

This kind of rhetoric may have been quickly dismissed by Jews in the audience but Gentiles would have heard this passage as a charge brought against all of humanity. Commentators drawing on the Stoic tradition have argued that the polemic, while it does have a cursory resemblance to some Jewish polemics, is actually markedly different from typically Jewish reasoning.<sup>57</sup> They argue that it is evidence of a different line of

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<sup>54</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 152.

<sup>55</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 278.

<sup>56</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 53 citing Max Pohlenz, “Paulus Und Die Stoa,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche* 42 (1949): 69–104.

<sup>57</sup> For example, “The language here is scarcely characteristic of earliest Christian thought... But it is familiar in Stoic thought” in James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary 38A (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 57. Jewett adds Epictetus, *Diss.* 1.6.19 and 6.20, where he writes that God “is already present in his own works.” Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 155n66. These expressions were also common in Philo, particularly that the invisible qualities of God were available to the mind through the created order, 155n67. Other parallel passages include Pseudo-Aristotle, *de Mundo*, 399b.14ff, and Plutarch, *Moralia*, 398A;

reasoning, not just a Jewish indictment of Gentile idolatry, but a broader indictment of the idolatry of the human race as a whole. Paul does not follow some of the more common Jewish arguments about idolatry.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, if there are references to Adam in this passage, as other commentators have argued, then Jews may have heard Paul's argument as an indictment against all of humanity.<sup>59</sup>

### **Inability to Discern in Paul's Letters**

Human inability to discern is not unique to Paul's argument in Romans. The same argument appears in Ephesians 4:17-23.<sup>60</sup> The sequence is the same and follows closely with Rom. 1:21-28. The Gentiles' minds have become futile, (here, ματαιότης which is a similar word to the verb used in Rom. 1:21, ματαιόω) because their minds and hearts have been darkened, (compare, "έσκοτωμένοι τῇ διανοίᾳ ὄντες" in Eph. 4:18 with "έσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία" in Rom. 1:21). In Ephesians 4:18, Paul says they have been alienated from God because of their hardness of heart. This resulted in licentiousness (in Ephesians, ασελγεια, compared to dishonorable passions and homoerotic acts in Romans 1), impurity, and covetousness (ἀκαθαρσία and πλεονεξία appear both places.) In both places, hardness of heart is combined with ignorance, showing that the solution lies not in new information, but in re-creation.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Jewett cites similar polemics found in Ps. 76, 1 En. 99:7-8, and T. Levi 14:4 to show that Paul generalizes beyond the more specific contemporaneous Jewish polemics. Jewett, *Romans*, 159.

<sup>59</sup> For three examples, see Dunn, 61; Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 374; Morna D. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1990), 73-84.

<sup>60</sup> For scholars who believe Ephesians is not Pauline, but was written by someone in the Pauline school, this similarity indicates the prominence of Paul's argument in Romans 1 in the Pauline tradition. For those who attribute Ephesians to Paul, this shows continuity in his own thought. For a comparison of the language, see Brooke Foss Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: The Greek Text with Notes and Addenda*, *Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 65.

<sup>61</sup> Fowl puts this point well, "The combination of ignorance with hardness of heart makes it clear that the Gentiles' failing is not simply an intellectual error that might be corrected through further study. Rather, along with futile reasoning and darkened understanding, ignorance and hardness of heart all work together to present a picture of Gentiles as alienated from their true end in God in a comprehensive way, touching on the intellect, perceptions, affections, desires, and judgments." Stephen E. Fowl, *Ephesians*, *The New Testament Library* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 148.

Despite some of the agreement over Paul's argument, his use of Stoic terms, and the effects of the revelation God's wrath on human desires, passions, and minds, commentators offer a wide range of responses and summaries. Dunn's summary at the end of his comments on chapter 1 is typical:

The point is not that *God* chose to test and to disqualify their minds, or caused their minds to degenerate, but that the act of making God the subject of a test was itself the act of an unqualified mind, of an intelligence 'below par.' The mind of the creature depends on the light of God (cf. v 21) for it to function properly. When God leaves it to itself it is not adequate, insufficiently qualified for its talk of informing relationships with others and with the rest of creation. Paul uses the image of failing a test, being disqualified, elsewhere in Romans (12:2; 14:5); Paul has no desire to dissociate man's rational processes from the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 14:14-15, 19); it is the mind which leaves God out of consideration, which befogs its own function (v 21) and disqualifies itself.<sup>62</sup>

Man's rationality is preserved, as Dunn mentions in reference to 1 Corinthians 14, but what then is the epistemic capacity of those who are outside of Christ? This is not just a matter of intelligence. Though Paul calls them foolish in 1:24, these people clearly have high intellectual capabilities. Paul was writing this letter to the most sophisticated city in the world, after all. But although they are ignorant, it cannot be said that they are simply lacking information. It will take more than new information to remedy their situation.

The mind of the flesh is plagued by the inability to discern, *δοκιμάζειν*, most prominently, not just by ignorance. First, it is not just the "light of God" that human beings need to function at their highest mental capacity, but union with the Son and the work of the Holy Spirit. As Romans 8 and 12 will show, the solution for humanity's epistemic plight is covered by the more general solution Paul gives throughout the letter: being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ (5:1).

Second, the relational inadequacy that Dunn pinpoints is an effect of the mind of the flesh. Other places, Paul connects social discord with the mind, most immediately

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<sup>62</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 66.

in the vice list that follows in 1:29-32, but also in Philippians 2:1-4, where Paul encourages the believers to be humble and unified by having the same mind, and again in Ephesians 4:17-23, as discussed above. These socially related sins are a result. In each case, Paul gives the same solution to the problem. In Phil. 2:5, he writes, “τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,” and in Ephesians 4:23, “ἀνανεοῦσθαι δὲ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ νοῦς ὑμῶν.” Both conceptually and linguistically this is similar to what Paul describes in Romans 12:2-3, that the believers would “φρονεῖν ἀλλὰ φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν” because he exhorts them to “μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς.” These three passages show a consistent theme. Transformation and renewal of the mind by the Spirit is the solution to the ignorance and hardness of heart of unbelief. This will enable believers to think and judge rightly through the mind of God (or of Christ).

Here Paul disagrees most sharply with the Stoics, who believed that education was the solution to ignorance. As will be shown in Romans 12, the mind of the Spirit is not just rational, but is able to think virtuously in ways that comprehend, or δοκιμάζω, the mind of God. This is the key to interpretation in 1 Corinthians 14 as well. As opposed to the Stoics, Paul does not believe that information alone, or any course of education, can enable the mind to think according to the wisdom of God. Jewett identifies this key distinction in both the nature of the problem and the solution; “In contrast to the Greek outlook, the flaw in the human race does not lie in ignorance that can be excused or modulated through education but rather in a direct and multifaceted campaign to disparage God and replace him/her with a human face or institution.”<sup>63</sup> Ignorance is not as much the problem as the outcome. The root problem is suppression (1:18).

Ephesians 4:20-24 presents a potential problem for this view. In response to the unbelievers’ ignorance and hardness of heart, Paul exclaims, “ὁμοίως δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ἐμάθετε τὸν Χριστόν” (4:20), which raises the question of whether or not learning, education, and

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<sup>63</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 181.

teaching can remedy the mind of the flesh. But what's clear in the sequence of Paul's argument in this passage is that his appeal to teaching is predicated on being in Christ; this is where the truth is, and the way to be renewed.<sup>64</sup> It's important how he phrases the response to his exclamation, “εἴ γε αὐτὸν ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἐδιδάχθητε, καθὼς ἐστὶν ἀλήθεια ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ” (4:21). Participation in Christ is the only way to possess the mind of the Spirit.<sup>65</sup>

Since Paul's indictment plays out through immorality, it's natural to read δοκιμάζω as referring to humanity's moral reasoning abilities, and the same with ἀδόκιμος νοῦς. Cranfield gives this sense; “The ἀδόκιμος νοῦς is a mind so debilitated and corrupted as to be a quite untrustworthy guide in moral decisions.”<sup>66</sup> This would explain why God reacted to the suppression of the truth with his wrath.

Fitzmyer discusses the issue of natural theology within Romans 1:18-32, comparing Paul's views to both pagan philosophers and other Jewish polemics.<sup>67</sup> Like others, he too believes Paul went beyond his Jewish contemporaries in asserting that the Gentiles could have “vague, unformulated knowledge of God” but not as far as the Greek philosophers who believed they could know far more about God than Paul concedes.

Against Moo and Hooker, Fitzmyer advocates for a stronger system of natural theology,

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<sup>64</sup> Jewett makes this distinction most clearly, drawing on the difference between “knowledge” and “acknowledgment” writing, “while humans may well admit the existence of God, they fail to acknowledge God's claim.” Jewett, 182 There may also be some precedent for this distinction in Epictetus' work, see Discourses 2.20.21, “Ah, what a misfortune! A man has received from nature measures and standards for discovering the truth, and then does not go on and take the pains to add to these and to work out additional principles to supply the deficiencies, but does exactly the opposite, endeavouring to take away and destroy whatever faculty he does possess for discovering the truth.” Epictetus, *Discourses, Books 1-2*, trans. W. A. Oldfather, LCL 131 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).

<sup>65</sup> For an example of this connection between participation in Christ and the renewing of the mind, see Joshua W. Jipp, “Sharing the Heavenly Rule of Christ the King: Paul's Royal Participatory Language in Ephesians,” in *“In Christ” in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Constantine R. Campbell, and Michael J. Thate (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 253–80 and; Ashish Varma, “Fitting Participation: From the Holy Trinity to Christian Virtue,” in *“In Christ” in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Constantine R. Campbell, and Michael J. Thate (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 477–502.

<sup>66</sup> Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:128.

<sup>67</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 273–74.

for example, that reflection on what God has made can lead to a limited knowledge of him, removing God from being the proximate cause of this knowledge. The contrary view, he argues, stems from the Enlightenment effort to deny any possibility of the knowledge of God through the unaided human mind.<sup>68</sup>

Again, Paul asserts that the root problem is not ignorance but suppression, implying that all people are capable of seeing God's attributes, specifically his eternal power and divine nature in the things he has made (1:20) but still do not see fit to honor him. This phrase sets a cognitive limit on what can be known outside of Christ.<sup>69</sup> At a minimum, all people are capable of knowing these divine qualities from observing God's creation, but this natural knowledge falls short of saving knowledge, due not to a lack of mental faculties, but to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>70</sup> It is clear and emphatic through the passage that the wrath of God is being revealed on account of the suppression of the truth; Paul states or alludes to this fact five times in this single pericope (1:18, 21, 23, 25, and 28).<sup>71</sup> However, the renewing of the mind and the enhancement of mental faculties in terms of intellectual virtue, beyond the state of sinful man, while it is not the source of man's disbelief, is a result of union with Christ.

Indeed, the knowledge of God always comes through revelation, here manifestation (*φανερώω*), for the Gentiles, God has manifested his attributes through creation. For the Jews, he has done so additionally through the law. In both cases, this provides a sturdy epistemic floor. Every human being has been made with the epistemic

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<sup>68</sup> Fitzmyer, 274.

<sup>69</sup> "People do have some knowledge of God. But this knowledge, Paul also makes clear, is limited, involving the narrow range of understanding of God available in nature... The outward manifestation of God in his created works was met with a real, though severely limited knowledge of him among those who observed those works." Moo, *Romans*, 106–7.

<sup>70</sup> This was a controversial point in Judaism. Jewett writes, "A decisive break with later Jewish theology is evident, for instance, in Paul's claim that the knowledge of God was available to every human, which obviously includes Gentiles and barbarians." Jewett, *Romans*, 154.

<sup>71</sup> "The indictment here is that failure to acknowledge God as Creator results inevitably in a sequence of false relations toward God, toward man, and toward creation itself." Schreiner, *Romans*, 56.

capabilities to learn about the world and to receive the content of God's revelation, whether the kind of natural observation Paul describes in 1:20 or the giving of the law.<sup>72</sup>

One of the conclusions that can be drawn in this passage is how different Paul's assessment of the human condition is from the Jews who believe that Gentiles cannot know God at all on one side, and from Stoics and other Greek philosophers who believe that human beings can know what is right and do with is fitting on the other. Paul argues that there are things that can be known about God but that only proves that humanity is without excuse for not discerning the will of God. Because humanity did not know God and see fit to worship him, God gave them over to minds that are incapable of discerning what is right.

The prospects of the intellectual virtues in the unbelieving world look bleak in Romans 1. Though humanity is capable of knowing certain things about God, they are unable to do what is most important, know the truth. Regardless of how and why the suppression of the truth happened the conclusion that humanity is incapable of exercising certain intellectual virtues, particularly those described by and associated with discernment and fittingness, is inescapable.

### **Romans 2:17-20: The Mind and the Law**

The second chapter of Romans is as fraught as the first with regard to identifying the audience. Is Paul now shifting his focus to the Jews?<sup>73</sup> In this section, I will argue that in Romans 2:17-20 Paul argues that like the Gentiles in Romans 1:18-32, the Jews also do not have the ability to discern the will of God outside of Christ. By the

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<sup>72</sup> This is not trivial. For an assessment of human epistemic capabilities and divine revelation through nature, see Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>73</sup> For those who believe so, Barrett aptly explains the movement from chapter 1 into chapter 2; "In the preceding paragraph Paul has reached the conclusion that Jew and Gentile are equal before God. To this statement there is one evident objection. The difference between Jew and Gentile is not simply a matter of race, but of religion, or rather, of revelation. God through Moses gave the law to Israel; this was an advantage the Gentiles never had." C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 47.



time Paul declares that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” in 3:23, he has already established that one of the qualities of this sinfulness is the inability to exercise the virtue of practical wisdom, most acutely because outside of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, both Jews and Gentiles have an *ἀδόκιμος νοῦς*.

In order to establish this point, it’s necessary to treat two topics prior to looking at vs. 17-20. First, 2:12-16 can be read as a foundational text for natural law ethics. How does this impact the intellectual virtues of those outside of Christ? This discussion highlights the point that Paul does not believe that humanity lost the total ability to reason because they suppressed the truth. People can still practice almost all of the intellectual virtues outside of Christ, but the key is that there is at least one they cannot practice, practical wisdom, which can be seen in 2:18.

Second, it’s necessary to look at the style of argument Paul is using in 2:17-20, particularly the suggestions that this is a diatribe in order to understand what Paul is saying. If this is the case, then it is likely that the string of rhetorical questions Paul gives in 2:21-22 all anticipate a positive answer and that the descriptions he uses of his interlocutor in 2:17-18 are all false in actuality. The interlocutor who calls himself a Jew actually does not know God’s will or approve what is excellent.

At the end of this section, then, both Jews and Gentiles have been indicted on account of their sin and bear the implications of being outside of Christ, separated from God, and without the Holy Spirit. Though they have the law, they cannot discern the will of God or practice the virtue of practical wisdom.

### **On Natural Law (2:1-16)**

In Romans 2:1-11, Paul brings a general indictment against those who do not do what the law says. He emphasizes that God is impartial in judging regarding Jews and Greeks who “do not obey the truth” (2:8-11).<sup>74</sup> Knowing these norms is no substitute for

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<sup>74</sup> Keener offers a helpful insight framing this first section and situating it with respect to Paul’s moral assessment throughout the letter; “Thus while Paul is focusing on God’s ethnic impartiality rather than on believers here, when he later addresses such issues he seems to assume that it is believers in

obeying them.<sup>75</sup> Then in 2:12-16, he turns to a discussion of the law. There are important implications, especially in verses 14-15 about the role of the conscience in non-believers who though they do not have the law, do what the law requires and “becoming a law to themselves... show that the work of the law is written on their hearts.” This raises questions about the nature and extent of natural law.<sup>76</sup>

What law is this referring to?<sup>77</sup> There are several different views among the commentators, including the Mosaic law and a Stoic natural law.<sup>78</sup> Stowers has argued that the natural law tradition that emerged around this passage in the West does not resemble the chaotic arguments over natural law among the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Stoics.<sup>79</sup> Cicero

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Jesus who are able to fulfill the role of the righteous. Christ comes not merely to forgive unrighteousness but to empower for righteous living.” Craig S. Keener, *Romans*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 45. Longenecker is definitive on this point as well; “Clearly universal guilt and divine impartiality are Paul’s central concerns in ch. 2.” Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 269.

<sup>75</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 39.

<sup>76</sup> The natural law tradition is extremely rich and complex in Christian theology, many of the streams flowing from Aquinas’ treatment of natural law in the *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 94, a. 1-6 and pervading his theological and anthropological vision. Aquinas himself draws largely upon Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Augustine’s *City of God*. Aquinas viewed natural law as the providence of God, written on the hearts of every person. Interestingly, Aquinas asserts that in matters of speculative wisdom, natural law is the same for all men, but in terms of practical reasoning, φρόνησις, there is a difference. However, he roots this difference in the knowledge of propositions, not the practice of virtues. In terms of the knowledge of salvation, Aquinas acknowledges a distinction between things that are above nature, including the gospel and the plan of salvation. ST I-II, q. 94, a. 4. For a general account of Aquinas’ theory of natural law, see Martin Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason: A Thomist View of Moral Autonomy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000); For a shorter overview of the natural law theory in ethics, see Mark Murphy, “The Natural Law Tradition in Ethics,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/natural-law-ethics/>.

<sup>77</sup> The most straightforward explanation of this position is Moo’s, “The division of the world into those who sin ‘without the law’ and those who sin ‘in the law’ corresponds to the distinction between Jews and Gentiles (see vv. 10, 14). This means the ‘law’ in question is the law of Moses, the body of commandments given by God through Moses to the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai.” Moo, *Romans*, 155; Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 269–72. Cranfield takes this to be the Mosaic Law, but also to be Gentile Christians who are abiding imperfectly by the law as an expression of their faith in Christ. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:156–59; Schreiner shares this view that it is the law of Moses and Gentile Christians. *Romans*, 131.

<sup>78</sup> The classical statement of the second position is John W. Martens, “Romans 2.14-16: A Stoic Reading,” *New Testament Studies* 40 (1994): 55–67; For examples of natural law in the Stoics and other Greek philosophical schools, see Fitzmyer, *Romans*..

<sup>79</sup> Stowers extended discussion is worth considering on this point, Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 109-118. He concludes decisively against the natural law reading of these verses, “Paul does not develop a body of moral principles for his Gentile congregations based on natural law. If he believed in natural law as Cicero and the later church did, this is precisely what one would expect him to do for his

and Philo represent two early attempts to understand natural law as a coherent body of “fixed moral rules.”<sup>80</sup> Collins suggests that Paul references Aristotle explicitly in vs. 14-15, showing that even the Greeks know what it is they should do, adding further condemnation to the Jews.<sup>81</sup>

What does it mean to act in accordance with nature? Paul uses the word φύσις again in vs. 14, this time in a Jewish context. Commentators are split over whether it should go with the preceding phrase, which would read, “Gentiles which do not possess the law by nature, i.e. by virtue of their birth.”<sup>82</sup> Others read it with the following phrase, rendering it, “by nature do what the law requires.”<sup>83</sup> Cranfield argues that the second view typically involves a notion of Stoic natural law connected with Paul’s use in 1:26, but that a comparison of other uses in Paul’s corpus makes this unlikely. Paul’s use of φύσις in chapter 1, though, accords much more closely with the Stoic use because it appears in the prepositional phrase, παρὰ φύσιν, one of the most prominent Stoic notions. Here, it seems unlikely that if Paul were speaking of the Mosaic law in vs. 12-13 that he would then switch over to import the Stoic notion of natural law in vs. 14. However, the most likely interpretation seems to be that the Gentiles do (portions of) the Mosaic law *by nature*. In this case, maybe Paul is appealing to a Stoic notion as Cranfield suggests.

If this is true, another important question must be answered. Can unbelieving Gentiles know and do the law because of the testimonies of their consciences? Certainly, it’s clear that pagans can live reasonably moral lives.<sup>84</sup> Even among the writings of the

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communities of non-Jews. But he rarely appeals to nature and uses other means and authorities in developing an ethic, including the Jewish law.”

<sup>80</sup> Stowers, 110.

<sup>81</sup> C. John Collins, "Echoes of Aristotle in Romans 2:14 15: Or, Maybe Abimelech Was Not So Bad After All," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 123-173.

<sup>82</sup> Cranfield reads the phrase this way, Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:156–58; Jewett, *Romans*, 214; Schreiner, *Romans*, 123.

<sup>83</sup> This is the ESV translation, supported by Moo, *Romans*, 149; Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 98; Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 274.

<sup>84</sup> Paul’s contemporary Philo also makes this point, “Philo also could speak of the patriarchs,

church fathers, it's clear that the ethical systems of the Greeks share some similarities with the teaching of the New Testament.<sup>85</sup> This prospect must be tempered by the context in which Paul is clear that no one is righteous before God through following the law. Even verse 14 must be limited in scope, as Longenecker points out, “The words τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν (‘they do the things of [or ‘required by’] the law’) are, in their context, to be understood in terms of Gentiles ‘doing’ *some* of the law’s commands, not all that the Mosaic law prescribes.”<sup>86</sup> Other commentators have approached this problem by reading these verses hypothetically.<sup>87</sup> This preserves the notion that if they were to live perfectly, even without knowing the law, they would be granted eternal life.<sup>88</sup> However moral the Gentiles in question might be, it's clear in the argument of Romans that they cannot be righteous before God outside of Christ.<sup>89</sup> In Romans 1, Paul has made the case that Gentiles cannot know the will of God because sin has darkened their minds and rendered their judgment incapable of godly discernment. In chapter 2, then, whether or not they obey parts of the law is inconsequential. There is a case to be made for natural law in this text, but it is not a case that includes practicing the intellectual virtues Paul ascribes to

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who lived long before Torah was revealed on Sinai, as being *nomoi empsychoi* (‘ensouled laws’) because of the virtues they demonstrated in their lives.” Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 40.

<sup>85</sup> Tertullian famously wrote, “Seneca saepe noster;” Seneca is often one of ours; Tertullian, *Treatise on the Soul*, 20.1. In Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care, Malherbe draws on parallels between Paul and Seneca and the similarities cited between the two in Tertullian and Jerome, as well as the differences between Paul and the philosophers. . James Thompson has stressed the presence of Greek rhetorical techniques in Paul’s writing and the influence the philosophical schools may have had on his worldview. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophical Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); *Moral Formation According to Paul: The Context and Coherence of Pauline Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011); James W. Thompson, *Apostle of Persuasion: Theology and Rhetoric in the Pauline Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020).

<sup>86</sup> Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 275.

<sup>87</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 191; Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 314–15.

<sup>88</sup> Schreiner sees this rationale in reading the verses hypothetically, but decides against it (without completely ruling it out) on the basis that Paul did not see a contradiction between saying that works are necessary for salvation but not sufficient for it. Schreiner, *Romans*, 124–25.

<sup>89</sup> Fitzmyer makes this point well; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 306.

believers in the rest of the letter. The strongest version of the natural law argument would be that non-believers have the exact same cognitive faculties that believers have, not just limited to sensory perception and memory, but including the testimony of their consciences.<sup>90</sup> Even this understanding of natural law does not necessitate that believers and unbelievers practice all the same intellectual virtues.

### **Discerning the Will of God (2:17-24)**

If Paul addresses a Jewish interlocutor in this section, then he implies that the Jews also do not possess the ability to know the will of God or to approve what is most important – to practice wisdom – and thus, like the Greeks and Gentiles, they are also in need of the transformed mind. At the minimum, the indictment in chapter 1 applies to Greeks and Gentiles, and at the maximum, all of humanity outside of Christ. In Romans 2, Paul narrows his focus, first to the one who judges (2:1), then to those under the law (2:12), to the one who calls himself a Jew (2:17), to the one who is circumcised (2:25), and finally to the one who would wish to be considered a Jew (2:28-29). But is this really an indictment of the Jews?

### **Paul's Interlocutor in 2:17-24**

As is the case throughout Romans, the intended audience in Romana 2 is contested. However, there are a few important disputes to summarize, and if possible, to adjudicate, in the service of understanding who Paul is referring to and what he means in 2:17-20.

If Paul does make a universal statement in 1:18-32, the progression from the Gentiles, or all of humanity, in 1:18-32 to the Jews specifically in 2:1-29 follows an intuitive progression.<sup>91</sup> Paul indicts all of humanity (or just the Gentiles) for their

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<sup>90</sup> See the earlier discussion concerning reliabilist and responsibilist virtue epistemologies.

<sup>91</sup> Moo and Schreiner both make this argument. Moo, *Romans*, 135–38; Schreiner, *Romans*, 136. Longenecker limits Paul's indictment to proud Jewish teachers. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 292.

ungodliness and unrighteousness. But the Jews might claim that they are not like the Gentiles who fit Paul's description. So Paul, anticipating this response, turns his attention to the Jews to ensure that they do not count themselves as exempt and miss the heart of Paul's argument: righteousness comes through faith. The universality of Paul's message in chapters 4-8 fits the universality of the indictment in chapters 1-2. The most logical response to Paul's charge in chapter 1 would be exactly what Paul brings up in chapter 2, what about the Jews? What about the Law?<sup>92</sup>

This reading of the transition from a Gentile to a Jewish audience between chapters 1 and 2 is contested.<sup>93</sup> Thiessen and Thorsteinsson argue that the beginning of 2:1, "Διὸ..." continues the thought of 1:32.<sup>94</sup> It is unlikely that Paul would begin with a new audience in this way. They also argue that the intended audience is Gentile through the whole letter. Others have argued that the interlocutor in 2:1-16 is a Gentile, but Paul addresses a Jew beginning in 2:17.<sup>95</sup> Against this view, Gathercole and Dunn have argued

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<sup>92</sup> It does not appear that this point is undermined by the arguments in Romans 2 between New and Old Perspective, "Paul is seeking to deny any false distinction between Jew and Gentile (vv 9-10), and the law is introduced as providing just such a distinction... The point is that there is no advantage in merely having the law... but [in] an obedience from the heart unrestricted by ethnic boundaries." Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 95.

<sup>93</sup> Several recent studies have argued that this passage is addressed not to the Jews but to Gentile converts. See Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 43–72; Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Paul's Interlocutor in Romans 2: Function and Identity in the Context of Ancient Epistolography* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 151–230; Rafael Rodriguez, *If You Call Yourself a Jew: Reappraising Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 47–72. N. T. Wright also argues that Romans 2 must be addressed to a Gentile. Wright points out that if Paul's goal is to include the Jews in his indictment of unrighteousness, he does a woefully inadequate job; the sins of 2:20-24 are not representative of what was happening in the first century, and most Jews would brush these charges off as misguided or irrelevant. These accusations simply do not fit. This is because, Wright argues, the sinfulness of the Jews is not the charge. Paul is arguing that they have been called by God to be the light to the nations, the "solution to the problem of humankind," but because of their unfaithfulness to their vocation, they not been a part of the solution but a part of the problem. In response to the charges Paul gives in vs. 21-24, Wright anticipates the response, "Come come, Paul, say the critics: you surely know that plenty of Jews don't steal, don't commit adultery, don't rob temples, and keep the Torah the way you say you did yourself, as one of the extreme 'zealous-for-Torah' people, as maintaining (presumably through repentance and the sacrificial system) the official status of 'blameless' under the law." N. T. Wright, "Romans 2:17-3:9: A Hidden Clue to the Meaning of Romans?," in *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978-2013* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 496–98.

<sup>94</sup> Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 44f.; Thorsteinsson, *Paul's Interlocutor in Romans 2*, 77f.; Rodriguez offers the best summary of the history and development of this position. Rodriguez, *If You Call Yourself a Jew*, 47–48.

<sup>95</sup> Cranfield makes the exemplary case for this position *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:137–42. Stowers believes this is a new Jewish interlocutor in 2:17. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 101–4.

that Paul must be addressing a Jew throughout chapter 2 because of the specific charges he brings against his dialogue partner.<sup>96</sup> By 2:17 the majority of commentators are agreed that the interlocutor is Jewish because of the claims pinned upon him, but there are exceptions.<sup>97</sup>

### **Completing the Indictment (2:17-24)**

Within this context, then, what is Paul saying specifically about the mind in chapter 2? With respect to 2:17-24, the question is, does Paul believe these claims are true? Can the Jews know the will of God? Do they really approve what is most important?

These questions strike to the heart of the mind of the flesh. If in fact the Jews are not included in Paul's indictment in chapter 1, then the interpretation of 2:18 determines whether or not the Jews have a fundamentally different epistemic situation than the Gentiles. Second, 2:17-24 brings the law into view, particularly with regard to the epistemic effects the law has on the Jews. If Paul is making sure the Jews understand that they too stand under the wrath of God because of their ungodliness, it makes sense that Paul would address the most obvious difference between Jews and Gentiles, the law. In a sense, then, the epistemic discussion revolves around a familiar question, what is the use of the law? But in this context, it might be refined as, what is the epistemic effect of the law?

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<sup>96</sup> Simon Gathercole has written a convincing response to those who argue that the interlocutor in 2:1-16 is a Gentile, but he believes the Jewish identity of 2:17-24 is not seriously contested. Simon J. Gathercole, *Where Is Boasting?: Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 197-201. Dunn builds on the arguments for this position in Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 78-82.

<sup>97</sup> In the scheme of this particular argument, we are left with a very small group of people who argue that there is anyone who is not subject to Paul's indictments in chapters 1-3. This would be anyone who believes that Jews are not included at all in either chapter and are not described in the universal conditions Paul describes in 1:18-32. For everyone else, chapter 2 focuses on one portion of the group addressed in chapter 1, but by chapter 3, Paul has established that all people bear the epistemic effects of sin.

This Jewish interlocutor makes claims that would have been common for the Jews.<sup>98</sup> Against these claims about righteous living, Paul argues that the Jews are actually unrighteous because of their sin. If this is so, then they have also incurred the epistemic effects of sin, just as Paul described in 1:18-32. Moo summarizes the mindset Paul assails underneath these claims; “Contrary to popular Jewish belief, the sins of the Jews will not be treated by God significantly differently from those of the Gentiles.”<sup>99</sup>

In order to flesh out this conclusion, the claims Paul’s interlocutor makes in 2:17-24 must be examined. Reading this section as an example of diatribe, it becomes clear that Paul is implicitly negating that these claims are true about the Jews. They too are unable to discern the will of God outside of Christ.

*Can Romans 2:17-20 be read as a diatribe?* Commentators have seen similarities in Romans to the ancient Stoic diatribe, a particular rhetorical form of argumentation common in Greek philosophical debates.<sup>100</sup> One of the techniques used in the diatribes of the Stoic philosophers in particular was the address of an imaginary interlocutor, which fits 2:17-24. Paul utilizes this technique to convey his theological point to the Roman church.

In *The Diatribe and Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, Stanley Stowers revises Rudolf Bultmann’s assessment of Paul’s use of the diatribe.<sup>101</sup> Bultmann originally

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<sup>98</sup> In fact, commentators tend to agree that this claim would have been a fair representation of the Jews generally. It seems that for the agreement on this point, the disagreement stems from what Paul charges the interlocutor with in 2:21-24. Schreiner, *Romans*, 137–39; Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 95f; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 132; Moo, *Romans*, 158.

<sup>99</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 136; Moo’s treatment of this passage is a refutation of the theological issue Longenecker raises, namely, that Jews and Gentiles are treated differently with respect to works. As an impartial judge, God judges every person by their works, (2:6-11), not just the Gentiles. Everyone is saved by grace through faith, not just the Jews (3:24, 4:16). Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 241–42.

<sup>100</sup> Many commentators cite Bultmann as first popularizing this position. Rudolf Bultmann, *Der Stil Der Paulinischen Predigt Und Die Kynisch-Stoische Diatribe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910); Stowers’ dissertation on this topic remains the starting point. Stanley K. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, Society of Biblical Literature, Dissertation Series 57 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).

<sup>101</sup> Stanley Stowers’ dissertation is an especially important source here. The first half of Stowers dissertation assesses and critiques Bultmann’s work. The second half makes a constructive case for Paul’s use of the diatribe in Romans, looking specifically at 2:1-5; 2:17-24; 9:19-21; 11:17-24; 14:4, 10. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul’s Letter to the Romans*; Dunn’s commentary is especially sensitive to this



proposed that the diatribe was a common philosophical tool, used to bring the teaching of the schools out to the masses. Where Stowers differs with Bultmann is important in understanding 2:17-24. Whereas Bultmann characterized the diatribe as a mass propaganda technique for the wandering Cynic or the popularizer of philosophy, Stowers claims that the diatribe was most commonly used by teachers in the philosophical schools.<sup>102</sup> Second, one of the common interlocutors was the *ἀλαζών*, or the hypocrite, and the purpose of engaging this interlocutor was to “lead him to a realization of his error and to lead him to a deeper commitment to the philosophical life.”<sup>103</sup> In fact, Stowers argues, all of the apostrophes in Romans utilizes this same interlocutor. This implies a teacher-student relationship between the author/speaker and those listening to his statements against the interlocutor, as was the case in the letter to the Romans.

This passage, 2:17-24 fits Stowers’ criteria for diatribes; (1) Paul uses the second person singular pronoun to address his interlocutor, (2) He suddenly changes to directly address an opponent, (3) He asks a series of rhetorical questions, (4) He ends with a list of vices. Especially in cases where the teacher is engaging with an *ἀλαζών*, or a hypocrite, the charges brought in the diatribe highlight moral inconsistencies. This is very similar to the way Stoic philosophers would indict a pretentious rival philosopher.<sup>104</sup> The implication of Paul’s indictment is that this interlocutor is a hypocrite.<sup>105</sup> While he claims

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issue. Dunn, *Romans*, 1988; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1988).

<sup>102</sup> Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 1–78; 175–76.

<sup>103</sup> Stowers, 176.

<sup>104</sup> Several commentators notice this similarity in both style and syntax. While these scholars disagree on who exactly the interlocutor represents, they agree that Paul is employing the diatribe to show that this person does not live up to their claims. Stowers, 112; Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 95; Jewett, *Romans*, 221.

<sup>105</sup> Moo makes this point most clearly, “There is some measure of irony in the way Paul presents these privileges as items in which the Jews boast. But the irony is not directed against the claim to these as such, for each of them is, according to the OT, a rightful possession of the Jew.” Moo, *Romans*, 159; Also, Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 131–32. Schreiner makes this point as well, “Paul is citing advantages that are genuine. The issue is how the Jews respond to their covenant advantages,” although he comes around to a similar point about the role of the Law and the minds of the Jews later in his argument. Schreiner, *Romans*, 137–39.

to rely on the law, know the will of God, and approve what is excellent, he does not. In fact, he breaks the law and instead of being a light to the nations, his behavior has caused the Gentiles to blaspheme God, not to serve and obey him.<sup>106</sup>

This technique is most common in Epictetus' *Discourses*, but also appears in the philosophy of Seneca and others.<sup>107</sup> The common uses there are instructive here. For Epictetus, pointing out moral hypocrisy is predicated on the view that "every error involves a contradiction."<sup>108</sup> Epictetus, and other Stoics believed that immorality was a breach in rationality; immorality comes from ignorance or confusion. The thief steals because he believes it is in his best interest. If it can be shown that stealing is no longer in his interest, the thief will stop stealing. Thus, the solution, "Every rational soul is by nature offended by contradiction; and so, as long as a man does not understand that he is involved in a contradiction, there is nothing to prevent him from doing contradictory things, but when he has come to understand the contradiction, he must of necessity abandon and avoid it."<sup>109</sup>

For Epictetus, the diatribe is a tool for exposing moral and intellectual hypocrisy. Accordingly, teachers had to become proficient in pointing out the illogic of immorality; "He, then, who can show to each man the contradiction which causes him to err and can clearly bring home to him how he is not doing what he wishes, and is doing what he does not wish is strong in argument, and at the same time effective both in

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<sup>106</sup> Witherington summarizes this charge; "Having the Law is no guarantee of doing the Law, and merely having it is no protection against God's judgment on disobedience, for all human behavior will be judged by God." Witherington III and Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 85.

<sup>107</sup> Stowers goes as far as saying that if this diatribe were found in a Greek author it would be a "classic example of indicting a pretentious philosopher." Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 112. Similar diatribes can be found in Epictetus, *Discourses*, 2.9.19-21; 3.7.17; 3.24.41; 2.13.23; 2.16.34; 2.8.11-12; 1.6.13; 11.17.22; and Seneca, *Epistles*, 77.17-18; 36.4; 60.3; Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 23.6; 26.6; 14.14.

<sup>108</sup> In the Greek, "πᾶν ἀμάρτημα μάχην περιέχει," 2.26.1. All translations of Epictetus taken from Oldfather, Epictetus, *Discourses, Books 1-2*.

<sup>109</sup> Epictetus, 2.26.3.

encouragement and refutation.”<sup>110</sup> There are some obvious similarities and differences in Paul. First, Paul shares Epictetus’ sense that immorality ought to be clearly pointed out and refuted, but as Romans 7:22-25 will show, Paul does not believe that morality is a matter of rationality in total. Second, as Romans 1 indicates, the mind of the flesh is predisposed toward sin because of suppressing truth, and the results are desires, passions, and an unfit mind. So, it is important to ask whether or not Paul and the Stoics share a similar enough anthropology to compare and contrast their moral instruction. Finally, Paul’s engagement with a Jewish interlocutor here displays very similar characteristics to the way Epictetus and others engaged with their philosophical opponents. Reading Romans with this in mind reveals that Paul and the Stoics have similar indictments of the world, but they offer very different, in fact, mutually exclusive visions of the solution.

The final question emerges: does Paul believe that what the Jewish interlocutor claims about himself is true? Does he rely on the law, know the will of God, and approve what is most important? The second list of qualities makes the question even easier to answer. Is he a guide to the blind or a teacher of children? The answer has to be no.<sup>111</sup> What Paul is doing amounts to more than charging the interlocutor with hypocrisy, in terms of saying one thing and doing something different. The charges Paul brings against the hypocrite in vs. 21-24 actually prove that the claims he makes about himself in vs. 17-20 are false. The charge would read this way: the fact that this person breaks the law and has failed so terribly in being a light to the nations that he has actually caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the name of God proves that he does not know the will of God, does not approve what is excellent, and does not understand the law.

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<sup>110</sup> Epictetus, 2.26.4.

<sup>111</sup> In 2:18, Thompson interprets Paul’s rhetorical questions as an assertion that the interlocutor knows the law, which is what is meant by the will of God, but does not do it. *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 150.

**Paul's indictment and intellectual virtue.** To conclude these first two sections, Paul's assessment of the mind of the flesh encompasses everyone. It would make no sense in Paul's argument leading up to 3:19-26 to exempt the Jews from the condition he pronounces in 1:28. For this to be true, 2:18 must actually be a false claim. Understanding Paul's use of the diatribe strengthens the point that he does not believe the Jews are able to discern the will of God.

By the end of chapter 2, the epistemic situation has become clear. One of the effects of sin is that humanity is unable to rightly discern the will of God. They have suppressed the truth and have been given over to epistemic futility. Paul does not assert that humanity is living in total intellectual futility, but that they are unable to practice the virtue of practical wisdom, discerning the will of God and what to do in each circumstance.

### **Romans 7:22-25: The Mind without the Spirit**

There is one more section in Romans that sheds light on intellectual virtue. In Romans 7:7-25, Paul describes someone who knows what is right but cannot do it. More specifically with respect to the mind, in 7:23, Paul writes, "I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind ( $\tau\tilde{\omega}$  νόμῳ τοῦ νοός μου) and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members." The overarching questions are what is this law of the mind and how does it contribute to our understanding of intellectual virtue in Paul? To answer this question, there are two issues to examine in this pericope. First, like chapters 1 and 2, there is the question of who Paul is describing in this passage. Is it autobiographical, either presently or before Paul's encounter with the risen Christ? Is it a character of some kind, either Jewish or Gentile? Second, does this distinction make a difference? What does Romans 7 contribute to the understanding of practical wisdom?

## Who's Speaking in 7:14-25?

At first glance, Paul seems to take a drastic detour in the second half of chapter 7, back to the hopelessness of chapters 1-2 and away from the trajectory of being reconciled to God and turning away from sin in chapters 5-6. In 7:1, Paul continues a discussion with those who know the law, most likely Jews and proselytized Gentiles. Using the example of the marriage covenant, Paul illustrates the point he had been making in 6:15-23, that in Christ humanity has a new master, no longer enslaved to the law, those who are in Christ now serve God (7:1-3). During this previous time of slavery, the law aroused sinful passion and bore the fruit of death (7:5).<sup>112</sup> Having been released from the law through death, now those who are in Christ live by the Spirit (7:6). Moo points out that the language of 7:6 previews the contrast between the flesh and the Spirit that Paul will exhibit in the next chapter.<sup>113</sup>

To strengthen this point, Wright argues that the entire section spanning from 6:1-8:11 is a continuation of Paul's exclamation in 5:20-21, "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."<sup>114</sup> Chapter 7, then, relates the struggle of Israel living under the law and being set free in Christ.<sup>115</sup> The following section, 7:7-12 answers another question about the purpose of the law, asserting that the law is holy and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> This is not the first time Paul has linked sin and the law together in Romans; 3:20; 4:15; 5:20. See Moo's discussion of this theme in Romans. Moo, *Romans*, 444. Dunn helpfully summarizes this relationship; "The intended inference seems to be that the law reinforces the connection between sin and death; the law has, as it were, a greenhouse effect, forcing the growth of sin to bring forth the fruit of death." Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 371-72.

<sup>113</sup> "While, however, still preoccupied with the law, Paul knows where he wants to go eventually in his argument, and so he announces it in the last part of this verse." Moo, *Romans*, 446.

<sup>114</sup> Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," 549.

<sup>115</sup> Moo also reads this passage as a retelling of the story of Israel. Moo, *Romans*, 448; Cranfield sees 7 as an explanation and clarification of how it is that Christians can live free from sin and the demands of the law in chapter 6. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:330-31; Similarly, Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 454.

<sup>116</sup> Longenecker argues for a break between 7:1-13 and 7:14-25. "The material of 7:7-13 has often been connected with what Paul writes in 7:14-25. But the question asked in 7:7a is so similar in form to the earlier two questions of 6:1 and 6:15a—and the response given in 7:7b-13 so similar in content to what Paul wrote in his two earlier responses of 6:2-14 and 6:15b-23—that 7:7-13 must be seen as

It is the final question in which Paul discusses the effects of indwelling sin on the desire to do what is right. In 7:14-20, Paul makes a series of shocking statements. He says that he is of the flesh, sold under sin (7:14), that he does not understand his own action (7:15), he does evil things (7:19), and he is still under control of indwelling sin (7:20). It's not surprising that this has sparked questions as to who is speaking. While it might seem counterintuitive to the modern reader, in ancient literature, "I" does not always mean the author is sharing their own opinion.<sup>117</sup> This "I" certainly does not sound like Paul.<sup>118</sup>

This is a difficult, if not impossible, question to solve. To exclusively identify with either one who is in Christ or not risks leveraging the rest of Paul's statements about intellectual virtue on unstable ground. Is it possible that this passage further describes the epistemic difference between believers and nonbelievers? A survey of two exemplary treatments of the passage, Timmins who believes that the "I" is a believer and Keener who believes that the "I" is not a believer will show that this is the case.

### **The "I" Is a Believer**

Will Timmins' recent monograph, *Romans 7 and Christian Identity*, is a significant addition to the literature on Romans 7 and the question of identity.<sup>119</sup> To understand who is "speaking" in this passage, it's essential to look at the qualities Paul ascribes to the ἐγώ. First, Paul associates the ἐγώ with the flesh (7:14: σάρκινος; 7:18, 25:

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connected directly with what precedes it in 6:1–7:6, and not as an introduction to what follows in 7:14–25." Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 639.

<sup>117</sup> Of the commentators, Schreiner gives the most detailed summary and analysis of the different positions as to who is speaking in 7:14-25. He concludes that Paul is talking about his present experience, "knowing and perceiving the sin that still bedevils him." Schreiner, *Romans*, 377–91.

<sup>118</sup> For this reason, Thompson holds, with Stowers, that Paul is not speaking autobiographically here, but using a literary technique of speaking in character. Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 146f; Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 251–85.

<sup>119</sup> Timmins presents a different angle on the identity of "I" and the technique Paul is using even from Dunn, Moo, Fitzmyer, and others who agree that this is not a Christian, but might be Paul before his encounter with Christ. Will N. Timmins, *Romans 7 and Christian Identity: A Study of the 'I' in Its Literary Context* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 198n4.

σάρξ). This state of being fleshly does not just describe the created human experience but of being in captivity to sin.<sup>120</sup> Timmins remarks that this war between the flesh, the law, and the mind is indicative that the ἐγώ is not participating in the freedom given in Christ linking this passage to the same struggle Paul describes in 6:12-14.<sup>121</sup> Second, the ἐγώ is divided, which is a common way to describe the differences between willing what is right and doing it. But in 7:18-20, Paul makes clear that the will is good and the actions are bad. This is not a problem of a divided will but a separation of will and action. So, the flesh cannot do what is right, even when the will is good.<sup>122</sup> The flesh is not capable of doing good, and the ἐγώ has not yet been given the ability to do what God requires.<sup>123</sup> Finally, in 7:24, the ἐγώ cries out deliverance from the body of death, the natural end of all that is fleshly. Timmins concludes, “Subject to the power of death, ἐγώ is utterly incapable apart from divine aid of carrying out the goodness of the commandment and experiencing its promised life.”<sup>124</sup> In sum, the fleshly ἐγώ is incapable of fulfilling God’s righteous commands. Though Timmins identifies this person as a believer in Christ, he observes that Paul is setting up a representative character to describe the struggle of anyone in the flesh trying to carry out the demands of the law.

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<sup>120</sup> “Sin has disempowered ἐγώ and brought him into a state of permanent fleshliness: sin has, as it were, branded him as ‘fleshly.’ Πειραμένως has in view the event of being sold that gave rise to the condition of fleshliness. Εγώ does not thereby say that he is a slave of sin, but he explains his fleshliness as a condition of being in captivity to sin. But he does more than that, since he implies that his fleshliness has come about through being sold under (Adamic) sin.” Timmins, 144.

<sup>121</sup> Timmins makes the distinction here that this is a description of the ἐγώ’s bodily state, not his ontological being. Timmins, 147.

<sup>122</sup> This is a conclusion Timmins draws from the comparison with 6:12-13. “What ἐγώ makes clear, in recounting the division within, is that what Paul commands in 6:12 of believers – to not let sin reign in the mortal body such that one obeys the body’s desires – is an impossibility for the flesh.” Timmins, 149–50.

<sup>123</sup> God grants this ability through the Spirit. Note the contrast here with 8:1-4 and 13:8-10.

<sup>124</sup> Timmins, *Romans 7 and Christian Identity*, 155. This body of death is “Adam’s legacy to his posterity,” 155.

## The “I” Is an Unbeliever

Keener takes this person described in 7:7-25 as one with knowledge of the Law but not in Christ.<sup>125</sup> This means it cannot be Paul’s own Christian experience, even if it might be his own experience before that. Thus, this passage depicts one who has “knowledge about what is right without the power to become right.”<sup>126</sup>

He argues that on both sides of this divide the common characteristic is that this “I” is trying to fulfill the demands of the law and is not being empowered by the Spirit.<sup>127</sup> The decisive point here, and against those who claim this passage describes Paul’s current state, is that 7:14-25 is “not just a struggle with sin but a defeat by sin.”<sup>128</sup> The struggle Paul depicted in Romans 7 would not have been foreign to ancient ears.<sup>129</sup> Where many of the philosophers may have differed with Paul is in the nature of the solution. Paul does not argue that reason will be sufficient to free the speaker in chapter 7. The solution ultimately lies in 12:1-3, the transformation of the mind.<sup>130</sup>

On this point, Keener’s analysis becomes focused on the relationship between knowledge and desire, which is a theme that runs through all of Romans. In Romans 1, it is not only that the people described lack knowledge, but that their actions change their

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<sup>125</sup> Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 56.; There are several different versions of this argument. Schreiner concludes that this passage is autobiographical and refers to Paul’s encounter with the law before his conversion. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 360–63; Moo represents the group that sees the “law” in 7:23 not as the law of Moses but another authority or demand that is actually opposed to the law. Moo, *Romans*, 464.

<sup>126</sup> Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 254.

<sup>127</sup> Keener, 59.

<sup>128</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 445.

<sup>129</sup> Keener includes a lengthy discussion about the nature of desire in the ancient world. In a helpful excursus, he provides some guardrails for interpreting desire in this passage. First, desire should not only be confined to sexual sin, as covetousness of all kinds was popular in ancient literature. Second, Keener warns against defining passion too broadly, eliminating some of the healthy passions Paul refers to like sexual desire within marriage and the enjoyment of food. In summary, the passions Paul is referring to here are ones specifically aroused by the prohibitions of the law. Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 81–97.

<sup>130</sup> “It is not mere information the speaker needs, but this speaker does need a different form of what some might call knowledge: divine truth understood by faith.” Keener, 96. In the accompanying footnote, he adds, “In Paul’s view, only those in Christ have the fuller transforming knowledge of the gospel.”



epistemic state. Their minds are darkened. They are handed over. The case in Romans 7 is no different. Knowledge is not enough to remedy the subject's epistemic faculties.<sup>131</sup> Going back to Keener's core claim about the chapter, the person being described, whoever they might be, is devoid of the Spirit. Splitting hairs over knowledge of *what* specifically, whether it be the moral plight of those under the law or the knowledge of the gospel itself, does not equate to the transformation that takes place upon conversion. A philosophical lens may bring some clarity here. The problems of Romans 1 and Romans 7 are the same. In both cases people are outside of Christ, devoid of the Spirit, and therefore without the ability to enact the epistemic virtues available in Christ. In the end, Keener reaches a similar conclusion, "Paul may allow that people can perform positive actions in obedience to rational guidelines such as the law, but he regards genuine transformation by the gift of righteousness as inseparable from the new creation in Christ."<sup>132</sup> Part of that genuine transformation would be the newly acquired ability to λογίζεσθε as Paul commands in 6:11.

Keener's summary at the end of the chapter is helpful. There is a legitimate difference between the people described in Romans 1 and the person described in Romans 7. Keener writes, "Unlike the lawless Gentiles of 1:18-32, this passage's figure is intellectually enlightened by the truth of God's law. Even such true moral formation, however, cannot free one from the verdict of one's passions. One can be freed only by the gift of a new life based on the divine righteousness."<sup>133</sup>

### **Practical Wisdom in 7:14-23**

Has the thread of intellectual virtue been lost in chapter 7? Not at all. If anything, this clarifies the issue. After chapters 1 and 2, it was clear that no person could

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<sup>131</sup> Keener relies on Stephen Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking A Pauline Theme* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 38-49.

<sup>132</sup> Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 97. Keener adds later, "The best that mere religion can do is recognize right from wrong, cover over the wrong, and insist on different behavior," 108.

<sup>133</sup> Keener, 112.

practice φρόνησις outside of Christ, because it is impossible to discern with an undiscerning mind. Sin has rendered humanity, Jew and Gentile alike, incapable of practicing this virtue. The situation grows even more dire in chapter 7. Consider the exegetical options.

If the “I” is a believer as Timmins argues, then the prospect for practical wisdom grows even dimmer. Anyone who is in the flesh cannot do what God requires. Even the person who believes in Christ will still struggle with the fleshly creaturely state. Consequently, this option makes it clear that even Christians are capable of not practicing practical wisdom. Whereas outside of Christ, there is no possibility of obedience, in Christ there is the possibility both of obedience and disobedience. Paul exhorts the Christians in Rome to present themselves as slaves to righteousness (6:19) and he illustrates the struggle to do so through this character in 7:14-25.

If the “I” is not a believer as Keener argues, then the limitations on φρόνησις outside of Christ comes into sharper focus. It is only by transformation in Christ through the Spirit that anyone can practice φρόνησις.<sup>134</sup> Though believers remain in the flesh, they also have the Spirit. They are not confined to the experience Paul describes in 7:14-25.

What both of these options have in common is that they reveal the true source of the Christians’ intellectual virtue, the Holy Spirit. It is not a new perspective or a new set of information that causes those who are in Christ to be able to discern the will of God and determine how to do it. An enlightened person cannot fulfill the law of love as Paul describes in 13:8-10, only a person who is enlivened by the Spirit can do this. As the next chapter will show, it is only through walking by the Spirit that anyone can do the will of

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<sup>134</sup> Without using the language of virtue, Keener is very clear on this point. “Paul may allow that people can perform positive actions in obedience to rational guidelines such as the law, but he regards genuine transformation by the gift of righteousness as inseparable from the new creation in Christ.” Also, “But one can appreciate moral truth (7:16) and even feel good about mastering intellectual knowledge and yet find oneself unable to suppress contrary desires or inclinations.” Keener, 97.

God. Participation in Christ means acting and thinking like he did, which is only possible by the help of his Spirit.

### **Conclusion**

What this analysis of Romans 1, 2, and 7 has shown is that Paul describes a practice of intellectual virtue that conceptually resembles the virtue of *φρόνησις* found in Aristotle and some of the other Greco-Roman philosopher. In Romans 1, he describes the plight of humanity, whether confined to Gentiles or universally, by demonstrating that because they have suppressed the truth, they have incurred the wrath of God. This wrath is acutely intellectual in its effects, particularly surrounding the ability to know and do the will of God. Though they may know about the invisible attributes of God, they do not properly assay reality and they do things that are unfitting. The *ἀδόκιμος νοῦς* is a mind incapable of practicing the virtue of *φρόνησις* because it does not recognize the good, the will of God, worshipping God, being thankful and honoring him, and it is not able to discern the right thing to do in contingent circumstances.

In chapter 2, Paul may turn his attention to the Jews. If he does, using the diatribe, he criticizes those who claim to know the will of God but actually do not. They too, because of their sin, have been rendered unable to be practically wise. By chapter 3, Paul has made it clear that every person suffers from the noetic effects of sin. This does not mean total degeneration of the mind, but only the inability to practice the virtue of *φρόνησις*.

In chapter 7, disputes about the identity of the *ἐγώ* make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the relationship between the law of the mind (7:23) and intellectual virtue. However, as Timmins and Keener demonstrate, this description describes someone who is living according to the flesh, whether a believer or not. Whether or not this person has the Spirit in Christ, they are not walking by the Spirit, which contrasts with the exhortations Paul will give in chapters 8 and 12.

In summary, the minds of Jews and Gentiles, though possessing different information, are essentially the same regarding their epistemic abilities. In neither case can anyone discern the will of God or practice godly practical wisdom. That is to say, outside of Christ, and the work of the Spirit, it is impossible to know the will of God or to practice φρόνησις. Only the mind of the Spirit is capable of practicing these intellectual virtues, and that is what Paul describes in chapters 8 and 12.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT: ROMANS 6, 8, AND 12

#### **Introduction**

Having described the mind of the flesh and the debilitating effects of sin on the intellectual virtues, Paul's turns to the work of the Spirit in believers. As Romans progresses Paul works out the problems of sin and unrighteousness, showing that faith in Christ and union with him can restore humanity's relationship with God and save them from their sins. Throughout this argument, Paul has also been describing the condition of the mind. Outside of Christ, there is no possibility of practicing the virtue of *φρόνησις*. The passages in the previous chapter provide a stark contrast for what will be discussed here.

The contrast between these two chapters proves the thesis of this study through the book of Romans: by the Spirit, those who are in Christ can practice the intellectual virtue of *φρόνησις* and those who are not in Christ cannot. As these first three sections make clear, it's not just that Christians get better at discernment or that they are now oriented to a new good based on new information, they are actually able to think in a new way. They can know the mind of God (11:34) and they can do what he says (13:8-10).

Beginning in Romans 6, but especially in chapters 8 through 12, Paul describes the radical impact that union with Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit have on the mind, particularly the intellectual virtues. Those who once had an *ἀδόκιμος νοῦς* are now being invited to have their minds transformed. Whereas before they did not discern (*δοκιμάζω*) correctly (1:28, 2:17), now they will be able to discern (*δοκιμάζω*) God's good pleasing and perfect will (12:2). Before they had a mindset of the flesh (7:22-24), now they have the mindset of the Spirit (8:5-7).

Whereas those who are outside of Christ have the mind of the flesh described in chapters 1, 2, and 7, those who are in Christ have the mind of the Spirit. Paul's words in 6:1-11, 8:5-8 and 12:1-3, reveal the primary qualities of the mind of the Spirit, a new disposition that allows those who are in Christ to think in such a way that they can discern the will of God and do what he commands. This stands in contrast to the mind of the flesh, which was incapable of knowing the will of God or putting it into practice. In Romans 6:11, Paul introduces a new way of accounting for the Christian life, dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ. In Romans 8:3-5, Paul describes the radical epistemic change that takes place due to the work of the Spirit, and the new kind of thinking available to those who walk by the Spirit. Those who walk by the Spirit can practice a new intellectual virtue because of the Spirit's work. They are oriented toward and disposed to living according to the practical wisdom of the Spirit. In Romans 12:1-3, Paul focuses on two specific qualities of the mind of the Spirit, the ability to discern God's will and to use spiritual judgment.

### **Romans 6:1-11: Consideration**

Being in Christ doesn't just mean having new information, it means being a new creation.<sup>1</sup> The transformation that takes place in the Christian life comes from this new identity. With respect to ethics, Furnish called this the relationship between the indicative and the imperative.<sup>2</sup> These concepts, describing the new creation and the new ethic of the Christian life are connected, contained within each other. The imperative is a necessary part of the indicative. The Christian life moves forward with new identity and

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal.6:15.

<sup>2</sup> See the "Character of the Pauline Ethic" in Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 207-241. This conception of new creation and ethic finds a clear statement in Furnish's work on ethics, but he attributes the idea to a continuation of Bultmann's slogan, "Become what you are!", 225. He rightfully nuances the argument against a simplistic logically sequential argument from indicative to imperative, but argues that they are nested within one another. This relationship between the indicative and the imperative has influenced other commentators, specifically on this passage. See Moo, *Romans*, 404.

new ethic together, “in Christ he knows that redemption is not just deliverance from the hostile powers to which he was formerly enslaved, but freedom *for* obedience to God.”<sup>3</sup>

The same thing can naturally be said for the intellectual virtues. They stem from the new identity found in Christ and are employed in living out that identity. In the same way that Christians can be free to obey God, as Furnish describes, they can now be free to practice the virtues of the Spirit. This necessary discipline is the way in which they will live out their calling, by discerning God’s voice and his will. In 6:11, Paul calls on the believers in Rome to consider themselves as new creations, dead to sin and alive to God. This is an essential piece of the new mindset available by the Spirit in Christ.

After discussing the problem of sin in 1:18-3:20 and the righteousness of God revealed in Jesus Christ in 3:21-26, Paul moves into a section on faith, both as it relates to justification and the Abrahamic promise (4:1-25), a restored relationship with God through Christ (5:1-11) and union with him (5:12-21). Chapter 6 begins with a question; “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” In response, Paul argues that on the basis of the new reality of being in Christ and knowing that they have been crucified with Christ and raised with him, they should present themselves to God as instruments of righteousness.

Paul argues that those who are in Christ should present themselves to God because they know that they have been united with him in death and resurrection.<sup>4</sup> At a minimum, those who are in Christ act upon a new set of beliefs (6:1-10). The content of these new beliefs is the main focus of the pericope, but Paul goes one step further in 6:11.

As a summary of vs. 2-10 and an answer to the question posed in vs. 1, Paul exhorts the Romans to “reckon themselves as dead to sin but alive to God in Christ

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<sup>3</sup> Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 226.

<sup>4</sup> Keener points out the cognitive element in the language of 6:1-11, specifically in vs. 3, 6, and 9, where Paul uses the verbs ἀγνοέω (see Paul’s use of these verbs in 1 Corinthians and the various translations. These passages will be discussed in a later chapter. For ἀγνοέω, 10:1; 12:1; 4:38), γινώσκω (1 Cor. 1:21; 2:8, 11, 14, 16), and οἶδα (1 Cor. 2:2, 11, 12; 3:16). *The Mind of the Spirit*, 44.

Jesus.” The imperative, λογίζεσθε, has two main senses in the New Testament.<sup>5</sup> In Romans 4, Paul uses it eleven times to describe God “reckoning” or “accounting” righteousness to Abraham through faith.<sup>6</sup> In the rest of the letter, he uses it to refer to “considering” or “regarding” events or information.<sup>7</sup> He exhibits the same kind of thinking in 3:28 and 8:18. In each case, λογίζομαι refers to a thought process leading to an action or an outcome.

Because this word was often used in Stoic epistemology, it’s enlightening to compare what Paul is saying here to what was common in Stoic philosophy. Craig Keener argues that Paul’s use here is very similar to the way the Stoics argued that new and corrected beliefs could reconstitute a person’s identity, and in turn their epistemic virtues.<sup>8</sup>

The process of deliberation was integral to Stoic epistemology. The Stoics thought virtue was a matter of rationality, and so one of the ways they talked about the sage was through decision making, or assent. Unlike many of the other schools, the Stoics believed in infallible knowledge and that each person had the ability to know what is true and do what is virtuous.<sup>9</sup> Most people, however, do not know infallibly even though they have the capacity; that is reserved for the Stoic sage.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The form is ambiguous; it can be indicative or imperative. Jewett takes it as an indicative, but most take it to be imperative. Although it only makes a small difference in this reading, imperative seems more likely. Harvey, *Romans*, 154; Jewett, *Romans*, 408; Keener makes an insightful contextual point here, “Scholars often find in Paul a tension between the indicative and the imperative; Paul summons them to be what he declares they are. This may be because for Paul identity is determined by being in Christ, but the believer must still choose to believe the eschatological reality sufficiently to live accordingly. Through faith one receives a new identity, and through faith one must also continue to embrace and live in that new identity, so that obedient works become expressions of living faith.” Keener, *Romans*, 82.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 4:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 2:3, 26; 3:28; 6:11; 8:18, 36; 14:14. One other case in 9:8 more closely resembles the use in chapter 4, “to account.”

<sup>8</sup> See the chapter on Romans 6:11 in Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 54.

<sup>9</sup> This doctrine goes all the way back to Zeno according to Cicero, *Academica*, 1.40-42.

<sup>10</sup> Hankinson on the incomparable knowledge of the sage, “Stoic Sages never make mistakes. Secure in their understanding of the providential structure of the world, which is identical with fate, which in turn is identical with the will of Zeus... Sages order their lives in accordance with it, assimilating their will to the will of Zeus, living in accordance with nature, and so achieving the smooth flow of life.”



Thoughts, sense perceptions, and other mental stimuli were called impressions, “φαντασία.”<sup>11</sup> Humans and animals both experience these impressions, animals through their senses and instincts, humans through their senses and their souls. Impressions can be of two kinds, cataleptic (καταληπτικός) or non-cataleptic, either accurately representative of an object or not. Having apprehended (κατάληψις) the impression, a person can either assent to it or not. At that moment, they stand between knowledge and ignorance, having only received the impression. If it is a cataleptic impression and the Sage assents to it, this is called cognition or knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). If it is true and they do not assent, that is ignorance. If it is false and they assent, that is called an opinion. The wise person assents to the true impressions, the fool to the wrong impressions. Cicero records that Zeno used the analogy of a hand to explain Stoic epistemology:

And this Zeno used to demonstrate by gesture: for he would display his hand in front of one with the fingers stretched out and say ‘A visual appearance is like this’; next he closed his fingers a little and said, ‘An act of assent is like this’; then he pressed his fingers closely together and made a fist, and said that that was comprehension (and from this illustration he gave to that process the actual name of *catalēpsis*, which it had not had before); but then he used to apply his left hand to his right fist and squeeze it tightly and forcibly, and then say that such was knowledge, which was within the power of nobody save the wise man—but who is a wise man or ever has been even they themselves do not usually say.<sup>12</sup>

The doxastic process had less to do with truth content of the impressions than with the virtue of the person.<sup>13</sup> For example, people who were not virtuous – because for the Stoics virtue was often seen as all or nothing – could have cognitions, but they were considered weak cognitions. Unlike the way the term “proper function” is used in epistemology today, for the Stoics it referred to the perfect application of intellectual

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Hankinson, “Stoic Epistemology,” 59.

<sup>11</sup> For a concise summary of Stoic epistemology, see Hankinson, “Stoic Epistemology.”

<sup>12</sup> Cicero, *Academics*, II. 145. Translated in Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods. Academics.*, trans. Harris Rackham, vol. 268, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 654–55.

<sup>13</sup> It’s debated whether or not the Stoics fit into a correspondence model of epistemology. Hankinson argues that they do not; “Stoic Epistemology,” 78; Long and Sedley likely agree; *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2016, 2:258–59.

virtue.<sup>14</sup> So, Long and Sedley summarize the process of cognitive improvement, “What perfects these latter is not a change in their objective content, but the expert understanding, consistency and moral integrity of their agent.,” and, “what chiefly inhibits people from becoming wise, in their view, is proneness to emotional disorder, and this is reflected in the startling identification of ignorance with insanity.”<sup>15</sup>

This brief summary shows that Paul does not share or acknowledge the finer points of Stoic epistemology, but it also illuminates what Paul is saying in this passage. The role of consideration, or reckoning, that Paul describes here is part of adjusting to the new and true reality of being in Christ. Both Paul and the Stoics share a limited commitment to a correspondence theory of truth and they each believe the knowledge of this correspondence changes after receiving a new mindset.<sup>16</sup> The Stoics believed this could be taught by a sage and Paul believed that it could occur through the leading of the Holy Spirit. One can only know this true reality in Christ.

### **Considering and Growing**

One of the ongoing tensions between Paul and the Greek philosophers is the way they conceive of moral progress. The Stoics have a doctrine of moral improvement (*προκοπή*), but few were able to progress from being a fool to being a sage. Paul disagrees with the Greeks and the Jews on this point of anthropology, grouping them together as unable to do what is good because of their desires. Unlike the Greeks, Paul does not believe weakness of will can be solved through education. Unlike the Jews, he does not believe that reading and studying Torah can change the will either. Paul is unique in

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<sup>14</sup> Cicero discusses the role of proper function among the virtuous and the fool in *On Ends*, 3.58-59.

<sup>15</sup> This summary is based on Stobaeus' quote from Chrysippus, “The man who progresses to the furthest point performs all proper functions without exception and omits none” and other sources. See Stobaeus, 5.906,18-907,5, p. 363, and the discussion of cognition, knowledge, and opinion, Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2016, 1:256–59.

<sup>16</sup> The limit is more clearly defined in Christian epistemology. Moo comments, “The last phrase of the verse reminds us that this new state is possible only in union with Christ: we are alive to God only ‘in Christ Jesus.’” Moo, *Romans*, 404–5.

antiquity in asserting, “no one is righteous” in 3:10.<sup>17</sup> It is the message he faithfully presents through Romans that can free humanity from the dominion of the passions. In 8:1, Paul puts a caveat on his good news, “for those who are in Christ Jesus.” He speaks similarly in other assurances, like 6:1-4 and 12:1-3, implying that freedom from the passions can only happen in Christ.

Paul asserts that every person who is in Christ should “consider” themselves based on this new reality. While he shares the conceptual framework that thinking is determined by the virtue of the thinker, to an extent, he is more concerned with the correspondence of the believers’ station, being in Christ, and the effect that has on their ability to think, than on learning to practice these virtues. In Paul, the disposition necessary to practice the intellectual virtues is given. Those who are in Christ begin to think of themselves as being alive in him. But they don’t do this by themselves. In Romans 8 and 12, Paul describes the animating force in the minds of those who are in Christ, the Holy Spirit.

### **Romans 8:5-8: The Mindset of Christ**

The second half of chapter 6 leads into a discussion over the law which extends through chapter 7, which ends with Paul portraying the person who has been exposed to the law but does not have the Spirit. In Romans 8, he turns a corner in response to the question asked in 7:24-25. Beginning there, Paul describes the new nature of those who are in Christ using the image of walking by the Spirit.

Unlike the unrighteous people in chapter 1 or the hypocritical teachers in chapter 2, those who walk by the Spirit will fulfill the righteous requirement of the law (8:4b). This is not the first time Paul has mentioned the Spirit in Romans, but the work of the Spirit becomes the focal point of this chapter.<sup>18</sup> Paul’s description of the mindset of

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<sup>17</sup> See Thompson’s discussion of this point in the context of ancient concepts of moral formation. Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 148–51, 155.

<sup>18</sup> Descriptions of the work of the Spirit are present throughout the book of Romans, but are

the Spirit here shows that the mind is transformed and enabled only by the Spirit to fulfill the requirements of the law. Taking on the mindset of the Spirit is the only way to practice φρόνησις.

### **The Fruit of Φρόνησις**

The behavior change that stems from practicing φρόνησις can be seen in other places in Paul's letters. The fruit of the Spirit, listed in Galatians 5:22-23, and the following verses show the practical implications Paul ascribes to the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> It's worth looking at this passage as a helpful augment to what Paul writes in Romans 8:3-5. It was common in ancient philosophical writing, predominantly in studies of practical wisdom common among the Stoics, to use vice lists to describe not just the conduct of the unwise, but also their state of mind.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, it was common for philosophers to use this same kind of fruit metaphor to describe moral transformation.<sup>21</sup>

What the Spirit does, as Paul alludes to in this list of the fruits of the Spirit and also in vs. 25, is transform Christians so that they will behave according to the Spirit, according to Christ, and ultimately, according to how God himself behaves. Ben Witherington makes the point this way in *Paul's Narrative Thought World*, "The Spirit makes believers capable of understanding and properly integrating the Christ, the Christ event, and what God has freely given them in Christ."<sup>22</sup> Because they Spirit enables them

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especially concentrated in chapter 8. See 2:29; 14:17; and 15:16-19. For the centrality of the Spirit in this passage, see Moo, *Romans*, 468.

<sup>19</sup> Rosner's study of Paul and the law is helpful in interpreting these behavioral passages with respect to the way Paul views the law. "To walk in the Spirit is thus to experience the ethical blessings of the new age of the Spirit, an age in which the dispensation of the law has passed away." Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 31 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 126.

<sup>20</sup> Engberg-Pedersen comments on this vice list in Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 160–61; He also gives a summary of the Stoic vice list, 339-340n9. Like Martyn, he believes Paul appropriated the standard vice list according to his apocalyptic worldview, with limitations. See Craig Keener, "A Comparison of the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 with Ancient Thought on Ethics and Emotion," in *The Language and Literature of the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Stanley E. Porter's 60th Birthday*, ed. Lois Fuller Dow, Craig A. Evans, and Andrew W. Pitts (Boston: Brill, 2016), 576.

<sup>21</sup> Keener, "The Language and Literature of the New Testament," 578; Jewett, *Romans*, 422–23.

<sup>22</sup> Ben Witherington, *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph*

to understand and empowers them to integrate their union with Christ, they begin to change. The process of producing the fruit of the Spirit, then, describes, “the life and character of God being replicated on a lesser scale in human lives.”<sup>23</sup>

### **The Mindset of the Spirit**

Romans 8:5-8 is the clearest contrast between the mind of the Spirit and the mind of the flesh in Romans. In these verses, Paul sets the two states in direct contrast with one another to show their differences. By his description, and the continuation of the argument from the first seven chapters, it’s apparent that this contrast includes an epistemic component.

In 8:5-8, Paul uses epistemic language to explain the work of the Spirit in the mind. It’s unsurprising that in another section on ethics, the epistemic virtues come into focus. Although not explicit here, the virtue of φρόνησις is the result of the mindset of the Spirit and the ethical implications Paul discusses in 8:12-13.

These verses present the strongest evidence for Craig Keener’s thesis in *The Mind of the Spirit*, that the Spirit works through and along with the human mind, not apart from it.<sup>24</sup> The new life in Christ is one of intellectual integration. The believer, because he is in Christ is oriented differently in the world (6:11), but this orientation comes at the leading of the Spirit. Unlike other Greek discussions of the passions, for Paul, “one overcomes the character of the flesh not by addressing it on its own terms but by recognizing the greater reality of what God has done for us in Christ.”<sup>25</sup> The activity

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(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 283.

<sup>23</sup> Witherington, 299.

<sup>24</sup> Put another way, Paul, “apparently experienced no conflict as a believer between life in the Spirit and an intellect directed by faith.” Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, xix–xx.

<sup>25</sup> Keener, 259. In the introduction, Keener nods toward the implications for charismatic theology in his study of the mind. Indeed, through the book, he has an eye toward the use of the gifts, particularly the supernatural gifts like tongues and prophecy, but does not treat them directly. One of the obvious implications though is that these gifts are within, or at least consonant with, the new mind. The Spirit does not work exclusively outside the mind. One area in which this study goes further than Keener’s is by making the connection between the work of the Spirit in virtues like discernment in understanding the will of God and in interpreting the voice of God through prophecy and tongues. The discernment that

of the mind of the Spirit results from the “reality of Christ” and the “new identity in him.”<sup>26</sup>

### **The Mindset of the Spirit and Epistemology**

The fundamental problem with traditional foundationalist or propositionalist account of Paul’s epistemology is how to account for the significant overlap in what believers and unbelievers can know. This is because while the question, what does someone know, is important, it is secondarily important to the question, how does someone know? In fact, it is only by answering this second question that the first can be answered.

The most common position among the commentators is that in Christ believers only gain a new perspective based on a new reality.<sup>27</sup> Descriptions of this change range from the impact of new information of believers’ thinking to a new focus in their lives. Talbert describes this change as spirit cognition, “an orientation in which God is one’s ultimate concern and one’s enabling power.”<sup>28</sup> But this language of concern, or perspective, slips into a minimal understanding of what this verse is saying. Both in 6:11 and 8:3-5, this explanation is too cognitive to be a complete explanation of what Paul was

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Christians can practice applies in both cases. For more on this, see the following chapters on 1 Corinthians.

<sup>26</sup> See Keener, 114-121, especially p. 121.

<sup>27</sup> The paradigm for this position is Martyn, “Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages”; F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2008), 141–43; “If they are in a ‘new world,’ then their behavior should follow accordingly. But although they share in God’s life through the gift of the Holy Spirit, they still inhabit mortal bodies and live within the structures of the world.” Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 105; “It is not just that they are to imitate Christ (because he has died to sin, so you too); Christians are also to arm themselves with the mentality that they are dead to sin; for that is what has happened to them in the baptismal experience.” Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 33:438; “Paul is simply demanding belief congruent with the truth he has explained in 6:2–10: in Christ, believers died to the sin of Adamic humanity and have new life.” Keener, *Romans*, 82; “We are not commanded to become dead to sin and V 1, p 226 alive to God; these are presupposed. And it is not by reckoning these to be facts that they become facts. The force of the imperative is that we are to reckon with and appreciate the facts which already obtain by virtue of union with Christ.” John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 1.225-226.

<sup>28</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Romans*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 204–5.

saying.<sup>29</sup> Epistemic content is open to believers and non-believers. Information alone cannot account for the changes Paul describes. If it were, what would be the role of the Spirit?

A new perspective cannot explain the change Paul describes in those who walk by the Spirit. Paul differentiates between thinking about the things of the flesh and the things of the Spirit; Paul puts this concisely in verse 5; “οἱ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ὄντες τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς φρονοῦσιν, οἱ δὲ κατὰ πνεῦμα τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος.”<sup>30</sup> At minimum, Paul is making an observation about the content of a person’s thinking, something along the lines of, “those of the Spirit should think about spiritual things,” which is not uncommon in Paul.<sup>31</sup> This interpretation reads φρονέω with an emphasis on the content of what is understood.

This is an uncontroversial explanation of what Paul is saying, but is it all he’s saying? Does it fit the context to only mention contents of what the believers are thinking about? To put the question differently, is Paul describing a difference in what those who walk by the Spirit think about or is he describing a different manner of thinking entirely?

To start from the premise that those who walk by the Spirit think the things of the Spirit, it’s helpful to divide the issue in two; first, what does Paul mean by “thinking,” the word φρονέω? Second, what does it mean to think the things of the Spirit?

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<sup>29</sup> Commenting on 8:4, Thompson writes, “Unlike his contemporaries, Paul does not indicate that humankind can do the will of God, but only that the ‘just requirement of the law’ may be fulfilled in the community of believers empowered by the Spirit.” Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 153.

<sup>30</sup> Because of the participle, “ὄντες” in these phrases, some have raised the question of ontology in this passage. Is there an ontological difference between those “ὄντες” of the flesh, and those “ὄντες” of the Spirit? This debate typically runs alongside theological preferences concerning regeneration. Schreiner and Moo read Paul as making a statement of ontological difference between Christians and non-Christians. Cranfield and Dunn do not. Schreiner, *Romans*, 410–12; Moo, *Romans*, 486; Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2004, 1:385; Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 425.

<sup>31</sup> There are several places where Paul says something like this, for example, Phil. 4:8, “ὅσα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ, ὅσα σεμνά... ταῦτα λογίσεσθε,” or Col. 3:2, “τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε, μὴ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.” This distinction is partially captured in Dunn’s use of “takes the side of” and “way of thinking” to translate φρονέω. Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 426. Moo understands this phrase as “thinking the things of the flesh/Spirit.” *Romans*, 487.

What's implied from the previous verse is that those who are “κατὰ πνεῦμα” here are those who are walking by the Spirit, and the same with those “κατὰ σάρκα,” they walk by the flesh. In a similar way, those walk by the Spirit think by the Spirit. Some of the difficulty bound up in this passage can be seen in the different attempts to render this passage in English. The most common understanding among the commentators is to render the term as “mindset.”<sup>32</sup> The matter of translation, though, is not as difficult as the question of meaning. In English, this is something like the difference between “thinking about something” and “how to think about something.” The difference lies in the quality and the nature of the thinking process, not just what is being thought about.

### **With Unveiled Faces: 2 Corinthians 3:12-18**

Paul emphasizes the Spirit's role in revelation other places in his letters, nowhere more significantly than in 2 Corinthians 3:12-18. Having been accused of using underhanded ways and emphasizing his boldness (*παρρησία*) and his authority, Paul contrasts the old and new covenants, showing that the new covenant, of which he has been made a minister, is even more glorious than the old. He does this, reminding the Corinthians, that he is operating out of borrowed authority, the authority of the messenger of the covenant, similar to the authority Moses had before the people of Israel when he brought the tablets down from the mountain. Whereas Moses brought down stones to display the word of God, Paul and his companions have the testimony of human hearts that have been changed.

Taking up the storyline from Exodus 34:33-35, Paul explains that they are even bolder than Moses had been.<sup>33</sup> The Israelites could not look at his face because of the

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<sup>32</sup> BDAG lists gives a range of meaning that coincides with “mindset,” thoughtful planning, way of thinking, frame of mind, understanding, insight, and intelligence. The commentators do not typically venture outside this range. Bauer, *BDAG*, 1066; Moo, *Romans*, 468; Schreiner cautions not to read too much into this word group in any direction. Schreiner, *Romans*, 405–6; Dunn's “way of thinking” for φρόνημα is similar Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 426.

<sup>33</sup> There are many interesting debates over the way Paul reads this story, especially considering several of the details he mentions; that the Israelites could not look at Moses face and the reason why, that do not occur either in the Hebrew or the LXX of Exodus 34. Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand



glory he had seen, and this new covenant is even more glorious. Then Paul makes an interesting interpretive move. He explains why it was that Moses put the veil over his face in reference to the Jews' inability to see "what was coming to an end," presumably the Old Covenant, of which Moses himself embodies in this reading. Their minds were hardened from seeing that the Mosaic covenant was coming to a close and the glory of the covenant. To this day, he explains, this "veil" remains over the eyes of their hearts when they read the Scriptures. Unlike Paul, they do not see Jesus as the Christ in the Scriptures.<sup>34</sup> But in Christ, this veil is removed. For Christians, the situation is remarkably different, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

This transformation comes from or during the process of "beholding" the glory of the Lord - seeing imperfectly but moving toward certainty.<sup>35</sup> Κατοπτρίζω, the verb Paul uses to describe seeing a reflection appears here and in the noun form ἔσοπτρον in 1 Corinthians 13:12, and in both cases, Paul is describing a process of seeing more clearly over time.<sup>36</sup> Again, Paul comes back to the concept of transformation as a characterization of sanctification.<sup>37</sup> In Romans 12:1-3 Paul characterizes transformation

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Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 292–93. Since the purpose here is to understand Paul's argument, I will focus exclusively on the argument he makes in 2 Corinthians 3 to the exclusion of how he might be utilizing the narrative in Exodus.

<sup>34</sup> There are powerful resonances here with the passages that describe Paul reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jews to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ. See Acts 17:2f; 18:4, 19; 19:8; 20:9.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Fishbane sees resonances of Numbers 12:8 and Ezekiel 43:3 in Paul's use of the image of a mirror to denote prophetic seeing, culminating in the time that we too speak with God face to face. The verb form of this same image in 2 Cor. 3 could also be read with this background in mind. "Through the Looking Glass: Reflections on Ezek 43:3, Num 12:8 and 1 Cor 13:8," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986): 63–75.

<sup>36</sup> It was common for the philosophers to use mirrors to symbolize indirect knowledge. Harris points out, though, that just because the vision is indirect does not mean it is inexact. "All 'mirrored' knowledge is of necessity indirect knowledge, but indirect knowledge is not necessarily imprecise or inaccurate knowledge; a 'mirror image' is indirect but may be perfectly clear. Significantly, there is here no ἐν αἰνίγματι ('dimly,' 'with blurring') as in 1 Cor. 13:12. The vision of God's glory accorded Christians is indirect, for it is mediated through the gospel, but it is clear, for the Christ who is proclaimed through the gospel is the exact representation (εἰκόν) of God (4:4)." Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 315.

<sup>37</sup> In a recent study, Kugler has argued that Paul viewed Christ as the image of God to which

in terms of the renewal of the mind to the end of discerning the will of God. Here, he relates transformation to contemplating the glory of the Lord. But what image is he referring to? This must be the image of Christ.

### **Interpreting Φρονέω**

Having already discussed the intellectual virtue of φρόνησις, much of what Paul means here can be explained by the philosophical backdrop. However, φρόνησις and φρονέω do not necessarily have the same connotation. Looking at the way Paul uses this verb in Romans and in the broader corpus nuances our understanding of the kind of thinking he prescribes.

**Φρονέω in the immediate context.** In the immediate context of chapter 8, Paul is discussing the operation of the Spirit in those who are in Christ. The work of the Spirit is the clear theme of this first part of Romans 8, so “thinking the things of the Spirit” should be read as part of the larger understanding of this work. For all the changes Paul describes in the lives of those who are in Christ, it is the Spirit that empowers and guides. The righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in those who walk by the Spirit (8:4). Those who walk according to the Spirit will set their minds on the things of the Spirit (8:5). To set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace (8:6). Those who have the Spirit belong to God (8:9). In Christ, the Spirit is life because of righteousness (8:10). The Spirit will raise those in Christ from the dead (8:11). Those who walk according to the Spirit will put the deeds of the body to death and live (8:13). Those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God and cry out, “Abba, Father” (8:14-15). The Spirit bears witness to the inheritance and glorification of the children of God (8:17). These descriptions cannot be explained by new information alone, but by the action of the Spirit in the hearts of those who are in Christ that leads them to act differently. If in each of these cases, the

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all believers are being conformed. This is inherent in the creation of Adam; “Jesus is the protological and cosmogonical image of God according to which Adam himself was made and toward which he was destined.” Chris Kugler, *Paul and the Image of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Academic, 2020), 197.

Spirit is leading believers in a new way of living, then how can it not also imply that believers are – by the Spirit – undertaking a new way of thinking?

As a governing metaphor to describe the relationship that Christians have with the Spirit, Paul uses the image of “walking by the Spirit.” He uses this term in thirty-two other places in his letters, always referring to a manner of living rather than a single action.<sup>38</sup> In Gal. 5:16, a very similar passage to this section, he writes, “*πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκὸς οὐ μὴ τελέσητε.*” Putting off the old way of life, following the desires and actions of the flesh comes through the work of the Spirit. In Colossians, too, he says something similar, this time not with the Spirit, but with Christ; “*Ὡς οὖν παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον, ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε.*” Walking by the Spirit, in Christ, is a well-defined concept in Paul’s writing, and without exception, walking in the flesh leads to sin and death and walking by the Spirit leads to righteousness and life. Additionally, this term refers to a new way of being in the world, not a specific action, or in this case, a set of historical facts.

If the mind of the flesh is epistemically limited because of sin, so that it cannot rightly discern the will of God and the right course of action (1:28; 8:7), the mind of the Spirit is now enabled to discern the will of God and determine what is right, because the Spirit enables those who are in Christ to walk in him. This is what Paul says explicitly in Romans 12:1-3. Though their bodies have not changed (yet, 8:10-11), Christians have been transformed by the Spirit and now they think by the Spirit, not by the flesh. As they walk by the Spirit, putting to death the deeds of the flesh, their minds are walking by the Spirit, pleasing God and obeying him.<sup>39</sup> So this change is not just a reflection on new information but a new way of thinking, a new mindset.

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<sup>38</sup> For similar examples see Rom. 6:4; 13:13; 14:15; 1 Cor. 7:17; 2 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 2:2. The single exception might be 2 Cor. 10:3 where Paul differentiates between walking “*ἐν σαρκί*” and “*κατὰ σάρκα.*”

<sup>39</sup> As an example of a similar interpretation, Gerald Bray includes a striking quote from John Chrysostom in his *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. In a homily on Genesis 22:10, Chrysostom remarks, “You are not in the flesh not because you are not clad in flesh but because in spite of being clad in flesh you rise above the thinking of the flesh.” Gerald L. Bray, ed., *Romans*, 2nd ed, vol. 6, Ancient

**Φρονέω in the epistolary context.** The theological arc of Romans indicates that Paul is describing a new way of thinking according to the Spirit. In Romans 1, Paul does not use any of these words, but he does describe the state of the mind of the flesh in terms that reflect a flawed quality of understanding. It is not the case that those Paul describes in Romans 1 need to simply change the content of their thinking, in fact they cannot. They need new minds and a new way of thinking.

Chapter 7 provides the most important backdrop. This passage comes on the heels of Paul's statement about the mind under the law in 7:22-25 and provides a contrast. Since Paul is describing a person who knows what is right, the implication would be that the person in Romans 7 is thinking about the content of what the Spirit might guide them to do. Later in the chapter, interestingly, Paul says that the Spirit intercedes according to the will of God (8:27). As has been clear throughout Romans, the will of God is the holiness and righteousness of his people, broadly speaking. This is exactly what people cannot do without the Spirit.

In contrast to 7:22-25, then, describing a person who intellectually understands what is right but is incapable of doing it, how is the person in 8:5-7 any different? If this were merely a matter of content, then what would be the difference? In chapter 8, the Spirit is the primary animating power, but where is he in chapter 7? For those who believe chapter 7 describes an unregenerate person under the law, this makes more sense. The person of chapter 7, having been exposed to the law, is able to think about the content of the Spirit, but does not think by the Spirit. He is able to comprehend the content of the law, but he is not able to think like Christ. As others have shown, the person in chapter 7, even if it is a believer, is not living according to the exhortations Paul gives in 6:21 and 8:13, for whatever reason that might be.

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Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 211.

In either case, then, the person in Romans 8 is no longer just responding differently to new information but actually thinking differently than the person in chapter 7, to the extent that they are able to think in a new way. The simplest and most likely explanation for this, as I have set out to prove, is that the believer in chapter 8 is practicing a new Spirit-given virtue of φρόνησις that the people in chapters 1, 2, and 7 cannot practice.

Framed this way, it highlights the curiosity that talk of the Spirit is so absent from Paul's discussion of discernment in Romans 12:1-3.

### **Romans 12:1-3: Discerning the Will of God**

At last, Paul reaches the climax of his argument about intellectual virtue in chapter 12.<sup>40</sup> In Christ, believers can be transformed by the renewing of their minds. In terms of the epistemic argument, verses 1-3 serve as the solution and contrast to what Paul began in 1:18-32. The result of the work of the Spirit in the minds of believers is that they will be able to know the will of God.<sup>41</sup> They demonstrate this by offering themselves to him, obeying him, and as Paul discusses later, by hearing and discerning his voice.<sup>42</sup>

Paul's language in this passage is significant in tying up various strands running through the previous eleven chapters.<sup>43</sup> The various syntactical and conceptual

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<sup>40</sup> "Paul's whole written work, in fact, could be seen as an extended application of Romans 12:1-2." Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1123.

<sup>41</sup> "Thus, the life yielded to God is the life dedicated to the discovery of God's will (Rom. 12:1-2) and responsive to the divine 'call' (cf. 1 Thess. 4:3, 7; 2:12)." Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 227-28.

<sup>42</sup> Like many commentators, Thompson gives an exemplary case for seeing the final section of instruction in Romans 12:1-15:13 as an expansion on the summary found in 12:1-3. He adds that the law plays a normative role in this ethical teaching, particularly echoing the language of the LXX. Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 120-25.

<sup>43</sup> "In chap 1 Paul illustrates the way in which the ἀδόκιμος νοῦς leads to disobedience; in chap 12 he suggests that the way in which the ἀνακαίνωσις τοῦ νοῦς gives the capacity for finding out God's will to do it. That this transformation can take place is due to the gospel, God's power for salvation." For a comparison of the terms used in these two passages and their ethical implications, see Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 104-6.

threads of the ἀδόκιμος νοῦς in chapter 1, the will of God from chapter 2, and the φρόνησις of those who are in Christ, all come together in these three verses. The futility of the mind exposed to the law in chapter 7 is enlivened by the Spirit to discern and act. The threads of 6:1-11 and 8:5-8 come together in a more definitive statement of the redemption of the mind and participation in the mind of Christ by the Spirit.

### **Who Has Known the Mind of the Lord? (11:34)**

In Chapters 9-11, Paul takes up the central issue of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in Christ.<sup>44</sup> At the end of this section, he moves into a doxology extolling God's infinite wisdom and his unsearchable judgments (11:33). Then he exclaims, “Τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου?” This is a quote from Isaiah 40:13 in the LXX.<sup>45</sup> The implicit answer is no one. While there is a section break between the end of the doxology in 11:36 and the new section beginning in 12:1, Paul returns to this subject of the mind of the Lord. Most of the commentators start with a new conceptual slate in 12:1, reading Paul's worship in 11:34-36 as the close of another topic.<sup>46</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, for example, rightly reads this doxology in 11:34-36 as describing the

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<sup>44</sup> Though chapters 9-11 can sometimes be treated as a theological excursus, they are central to the continuity of Paul's argument between chapters 8 and 12. For a summary of the importance of this section in the overall argument of Romans, see Bruce, *Romans*, 183–85. Moo's summary of the problem of Israel is excellent for an overview, *Romans*, 569–75.

<sup>45</sup> The LXX reads, “τίς ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου.”

<sup>46</sup> This break in the chapter assignments, probably combined with the end of the doxology in 11:36, has caused many commentators to draw a clean topical break between the end of chapter 11 and the beginning of chapter 12. For examples, see Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 908–9; Fitzmyer actually draws a parallel with Romans 1:19-20 but does not connect this insight to 12:1-3. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 33:634–35; Moo, *Romans*, 762; Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 185–86; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2.107; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 590–91.

“otherness” of God.<sup>47</sup> This doxology does serve as a section break, and is not an uncommon feature in Paul’s letters.<sup>48</sup>

The stunning fact is that Paul does answer the question he poses in 11:34 – in part – in the following verses. In 12:1-3, Paul exhorts Christians to present themselves to God and to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, so that they will be able to discern the will of God and think with sober judgment. This is an answer to the question he posed.

What’s more, he quotes this same passage from Isaiah in 1 Corinthians 2:16 and there he goes on to answer the previously rhetorical; “we have the mind of Christ.” Thomas Schreiner emphasizes the conclusion Paul draws in these passages:

Human beings cannot discern God’s wise plan for history on their own, nor would they ever devise a scheme like God’s. Nonetheless, in Rom. 9-11 Paul has communicated the main strokes in that plan so that believers can discern the wisdom of God as it unfolds. This is not to say that comprehensive and exhaustive knowledge is granted to believers, only that the chief lineaments of his plan are made known to them. Romans 11:34 is therefore remarkably similar in theme to 1 Cor. 2:16: human beings cannot know God’s wisdom unaided, but they can access it as the Holy Spirit reveals it.<sup>49</sup>

What an incredible assertion. The plan of God, which Paul reminds the Colossians had been hidden from before the foundation of the world (Col. 1:27), has now been revealed and those who are in Christ can comprehend it. This is not complete knowledge of every thought of the mind of God, but it is access that had previously been impossible, separated by the distance between God and humanity.

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<sup>47</sup> Johnson goes one step further and argues that the οὖν beginning 12:1 would orally link the two passages together. Despite this linguistic marker, he does not make the conceptual comparison; “He connects 12:1 to 11:36 with οὖν (‘therefore’). In ancient manuscripts, there would have been no chapter or paragraph indicator between the two verses. In oral delivery, there may well have been a pause after the ‘Amen’ in 11:36, but the very next words the audience heard would be connected to it by ‘therefore.’ The clear implication is that what Paul has said in chapters 1–11 serves as the ground for Paul’s instructions.” Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 186–87.

<sup>48</sup> See another doxology to conclude the letter, Rom. 16:25-27, and others in Eph. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 3:11-13; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17.

<sup>49</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 618.

The fundamental difference, then, between believers and non-believers, between those who walk by the Spirit and those who walk by the flesh, is the ability to discern the will of God. In Romans 8:7-8, Paul emphatically states that those who think according to the flesh cannot submit to God's law and they cannot please him. Here, he asserts that the sign of those who have a renewed mind is that they can discern the will of God.

### **Transformation, Renewal, and Discernment: 12:1-2**

Therefore, Paul writes, bringing the preceding eleven chapters to bear on these words, considering the mercy of God, every Christian ought to present themselves to God as a living sacrifice. The images Paul uses are all-encompassing. Christians no longer offer sacrifices after Christ's atoning death, but instead they give themselves to God, every facet and every part of their bodies and souls. This new and continual sacrifice, in Christ, will be living, which marks its continuity from conversion until resurrection, holy, and pleasing. This is the true act of worship.

#### **What Does “Λογικὴν Λατρείαν” Mean in Romans 12:1?**

Paul concludes verse 1 by saying that this presentation is the believers' λογικὴν λατρείαν, a difficult but important phrase in this passage. The kind of worship in Romans 12:1 is important for the overall argument. The word λογικός has been translated “spiritual,” both here and in 1 Peter 2:2, along with “reasonable,” and “true.”<sup>50</sup> It's puzzling that some translators obscure the intellectual sense of the Greek.

There are several possibilities for what this could mean. Λογικός could mean “reasonable,” describing a response that is fitting given what God has done.<sup>51</sup> Several commentators point out that if Paul wanted to say “spiritual act of worship” he easily

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<sup>50</sup> There are three approaches among the translators. The ESV reads, “spiritual worship” and the NASB, “spiritual service of worship.” The NIV and CSV opt for, “true and proper worship” and “true worship.” The KJV, NKJV, and NET opted to render the phrase, “reasonable service.”

<sup>51</sup> Longenecker takes this view, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 921; Moo argues for a similar reading, *Romans*, 772.



could have. Why would he use λογικός here to mean πνευματικός? This is the only place λογικός appears in Paul's writings.<sup>52</sup> BDAG gives the gloss, "thoughtful," because "the cognitive aspect anticipates the phrase "εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ" later in 12:2.<sup>53</sup> If λογικός means something more like "rational" or "thoughtful," which seems most likely, then the implication is that the rational choice has now become the worship of the one true God. Ian Paul's analysis of this word shows that it referred to actions guided by "reasoned thought."<sup>54</sup> This means the sacrifice Paul is describing is the product of rational ethical deliberation.<sup>55</sup> In saying this, Paul emphasizes again that Christian ethics flow from Spirit-driven reasonable practice of φρόνησις.

### **Transformation and Renewal**

The terms transformation and renewal are interesting paired together in this verse. It shows both the continuity and the discontinuity of what believers experience in Christ. Paul is thinking here of "a continual activity of the Spirit on the mind."<sup>56</sup> Both of these actions are ongoing in the Christian life, just as they are continually to offer themselves to God they will continually be transformed.

The reference back to 2:18 is also notable. Here, too, Paul mentions discerning the will of God, and not through the law, nor as Dunn remarks, through "recognizing the eschatological tension of living between the two ages."<sup>57</sup> This cannot be right. If knowing

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<sup>52</sup> Schreiner summarizes the main positions on the meaning of λογικός, saying most scholars take the entire phrase, "τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν" to be in apposition to the rest of the sentence. Schreiner, *Romans*, 626–27; Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 711; Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2004, 1:601; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 33:640. He renders the phrase, "it is eminently reasonable, given the mercies of God, for believers to dedicate themselves wholly to God." Schreiner, *Romans*, 627.

<sup>53</sup> Bauer, *BDAG*, 598. LSJ also gives an intellectual aspect of this term.

<sup>54</sup> Scott, "Your Reasoning Worship."

<sup>55</sup> Scott, 525. Scott connects this meaning to the practice of φρόνησις in Philo's writing, following Aristotle. At the same time, the Stoics used it to suggest that even religious worship should be governed by principled deliberation and reason. To summarize his conclusion, Christian worship should be actions governed by a rational mind, connecting the concrete description of ethics Paul will give in the following chapters to the spiritual aspects of worship and transformation.

<sup>56</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 714.

<sup>57</sup> Dunn, 717.

the content of the law did not enable the Jews to discern the will of God, then how would the knowledge that they are living between two ages? This is also reminiscent of Martyn's famous essay on Pauline epistemology. To say that this knowledge can cause someone to discern the will of God while the knowledge of the law could not simply trades assent to one set of assertions for another. But unlike the Greeks of his day, this is not how Paul conceived of the renewing of the mind.

Before Paul gets to the matter of transformation, he issues a negative command: do not be conformed to the pattern of the world. This is not to be read as much as an indictment of the Roman Christians, but as a prescription for all Christians to note the stark difference that comes by walking in the Spirit.

As most of the commentators make explicitly clear, the two terms juxtaposed in 12:2, *συσχηματίζω* and *μεταμορφόω*, do not refer to an external and an internal division between beliefs and actions.<sup>58</sup> They both refer to the innermost parts of a human being, either being like the world, or being transformed to be unlike it. This fits the rest of Paul's argument. Those who are outside of Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, conform to the world exactly in their inner being. Even the Jews who have the law are still under the power of sin and stand condemned by their unrighteousness. Neither do the terms indicate that the mind is free from the process of change. Instead, the mind is changed on account of being in Christ.

Metamorphosis was a common term among the Greeks and would have been a familiar category in the moral context Paul assigns it for his readers in Rome. Seneca wrote something similar only a few years later in Rome, "I know, Lucilius, I am not just being changed; I am being transformed."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 629.

<sup>59</sup> "Intellego, Lucili, non emendari me tantum sed transfigurari." *Epistles*, 6.1

What separates Paul's teaching from that of other Greek philosophers is the animating principle behind this new mind.<sup>60</sup> Paul makes a similar point in Ephesians 4:17-23. In a way very similar to Romans 1, Paul describes the plight of the Gentile mind, this time describing their minds as futile, “ἐν ματαιότητι τοῦ νοῦς αὐτῶν.”<sup>61</sup> Because of their hardness of heart, these Gentiles have had their minds darkened (4:17). Note the correlating phrase: they have been alienated from the life of God, because of their ignorance. This mirrors what Paul says in Rom. 1:18-32, but it has an even more personal element. These Gentiles have not just been the subjects of God's wrath; they have been alienated from him. This is why their minds are darkened.

Those who are in Christ have been reconciled and reunited with God (Rom. 5:1) and should be renewed in the spirit of their minds, “ἀνανεοῦσθαι δὲ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ νοῦς ὑμῶν” (Eph. 4:23). In this passage in Ephesians, Paul makes explicit what is only implicit in Romans: this renewal occurs concomitantly with putting on the new self which is (re)created in the likeness of God, “ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα” (4:24). Here, Paul goes beyond Romans 12 by asserting explicitly that the new mind is patterned after the mind of God, a point he will also make in 1 Corinthians 2 and Philippians 2.

The mind is being transformed into the image of Christ because of the renewal that has taken place. That means those who are in Christ think the way Christ thinks, not in terms of the content of his thoughts, but in terms of the thought process. The telos of this transformation is that believers will be able to discern the will of God and do it (12:2).

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<sup>60</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson comments, “In this context, and from the ways Paul will develop his exhortation, it is clear that the ‘new mind’ to which believers are to be transformed is precisely the ‘mind of Christ.’ They are to view reality from a perspective shaped by the Holy Spirit according to the image of Christ.” Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 191.

<sup>61</sup> This is also the way Paul describes creation under the power of sin in Rom. 8:20, “τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἢ κτίσις ὑπετάγη.”

## Discerning the Will of God (12:2b)

The second half of this verse reveals the goal of transformation and the point to which Paul has been building along this intellectual theme running through Romans.

Christians are transformed by the renewing of their minds so that they might discern the will of God; “εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ.”<sup>62</sup>

Paul reconnects to chapters 1 and 2 syntactically and conceptually by bringing the discernment process back into focus. Dunn suggests, with Dodd, that *δοκιμάζειν* can be understood here as “the capacity of forming the correct Christian ethical judgment at each given moment.”<sup>63</sup> The renewed mind is able to know God’s will because it is influenced by, or participates along with, God’s mind.<sup>64</sup> This is consistent with the reverse argument Paul made about the mind of the flesh.

Notice that it’s not just Romans 1:18-32 in the backdrop, but Romans 2:18 as well.<sup>65</sup> This is the only group of people who can discern the will of God and do it in the book of Romans. What is impossible for Gentiles and Jews, even for the subject in chapter 7, is now possible for Christians.

Furnish describes the stark difference between the way Paul describes the nature of the Jews’ relationship to the will of God and that of the Christians; “[Paul] does not deny that the law may mediate the will of God. Nowhere, however, does he speak of

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<sup>62</sup> On this point it does not matter if “εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν” is a purpose or a result. See the explanation in Harvey, *Romans*, 296; Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2004, 2:609.

<sup>63</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 1988, 714; C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, The Moffatt New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1932), 189.

<sup>64</sup> Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 167; W. F. Murphy, “The Pauline Understanding of Appropriated Revelation as a Principle of Christian Moral Action,” *Studia Moralia* 39, no. 2 (2001): 371–409.

<sup>65</sup> Keener is excellent on this point. “When Paul expects the believer’s mind to be renewed to evaluate the good things that are God’s will, he counters the false claim of the hypocritical law-expert in Romans 2:18, who supposedly knows God’s will and thus evaluates what is best. Romans 2:18 and 12:2 are the only two uses of *θέλημα* (‘will’) in Romans besides the framing verses about Paul’s desire to visit the believers in Rome (1:10; 15:32). These are also two of the only four uses of *δοκιμάζω* (‘evaluate’) in Romans—one of the others being 1:28, to which 12:2 also alludes by way of contrast. Thus the renewed mind of 12:2 contrasts with both the pagan mind uninformed by the law (1:28) and the fleshly mind informed by not transformed by the law (2:18; see also 7:23, 25, which offer two of the other uses of *νοῦς* besides 1:28; 11:34; 12:2; and 14:5).” Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 159.

the *Christian* as having God's will available in the law. For the Christian, the will of God is not *possessed* but – as Rom. 12:2 implies – ever newly sought and found.”<sup>66</sup> This is a perfect description of virtue:

What matters is Paul's overall point, throughout these various passages: the problem of true knowledge is not merely that appearances deceive, or that people make wrong inferences, but rather that human rebellion against the one god has resulted in a distortion and a darkening of the knowledge that humans have, or still ought to have. Paul would want to say to the philosophers that wisdom is not simply a matter of learning to see, like the owls, in ordinary darkness. It is a matter of the one God piercing the darkness and bringing new light, the light of new creation, and at the same time opening the eyes that have been blinded by 'the god of this world' so that they can see that light.<sup>67</sup>

Wisdom, which the philosophers were seeking, has been found in Christ.

Anyone who is in him can now have knowledge of the will of God. By discerning, they can understand and do what God has required.

### **Christians and Sober Judgment (12:3)**

It's easy to disconnect Paul's argument in chapters 1-11 from his more practical advice to the church in Rome in chapters 12-15, but the issues Paul addresses and his explanatory and exhortatory logic display a tight coherence, maybe most pointedly in Paul's discussion of the practical and active aspects of new life in chapters 12-14. The final section of Romans, beginning in 12:3 with “Λέγω γὰρ,” is an explanation of verses 12:1-2, which is itself the culmination of the argument Paul has made in chapters 1-11.<sup>68</sup>

In 12:3, Paul introduces another philosophical term, *σωφρονέω*, to describe one of the activities of the new mind. The first activity Paul calls Christians to in discerning

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<sup>66</sup> He makes this point slightly differently a page before, “As the Christian's whole life is 'transformed' and his critical faculties of ethical discernment and decision are 'renewed' ... he is able to 'find out what the will of God is.'” Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 188–89.

<sup>67</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1364.

<sup>68</sup> Longenecker gives a short survey of this phrase as a transitional marker. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 972–928.

the will of God is to think of themselves soberly, or with proper judgment.<sup>69</sup> The virtuous person uses practical wisdom (φρόνησις) to act in moderation (σωφροσύνη). In Romans 12:3, Paul uses the term to describe the believer's new mindset with regard to unity among the body of Christ.

Paul's exhortation in 12:3 might be the most significant verse for understanding Christian epistemic virtue; "Λέγω γὰρ... μὴ ὑπερφρονεῖν παρ' ὃ δεῖ φρονεῖν ἀλλὰ φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν, ἐκάστῳ ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἐμέρισεν μέτρον πίστεως." Notice the repetition of "φρον-" words four times in this single verse. Paul is describing the mindset of the new believers as they go about living like Christ as the Spirit directs.<sup>70</sup> Believers must take on new epistemic abilities in Christ to account for the changes Paul describes in the chapters that follow. The conceptual arc of Paul's argument is easy to see; those who are in Christ can now discern the will of God, whereas before they could not.

### **Intellectual Virtue in Romans**

To summarize Paul's argument for all of Romans, in Christ the Holy Spirit gives Christians the ability to understand the will of God and do it. To use terms and concepts common in Paul's day and among virtue epistemologists today, the Spirit gives Christians the unique ability to practice φρόνησις. This does not just follow as an implication from what Paul says about sanctification; changes in behavior are also predicated on being in Christ. Paul makes this case explicitly between 1:18 and 12:3.

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<sup>69</sup> This word, σωφροσύνη, has a wide range of meanings. It can be used to describe moderation or temperance, especially sexual temperance. Paul uses it this way to describe the way women should adorn themselves in 1 Timothy 2:9. LSJ also cites examples of it being used to describe something similar to an intellectual virtue referring to soundness of mind. Though Aristotle does not appear to consider this a virtue, he does use it in this way to describe the quality of a wise man that preserves his φρόνησις. See *Nic. Eth.* 1140b11-14.

<sup>70</sup> This connection summarizes Keener's argument, "Paul exhorts his hearers to decide 'rationally' to present their bodies as sacrifices that please God in how they live. He goes on to describe the rational element more fully. Believers will be transformed by the renewing of their minds: this renewal enables them to evaluate the present age from the values of the perfect world to come, and thus not to be pressured into conformity with the present age." Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 172.

One final point must be discussed in Romans. How does the Spirit bring about this change? To put this into the language of virtue, the virtuous person, the person who fulfills the law (8:4; 13:8-10), acts like the Spirit would act in a similar circumstance. In the same way, the virtuous person, the one whose mind has been transformed by the Spirit (12:2), thinks like the Spirit would think in a similar circumstance.

### **The Gift of Virtue**

Luke Timothy Johnson has produced the most cogent reading of the Spirit's role in epistemic virtue in Romans in his article, "Transformation of the Mind and Moral Discernment in Paul."<sup>71</sup> He notices that although the Spirit is the focus of chapter 8, Paul only mentions the Holy Spirit one time in chapters 12-14. What does this mean for Paul's vision of transformation and moral discernment? He states it this way: what role does Paul assign the soul between the power of the Spirit and the action of the body?<sup>72</sup> Do the mind and its faculties – part of the soul in Greek psychology – have a role to play in this transformation?

Like Keener, Johnson argues that the Spirit works through the mind, not apart from it. Pneumatology and ethics are indivisible. Johnson moves to place Paul against an Aristotelian backdrop. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle connects virtue, practical wisdom, and temperance through the example of a great political and military leader like Pericles, who practices deliberative excellence in uncertain circumstances.<sup>73</sup> The leader's

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<sup>71</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, "Transformation of the Mind and Moral Discernment in Paul," in *Early Christianity and Classic Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald, Thomas Olbricht, and L. Michael White (Boston: Brill, 2003), 215–36.

<sup>72</sup> Johnson, 215.

<sup>73</sup> See *NE* 1140a-1145a. In Aristotle's psychology, wisdom (*σοφός*) and practical wisdom (*φρόνησις*) reside in different parts of the soul. His taxonomy is more complex than is represented in this discussion between the various virtues and the different parts of the soul. The reason *φρόνησις* can stand alone is that Aristotle argues that it ensures the means of accomplishing the other virtues (*NE* 6.12.6). He compares this relationship the relationship between health and medicine. "Medical science does not control health, but studies how to procure it." In the same way, "while Moral Virtue enables us to achieve the end, Prudence makes us adopt the right means to the end." (*NE* 6.13.8). The relationship between wisdom and practical wisdom will be discussed in the next chapter and the way practical wisdom functions in the Christian life will be discussed in the final chapter.

ability to discern is based on his virtue. The virtuous leader will be able to discern the good and do it, and the fool will not. Johnson makes the connection to Paul's argument in Romans, "This, I submit, sounds a lot like Paul's view of how the Gentiles' corruption of mind disabled them from seeing clearly and led them ever deeper into darkness and vice (Rom. 1:18-32)."<sup>74</sup>

Notice the point of similarity between the ways Paul and Aristotle construe the enlightened and unenlightened mind. In both cases, something has to happen to the mind in order for the wise person to be able to discern or to practice the intellectual virtues. Johnson summarizes the similarities in the way Paul and Aristotle construe intellectual formation:

In Paul as in Aristotle, the capacity to "test" or "estimate" morally derives from the νοῦς, not simply intelligence as a capacity, but perhaps something closer to what we would call a "mind-set," that is, a moral intelligence that grasps certain fundamental principles or values. In Paul and in Aristotle, the corruption of the νοῦς makes moral discernment impossible rather than simply difficult.<sup>75</sup>

The major difference comes in how the each one explains the change that takes place. For Aristotle, more so than the Stoics who later expanded on this same framework, moral change comes through developing better habits, which can be changed through teaching. Paul asserts that the mind can only be transformed through faith in Christ and the leading of the Spirit. As he will say in 1 Corinthians 2:16, Christians possess the mind of Christ by the Spirit. By doing this, they are practicing the intellectual virtues of Christ.<sup>76</sup>

Aristotle does not offer any conceptual parallel to the way Paul describes the Spirit giving Christians the ability to practice a new intellectual virtue, but this concept was not unprecedented. The Wisdom of Solomon portrays Solomon being given φρόνησις

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<sup>74</sup> Johnson, "Transformation of the Mind," 223.

<sup>75</sup> Johnson, 225.

<sup>76</sup> "Thus, he speaks of not merely a frame of mind that accords with God's but one that is inspired or activated by God." Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 127.



as the basis for his ethical life.<sup>77</sup> Only the person given φρόνησις can understand the will of God and develop the virtues (Wisd of Sol 8:4f.). The author goes on to list the four cardinal Greek virtues of prudence (σωφροσύνη), practical wisdom/discernment (φρόνησις), justice (δίκαιοσύνη), and courage (ἀνδρεία). Though Paul does not list all of these virtues in Romans, he makes a similar argument about what Christians can do in the Spirit. These intellectual virtues are not enhancements of pre-existing abilities, they are new gifts for those who are in Christ.

Like the wise man in Aristotle and in the Stoics, the Christian is able to practice virtues that the non-Christian cannot. Because sin damages the mind and renders it incapable of knowing God's will, it takes the saving work of God to transform the mind and enable it to function in such a way as to imitate Christ. This new mindset that Christians have is part of their sanctification, part of being in Christ and being led by the Spirit. As Johnson summarizes, the Holy Spirit is the effectual cause of these new virtues and the example of Christ is the formal cause.<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

### Φρόνησις According to the Spirit

With this framework, it's easy to see that Paul would not have used the word φρόνησις to refer just to the content of thinking, but to the process of thinking itself. So his assertion in Romans 8:5-8 requires a substantial change in believers, not just in what they think, but in how they think. They employ practical wisdom to discern the will and the voice of God. They seek the truth as they practice the intellectual virtues that Christ would practice in their place. This is what it means to walk in accordance with the Spirit.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> See James Thompson's analysis of the φρόνησις theme in the Wisdom of Solomon. Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 32–33.

<sup>78</sup> Johnson, "Transformation of the Mind," 231.

<sup>79</sup> For a survey of how Paul speaks of living "by the Spirit," see Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul*

This discussion leads to an intriguing relationship between the Spirit and the intellectual virtues. Perhaps it might be best to approach this relationship using a two bookends. It's tempting to think of the mind and the Spirit existing in tension with each other, the mind as a cognitive and analytical processor and the Spirit as more of a mystical a-rational sensor, moving together in a push pull relationship toward the golden mean of godly living. But as Keener has argued, this distinction is totally foreign in Paul.<sup>80</sup> As difficult as it is to describe, Word and Spirit work together in the Christian life.

### **From Infallibility Forward**

The first bookend works from the caricature of the mind as only intellectual cognition forward. As the exegesis of Romans up to this point suggests, information alone cannot drive a Christian to discern the will of God or obey the commands of the law. One reason is because this picture of the mind is incomplete.

James K. A. Smith's Cultural Liturgies series challenges this assumption, proposing that humans are desiring creatures before and beneath being simply thinking creatures.<sup>81</sup> In the midst of writing these volumes, Smith published *Thinking in Tongues*, developing these anthropological and epistemological insights into a short charismatic theology prolegomenon.<sup>82</sup> In the chapter on charismatic epistemology, Smith presses the

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*and the Hope of Glory: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 431-433. Campbell stresses that living by the Spirit means living according to the Spirit, in a way that tracks more and more closely with the Spirit's guidance.

<sup>80</sup> "In principle, most of us would affirm the value of both exploring the biblical text cognitively and embracing the Spirit experientially; the biblical text invites such experience, and without the objective constraints of Scripture, experience can quickly lose its Christocentric mooring. But each Christian tradition has its own predilections, each has focused on some different yet genuine biblical emphases, and each therefore has something valuable to learn from the other. We need both Word and Spirit; for Paul, certainly, the two are inextricably bound together. This book will argue that against some circles, the Spirit does in fact often work through the mind and not only apart from it." Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, xx.

<sup>81</sup> The first volume especially takes up this anthropological and epistemological point. Smith argues that humanity is motivated more by a vision of the good life than by propositional knowledge. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

<sup>82</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*.

importance of narrative knowledge, particularly the kind exhibited in testimonies and stories of the Christian life.<sup>83</sup> Smith considers charismatic epistemology to be a critique of rationalism in the sense that it is not “antirational, but antirationalist,” expanding on the limited range of knowledge available in the rationalist paradigm.<sup>84</sup> By incorporating discussions of embodiment, narrative, emotion, and imagination, Smith moves from rational and propositional knowledge outward to a fuller understanding of knowledge in a charismatic epistemology. Echoing Ian Scott’s work in *Paul’s Way of Knowing*, Smith concludes his section on narrative by observing Paul’s arguments in Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 1-2; “So the work of the Spirit is not the provision of new *content*, but instead the gracious granting of ‘access’... the Spirit’s gracious epistemic operation is a combination of moral regeneration... and narrative location.”<sup>85</sup>

The problem for Scott and Smith, though, is that moral regeneration and narrative location are not equivalent. Why not say epistemic regeneration? Here again, a virtue lens enables us to draw out Paul’s understanding of the way the mind is transformed. The mind is a new creation which leads to a new way of thinking. In Romans, Paul describes this process as the practice of the virtue of *φρόνησις*. In Smith particularly, there is only a vague sense that incorporating these new forms of knowledge will lead to significant moral improvement, which is a constant theme in Paul. Both Smith and Scott importantly expand the versions of knowledge often read into the texts, but they stop short of a full explanation of how Paul describes the new mind in action.

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<sup>83</sup> Smith, 52, 62–71; The following chapter on Philippians expands on this theme. See, also, a very different approach that leads to a similar assertion about Paul’s narrative epistemology in the worldview sections of Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 538–72; Scott’s discussions of non-cognitive knowledge and “emplotment” is also similar. Scott, *Implicit Epistemology in the Letters of Paul: Story, Experience and the Spirit*, 143–57.

<sup>84</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 53; Alston addresses this same theme in Alston, *Perceiving God*.

<sup>85</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 68–69; Scott, *Paul’s Way of Knowing*, 44–47.

## From Renunciation Backward

On the other side, expanding the knowledge and guidance of the Holy Spirit to include testimony, experience, emotion, and other forms of knowledge can result in a nebulous dissolution of the epistemic task. The other bookend, the caricature of the ecstatic provides a way back to the moderate level of epistemic certainty of God's will Paul advocates throughout Romans.

Daniel Castelo has suggested in a recent article, that the multidisciplinary approaches to knowledge can shed light on a pneumatological epistemology.<sup>86</sup> Some disciplines, he suggests, are more readily accepting of pneumatology than others, and theology is not excluded. He writes, "certain accounts of knowledge are more spirit-friendly than others, or at least, certain approaches within certain domains of knowledge are more spirit-friendly than others."<sup>87</sup> In order to utilize this fact, Castelo suggests a synchronous and an asynchronous approach to learning from one another. Different disciplines should inform one another in terms of epistemology and different eras of the church's history should be mined for the Spirit's work.<sup>88</sup>

These efforts give rise to two insights worth considering in further detail. First, Castelo joins many others in asserting that knowledge in the Spirit is implicitly tied to experience. He does not just mean any kind of experience, the epistemic transformation that takes place in believers is born out of experience and relationship with the Spirit. As he defines it, Spirit knowledge is the "kind of knowledge made possible by the Spirit pouring out God's love upon our hearts, that very center and core of who we are." This

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<sup>86</sup> Daniel Castelo, "'Spirit Enlightenment': Contributions of a Pneumatological Epistemology," in *The Third Person of the Trinity: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 68–87.

<sup>87</sup> Castelo, 71.

<sup>88</sup> On this point specifically, Castelo lists three registers of the Spirit's work worth considering: "sighs too deep for words," "God's love being poured into our hearts," and "walking and living according to the Spirit." It should be noted though as a push back to Castelo, though, that the goal of spirit-friendliness should still be in the service of knowledge and discernment. Castelo may confuse intellectual humility with intellectual uncertainty. The purpose of working together is not just to become less sure in the things we used to believe, but to become more sure of what we should believe. Castelo, 75–87.

begins to make sense of the claim Paul makes in Romans 8:26 that the Spirit intercedes with longings too deep for words. These groanings come as an expression born in relationship.<sup>89</sup> Paul writes, “And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom 8:27).

In this passage, though, Paul sets epistemic parameters on the content of the groanings. Though they may be inarticulable, they are not unintelligible. Since the Spirit intercedes according to the will of God, Spirit knowledge is bound by the same standard as the practice of *φρόνησις*. The relational influence of the Spirit brings about the fruit of the obedience. Spirit knowledge emerges out of the connection between the deep things of the Spirit and the deep things within our own hearts, the kinds of cavernous depths that can only be carved by experience, emotion, and prayer – the kind of depth that comes only by having walked by the Spirit and with the Spirit toward the obedience of faith.

The second issue worth considering involves discernment; specifically, the relationship between discernment and projection. Castelo captures the difficulty of defining, and even more importantly, practicing discernment, by placing it in opposition to a more familiar phenomenon, projection.

How can Christians know they are discerning the will of God? It’s not a small thing theologically, or practically, to assert that the Spirit is saying or doing something. Are there any limits on this assertion pertaining to practicing the gift of *φρόνησις* and the process of discernment? Paul warns of both grieving and quenching the Spirit, the twin

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<sup>89</sup> Longenecker makes some sense of this mystery of communication between the Spirit and the searcher; “In effect, therefore, though a Christian’s prayers are translated by the Spirit into his own ‘language of prayer,’ there is nothing lost in the translations (1) from the prayerful words of a Christian to the groans of the Spirit or (2) from the Spirit’s groans before God to God’s gracious response to the Spirit’s prayers on behalf of a Christian. It is in this confidence that the Christian prays—that is, in the confidence that ‘life in the Spirit’ includes (1) the work of the Holy Spirit to teach us what we should pray for, (2) the translation by the Spirit of our words into his own language of prayer, (3) the presentation by the Spirit of our requests to God in accordance with God’s will, and (4) God’s knowing the mind of the Spirit, and therefore his answering a Christian’s prayer in terms of his own will.” Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 734–35.

ditches on the road of discernment.<sup>90</sup> Combined with the subtlety with which the Spirit often communicates, discernment takes on a high degree of difficulty. Castelo suggests the preconditions of welcoming, desiring, and obeying God, and characterizes the process of discernment not as “calculation but renunciation and growing conformity. The goal is not projecting onto God, but reflecting and beholding God.”<sup>91</sup> These warnings are sobering. Discernment is a difficult task, as Paul’s use of metaphors like “walking” and “keeping in step” convey.

In the name of staying away from projection, though, Castelo may tend too far toward apophaticism. Paul does not seem to share this same pessimism for discernment. In fact, this highlights the importance of treating discernment as a part of the virtue process. In fact, Paul adopts a cautious optimism about Christian discernment which is captured in the fact that over the course of his letters he points out numerous examples of faulty discernment but he continues to exhort these young Christian churches to continue to discern.<sup>92</sup>

The background of practicing the virtues found in the philosophers shores up several of the potential holes in charismatic epistemology.<sup>93</sup> Knowing by the Spirit is not infallible, it takes guidance and practice, but it is not unbounded, its telos is the will of God. It is also pointed at the image of Christ and guided by his Spirit. It is at once more

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<sup>90</sup> See Eph 4:30 and 1 Thess 5:19-21 for these two instances. Castelo also mentions examples outside of Paul’s letters including lying to the Spirit (Acts 5:3), outraging (Heb 10:26-29), and most seriously, blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31-32). Additionally, Castelo points out the delicacy of the penalties for wrongly discerning or attributing things to the Spirit and understanding the subtlety with which the Spirit is often perceived. Castelo, “‘Spirit Enlightenment’: Contributions of a Pneumatological Epistemology,” 81–83.

<sup>91</sup> Castelo, 82–83.

<sup>92</sup> On this point, see the following chapters on 1 Corinthians.

<sup>93</sup> The framework of considering sanctification through the lens of virtue curbs the excesses of mechanization and total improvisation, just as Aristotle describes in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Epictetus describes in the *Discourses*, and Linda Zagzebski describes in *Virtues of the Mind*.

expansive than a new perspective, more transformative than a new set of information, and more certain than improvisation.

The question remains, how should Christians practice this virtue? If Romans is a theoretical explanation of the epistemic difference between those who are in Christ and those who are not, 1 Corinthians is a field guide. There, Paul demonstrates the way this new intellectual virtue should be practiced.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE MIND OF CHRIST: 1 CORINTHIANS 1-6

#### **Introduction**

The first letter to the Corinthians adds a third dimension to Paul's virtue epistemology. Beyond the historical setting in which virtue and practical wisdom were the goals of the good life and the theological argument in Romans, 1 Corinthians is a look at Paul in action, applying the wisdom of Christ to everyday life in the churches.<sup>1</sup> The Corinthian correspondences, like all of Paul's letters, are out in the field, adding flesh to the theology of new life in Christ by working out practical and situational applications; in fact, this is what it meant for Paul to do theology. Like many of his Greco-Roman counterparts, Paul does not seem to have much use for the purely theoretical.<sup>2</sup> Theology served the life of the church. This letter, then, shows Paul doing remotely what he was most often doing locally, building the church, "warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ."<sup>3</sup>

Crisis is the catalyst for many of Paul's letters; false teaching in Galatia, false beliefs in Thessalonica, and disunity in Philippi and Corinth drew Paul's hand to the parchment, so one of the first question to ask in approaching his letters is, what did Paul

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<sup>1</sup> First Corinthians is a more practical letter than Romans in the sense that it deals with immediately pressing issues for the recipients. As several commentators point out, 1 Corinthians was probably written before Romans and thus Romans can be used as a theoretical expansion on similar topics from 1 Cor in a similar time period during Paul's ministry. So Conzelmann, "The statements in 1 Corinthians are thoroughly practical, those in Romans more thematic. The latter gives the impression in these sections of being a theoretical further development of the former." He also includes a list of comparable passages between the two letters that highlight this relationship. *First Corinthians*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> This is one of the core assumptions of Wright's work on Paul; "Paul remained a deeply Jewish theologian who had rethought and reworked every aspect of his native Jewish theology in the light of the Messiah and the spirit, resulting in his own vocational self-understanding as the apostle to the pagans." Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 46.

<sup>3</sup> Col 1:28.



think he was doing by writing these letters? What was his goal? There are good reasons for letter writing in the ancient world more generally, Paul included, as rhetorical studies have shown.<sup>4</sup> Yet, it seems as though Paul is doing something very different in the content of his letters than either his Greco-Roman or Jewish contemporaries.

In 2:16, Paul writes, “We have the mind of Christ.” The following chapter will demonstrate that Christians who have the mind of Christ are capable of practicing the intellectual virtues that Christ practiced. That includes practicing φρόνησις to know the will of God and discern what to do. In 1 Corinthians, Paul also shows that this means judging practical matters within the church and discerning the voice of God through the gifts of prophecy, interpretation, and tongues.

The form and the content of 1 Corinthians both reveal the way that intellectual virtue should be practiced in the church. Because of this, the very act of writing the letter the way Paul did is instructive about how Christians should practice φρόνησις, as is the discipline of doing practical theology in the churches.

This chapter will examine intellectual virtue in 1 Corinthians both in the content and the writing of the letter. As background and prolegomena three topics will be covered before the exegesis of the letter itself: the role of theology as an example of Paul’s practice of φρόνησις, the uniqueness of 1 Corinthians as an example of intellectual virtue, and the occasion and content of the letter as an exhortation to intellectual virtue. Following this opening section and building on these themes is an exegesis of key passages, predominantly 1:18-2:16, 6:1-11, and 12-14:33.

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<sup>4</sup> Mitchell’s work in the rhetorical style, outline, and purpose of 1 Corinthians is one of the standards for any study of 1 Corinthians. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*; Margaret M. Mitchell, “Concerning Περὶ Δέ in 1 Corinthians,” *Novum Testamentum* 31, no. 3 (1989): 229–56. For an overview of the history of rhetorical analyses of the letter, see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*; Anthony C. Thiselton, “The Significance of Recent Research on 1 Corinthians for Hermeneutical Appropriation of This Epistle Today,” *Neotestamentica* 40, no. 2 (2006): 320–52.

## Theology and Intellectual Virtue

What is theology for Paul? In *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, N. T. Wright suspects Paul may be up to something groundbreaking with his “theology.” In the midst of his pioneer mission work, Paul discovered that his new converts needed to undergo the same kind of worldview transformation that he had. As he encountered the risen Christ and in the years after, Wright argues, Paul reconfigured his entire worldview, reforming his understanding of monotheism, election, and eschatology around Christ.<sup>5</sup> The people of God needed symbols, praxes, and theology to understand what had taken place. Worldview begets theology, but theology sustains worldview transformation.<sup>6</sup> Paul undertook the task of developing theology for his converts to coalesce with the epistemic change that he believed had taken place.<sup>7</sup> Theology became a kind of *παιδεία* for Christian intellectual virtue.

Put another way, Paul is detailing a new kind of wisdom, the wisdom of God that has been manifested in Christ (1:24). To do this, he deconstructs the wisdom of the world and proclaims the wisdom of God, which must be discerned spiritually. But then he proceeds to expound on this wisdom – and to demonstrate it – the for the remainder of the letter. This is one of the more prevalent themes in both of the Corinthians letters.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This is the skeletal framework of Wright’s work. “The hypothesis I offer in this book is that we can find just such a vantage-point when we begin by assuming that Paul remained a deeply Jewish theologian who had rethought and reworked every aspect of his native Jewish theology in the light of the Messiah and the spirit, resulting in his own vocational self-understanding as the apostle to the pagans.” Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 46. Others have adopted a similar approach of worldview transmogrification. See Johnson’s two volumes on Paul. Johnson, *Constructing Paul*, 143–44, 224–46; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Interpreting Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Wright makes this point totally clear, “There is, then, an epistemological revolution at the heart of Paul’s worldview and theology. It isn’t just that he now knows things he did not before; it is, rather, that the act of knowing has itself been transformed.” Wright, 1355–56.

<sup>8</sup> “That, in a measure, is the story of the two letters to Corinth: a firm denial that Paul’s gospel owes anything to human wisdom, coupled with a careful construction of an alternative ‘wisdom’ which, hidden for long ages, has now been revealed.” Wright, 1355. For an insightful study into modern theology as wisdom, see Daniel J. Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God: Toward Theology as Wisdom* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006).

Paul is attempting to change the audience's thinking toward viewing each situation "in light of the cross."<sup>9</sup>

For Paul, theology serves the purpose of discerning God's will within a specific context, both theoretically and practically. As this letter demonstrates, theology is not an "application of timeless principles but the understanding of the situation in which man finds himself at the moment in which grace reaches him through the word," and because of this, the outcome of theology is local, relevant, and practical; "he can therefore spotlight the church and the individual in the concrete position of the moment."<sup>10</sup> It's precisely this activity of "doing theology" that displays the unique practice of intellectual virtue that Paul possesses and encourages the Corinthians to practice with him.

In Corinth, theology is a community activity, with Paul leading and guiding the process. The church as a body must think together as the mind of Christ (2:16). Doing so will result in more than just specific instances of godly wisdom applied to the questions they have posed, it will also knit them together in the unity of their minds and the service of their savior.

### **First Corinthians as Example of Virtue**

Reading 1 Corinthians next to Romans draws out the practical nature of the letter and the very different purpose with which Paul was writing. This letter is concerned with a much more practical question; How should Christians practice *φρόνησις* in the church? What's unique about Paul's letters is that he is doing practical theology in his letters, displaying the very qualities and practices he is instilling in the churches.

What's evident in 1 Corinthians 2, specifically, is that Paul believes that Christians, together as local churches have the ability to understand the will of God and

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<sup>9</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 9.

make wise decisions. What is his advice to these churches if it is not practical wisdom? This means 1 Corinthians should be read with two perspectives; first, as a letter exhorting the Corinthians to think and act wisely, because they have the mind of Christ (2:16), and second, as an example to follow of acting wisely from someone who is thinking with the mind of Christ (2:1-5; 11:1).

Additionally, even as Paul explains the limitations of worldly wisdom in chapters 1-3, he uses rhetorical techniques to convince his readers to see his point. A picture begins to emerge from Paul's own action in writing the letter. Worldly wisdom can be used to communicate heavenly wisdom, but it must be discerned spiritually. Paul uses various familiar persuasive mechanisms to address his readers, even as he describes the wisdom of God.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout the various sections of the letter, discernment becomes a prominent theme in relationship to practical wisdom. André Munzinger's *Discerning the Spirits* is one of the few studies of a single intellectual virtue in 1 Corinthians.<sup>12</sup> He has investigated the theme of discernment in 1 Corinthians and argues that discernment plays a "key role in the translation of theology into ethics and vice versa."<sup>13</sup> The Spirit "transfigures" the mind by creating a new perception of reality and revolutionizing "the basis on which the mind works."<sup>14</sup> In short, discernment is proof of the Spirit's transformation of the mind.

What Munzinger and others fail to notice, though, is that the nature and occasion of 1 Corinthians create a unique insight into Paul's own practice of the intellectual virtues. While he is exhorting the Corinthians to discern the voice of God,

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<sup>11</sup> Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*. For a general treatment of Paul's rhetorical and persuasive techniques, see Thompson, *Apostle of Persuasion*.

<sup>12</sup> Munzinger, *Discerning the Spirits*.

<sup>13</sup> Munzinger's study is substantial to many portions of this chapter. Munzinger, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Munzinger, 170.

Paul is practicing it before their eyes, just as he had when he was with them.<sup>15</sup> The reader now has the dual advantage of seeing Paul discern by the Spirit, even as he teaches the Corinthians how to discern. In his pastoral letters the medium and the message are both instructive into how Christians should practice φρόνησις.

### **First Corinthians as Exhortation to Virtue**

The form of 1 Corinthians is instructive, but so is the content. In answering the questions the Corinthians pose, Paul is teaching them to practice the spiritual wisdom he explains to them in chapter 2. This approach was very common in the ancient world, to the extent that it came to carry distinct rhetorical markers. Margaret Mitchell has argued convincingly that 1 Corinthians should be considered deliberative rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> This kind of letter has the following characteristics: (1) a focus on future deliberation, (2) employment of specific rhetorical techniques, specifically the advantageous, (3) proof by example, and (4) subjects for deliberation.<sup>17</sup> As Mitchell shows, 1 Corinthians possesses all of these qualities. The most significant conclusion she draws from this fact is that 1 Corinthians, like all deliberative rhetoric, is meant to convince the readers “to pursue a particular course of action in the future.”<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, the genre and style of the letter support Paul’s theological goals. He is writing to teach them to practice the virtues that they are now capable of practicing in the Spirit. As he does this, he is setting an example of how to practice practical wisdom

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<sup>15</sup> Mitchell points out that Paul uses himself as an example for the Corinthians repeatedly in this letter and gives a survey of the studies on this topic, but she only does so to prove that this is a technique in deliberative rhetoric, not to take any lessons from what can be learned through this practice. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 49-50. In the subsequent chapter on Philippians, moral exemplarism will be treated in its own right as a part of Paul’s vision of intellectual formation.

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*.

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Mitchell, 24.

and deliberation. What's clear now, is that when Paul says, "follow me as I follow Christ" in 11:1, he's marking a template for what it looks like to have the "mind of Christ" (2:16).

These three initial considerations adorn the exegesis of 1 Corinthians, like a trace of dye flowing alongside the theme of intellectual virtue. The discipline of theology was Paul's paideutic tool to aid in worldview transformation, in bringing the Corinthians into intellectual maturity by the Spirit. As he exhorts them to discern and deliberate, he models Christ-like discernment and deliberation. Because of these qualities, 1 Corinthians is the practical explanation to Roman's theological explication of intellectual virtue.

### **Wisdom and the Mind of Christ: 1:18-2:16**

#### **Against Worldly Wisdom: 1:18-2:5**

Paul begins the letter thanking God for the Corinthians and letting them know what he's been praying for them (1:4-5). These prayers often serve as a short introduction to the contents of the letter, and these opening verses introduce one of the most important themes in the first four chapters of the letter.<sup>19</sup> Paul thanks God that because of his grace, the Corinthians have been made rich in him in all things, specifically in speech and in knowledge (1:5). The entire phrase is worth considering, as these words recur in the next three chapters, "ὅτι ἐν παντὶ ἐπλουτίσθητε ἐν αὐτῷ, ἐν παντὶ λόγῳ καὶ πάσῃ γνώσει."<sup>20</sup> The verb πλουτίζω appears again in 4:8, where Paul asks, "have you already become rich?" He may be playing against this acknowledgment that everything they have, including speech and knowledge as well as the gifts of the Spirit, came from God, including, as will become a central focus later in the epistle, wisdom. Certainly here, as

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<sup>19</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 54–55; Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, vol. 7, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 54.

<sup>20</sup> Brookins and Longenecker point out this is the first time γνώσις is used in a Christian text. Timothy A. Brookins and Bruce W. Longenecker, *1 Corinthians 1-9: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 8.

the immediate context makes clear, their reason and understanding have been given by God.

The two words νοῦς and γνώμη signal things to come.<sup>21</sup> The fundamental problem in Corinth is that even though they have been made rich in knowledge and insight and have been given every gift, they are divided.<sup>22</sup> Verse 10 is the central theme of the letter: agree in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>23</sup> Paul appeals that they might “speak the same things” so that there might not be divisions and they might function together in unity by having (again) the same mind and νοῦς and γνώμη.<sup>24</sup> The broad course of the letter will address these division, but immediately, Paul takes to explaining the nature of the divisions themselves. There are underlying causes of division that supersede the specific issues he will deal with later in the letter.

While the narrow flow of Paul’s argument in 1:17-3:23 is difficult to trace with a single line, the theme is easy to discover. Paul is contrasting the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God.<sup>25</sup> In vs. 17-18, Paul makes the claim that he preached the cross

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<sup>21</sup> Thiselton makes a helpful comment that will be prescriptive for the study of νοῦς, especially, in 1 Corinthians; “The varied translations well reflect the two types of difficulty which the translator encounters. First and foremost, the lexicographical and semantic range of both νοῦς (usually but not always mind) and γνώμη (purpose, intention, mind, opinion, judgment, consent) is exceptionally wide and context-dependent. Second, interpretations of νοῦς as mind, outlook, attitude, or mind-set are bound up not only with contextual factors but also with detailed debates in the history of Pauline research.” *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*; Conzelmann draws from Bultmann’s reading, that these words are used interchangeably here and in the letter, *First Corinthians*, 32. Lightfoot points to a minor difference between mindset and judgment, but it’s clear these terms are working to express one concept. *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul from Unpublished Commentaries* (London: Macmillan, 1895), 152.

<sup>22</sup> See Mitchell’s assertion that this is one of the reasons Paul chose to write a deliberative letter. Factionalism was a common political problem and other attempts to address this problem in the ancient world share qualities with 1 Corinthians. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 60–64.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Mitchell’s work is decisive on this point. 1:10 is the binding theme of the letter, the propositio, and summarizes the content, the deliberative genre, and the rhetorical style Paul employs. 1; Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 69; Thiselton agrees that 1:10 is the proposition of the letter, but disagrees with Mitchell that it is deliberative. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 49; Schnelle and Conzelmann both resist claiming a single purpose or theme for the letter. Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, 195; Conzelmann considers 1:10-17 to be an overview of the disparate issues Paul will deal with in the letter. Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 30–31.

<sup>24</sup> Mitchell takes the phrase, “ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ λέγητε πάντες” as “a figurative way of depicting social harmony.” Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39. For a longer discussion of the political undertones in this phrase, see *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 76–80.

<sup>25</sup> Wisdom is one of the central themes in the first three chapters; Paul uses σοφία and σοφός a

without worldly words of wisdom, because the wisdom of the world, manifested in the different receptions of the word of the cross, empties the word of the cross of its power (1:18). In the cross, the wisdom of God is put into contrast with the wisdom of the world, specifically the foolishness of humanity and the power of God (1:19-25). Paul is not arguing against all wisdom, but against worldly wisdom.<sup>26</sup>

Here, the connection between Romans and 1 Corinthians is helpful. The foolishness Paul refers to in 1 Cor. 1:18-20 should be informed by Paul's description of human foolishness in Romans 1:18f.<sup>27</sup> The composition of the church in Corinth proves this point, and also prohibits any boasting on the basis of worldly wisdom (1:26-31). Because this is the case, Paul reminds them, he did not come using words of wisdom, but through the demonstration of the power of the Spirit, so that their faith would rest on the power of God, not the wisdom of men (2:1-5). However, all of this is not to say that there is no wisdom in the cross. On the contrary, there is a different kind of wisdom, a heavenly wisdom which is revealed by the Spirit of God, and one which Christians, spiritual people, can understand. This is because Christians have the mind of Christ (2:6-16).

Second, there is the difference between spiritual and fleshly people. After showing that he does not put stock in worldly wisdom, so that the cross might not be emptied of its power, he turns to the distinction between those who have believed and those who see the cross as foolishness (1:18-19). It's remarkable to Paul that the Corinthians are so enamored by the worldly system of prestige that they do not see the

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combined 27 times: 1:17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 30; 2:1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13; 3:19. It also appears in 12:8. For σοφός: 1:19, 20, 25, 26, 27; 3:10, 18, 19, 20. It's interesting that Paul also views the case of judgment in 1 Corinthians 6:5 through the lens of wisdom. See Fee's framing of this section running from 1:18-2:5. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Revised ed (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 68–69; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 156–57.

<sup>26</sup> Stanley Stowers discusses the distinction between wisdom as such and worldly wisdom, casting Paul in the light of the philosophers. Stanley K. Stowers, "Paul on the Use and Abuse of Reason," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 253–86.

<sup>27</sup> Conzelmann notes that the similarity in these passages indicates that here and elsewhere, Romans "can provide a commentary on the briefer hints of 1 Corinthians." *First Corinthians*, 44.



inverse relationship between the favor of the world and the makeup of the church (1:20-31). In fact, the relationship between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God seems to be inversely related when it comes to fleshly and spiritual people.

Because of these divisions, and because of the nature of the gospel itself, Paul introduces yet a final division, between fleshly and spiritual preaching. Unlike the rhetorical power the Corinthians were used to, Paul displayed the power of the Spirit and the weakness of the flesh, knowing nothing but Christ and him crucified (2:1-5). His preaching is the example par excellence of godly wisdom. Paul is reminding them that there are two kinds of wisdom, two kinds of preaching, and two kinds of people. Against worldly strategies, he is using spiritual means to portray a spiritual picture to spiritual people.

### **Worldly Wisdom as Philosophy and Rhetoric**

One question that has to be considered in the Corinthian letters is whether or not there was a pronounced difference between philosophy and rhetoric in the first century and whether it makes a difference in interpreting the letters.<sup>28</sup> Paul is emphatic in disavowing the wisdom of man as opposed to the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2:6-16) and the use of rhetoric to teach wisdom (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

Much has been written about Paul's denunciation of rhetoric in these opening chapters, especially in this section of the letter.<sup>29</sup> In the opening line of this paragraph, Paul distances himself from philosophers and teachers who had come with lofty speech

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<sup>28</sup> For an overview of this question and an assessment of the major positions, see Krentz, "Logos or Sophia: The Pauline Use of the Ancient Dispute Between Rhetoric and Philosophy."

<sup>29</sup> For three monographs on the topic, see Duane Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching: The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015); Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 134 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1992); Michael A. Bullmore, *St. Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style: An Examination of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 in the Light of First Century Graeco-Roman Rhetorical Culture* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1995). In addition, the major commentaries all summarize or outline the major positions on the relationship between worldly wisdom and rhetoric in Paul's thought. Thiselton's summary is especially thorough, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 204–6.

and wisdom. The obvious reason Paul abstains from this same practice is because it would empty the cross of its power (1:17) and so that neither he nor the Corinthians could boast (1:31).

In consonance with this approach, Paul tells them that he decided to know nothing among them except Christ and him crucified, not meaning that he literally knew nothing but that he resolved to do and to say “only what served the gospel of Christ crucified.”<sup>30</sup> So he preached in weakness rather than rhetorical strength, relying on the demonstration of the power of the Spirit rather than the power of worldly wisdom (2:4, 13).<sup>31</sup> This includes rhetorical techniques that rely on persuasive words for their power as opposed to the power of the gospel.<sup>32</sup> Paul made every effort that eliminate any explanation of their faith outside of the power of God.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 212.

<sup>31</sup> Verse 4 contains a textual variant worth mentioning. The NA28 reads, “ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας [λόγοις],” indicating that λόγοις is not contained in some manuscripts. In fact, there are 11 different variants in this verse. For an overview, see Thiselton as well as Brooking and Longenecker. Thiselton concludes, “the result makes little serious difference for the thrust of the verse.” Thiselton, 215–16; Brookins and Longenecker, *1 Corinthians 1-9*, 46–47; For the thrust, yes. For the specific point about what Paul is contrasting his preaching with, more explanation is needed. It has been clear to this point that Paul is contrasting human and godly wisdom. It’s interesting that in several manuscripts, “ἀνθρωπίνης” appears on either side of σοφίας. Metzger dismisses these instances as explanatory glosses “in order to identify more exactly the nuance attaching to σοφίας.” Additionally, other manuscripts have “πειθοι σοφίας” or “πειθοις σοφίας” reading something like “the persuasiveness of wisdom,” the sigma being in question and the form “πειθοις” being found nowhere else in Greek literature. Finally, some manuscripts contain “λογοις” but none of those that do not also contain “ἀνθρωπίνης.” Metzger gives “πειθοι σοφίας” as the most likely reading with a C rating. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Revised ed (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 481; The most likely case, then is that Paul is contrasting the power of the Spirit with the power of the persuasiveness of wisdom, presumably the earthly tradition based on rhetorical arguments. In the case of whether or not Paul includes words or arguments in his contrast, see 2:13, where he uses all of these terms together “ἐν διδακτοῖς ἀνθρωπίνης σοφίας λόγοις.” For a list of all the reading, see Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed (Stuttgart: Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 520.

<sup>32</sup> Litfin makes this point too exclusively. He rightly demonstrates that the Sophists were not concerned with the truth value of the propositions they were teaching, but the power of influencing belief, whereas Paul was concerned with the truth of the message. However, it’s also clear that Paul utilized rhetorical techniques to his advantage in his letters. So there is not an absolute divide between using rhetoric and not using rhetoric, but between the power that brings the hearers to believe it. *Paul’s Theology of Preaching*.

<sup>33</sup> “Against this background it seems clear that Paul determines to let truth speak for itself, confident in the power of the Holy Spirit of God to bring this truth home to the hearts, minds, and wills of the hearers. But the price is a renunciation of the status of rhetorician, for while it is tempting to render ἐν ἀπαδείξει as exhibiting or manifesting (with Oke) the rhetorical background makes it virtually certain that Paul gives rhetorical or logical demonstration or transparent proof a distinctive turn by ascribing such proof ultimately to the agency of the Holy Spirit as effective power.” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 220.

Against his rhetorical rivals, Paul maintains his concern for the truth and for how it is delivered. He refuses to rely on the instrumentation of rhetoric or on the power of persuasion to bring his audience to belief in the truth. Instead, he rests on the power of the Spirit to reveal and convince, which is the topic he turns to in the next section.

### **Spiritual Discernment: 2:6-15**

What then is the status of wisdom? In vs. 6, Paul turns the tables again; “Σοφίαν δὲ λαλοῦμεν ἐν τοῖς τελείοις.” There is another kind of wisdom, a secret and hidden wisdom of God. It is the cross in the foreground of this picture, hidden in plain view from the rulers of the world but a demonstration of what God has prepared for those who love him. Remembering these three categories, Paul reminds them that seeing the cross as it is comes not from them but from the Spirit. In fact, this appears to be the way Paul defines maturity in this context.

Paul continues the argument from chapter 1, where he sets the wisdom of God in opposition to the wisdom of the world. Paul claims that only people of the Spirit can discern matters of divine wisdom (2:10-11). Paul illustrates this difference by contrasting the wisdom of the world and preaching the gospel.<sup>34</sup> For Paul, the word of the cross is the epitome of the wisdom of God. Seeing this is the litmus test for those who claim to have the mind of Christ.<sup>35</sup>

In 1 Cor 2:6, the repetition of “wisdom” is rhetorically significant. Paul confronts the Corinthians love for worldly wisdom with a wisdom foreign to Greek culture, the eschatological wisdom of God. In 2:7-9, Paul claims that the wisdom of God has been hidden from the world, and that by worldly wisdom none of the rulers of the world have been able to discern his plans. The question arises, could this simply be

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<sup>34</sup> See Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*. Keener also references, Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians*, 32; Another difficulty in this passage is determining what Paul is advocating as his own position and what he might be characterizing in his opponents' positions. Conzelmann's commentary is especially sensitive to this question. *First Corinthians*, 57f.

<sup>35</sup> “The heart of divine wisdom, and hence the heart of what it means to share the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16), is the way of the cross,” Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 176.

because of a lack of perspective, or picking an improper vantage point? Later, Paul explains that the natural man, “is not able to understand” the wisdom of God, because it is “spiritually discerned” (2:14). This was a common belief among the philosophers, who considered divine plans unreachable to human minds.<sup>36</sup>

There are several ways to try to explain what Paul is saying about spiritual wisdom and the new mind. Keener, who is extremely sensitive to the philosophical backdrop against which Paul is writing, connects the epistemic dots in his chapter on this passage, most notably as he summarizes 2:10-13,

Those who have only the spirit of the world (2:12) cannot recognize what spiritual truth is (2:14). They cannot embrace and live by spiritual truth, because that level of understanding comes only to those with the perspective inspired by God’s Spirit. Thus, they cannot understand the choices of people of the Spirit, though people of the Spirit understand why people of the world are the way they are (2:15). Only people of the Spirit have the ultimate interpretive grid for reality, the grid provided by the creator.<sup>37</sup>

There is a chasm between natural people and spiritual people on the specific topic of wisdom. Those who walk by the Spirit can discern in ways that the natural man cannot.

Here, and in 3:1-2, Paul links maturity with this kind of spiritual wisdom; given by the Spirit to spiritual people and discerned spiritually. Moffatt seizes on this connection and links it to intellectual virtue: “In the Church, he suggests, the knowledge of God is not a matter of mere knowing or cleverness, gained from one teacher; it is not a speculative adventure, on which one may pride oneself, but a spiritual perception which requires moral humility and true fellowship.”<sup>38</sup> Like all intellectual virtues, spiritual

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<sup>36</sup> Keener cites Plato, *Timaeus* 28c, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 181.

<sup>37</sup> Keener, 179. This reveals signs of Keener’s underlying commitment to charismatic theology. See also, “These are matters that can be revealed neither by the senses nor by human reasoning,” presumably referring to speaking in tongues, 179. See Keener’s discussion of the gift of tongues in, Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Craig S. Keener, *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); For the unique contributions charismatic theology holds for epistemology, see Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*.

<sup>38</sup> James Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1938), 37. Given the ambiguity over what Paul may be quoting and asserting in portions of chapter 2, this understanding of maturity makes more sense than Conzelmann’s Paul responding to a Gnostic group of “mature” Christians in Corinth. Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 68–69.

discernment takes practice and though the ability to discern might be a two value category, practicing discernment is like an art, gradually increasing over time. In this way, sanctification, maturity, and intellectual virtue all track together.

There's no indication that this entire section, 2:6-16, should not apply to all Christians. Maturity is not relegated to an enlightened group or a band of pneumatics in the church captured by ecstatic experiences. Here, and later in the letter, Paul is charting a course for all Christians to move toward maturity, toward fullness more than perfection.<sup>39</sup> Continuing to contrast his message and his method with the wise in the world, Paul gives three characteristics of this wisdom that distinguish it from the world; it is not possessed by the rulers of this age, it was secret and hidden, and it was decreed before this age. This *μυστήριον* not only transcends the understanding of the rulers of this age, it is among the private counsel of God which is now being made known. What no one could have seen, heard, or imagined, has now been revealed through the Spirit to those who are in Christ.

The wisdom that is being manifested to the mature in Christ is the same concept that Paul refers to in Romans 2:18 and 12:2-3. This is the will of God for the ages. It is not limited to the cross, although it flows from the fountainhead of the cross and the divine plan of salvation. This wisdom embodies all of God's plan revealed in Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Paul is unequivocal that this wisdom comes through the Spirit.<sup>41</sup> He takes it as an axiom that the Spirit can reveal the thoughts of God because he knows them. In fact,

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<sup>39</sup> Collins' discussion is especially helpful here; "Paul has not suggested that the wisdom he proclaims, his message, is reserved to some group of elite persons. He does not espouse a two-tier view of the Christian community with an eschatological message being addressed to the perfect and the basic teachings essential for Christian life being addressed to others. Such a division of the community would be inconsistent with the genre of the entire letter, which is a rhetorical plea for unity within the community." On a second point, Collins notices both the Greco-Roman and the Jewish implications of Paul's vision of maturity. Against the Stoic sage, he believes that all people can and should move toward maturity by the leading of the Spirit, not by secret knowledge. Drawing from the Jewish tradition, Paul employs a vision of wholeness that comes alongside wisdom and human development. *First Corinthians*, 7:128.

<sup>40</sup> For all of Paul's uses, and the centrality of the plan of salvation revealed in Christ, see Bauer, *BDAG*, 662.

<sup>41</sup> Collins and Thiselton point out that this is the first extended section in which Paul talks about the Spirit's role in revelation. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 7:123; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the*

without the work of the Spirit, no one would know the thoughts of God.<sup>42</sup> This is the crucial point for the arguments that follow; “The absolute key to understanding God’s wisdom lies with the Spirit.”<sup>43</sup>

God gives the knowledge of his thoughts through the Spirit to spiritual people, through a spiritual process of discernment. Verse 13 presents an interpretive difficulty.<sup>44</sup> Paul uses the phrase, “πνευματικοῖς πνευματικὰ συγκρίνοντες,” which can be construed several different ways, depending on the gender and referent of πνευματικοῖς and the meaning of συγκρίνοντες.<sup>45</sup> Since Paul uses ψυχικός in the next verse in contrast to what he’s said in vs. 13, and playing on the ongoing contrast between spiritual and natural people, it seems most consistent to read πνευματικοῖς in the same way, “interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people.” Verse 14 continues to define this division. The natural person not only does not accept spiritual things, he does not discern things spiritually. The three always go together; noun, adjective, and adverb. Spiritual things discerned by

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*Corinthians*, 256.

<sup>42</sup> Although the mystery of God revealed contains the plan of God for salvation, Paul is clear here and many other places that it must also be more than that. Schnelle, particularly limits this knowledge to God’s plan of salvation and misses the full impact of what Paul is saying in 2:12-16. See discussion below and Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, 589.

<sup>43</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 117. “The Spirit, to whom Paul had made reference in 2:4, is a major theme of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. Verses 10–16 of this chapter make up his first sustained reflection on the Spirit, one in which he focuses on the Spirit as the source of divine revelation, that is, of divine wisdom imparted to human beings.” Collins, *First Corinthians*, 7:132.

<sup>44</sup> For the uses of πνευματικοῖς, see Bauer, *BDAG*, 837.

<sup>45</sup> The difficulty in this phrase is two-fold. First, πνευματικοῖς can be either masculine or neuter, and second, συγκρίνοντες can mean combine, compare, or explain. Thiselton presents the best breakdown of the options; “(i) If we take πνευματικοῖς as neuter, we may render: a. Combining things (words) with spiritual things (subject matter) b. Interpreting (explaining) spiritual things by spiritual things... (ii) If we take πνευματικοῖς as masculine we may render: a. Suiting (matching, fitting) spiritual matters to spiritual hearers b. Interpreting spiritual truth to spiritual hearers.” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 265. This makes it easy to group the various commentators in terms of their interpretations. Morris prefers (i),a. Leon L. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 63; Brookins and Longenecker stand as a bit of an exception. They take (i),a but render πνευματικοῖς masculine, Brookins and Longenecker, *1 Corinthians 1-9*, 59. Cozelmann, who takes πνευματικοῖς as a criterion for interpretation, (i),b. Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 67; Witherington translates the clause, “We... interpret spiritual things to spiritual people,” following reading (ii),b, as do Ciampa and Rosner and Collins. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 128; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 133–34; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 7:135; Keener also follows Witherington, Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 183; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 37–38.

spiritual people spiritually. The spiritual person, however, is able to judge (or to discern) all things, and is judged by no one.<sup>46</sup>

How does the Spirit guide this spiritual discernment? Through discernment, here *ἀνακρίνω*. Or, to return to a broader statement, through practicing the intellectual virtue of *φρόνησις*. Paul makes clear here that the natural person, the *ψυχικός*, cannot discern spiritually.<sup>47</sup> This is more than a matter of information, in fact, this is the brunt of the exhortation Paul is making.<sup>48</sup> They know the right information, but they are not thinking the right way. The nonbelievers to whom the cross is a stumbling block have an understanding of the logistical details, but they have no ability to discern. Paul is calling Christians to maturity precisely because they are spiritual people who have the ability to discern spiritual things spiritually.

### **The Mind of Christ: 2:16**

In 2:16, Paul makes the most significant epistemic statement in his letters, “we have the mind of Christ.”<sup>49</sup> In fact, it would hardly be an overstatement to say that discussions about epistemology in Paul’s letters revolve around these words. Taking the momentum of the passage into account, this statement summarizes the entire section. It’s clear that this statement involves the process of spiritual discernment he began discussing in 2:6. What is the key for the spiritual people who judge all things and understand the

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<sup>46</sup> Munzinger equates *ἀνακρίνω*, *διακρίνω*, and *δοκιμάζω* in most cases, particularly those in which *δοκιμάζω* does not refer to proving worthiness. He includes the use of *δοκιμάζω* in Rom. 1:28; 2:18; 12:2. Keeping this syntactical connection in mind preserves the relationship between what Paul says about discernment in Romans and 1 Corinthians. Munzinger, *Discerning the Spirits*, 8–10.

<sup>47</sup> The *ψυχικός* is a difficult concept to translate, but is perhaps better defined in terms of what it is contrasted with, the *πνεύματος*. At minimum, the *ψυχικός*, is the person who cannot discern spiritually. By implication, this is likely a person to whom the Spirit is not revealing the mystery of God. It is a “natural” person as opposed to a “spiritual” person in the sense Paul uses it here. Bauer, *BDAG*, 1100.

<sup>48</sup> “Human persons cannot search out the hidden things of God unaided, through their own limited resources of wisdom, knowledge, or stance. The verb *ἀπεκάλυψεν* is the aorist, not the perfect, of *ἀποκαλύπτω*, I reveal, I disclose, I uncover, and alludes to God’s act of removing any barrier which keeps the content of his predetermined purpose secret.” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 256.

<sup>49</sup> Fee makes the most significant argument for the universality of Paul’s claim in 2:16. This is not a polemical statement against the other groups in Corinth, but an assertion about every believer. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 119. Contra Conzelmann who argues that this only applies to the faction of pneumatics. Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 69.

things freely given by God? They have the mind of Christ.

In the first half of this verse, Paul poses a rhetorical question quoting from Isaiah 40:13, “For who has known the mind of the Lord?” In its original context in Isaiah, the presumed answer is clear: no one.<sup>50</sup> In both instances where Paul quotes this passage, he provides a very different answer. The structure and chapter break in Romans 11:33-12:3 might obscure the answer there, but here there is no obscurity. Paul astonishingly asserts that Christians can know the mind of God. As Munzinger remarks, “True wisdom is now accessible for all (in Christ).”<sup>51</sup> This wisdom is found in Christ. The logic of the passage follows backward through two parallel phrases. Who can know “*νοῦν κυρίου*?” We can, Paul answers, because we have “*νοῦν Χριστοῦ*.”

Combined, Romans 12:2 and 1 Cor. 2:16 present a new epistemic reality for those who are in Christ. What was formerly distant has come near. True knowledge of God’s will comes through the renewal of the mind, that is to say, being conformed into the image of Christ, including his mind.

This is not to say that all Christians immediately know or have access to all of Christ’s thoughts. Thinking about access in terms of processes instead of bits of information better construes the way Paul describes possessing the mind of Christ. Christians still cannot know God’s wisdom unaided, but they can access it as the Holy Spirit reveals it.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> In this prophecy, the focus is God’s unrivaled power, wisdom, and self-sufficiency. In vs. 9, the herald is commanded to go up to the mountain and tell Israel to behold their God who protects them and watches over them (40:10-11). Then he moves into a series of rhetorical question in which he underscores God’s complete and unparalleled power and wisdom (40:12-18). For a discussion of this passage, see J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction Commentary* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 303.

<sup>51</sup> The broader context of Munzinger’s analysis is helpful: “Consequently, in both 1 Cor. 2.16 and Rom. 12.2 Paul’s argument is the same: it is possible to discern God’s will. And, significantly, this knowledge is not found in scripture or in apostolic authority or even transcendent wisdom. It can be found in the renewed νοῦς (or in its equivalent, the ‘mind of Christ’ [1 Cor. 2.16]).” *Discerning the Spirits*, 41.

<sup>52</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 618.



## Accessing the Divine Mind

Divine empowerment would not have been a foreign concept to Paul's readers. This is one of the central points Keener makes in his exegesis of 1 Corinthians 2; "Given potential ancient analogies, Paul probably means more than metaphor when he speaks about 'the mind of Christ' (1 Cor. 2:16), thinking the way Jesus did (Phil. 2:5), thinking according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:5), and the like."<sup>53</sup> This does not mean that Paul believed Christians became divine or even took on divine attributes, but that the Holy Spirit acts directly on the minds of those who are in Christ. In the most striking difference between Paul and his Stoic contemporaries, when Paul talks about the Spirit, he never shows any sympathy to pantheism. The Spirit and the believer remain separated, even as the Spirit enlivens and guides the mind.

This is part of the relationship that Christians have with Christ and with the Holy Spirit, and it is this relationship that enables them to know the mind of God and to discern his will. At minimum, Paul must be saying something similar to what Esther Meek outlines in *Loving to Know*.<sup>54</sup> The relationship Christians have with Christ changes the way they know because they are bound by a relational covenant with him. They begin to know as Christ knows, which is why virtue serves as the best model for explaining the epistemic changes that take place in Christ. The process of learning is deeply personal and it grows in specificity and skill as time goes on.

Of course, there are other things involved in knowing. Paul is heavily influenced by the Hebrew Scriptures. This remains true for all believers. Even in the case

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<sup>53</sup> Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 127. Keener cites, Leander E. Keck, *Romans*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 200. And Andrie du Toit, "'In Christ', 'In the Spirit' And Related Prepositional Phrases: Their Relevance for a Discussion on Pauline Mysticism," *Neotestamentica* 34, no. 2 (2000): 287-98.

<sup>54</sup> Meek, *Loving to Know* Meek builds on Michael Polanyi's concept of subsidiary focal integration to propose a covenant epistemology; "We should take covenantally constituted interpersonal relationship as our paradigm of all acts of knowing," 396. This means all knowing takes place within the relationship of two people. Meek argues that all knowing is in some sense knowing God, because the world is full of his gifts. For a full summary of covenant epistemology, see p. 411-415, Esther L. Meek, *A Little Manual for Knowing* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

that it's unclear exactly how Christians read the Scriptures, the underlying premise holds: they read Scripture differently because of their relationship with the resurrected Christ.<sup>55</sup> Paul offers several different ways that believers can access the mind of Christ, but they all spring from the relationship they have with him – participation in him – by the facilitation of the Spirit.

So, what can be made of the believers' access to the mind of Christ? At first glance, it's obvious that Paul does not mean that every Christian knows everything that Christ knows, or even that have adopted his intellectual virtues completely. Having the mind of Christ does not mean limitless comprehension of the divine mind. In a sense, Paul preserves the difference between having the mind of Christ and having all of the knowledge in the mind of Christ. This underscores one of the most significant differences between Paul and the Stoics. Paul shuns the independence of the Greek sages. Christians do not possess all knowledge, they remain dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit and they remain in a relationship with God in Christ, not becoming Christ but becoming like him.<sup>56</sup>

Paul advocates for participation in Christ. Proponents of the doctrine of participation have also been careful to set up some border fences between union, participation, and deification. Ben Blackwell accepts the term “theosis” but offers a model of “christosis” that he argues both appreciates the participatory nature of salvation in Paul's writings and incorporates the heritage of orthodox theology in the church.<sup>57</sup>

For example, there's a difference between “we have the mind of Christ” or

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<sup>55</sup> For a full length treatment of this topic, see Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics* He concludes, “A Spirit epistemology, foundational for a Spirit hermeneutic, embraces God's truth. Although evidence matters, so do presuppositions; apart from the regenerating, empowering and renewing work of the Spirit, a fallen worldview becomes a lens that inevitably distorts reality,” 186.

<sup>56</sup> “He is not on the move toward himself, but knows himself related to the Lord in faith. His self-understanding, his ‘wisdom’ accrues to him in recognizing the foolishness of the cross. It does not become his ‘own’ wisdom, of which he could boast.” Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Blackwell, *Christosis: Engaging Paul's Soteriology with His Patristic Interpreters*, 3–5.

“have this mind among you which is yours in Christ Jesus” and that our mind and Christ’s mind have become the same. There is a relationship and an access that is open to those who are in Christ, but there is no ontological identity between the minds of believers and the mind of Christ.<sup>58</sup>

One sign of having the mind of Christ, of being a spiritual person, is unity. It’s obvious to Paul that the church in Corinth is still immature because they have divisions (3:1-4). Paul offers his own perspective, as an example of spiritual thinking, reminding them that whoever plants and waters, God is the one who brings the growth. Whoever builds does so on a foundation that has already been laid – and that work will be assessed on the last day (3:5-16). All of this demonstrates the wisdom of God and the folly of the world because all things are in Christ, and Christ is in God (3:17-23).

Paul disavows earthly wisdom and the natural man because they cannot discern spiritually. Though they may be able to know many things, they cannot know the will of God; that is reserved for believers through the Spirit. As Paul explains the process of spiritual discernment in these chapters, it becomes clear that the virtue of practical wisdom and the practice of discernment describe the nature of having the mind of Christ. In the rest of the book, Paul continues to demonstrate this by exemplifying spiritual φρόνησις. Paul’s practical theology in the rest of the letter serves as an example and an exhortation for Christians to practice this same virtue.

### **Practicing the Mind of Christ**

After chapter 4, the letter can be divided into two major sections, chapters 5-6 and chapters 7-16.<sup>59</sup> In the first section, Paul deals with two clear-cut ethical issues, an

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<sup>58</sup> Keener agrees here with Blackwell and Gorman on using the term theosis, with the right qualifications, "Although I believe that Paul avoids deification language, I am not denying the heart of what the Eastern Christian tradition has called theosis (on theosis and holiness in the fathers, see Blackwell, *Christosis*), insofar as we define theosis in terms of the genuine Pauline emphasis on “transformative participation in the kenotic, cruciform character and life of God through Spirit-enabled conformity to the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected/glorified Christ, who is the image of God (Gorman, *Inhabiting*, 7, 125).” Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 206n207; Blackwell, *Christosis: Engaging Paul’s Soteriology with His Patristic Interpreters*; Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*.

<sup>59</sup> For different ways of organizing the second half of the letter, see Thiselton, *The First Epistle*

egregious case of sexual immorality (5:1-13) and lawsuits between believers (6:1-11). In the second section, Paul responds to six different matters that the Corinthians have written him about; sexual abstinence (7:1), betrothal (7:25), food offered to idols (8:1), spiritual gifts (12:1), the collection (16:1), and Apollos (16:12).<sup>60</sup> Both sections deal with ethical issues, but of two different kinds. Thiselton categorizes the two different approaches Paul takes;

If 7:1–11:1 legitimate some form of “situation ethics,” 5:1–6:20 demonstrate that certain moral principles stand above and beyond situational variables. Depending on the ethical content of the moral issue, therefore, Paul expounds *both* an absolutist ethic *and* a situational ethic. On the first he is unwilling to negotiate; on the second, negotiation, dialogue, and “what if ...?” remain all-important. and Paul combines a situational ethic with pastoral judgment and sensitivity to variations between different cases and case studies.<sup>61</sup>

The tone of these two portions of the letter indicates the change in Paul’s mindset and in the way he chooses to advise the church.

Of the two issues in this first section, 6:1-8 presents the clearest example of the way Paul encourages Christians to practice φρόνησις. There, he advises the Corinthians about how to judge those in the church and to mediate disputes.

### **First Corinthians 6:1-8**

One of the clearest examples of the epistemic difference between believers and nonbelievers can be found in Paul’s discussion of lawsuits in 6:1-8. Here, Paul not only exhibits practical wisdom, he also expects that those who are in Christ should be able to think wisely as well, to the extent that he urges the Corinthians not to settle their disputes in the law courts of the unrighteous but to settle them within the church. This

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*to the Corinthians*, 380–81; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 107; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 7:203–4; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 212.

<sup>60</sup> Each of these phrases is introduced by “Περὶ δὲ” which serves as an organizing feature for the second half of the letter. Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 1; Mitchell, “Concerning Περὶ Δέ in 1 Corinthians”; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 483.

<sup>61</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 381–82.

demonstrates the clear difference between the way Paul assesses the capacities for wisdom and discernment inside and outside of the church. In this example, he proves that there is an epistemic difference between those who are in Christ and those who are not by telling the church to bring the case before Christians.

This same theme of judgment within the church begins a chapter earlier when Paul confronts the issue of sexual immorality. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-11, Paul is attempting to redefine and emphasize the boundary markers between believers and unbelievers, and he does so both in defining different actions and different ways of thinking.<sup>62</sup> The two situations Paul discusses in chapters 5 and 6 display these differences as a matter of the highest importance and as an outflow of Christian identity.

In the first case, it's not just the case of sexual immorality that Paul corrects, but even more centrally, the church's failure to see the situation clearly and handle it correctly. This is a failure of judgment on two levels, individually and corporately.<sup>63</sup>

The metaphors Paul uses to describe Christian conduct elicit a measure of subjectivity that requires mature Christian wisdom to adjudicate. This instance of immorality is an egregious example, as he points out in 5:1-2, but not all cases are so simple. Take the metaphor of walking that Paul uses repeatedly to describe Christian conduct. To return to a point that James Thompson makes in his assessment of Paul's moral language, phrases like "walk worthily of God" (1 Thess 2:12; Eph 4:1; Col 1:10), "walk according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:16), and "walk in him" (Col 2:6) show

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<sup>62</sup> For helpful discussions on this point, see Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 46–51 and Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 225–26.

<sup>63</sup> Thompson and others point out that this text is useful in understanding the community boundaries Paul establishes in his churches, but they fail to connect the fact that since these boundaries are not just delineated by two-value symbols like circumcision or baptism, they require discernment and prudence to enforce. Therefore, in this case, it is not just that a boundary has been transgressed in the Corinthian church, but that the leaders do not have the practical wisdom to see this and handle it accordingly. For an example, see Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 48–49. Of course, it's easy to see the individual failure of the man in question, but the community has also exhibited a lack of judgment. Fee writes, "The believing community must act responsibly, and boasting is not responsible. For their own sake, as well as for his, they are to put the incestuous man outside, meaning at the least to exclude him from their community meals." Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 249.

both an indebtedness to Jewish ethical instruction and a departure from the specificity of ethical teaching in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>64</sup> However, these general descriptions, when paired with the example of Christ are perfectly consistent with a virtue ethic, and by consequence a virtue epistemology.<sup>65</sup>

In the next chapter, Paul argues very similarly but using a different example within the church. It was surprising to Paul, and totally improper in his view, that the Corinthians were taking each other to court.<sup>66</sup> The courts in the first century were known for their corruption, characterized by bribery, and bereft of the standards of due process.<sup>67</sup> But this is more than a pragmatic issue for Paul; like the other issues in 1 Corinthians, his direction comes as consequence of living in accordance with the gospel.<sup>68</sup> Lawsuits and arbitration present an especially interesting example because in taking their suits before the public magistrates, they were looking for wisdom, justice, and the authority to set things right, all of which Paul has already exhorted them to find in Christ, both previously in the letter and presumably during his time there in person. It would be hard to conceive of a more direct example of the role intellectual virtue plays in the Christian life.

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<sup>64</sup> Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 61–62, 64–65.

<sup>65</sup> Here again, Thompson does not make any connection with the virtue tradition but traces Paul's instructions back to Jewish moral formation. Thompson, 65.

<sup>66</sup> It's clear that Paul is speaking about lawsuits among believers because of the phrase, "πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον." Both the general context of this section and his later references to those outside the church make this an uncontroversial interpretation. What's interesting is that he does not advocate for exercising judgment outside of the church. If Paul believes that Christians should or should not be involved in lawsuits with unbelievers, he does not give any indication of it here. Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 104.

<sup>67</sup> On the nature of the courts and magistrates, see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 419, 428; Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 117–18. Winter takes up the question, why does Paul seem to have a different opinion of the courts in Romans 13 in "Civil Litigation In Secular Corinth and the Church: The Forensic Background to 1 Corinthians 6.1–8," *New Testament Studies* 37, no. 4 (1991): 559–72. In each of these analyses, the determinative factor in the Greco-Roman context is that Paul is referring here so something like small claims courts that deal with civil disputes.

<sup>68</sup> Peppard argues that these may have been inheritance disputes, in which case Paul uses this example to stress the brotherhood of the church and the inheritance of the Spirit. Michael Peppard, "Brother against Brother: Controversiae about Inheritance Disputes and 1 Corinthians 6:1–11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 1 (2014): 179–92. Collins also stresses this point, *First Corinthians*, 7:233–34.

Reading chapters 1-4 should prepare the reader for the substance of Paul's discussion in 6:1-8. In Christ, these believers can judge and discern for themselves, certainly producing better outcomes than the civil magistrates who neither know nor love God nor plaintiff.<sup>69</sup> To go before these men is to subject the church to loss, even if they win the lawsuit individually, Paul explains. Because of the work of the Spirit, they love each other and they love God; that makes a fundamental difference in their ability to discern what to do.

An initial question must be asked to clarify what Paul is recommending. Is he worried about the intellectual virtue of the judges or their susceptibility to corruption? If this question is answered in terms of virtue and not propositional knowledge, the answer can easily be both. Intellectual virtue is rooted in the character of the deliberator, so susceptibility to corruption is a very relevant consideration. It may also have been likely that in these suits the rich in the church were taking advantage of the poor, something that would have outraged Paul but would have been commonplace to the civil magistrates.<sup>70</sup>

Regarding this situation, Paul's advice is two-fold; first, that this should not be happening in the church. Elsewhere in his letters, Paul demands that the rich not look down upon the poor and that every member of the church act with regard for one another.<sup>71</sup> Second, Paul understands that this situation would likely be ignored, or

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<sup>69</sup> There are two ways to take the phrase, “τοὺς ἐξουθενημένους ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ” in vs. 4, depending on whether those who have no standing are inside or outside of the church. The difference hinges on the preposition. This group could be in the church and have little standing or they could be outside the church and have little standing in the eyes of those who are in the church. Given the flow of Paul's argument to this point, the second option is preferable. See, Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 119; Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 105.

<sup>70</sup> On the history of exegesis that bears out this point, “Mitchell argues that ‘higher status people were taking lower status people to court, where the latter were at a disadvantage.’ Thereby a concern for the unity of the congregation was sacrificed to the use of social networks of power and patronage outside the congregation. To succeed at law a person usually needed the right contacts and direct or indirect influence.” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 419–20; citing, Alan C. Mitchell, “Rich and Poor in the Courts of Corinth: Litigiousness and Status in 1 Corinthians 6.1-11,” *New Testament Studies* 39, no. 4 (October 1993): 562–63.

<sup>71</sup> Paul rarely addresses riches and poverty, to the extent that Schmidt writes, “The lack of attention in the Pauline letters to the rich and the appropriate use of riches is remarkable... Admittedly, the use of wealth falls somewhat outside the scope of the interpersonal and intercommunity issues most characteristic of Pauline ethics.” Although this theme is limited in Paul as compared to other NT authors, his focus on the collection demonstrates his care for the poor and the importance of giving. Schmidt

exacerbated, by the unrighteous judges. In making this point, if indeed this was the case, Paul highlights the different mindset and worldview between believers and non-believers. In Christ, the Corinthians should no longer look out for themselves, but for one another through the lens of the love of Christ.<sup>72</sup> Because the subject of riches is so rarely a main topic for Paul, it's likely that something else is motivating his advice in this section. Invoking another virtue unknown to the pagan world, Paul asks them, "Why not rather suffer wrong?"<sup>73</sup>

As might be expected from Paul, this example is refashioning an older tradition in the Scriptures.<sup>74</sup> There is a clear tradition of leaders sitting in judgment within the Jewish community dating back to the time of Moses.<sup>75</sup> When he was overwhelmed by the number of the Israelites, his father-in-law suggested that he disperse the load and delegate the authority of judgment to the elders of the twelve tribes. The tradition continues in the "judges" of Israel who mediate among the people all the way to the time of the Maccabees. The Greeks did not share this tradition but developed a court system, the

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mentions Rom. 12:8, 13; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:2; Eph. 4:28. He also mentions his concern for the poor in Gal. 2:10. The only extended treatment of poverty and riches is found in 1 Tim. 6:6-19. T. E. Schmidt, "Riches and Poverty," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993). Meeks highlights the collection and the relationship between socio-economic groups in Corinth in *The First Urban Christians*, 110. For a survey on this theme in Paul, see Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010).

<sup>72</sup> Across both letters to the Corinthians, Paul is emphatic that they should act out of love and regard for one another, in direct contradiction to the way they used to live. See particularly, the way Paul argues for regard of the weaker brother in 1 Cor 8-9, consideration in the Lord's supper in 1 Cor 11:17-34, the way of love in 1 Cor 13, and the paradigm of seeing each other through the lens of love in 2 Cor 5:14-21.

<sup>73</sup> One connection to following Christ, "Is Paul's expectation fair or reasonable? It is no more 'fair' and 'reasonable' than the divine grace which has eclipsed justice in Christ's giving up of his person and his 'rights' on the cross, indicating in turn God's surrender of his 'right' to pronounce a negative verdict on humankind without transcending justice in costly, generous mercy." Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 437.

<sup>74</sup> McDonough sees the influence of Deuteronomy 17 in the background of Paul's appeal to judgment. Sean M. McDonough, "Competent to Judge: The Old Testament Connection Between 1 Corinthians 5 and 6," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, 56, no. 1 (2005): 99-102.

<sup>75</sup> See Rosner's article, "Moses Appointing Judges: An Antecedent to 1 Cor 6:1-6?," *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche* 82, no. 3-4 (1991): 275-78; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 7:228.



nascent form of the judicial systems in the West.

In keeping with the model of leadership found in the Scriptures and drawing on the wisdom Christians have access to in Christ, Paul says - to their shame – that they should find someone within the church to judge. This tradition alone does not capture the extent of Paul’s direction, though. He marshals his argument on the eschatological basis that believers will judge the angels.<sup>76</sup> If they possess judgment to rule over them, why can they not sort out matters of dispute in the church? The verb *κρίνω* in vs. 2 taps into the larger theme of discernment, as Munzinger has shown.<sup>77</sup> Paul reasons from the greater to the lesser: if they are going to be trusted to rule on heavenly things, then they should be able to rule on earthly things (*βιωτικός*) as well.<sup>78</sup>

Here again, Paul is refashioning his Jewish framework around the Messiah. In this case, it is not simply the death and resurrection of Christ that informs Paul’s thinking, but the union of believers with Christ and the powerful implications for their life in him. While the Jewish Scriptures portray the judges ruling on human cases, and some indication that they believed human beings would judge the world, there is no indication that they would judge the angels.<sup>79</sup> But here again this distinction introduces a category difference between two kinds of judgment. Thiselton shows the difference of opinion among the fathers on this issue, “Chrysostom, far from alone among the Fathers, insists

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<sup>76</sup> “The criterion is supplied by eschatology. The apocalyptic idea of the role of the ‘saints’ in the last judgment is reinterpreted in terms of the present, not in the sense that the church anticipates the judgment in moralistic ways, but in the indirect sense that it practices its eschatological sovereignty in the world.” Munzinger, *Discerning the Spirits*, 104. Schreiner interprets “judgment” here as referring to ruling rather than granting justice or doling out rewards in specific cases pertaining to the angels. *1 Corinthians*, 119.

<sup>77</sup> Munzinger, *Discerning the Spirits*, 5.

<sup>78</sup> Thiselton considers these suits the equivalent of “small claims court.” *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 419. Schreiner agrees as to the level of seriousness. *1 Corinthians*, 117–18.

<sup>79</sup> Conzelmann makes this connection, “The judging of the world is reserved in Judaism to God. In Christianity the office of judge is transferred also to Christ. And thus those who are ‘in Christ’ also have part in it.” *First Corinthians*, 105. Daniel 7:15-22 provides the clearest example of the saints judging the world with the Messiah. Without taking a strong position on the full extent of this prophecy, it’s easy to see this being fulfilled after the resurrection by those who are in Christ. Thiselton disagrees and points to examples of the people judging the world with the Messiah in documents from Qumran, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 425–26.

that ‘they will *not* indeed judge,’ in the sense of demanding account.”<sup>80</sup> This judgment would have been reserved for God and for the Messiah. Paul emphatically asserts that Jesus is the Messiah and that he will judge the world. Then he draws his conclusion; those who are in Christ will judge the world with the Messiah.<sup>81</sup>

Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:29 makes the same point about the church’s authority in judgment and it is portrayed in Revelation 20:4, but here, Paul is not just pointing to a future date when the saints will judge the world, but arguing that because they will judge the world then, they should be able to judge matters in the church now. This goes beyond what Thiselton is willing to grant; “Chrysostom’s concern might perhaps be expressed more accurately by asserting that no Christian will ‘judge’ the world *as an independent individual*, but as one of the corporeity who bears Christ’s image and *shares Christ’s destiny and likeness* as raised-with-him. All judgment would in this sense remain *Christ’s* since those in Christ would reflect only the character of Christ.”<sup>82</sup> This conclusion relies on a subtle non-sequitur. It’s possible to be one of the corporeity and share Christ’s likeness without doing away with independence entirely. The church is called to judge these cases as individuals who are in Christ. Since none of the individuals are immediately conformed to the image of Christ, we cannot expect that

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<sup>80</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 426. This is similar to the distinction Munzinger and Schreiner make. See n53.

<sup>81</sup> This concept can be seen partially in the Wisdom of Solomon 3:8. Marshall points out that this theme is widespread in across the New Testament and in Paul’s letters. See Rom 5:17; 8:17-18; 1 Cor 4:8; 6:2; Rev 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5. In 2 Tim. 2:11-13, Paul quotes a saying that makes this point explicitly, “if we endure, we will also reign with him.” I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 740. Marshall quotes Polycarp who makes a similar point, “In like manner deacons should be blameless in the presence of His righteousness, as deacons of God and Christ and not of men; not calumniators, not double-tongued, not lovers of money, temperate in all things, compassionate, diligent, walking according to the truth of the Lord who became a minister (deacon) of all. For if we be well pleasing unto Him in this present world, we shall receive the future world also, according as He promised us to raise us from the dead, and that if we conduct ourselves worthily of Him we shall also reign with Him, if indeed we have faith.” “The Epistle of S. Polycarp,” in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer (London: Macmillan and Co, 1891), 178–79.

<sup>82</sup> He also presents a third option, that some in Corinth may have held the naive view that they really did have knowledge and should sit in judgment on their own merits. This case requires reading Paul’s response almost sarcastically, shaming them for thinking they could sit in judgment rather than for taking their cases before the magistrates. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 427.

the judgment of the church and the judgment of Christ are identical in every case, even if that is the goal. The church, and the people in it, practice virtue, because they have the mind of Christ, but that does not seamlessly erase them into the virtue of Christ.

This example would make better intuitive sense if it were an action. Take the gifts as an example. No one prophesies outside of the work of the Holy Spirit, but Paul does not give the impression that the one who prophesies recedes into the body of Christ as they prophecy. Paul is clear that there are rules to follow when prophesying and that the prophet has influence over the time and manner in which they prophesy. In the same way, Paul says believers have the mind of Christ, not just in the corporate sense and not simply as a perfection of human wisdom, but as a facet of their transformation into his image.

Again, the logic behind this point is crucial to understand. Paul calls them to judge because they are in Christ. In the same way that he says they have the mind of Christ, that their minds have been transformed to discern the will of God, they are able to judge the will of God in these matters in the church.

It's almost astounding the level of confidence Paul shows in the judgment of the Christians in Corinth. As Schreiner rightly points out, these acts of judgment are insignificant in comparison to what Christians are capable of and called to: "This rule is given to believers because they belong to Jesus Christ, for Jesus will allow believers to sit on the throne with him to rule the world (Rev. 3:21), and this rule presumably includes rule over angels. If believers are going to rule over angels, they should be able to resolve disputes over matters of ordinary life."<sup>83</sup> The astonishment fades in the context of what Paul has already said in this letter. If Christians have the mind of Christ, then of course they will be able to judge these disputes. This is a matter of spiritual *φρόνησις* and discernment. As he does elsewhere, Paul is encouraging them to live like they are guided

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<sup>83</sup> Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 119.

by the Spirit, to practice the intellectual virtue that they uniquely possess, and to trust their spiritual discernment.

### **Conclusion**

Paul began the letter to the Corinthians contrasting the wisdom of God with the wisdom of the world. Spiritual wisdom can only be discerned spiritually by spiritual people. No one who is outside of Christ can participate in this process of discernment. They cannot practice this virtue with the people of God, only the Spirit can bring this about. Through Paul's own example of *φρόνησις*, he models the mind of Christ for the church even as he reminds them that they too have the same ability. He intends them to use it. 1 Corinthians 6:1-11 serves as an example of the epistemic difference between believers and unbelievers, the former will judge the angels so they should not take their lawsuits before the latter.

The rest of 1 Corinthians continues this theme. Paul reveals a new element of the mind of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12-14. By discussing the spiritual gifts, particularly tongues, prophecy, and interpretation, he gives another very clear example of the unique capacity Christians have to practice *φρόνησις*: discerning the voice of God.

CHAPTER 6  
DISCERNING THE VOICE OF GOD: 1 CORINTHIANS  
12-14

**Introduction**

The previous chapters have created an interpretive framework to help situate the notoriously difficult discussion of prophecy and tongues in chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians. Because of sin and God's responsive wrath, all of humanity is left with undiscerning, unwise minds (Rom 1:28; 2:17-18), but because of the work of the Spirit, those who are in Christ are being transformed and having their minds renewed (Rom 6:11; 8:3-5; 12:1-2; 1 Cor 2:6-16; 2 Cor 3:18, Eph 4:22-24). This results in the Christian's ability to practice the intellectual virtue of *φρόνησις*, practical wisdom through discerning God's will and knowing what to do to obey him and fulfill the law of love (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:1 Cor 6:1-11).

Two of the most difficult topics to approach epistemologically are the gifts of tongues and prophecy. Paul's approach to the supernatural gifts is the same as his approach to lawsuits (6:1-11). He exhorts the Corinthians to practice the very same kind of *φρόνησις* he describes in Romans. If the Corinthians, then, and Christians now want to know the will of God, the voice of God, or what to do to walk by the Spirit, they must practice *φρόνησις* and learn to discern. Paul says this exactly in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21, "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything (*πάντα δὲ δοκιμάζετε*); hold fast what is good." This overview of 1 Corinthians 12-14 will demonstrate that Christians should approach the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and interpretation as opportunities to practice the Spirit-given virtue of *φρόνησις*.

In order to show the connection between the gifts and the virtue of φρόνησις it will be helpful to consider Paul's argument out of order, first the general teaching on the gifts in 12:1-31, then the specific gifts of prophecy, tongues, and interpretation in 14:1-33, and finally the topic of love in 13:1-13. By doing this, the specific practices of φρόνησις and discernment can be seen in Paul's instructions concerning worship in the assembly and circumscribed by love, which binds the whole of the Christian life together, including the life of the mind.

### **Preliminary Questions Related to Tongues and Prophecy**

The second half of the letter of 1 Corinthians is dominated by questions about worship. Continuing the style of answering questions and employing practical wisdom to the Corinthians' different situations, Paul deals with a cluster of issues that have arisen in the course of the Corinthians' gatherings. Particularly, after laying down foundational principles for life together in discussions of meat sacrificed to idols and Christian "rights" in eating and drinking (8:1-11:1), Paul turns to deal with head coverings (11:2-16), the eucharist (11:17-34), and the practice of the gifts of prophecy and tongues (12:1-14:40).<sup>1</sup> In terms of volume, spiritual gifts occupy the largest share of the letter.<sup>2</sup> Considering the connections between Paul's opening counsel on wisdom, particularly on the topic of discerning godly wisdom, these three chapters are very near the logical core of the letter as well.

In addition to being one of the longer sections of the letter, chapters 12-14 have proved to be one of the most difficult sections in the Corinthian letters, not just because of what the text says, but because of three other complicating factors; the unknowns on

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<sup>1</sup> Any attempt to break the letter up shows the interconnectivity among the sections. Fee draws a dividing line for this section in 8:1, marking the end of the introduction to this topic in 10:22. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 631.

<sup>2</sup> There is some debate as to whether the term πνευματικῶν in vs. 1 is referring to spiritual gifts or spiritual people, continuing the discussion about the pneumatic sect in Corinth. The evidence points overwhelmingly to this term meaning spiritual gifts based on the totality of Paul's treatment here and elsewhere. For the arguments for this reading, see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 909–10; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 638.

the other side of the letter regarding what it was that the Corinthians were actually doing when they gathered, what Paul had already taught them during his time in Corinth, and how Christians then and now should put Paul's instructions into practice.<sup>3</sup>

These difficulties prove one of the points of this study, that Paul's approach to the problems in Corinth is not just to give broadly applicable principles, but to appeal to their own individual and communal use of the mind of Christ, the exercise of wisdom which he appeals to in the opening chapters. It will be the Spirit, at work in the lives of the individuals in Corinth, and especially the leadership of their elders, prophets, and teachers, that will collectively guide the church forward into maturity.

A second point should be made in introduction. While the topic of prophecy and tongues can create false juxtapositions between the rational and the ecstatic, the word and the Spirit, the coherent and the incoherent, close study of these passages reveals that Paul views the gifts of prophecy and tongues as aids for knowledge and discernment.<sup>4</sup> Put another way, Paul regards the gifts of prophecy and tongues as opportunities to practice the same kind of discernment and wisdom he advocates everywhere else in the letter. Because of their unique nature, maybe even more than the other issues Paul addresses, the spiritual gifts exhibit the need for intellectual virtue. It is the unique practice of intellectual virtue that allows these gifts to function within the church as God intends.

In fact, this section is continuous with the rest of the letter in ways that highlight the intellectual virtues. The entire discussion of the gifts, as a part of the larger

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<sup>3</sup> For issues with mirror-reading in Paul's letters and determining what was going on in the churches, see: Nijay K. Gupta, "Mirror-Reading Moral Issues in Paul's Letters," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34, no. 4 (2012): 361–81; John M. G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemic Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1987): 73–93.

<sup>4</sup> James K. A. Smith's work is an example of excellent philosophical and theological engagement with charismatic theology and practice in passages like 1 Corinthians 12-14. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*. There is an abundance of resources treating the theology of the Spirit that deal with these texts as well. Many will be instrumental in this discussion. For the most prominent examples, see Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997); D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019); Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*; Munzinger, *Discerning the Spirits*; Keener, *Gift and Giver*.

section from 11:1-14:40 is a reordering of the Corinthians' values. In the same way that divisions over teachers were springing up from employing the wrong criteria in chapters 1-3, here, they are also dividing because their judgment reflects the honor code of the pagan culture rather than the love of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

This point reveals a strong point of similarity between what Paul says in Romans, not just because he also mentions spiritual gifts in chapter 12 of Romans, but because the nature of the gifts of prophecy and tongues require the ability to discern the will of God. This is something as we've seen in Romans and earlier in the letter that believers – and only believers – can do.

### **Intellectual Virtue and the Gifts**

#### **The Spiritual Gifts: 12:1-31**

The first question to ask at the outset of chapter 12 is what Paul is doing talking about spiritual gifts (τῶν πνευματικῶν in 12:1). With respect to this topic, it's likely that he's going down the list of questions the Corinthians have raised through their messengers and applying his φρόνησις framework.

On the broadest level, Paul is resetting their understanding of both the telos of the gifts of the Spirit and the general way in which they should practice the gifts. Paul homes in on the intellectual virtues as the essential mission components. Regarding the manifestations of the Spirit, Paul urges them to focus on the content of the gifts rather than just the form. Second, he reminds them that the maturity of the body relies on working together, each person working according to the leading of the Spirit and everyone working together to practice the community virtues of discernment and wisdom.

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<sup>5</sup> On this point of comparison between the pagan and Christian conceptions of honor and hierarchy in prophecy and ecstatic utterances, see: the discussion in Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 900; Dale B. Martin, "Tongues of Angels and Other Status Indicators," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59, no. 3 (1991): 547–89.



From another angle, though, what does Paul mean by τῶν πνευματικῶν in 12:1? Isolated from this context, there is no reason to assume that by this term, Paul is referring to the “gifts” as he does elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> It could as easily mean spiritual people.<sup>7</sup> Paul has been talking about the things of the Spirit since the opening chapters of the letter. Here, while he may have a more specific set of issues in mind, the readers should expect a continuous treatment of the topic, incorporating what Paul has already said, particularly in chapter 1-2. The full context of the chapter makes clear that whatever Paul does mean it is not less than the spiritual gifts and Paul does not want them to be without knowledge about this topic (12:2).

### **The Gifts - Form and Content: 12:2-11**

To shore up the Corinthians’ knowledge about spiritual matters, he makes a contrast to their former lives. Prior to their conversion, many of the Christians in Corinth likely had had experience with prophecies or ecstatic utterances, but they had not experienced the Spirit.<sup>8</sup> Paul contrasts the ecstatic experiences previous to their conversion by pointing out that these idols were mute, whereas the Spirit speaks.

It’s likely that the Corinthians had imported a pagan understanding of the gifts into the church based on their own experiences with ecstatic irrational utterances before they became Christians. Collins defines the contrast Paul sets up between their present

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<sup>6</sup> Paul refers to the gifts in various ways throughout his letters. He uses the word χάρισμα most commonly in this chapter (1:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 21) and elsewhere (Rom. 12:6). But he does not always use this term to mean a spiritual gift. See Rom. 5:15; 6:23 where he uses it to describe the gift of salvation, and 1 Cor. 7:7 where he uses it to describe the gift of contentment. In Eph. 4:8-11, he uses δόμα to refer to gifts from Christ in the form of roles within the church.

<sup>7</sup> Thiselton gives an overview of the arguments for and against this understanding. He concludes that this is best translated to convey that he is talking about things that come from the Spirit. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 910–11. Because of the context following in the chapter, Schreiner concludes that this is referring to the gifts. *1 Corinthians*, 253; Conzelmann takes Paul to be repeating a phrase from the church referring to the gifts. *First Corinthians*, 204.

<sup>8</sup> “Most likely, therefore, he is reminding them of what they well know, that in some of the cults ‘inspired utterances’ were part of the worship, despite the ‘mute idols.’ If so, then his concern is to establish early on, as the next sentence seems to corroborate, that it is not ‘inspired speech’ as such that is evidence of the Spirit. Many of them had already known a similar phenomenon as pagans. Rather, what counts is the intelligible and Christian content of such utterances.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 640.

worship as Christians and their former worship that may have had similar features as pagans; Collins summarizes the contrast Paul is making here; "The Corinthians' Greco-Roman culture widely assumed that religious experience was involuntary and irrational. Ecstatic experience was a matter beyond human control; it was a matter of being driven by a divine force."<sup>9</sup>

It's clear enough that Paul is informing them, much as he did in 2:6-16 that the Spirit's work is not irrational even if it is undiscernible to outsiders. To prove this point, Paul gives an example of a parameter: "I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (12:3).<sup>10</sup>

This parameter provokes a question: what can be known by the unbeliever? Indirectly, we're told, they cannot say, "Jesus is Lord." This follows from Paul saying that one can only acknowledge Jesus is Lord by the Spirit. It hardly seems to be true, though, that unbelievers cannot *say*, "Jesus is Lord." But does this constitute a difference in knowledge or something different?

In the first place, against the claim that the utterances of the Spirit are unintelligible to both the speaker and the hearers, Paul asserts later that the goal of prophecy and tongues are to speak intelligible words of encouragement to the church, with the help of an interpreter if necessary (14:9-19).<sup>11</sup> "Jesus is Lord" must be more than just an irrational statement. It involves the speaker in something more than just speaking

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<sup>9</sup> Collins, *First Corinthians*, 7:447.

<sup>10</sup> See Conzelmann for the way this phrase is understood to be a parameter against the belief that speaking in tongues is indiscriminately a sign of the Spirit's work. "It follows from v 2\* that ecstasy alone is no criterion for the working of the Spirit, but itself requires such a criterion. This is supplied by the *κύριος* acclamation, which is for its part an effect of the Spirit." *First Corinthians*, 206.

<sup>11</sup> In Greco-Roman religious rites, some believed that divine inspiration could override human rationality. People speaking might not remember what they said at all. For this view see Joop F. M. Smit, "Tongues and Prophecy: Deciphering 1 Cor 14:22," *Biblica* 75, no. 2 (1994): 175–90. Against this view, see Christopher Forbes, "Early Christian Inspired Speech and Hellenistic Popular Religion," *Novum Testamentum* 28, no. 3 (1986): 257–70.

these words like an incantation.<sup>12</sup> As a confession of belief, whether or not it is spoken in tongues, this is a statement only the Spirit can instigate.<sup>13</sup>

**The purpose of the Spirit's influence.** Paul is fundamentally arguing that the fact that they speak in tongues or prophesy is not as important as the content of what they say. This is the true indication of the Spirit's work. That being the case, the mind must participate in the practice of the gifts. After all, they are aimed at the mind. Now, in their worship together, it would be the "*intelligible and Christian content*" of the gifts that would be the distinguishing factor.<sup>14</sup> Fee finds the summary point of this test of the Spirit's work, which will serve as a useful criterion for appraising the gifts later in the following three chapters: "The presence of the Spirit in power and gifts makes it easy for God's people to think of the power and gifts as the real evidence of the Spirit's presence. Not so for Paul. The ultimate criterion of the Spirit's activity is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord, which in turn expresses itself in loving concern for others."<sup>15</sup>

This point is made even more clear by the list of gifts Paul provides in 12:8-11. Several of these gifts have epistemic content and implications for virtue. The first two gifts on the list, words of wisdom and knowledge, present the clearest connection between practicing the gifts and practicing intellectual virtue. The fact that these two gifts are on this list, for they appear nowhere else in Scripture, highlights the emphasis Paul is placing on epistemic virtue for the Corinthians specifically. This is undoubtedly because both knowledge and wisdom are loaded terms in the church.<sup>16</sup> There could not be a clearer link between the work of the Spirit and the practice of intellectual virtue.

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<sup>12</sup> The commentators are grasping at words to describe the difference here. However it is defined, though it is clear that Paul means something more here than just uttering words. "We shall argue that the utterance concerning *κύριος* is a confession which combines an assertion about Jesus Christ with self-involvement on the part of the speaker." Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 918.

<sup>13</sup> Thiselton, 924–26; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 644–45.

<sup>14</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 640.

<sup>15</sup> Fee, 645.

<sup>16</sup> See the discussion of 1 Corinthians 1-2 in the previous chapter.

There is some disagreement over what these phrases mean in terms of what kind of wisdom this is. The major divide could be read into two possible readings of the genitives in the phrases, *λόγος σοφίας* and *λόγος γνώσεως*.<sup>17</sup> This could mean words that are from “Wisdom,” focusing on the source, an interpretation more similar to the gift of prophecy. Thiselton argues that divine wisdom and knowledge are clearly the referents in these gifts.<sup>18</sup> Fee draws his interpretation from 2:6-16, “There the ‘message of wisdom,’ revealed by the Spirit, is not some special understanding of the “deeper things” or ‘mysteries’ of God. Rather, it is the recognition that the message of Christ crucified is God’s true wisdom, a recognition that comes only to those who have received the Spirit.”<sup>19</sup>

The second sense would focus on the quality of the words and their effect on the congregation. Thiselton summarizes this sense as, “evaluation of realities in the light of God’s grace and the cross of Christ. It is part of a response to grace.”<sup>20</sup> These gifts are the ability to speak wisely and knowledgeably about pressing issues in a way that coincides with the wisdom and knowledge of God. This second sense has some resonance with the renewal of the mind in Romans 12:2. Connected with another gift later in the list, discerning the spirits (12:10), words of knowledge and wisdom represent specially prescient instances of what all believers are called to do: test and approve God’s will. Combined, the impact of these three gifts is a substantial place for intellectual virtue, guided by the Spirit in the operation of the church; “If we place together these two proposals, the gifts of discernment or *discrimination* include (a) a *critical capacity to*

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<sup>17</sup> Another difficulty is telling the difference between the two. Most modern commentators do not put significant weight in the difference between them. Augustine does differentiate between these two in terms of content, wisdom applying to eternal things and knowledge to temporal things. *De Trinitate*, 12.15.25

<sup>18</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 939.

<sup>19</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 656–57.

<sup>20</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 939; Dunn also prefers this second sense, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 217–21.

*discern the genuine transcendent activity of the Spirit* from merely human attempts to replicate it; and (b) a *pastoral discernment of the varied ways in which the Spirit of God is working*, in such a way as to distinguish various consequences and patterns."<sup>21</sup>

Does the Spirit really guide individual decisions? Fee makes a distinction between the Spirit guiding and the Spirit deciding, especially in minute cases.<sup>22</sup> He argues that the Spirit does transform believers, but not on the level of directing individual choices.<sup>23</sup> Munzinger offers a compelling explanation of the Spirit's actions.<sup>24</sup> First, the Spirit transforms believers through a relationship, not exclusively through new content. The Spirit, as a person of the Godhead, guides and renews through a gradual relation with each individual person in Christ. He describes this as translation.<sup>25</sup> Second, the Spirit's work is holistic; "For Paul rationality must be integrated into the total transformation of the person."<sup>26</sup> Dunn points out that Paul roots all change in the fundamental renewal of the mind.<sup>27</sup> The gifts are an outpouring of this work of the Spirit in the same way. Third, the Spirit's work is integrative, meaning the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with the church community is inseparably linked together; "God can now be known because the believer is transformed through love so as to be enabled to perceive God."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 967. Emphasis original.

<sup>22</sup> Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 563.

<sup>23</sup> Fee stands in slight contrast to Dunn, who argues that Christians can have assurance and confidence in specific moral circumstances and decisions. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 222.

<sup>24</sup> For the following discussion, see Munzinger, *Discerning the Spirits*, 172–87.

<sup>25</sup> "In other words, the Spirit translates the Christ-event into the lives of believers by empowering them to live in a similar manner." Munzinger, 174.

<sup>26</sup> Munzinger, 176; Again, Munzinger is tracking closely with Dunn on this point. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 73–78.

<sup>27</sup> The connection between the mind and action should also be observed for the way the Spirit influences the intellectual virtues and the way the gifts operate. "Full conviction at the rational level was important in making ethical decisions." Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 74.

<sup>28</sup> Munzinger, *Discerning the Spirits*, 177–178. This squares with the way Paul describes God's gifts elsewhere, particularly in Eph. 4:11–24, another place where the renewing of the mind is discussed in

What can be said about the extent of the Spirit's work? Common among the minimalist and maximalist understanding of the transformation and guidance of the Spirit is that the Christian, having been made new, is making new kinds of decisions. This is another nod to the virtue tradition, which possesses the conceptual framework to step back from evaluating each individual action on its own merits to assess the kind of person acting the effects the actions might have on them over time. The same is true for the intellectual virtues, though they are harder to conceptualize in this same way. The Spirit doesn't fill the minds of Christians with the right thoughts in every scenario as much as he creates a person who thinks like Christ would.

### **Community Virtues: 12:12-31**

In the next phase of the argument, Paul uses the famous metaphor of the body to clarify the Spirit's work in the community. Against the prominence the Corinthians placed on the gift of tongues, Paul reminds them that the plurality of gifts distributed by the Spirit is essential to the maturity of the church. Moreover, this is another instance of rivalry and factionalism in the church, driven by pagan notions of honor and prestige and not on the example of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

The metaphor of the body was common in the ancient world, and here it suits Paul's message perfectly. The familiarity of the metaphor used in a new light may have increased the difference between what the Corinthians had been doing previously and what Paul was calling them to in Christ.<sup>30</sup> Epictetus uses this metaphor to describe the different duties that come with different roles in society; immorality by any part of the

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connection with the gifts.

<sup>29</sup> For the best discussion of the role status played in the exercise of the gifts, see Martin, "Tongues of Angels."

<sup>30</sup> For the sources Paul may have been drawing from, see Timothy A. Brookins, "Paul and the Ancient Body Metaphor: Reassessing Parallels," *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 6, no. 1 (2016): 75–98. Collins also includes a helpful discussion; *First Corinthians*, 7:462.

body results in a loss for the whole body.<sup>31</sup> Mitchell and Martin point out that the metaphor was often used in political contexts, describing the ideal citizen as part of the body politic.<sup>32</sup> Here Paul may be borrowing the common image of the polis and reorienting the believers' expectations for their roles within the ecclesia.

The difference between these other metaphors and Paul's is that he is concerned with how the church can work together to understand the content of the gifts, not just to promote peace in the polis or preserve an existing hierarchy.<sup>33</sup> Virtue formation is a community enterprise for Paul.<sup>34</sup> It takes the whole body for each individual to grow to maturity. Even this metaphor of the body is an epistemic guide for the church to follow and not just an acknowledgment of diversity within the work of the Spirit.

To put this passage in conversation with modern discussions of intellectual virtue, consider the implications here for the practice of humility as an epistemic guide. Since practicing the gifts moves toward the telos of building up the body (14:4), both the general practice of the spiritual gifts and the specific manifestations rely on the presence and interworking of the community.<sup>35</sup>

The beauty of Paul's image of the body reminds the Corinthians that the intellectual virtues must be practiced among brothers and sisters in the family of Christ. In fact, the gift of tongues when it is exercised in the church is bound to the multiplicity of gifts within the body. It can only be edifyingly used in tandem. One cannot practice it

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<sup>31</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses*, 2.10. See also, Plutarch, *Moralia* 487D.

<sup>32</sup> Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 68–83.

<sup>33</sup> Martin and Witherington both notice this difference between the way the body metaphor was used in a political sense in the Greco-Roman world and the radically egalitarian way Paul uses it here. Martin, "Tongues of Angels"; Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 258–59.

<sup>34</sup> "As I have argued elsewhere, one of the major differences between virtue-ethics in the ancient non-Jewish world and their equivalent in Paul is that for the tradition from Plato and Aristotle onwards 'virtue' was basically a solo occupation, whereas for Paul it was, and could only be, a team sport." Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1097. Also see Paul's description of the gifts and their community function in Ephesians 4:11–16.

<sup>35</sup> Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 241–83; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1005–6, 1087–90.

in the body alone, an interpreter must be present. It's as though this gift taps into a deeper sense of unity within the church.

Only the most important items are guarded by distributed keys and codes. Information, from passwords to family recipes are entrusted to groups of people, so that no one person can take advantage for their own benefit; a counsel of wisdom is necessary to utilize the most important information. Words of knowledge in the assembly are no different. They are too important to keep to one person.

The importance of the content is only one aspect of this metaphor. The image of multiple keys split between various parties has an even deeper resonance. They all have to come together and agree to open the lock. The words of prophecy actually cannot be shared with everyone without the input of multiple people with multiple gifts, and these gifts are not given as the world gives. God gives as he sees fit to build up the body. These gifts are too precious to be distributed to the most successful or to the ones with the most prestige as the world might distribute them. They are given according to the will of God and perfectly fit to accomplish the task he desires in the church (vs. 22-26).

It is no matter of practicality, then, that the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," it is a virtuous feature of the mind in Christ. Discernment is a community activity undertaken by individuals, together.

### **The Gifts of Tongues, Prophecy, and Interpretation: 14:1-33**

Whereas in chapter 12 Paul was primarily focused on broader concerns with the gifts in general, questions of unity, diversity, and the purpose of the gifts generically, in chapter 14 he is concerned to clarify questions about three specific gifts: tongues, prophecy, and interpretation. These are the gifts the Corinthians have likely asked about, or if they have not, they are the gifts about which Paul has heard and is seeking to correct. Chapter 13 provides a bridge between the two discussion and establishes the centrality of love.



While chapter 14 contains a myriad of controversial questions about the nature of the gifts, the way to practice them, and the question of their continuity today, one such question is most useful for this study: what does Paul's teaching about these gifts reveal about his epistemology? Even more specifically, is there any connection between these three gifts and the intellectual virtue of *φρόνησις*? A brief survey of Paul's teaching on the gifts will reveal that they are essentially intertwined with the intellectual virtues.

In the first place, the major movement in this chapter is one of contrast. Prophecy is for building up the church through encouragement and consolation, tongues is for building up the self (14:4). Prophecy is a sign for believers, tongues is a sign for unbelievers (14:22). Prophecy can convict outsiders of their sins and bring them to repentance, speaking in a tongue enlightens the person speaking or praying (14:24-25). Speaking in tongues is good, but prophecy is better (14:1, 4-5, 31).

There are notable similarities as well. Both gifts should be used to build up the church (14:4, 12, 18-19, 29). Building up the body is Paul's refrain and his ultimate charge in this chapter. As he made clear in chapter 12, all of the gifts have been given for this purpose. Both gifts are mediated by the Spirit (14:2, 12). Both gifts are supposed to be conducted in a limited and orderly way in the assembly (14:27-29). Both of these gifts are good and should be practiced by the people of God (14:5, 18-19).

By the end of this section, it's clear that there is more than just similarity between these two gifts, there is a considerable overlap. Paul does not provide tight parameters for the content of what can or should be said in tongues, but there is one place in this chapter indicating that some instances of speaking in tongues can also be prophetic. In 14:6, Paul says tongues can contain revelations, knowledge, prophecies, and teaching. In the same way, a tongue might also express thanksgiving and can be practiced in the church if there is an interpreter (14:16-17).

Two other points deserve attention to connect these gifts with the mind. Throughout the discussion of the gifts, Paul stresses the importance of cognition together

with prophecy and tongues – tongues through the accompanying gift of interpretation. One of the difficulties in discussing the gift of tongues is identifying exactly what Paul is referring to. There are several competing interpretations including speaking in an angelic language, speaking in a real earthly language that is not one’s native tongue, and speaking in ecstatic utterances unknown to the speaker, to name a few of the most common options.<sup>36</sup> But regardless of what the gift of tongues is, Paul makes it clear that he has in mind one goal for both tongues and prophecy: building up the church. This requires that the effects of both gifts be understandable.

With regard to prophecy in particular, the greater gift among the two in the assembly, Paul paints a very intelligible and cognitive picture. Though prophecy in the ancient world was commonly thought of as an experience of being overtaken, the Christian experience is one of Spirit-led cognition.<sup>37</sup> Prophecy must be intelligible, understandable, and applicable to those listening in order that it might build up the church. This is Paul’s governing criterion.

Prophecy, according to Paul, requires discernment on the part of the one speaking as well. In Romans 12:6, Paul gives the guidance that those who prophesy should do so in accordance with their measure of faith. Dunn takes this to mean that they should prophesy “within the limits of their confidence that their words were God’s

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<sup>36</sup> Thiselton gives the most complete overview of these various positions. He concludes, based on Paul’s statement in 14:13 that the speaker should pray to be able to interpret their own message in tongues, that speaking in tongues is unintelligible to the speaker. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 970–89. Fee believes that tongues is an angelic language used for communicating with God. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 699. Carson gives the most extensive discussion over whether the language of tongues is a real language. He concludes, “On balance, then, the evidence favors the view that Paul thought the gift of tongues was a gift of real languages, that is, languages that were cognitive, whether of men or of angels.” Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, 101–6.

<sup>37</sup> “This shows that Paul does not think of the gift of tongues as an overpowering emotional experience in which the speaker is possessed by the Spirit in some sort of ecstatic trance.” Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 242. “With these words Paul lifts Christian ‘inspired speech’ out of the category of ‘ecstasy’ as such and offers it as a radically different thing from the mania of the pagan cults. There is no seizure here, no loss of control; the speaker is neither frenzied nor a babbler.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 771. Even in Philo, the work of the Spirit is set in opposition to the mind: “A higher level of anthropological reflection is reached by Philo: the πνεῦμα, ‘Spirit,’ expels the νοῦς, ‘mind,’ and leads to the vision of God.” Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 234; Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 180.

words.”<sup>38</sup> The prophet is required to exercise discernment over their own prophecy. The same is true in 1 Cor. 14:32, when Paul reminds them, “The spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet.”<sup>39</sup> This too implies that the prophets must discern whether or not to share their prophetic message with the congregation. Those who are mature will practice wisdom to know if prophecy or tongues will fulfill the purpose God has assigned, bringing people to repentance and building up the church (14:20-25).

Second, in addition to cognition and intelligibility among the prophets, Paul stresses the need for practical wisdom on the part of the hearers. This point is clear from the purposes and goals Paul assigns to the gifts. Prophecies and tongues both require discernment on the part of the hearers to ensure that they fulfill their purpose of building up the body. Munzinger makes a helpful argument here. He points out that in 14:29, Paul instructs the Corinthians to weigh (*διακρίνω*) what is said by the prophets who speak in the assembly.<sup>40</sup> Paul gives very similar instructions in 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21. He argues that Paul instructs them to do this in order to prevent disunity. Discernment is a means of community self-regulation, a reinforcement of the point Paul made in chapter 12 that the proper exercise of the gifts requires everyone to participate.<sup>41</sup>

Yet again in the letter to the Corinthians, Paul shows that the Spirit and the mind work together. The work of the Spirit may be superrational, but it is not antirational. The wisdom of the Spirit can be spiritually discerned using the mind. As Keener argues,

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<sup>38</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 581. Others see this passage differently. Fitzmyer takes it as a more general “faith” meaning within the Christian faith. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 647. Moo agrees with Fitzmyer but gives slightly more nuance. The prophet is supposed to inspect their own prophecy to see if it is within the measure of the faith. Though this is not exactly the same as what Dunn says, it invokes the same kind of discernment on the part of the prophet. Moo, *Romans*, 784.

<sup>39</sup> Thiselton makes the helpful observation that the discernment of the prophet in deciding whether or not to share the prophecy is as much the work of the Spirit as the inspiration of the prophecy; “Such control is no less a part of the Spirit’s work than the content of the utterance, but (like the utterance, at least in Paul’s view) it also involves the active and responsible agency of the prophet.” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1144.

<sup>40</sup> For the interchangeability of *διακρίνω* and *δοκιμάζω* in Paul see Munzinger, *Discerning the Spirits*, 6–13.

<sup>41</sup> For a summary of this argument, see Munzinger, 64.

“With the exception of tongues, all of the corporately edifying activities in 1 Corinthians 14:26—worship in the vernacular, teaching, and prophetic revelation—communicate cognitively at least in part. Coupled with interpretation, as Paul expects in public assemblies, even prayer in tongues can facilitate communal cognition.”<sup>42</sup> The gifts are acts of *φρόνησις* and they should be discerned and tested by the people listening. Even Paul’s teaching about the gifts is an example of mature thinking, his own *φρόνησις* on display (14:20-25).

### **The Epistemology of Love: 13:1-13**

In the middle of these two chapters about the spiritual gifts, Paul moves into a discussion of love. It is in the middle not primarily because it logically follows chapter 12 and precedes 14, but because it is central and foundational to both of them, indeed to the letter as a whole. Love is the foundation upon which every exhortation to the church rests.

There is a natural segue between 12:31 and 13:1. After emphasizing the shared responsibility of stewarding the gifts, Paul brings the church back to the overarching concern of the letter, that they would have one mind in the Lord (1:10). These factions within the church have evidently come, in part, because of the practice of the gifts. Whether the practice of certain gifts had resulted in hierarchies in the church or teachers with certain gifts had given rise to the various factions, the gifts had played a role in developing discord.<sup>43</sup> The answer, Paul suggests is to ground the understanding of the practice of the gifts – and all facets of the corporate gathering – in selfless love.<sup>44</sup> This is the higher way Paul wishes to show them (12:31).

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<sup>42</sup> Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 200. “Contrary to widespread popular uses of this chapter to assume an intimate connection between being inspired by the Holy Spirit and ‘spontaneity,’ the chapter as a whole places the issue of concern for the other and communicative intelligibility at the center of the discussion.” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1075.

<sup>43</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 634.

<sup>44</sup> Mitchell shows that love was seen to be the antidote to factionalism in other contemporary sources. Paul’s unique presentation of Christian love would have been understandable within the tradition

For Paul, the topic of love is even more fundamental than just providing a basis for practicing the gifts; it rises to the level of answering the question, what are people of the Spirit like? Some of the Corinthians believe that the mark of the Spirit is speaking in tongues, but Paul reminds them that the sign of the Spirit is much more basic than that. It is walking in love.<sup>45</sup>

In the first two sections of this chapter (1-3 and 4-7), Paul establishes that without love, none of the gifts have their proper result; love is selfless, persistent, and truth-seeking. But in the third section (8-13), he introduces another important correlation. Love and knowledge go together as well. It should not come as a surprise that love is a guide for knowing. Going back to the epistemic boundaries Paul begins to trace in 12:1-3, love of God and of neighbor binds everything together. Love is as important for Christian epistemology as it is for Christian ethics.

How does love inform the practice of the gifts? Paul identifies two qualities of this relationship for the church. First, the gifts are temporary and love is not (13:12). The gifts are a temporary aid for building up the church. When the perfect comes, they will no longer be practiced because they will no longer be necessary.<sup>46</sup> The use of the gifts now necessitates keeping the end goal in mind; “The Corinthians, therefore, must beware of prizing the gifts inordinately. They are useful and edifying, but they are not the *summum*

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of political speech. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 271–73.

<sup>45</sup> Fee: “It is hard to escape the implication that what is involved here are two opposing views as to what it means to be people of the Spirit. For the Corinthians it meant ‘speaking in tongues’ and having wisdom and knowledge—in their case = pride—and thus without a commensurate concern for truly Christian behavior. For Paul it meant first of all to be full of the Spirit.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 698. Witherington draws a similar conclusion: “At least some Corinthians were focused on power and ego and had a different view of the real heart of Christianity. Paul’s point is that such egocentric behavior hurts not only others but also the self. One has no profit without love.” Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 268.

<sup>46</sup> “At the coming of Christ the final purpose of God’s saving work in Christ will have been reached; at that point those gifts now necessary for the building up of the church in the present age will disappear, because ‘completeness’ will have come.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 716.

*bonum*. A greater reality is coming, and the gifts will be forgotten as the glory which the gifts point to arrives.”<sup>47</sup>

To reinforce his point about the end goal of the gifts, Paul adds two similar illustrations, maturing from a child to an adult (13:11) and looking into mirror (13:12). Both of these illustrations reinforce the point that a greater reality is on the way, something more complete and mature in the first case and something clearer and more complete in the second.<sup>48</sup> Practicing the gifts correctly, in a way that accomplishes the purpose of building up the church, requires the proper perspective. What is now is not what will be. In both metaphors, Paul makes clear that they are on the right track, but they are not to the end yet. There is a sense of continuity in each image. The child will grow into the adult, and it will still be the same person. The image in the mirror will clear up, but it will be the same image. For now, they see an incomplete picture.

In the following sentence, Paul summarizes this third section of the chapter; “Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (13:12). As the whole chapter emphasizes, Christian love is relational, and consequently, so is knowledge. Relationships with God and with others are the context for the gifts. This point offers an insight into how Paul understands knowledge. Of course, one way to construe knowledge is through the two-value system of propositional knowledge. A statement is either known or unknown. Paul sometimes speaks this way, but more often he speaks of knowledge as he does here, as a relationship. The end goal of love is to

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<sup>47</sup> Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 281.

<sup>48</sup> There is a lot of discussion as to what these metaphors mean on a more granular level. Though commentators agree on the general message Paul is communicating, they are divided over the nature of these metaphors. Conzelmann shows that the first metaphor about maturity was commonplace in the ancient world. He also includes an extensive discussion of the “Figure of the Mirror” with Numbers 12:8 in the background. Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 225–27. Witherington notes that the maturity metaphor probably does not refer to the practice of prophecy and tongues, because Paul practices both of these gifts, but instead the intention and manner of practicing them in Corinth. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 271. Others have noted that Corinth was known for producing high-quality mirrors. This adds to the resonance of Paul’s example. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 718; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1068. Fishbane sees the mirror analogy as an appeal to the broader Greco-Roman concept that mirrors represented indirect knowledge. Fishbane, “Through the Looking Glass: Reflections on Ezek 43:3, Num 12:8 and 1 Cor 13:8.”

know fully and be fully known. This kind of reciprocal knowledge can only happen with a person, someone who can know in return. Paul often speaks this way of knowing Christ.<sup>49</sup> Here he equates the personal and vulnerable reality of knowing and being known with the τέλος of the gifts. The purpose of prophecy is not just to reveal information, it is to know God.

Surely, this is one reason that love abides forever; God's relationship with his people abides forever. So, prophecy and tongues do not arbitrarily cease, they are consummated. It would be like calling someone to talk when they are sitting within arm's reach. The knowledge of God mediated through prophecy and tongues will fail to compare to knowing God face to face (13:12).<sup>50</sup>

In this context, a new feature of intellectual virtue emerges. If knowing is relationally circumscribed, as Paul explains here, then φρόνησις is a relational virtue. In Grant Macaskill's work, *Living in Union with Christ*, he concludes that because transformation is rooted in union with Christ, the practice of virtue is relational.<sup>51</sup> As opposed to other conceptions of virtue, Christian virtue is defined by participation, not individual heroism.<sup>52</sup> There is only one wise man, only one "sage," the Lord Jesus Christ. All Christian virtue is in imitation of and participation in him.

The Spirit's work of transformation takes place by virtue of being united with Christ. Christians are transformed because of their relationship with God through Christ

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<sup>49</sup> 1 Thess. 4:17-18; Phil 2:10, 3:8; 2 Cor. 3:17-18.

<sup>50</sup> The background for Paul's phrase, "πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον" is almost certainly from the LXX and refers to the way God has known his faithful servants in the past. Paul uses this to imagine the way God will know his people in the future. Collins takes the example in Numbers 12:8 of God speaking to Moses "mouth to mouth" as an example of unmediated relational knowledge. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 7:487. Schreiner compares this language to the OT theophanies; God's appearances to Jacob (Gen. 32:30), Gideon (Judges 6:22), and Moses (Deut 34:10). Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 281. This topic is the base for Meek's covenant epistemology. Meek, *Loving to Know*.

<sup>51</sup> For the first stage of this argument, see his discussion of union and sonship. Grant Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ: Paul's Gospel and Christian Moral Identity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 112.

<sup>52</sup> Macaskill, 133.

and with Christ through the Spirit. Each of these relationships has a transformational effect. They also have a τέλος or a consummation. This is the point Paul makes here; the consummation of knowledge, and of the intellectual virtues is to know and be fully known by God.<sup>53</sup>

The goal of φρόνησις is not to just to become a wise person, but to become a person who knows God as he is fully known by God. Here, Paul takes a different tack from the philosophers. His conception of φρόνησις has a completely different end. The virtuous person, the one who has the mind of Christ, is the one who knows God like God knows them.<sup>54</sup> This ties Paul's statements together. The problems in Corinth with the gifts stem from the mistaken assumption that the gifts of prophecy and tongues say something about the speaker. As Paul emphasizes throughout these three chapters, the spiritual gifts are means through which the church may grow in knowing God. Discerning prophetic words and those spoken in tongues may have immediate value, but their end is to bring the church into closer relationship with God himself and with one another. This is the true goal of φρόνησις.

### Conclusion

The spiritual gifts provide another opportunity for Paul and his readers to employ the virtue of φρόνησις. In chapters 12-14, Paul expounds the nature and purposes of the spiritual gifts, generally in terms of the participation of the whole body together in chapter 12 and specifically giving guidance on the three gifts of prophecy, interpretation, and tongues in chapter 14. In each of these discussions, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to practice discernment as they receive, interpret and share the word of God in the

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<sup>53</sup> Conzelmann notices this in vs. 9: "But the gifts will reach their τέλος, their 'goal.' Thus the future is here not the end of the world, but its consummation." *First Corinthians*, 226.

<sup>54</sup> "God's knowledge of us is immediate—full and direct, 'face to face,' as it were; at the Eschaton, Paul seems to be saying, we too shall know in this way, with no more need for the kinds of mediation that the mirror illustrates or that 'prophecy' and the 'utterance of knowledge' exemplify in reality." Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 719.



congregation.

The whole community of the church is required to work together as the body of Christ to practice φρόνησις and discern the word of God. The epistle to Corinthians serves as a model of φρόνησις as Paul instructs the church, modeling the new conception of theology he developed to serve his congregations. It also features deliberate calls toward Christian φρόνησις, seen in the practical matters Paul deals with, most obviously in the cases of lawsuits between believers (6:1-11) and the practice of the spiritual gifts (12:1-14:33). Practical wisdom is not just something Christians are able to practice, as Paul argued in Romans, but as 1 Corinthians makes clear, it is something they must grow into for the building up of the church.

## CHAPTER 7

### PHILIPPIANS AND 1 THESSALONIANS: EPISTEMIC FORMATION AND EXEMPLARISM

#### **Introduction**

In this final examination of intellectual virtue in Paul's letters a new aspect emerges, intellectual exemplars. The letters of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians exhibit a movement away from the definition of the intellectual virtues and the proof that they are unique to those who are in Christ and toward the way in which the virtues are formed and practiced.

While the focus of these letters shifts the discussion from definition to practice, studying these letters adds another crucial proof to the thesis that there is an epistemic difference between those who are in Christ and those who are not. In fact, discussing intellectual formation and exemplarism both underscore the point that Christian intellectual virtues are unique. Because the Holy Spirit is the *sine qua non* of sanctification, as Paul demonstrates in Romans and 1 Corinthians, developing intellectual virtue without the Spirit is impossible. Similarly, as modern epistemologists have shown, because moral and intellectual exemplarism depend on admiration, it is impossible for Christians and non-Christians to admire the same things in their exemplars. This crucial, and controversial, point bolsters the conclusion that in Paul's estimation Christians become intellectually virtuous by imitating Christ and those whose examples point to him by the work of the Spirit.

Philippians will serve as the main letter of examination in this chapter because of its uniquely intellectual focus. If the letter of 1 Corinthians gives the reader a tactical and exemplary guide to *φρόνησις*, Philippians brings it into living color. Paul is focused

on the mind in this letter, and he weaves and roots his exhortations into an expansive discussion of the ways in which φρόνησις is formed and exhibited in the church.

In Philippians specifically, and elsewhere in his letters, Paul holds up moral exemplars to inspire Christians to think and behave in ways consistent with their life in Christ. In Philippians, Paul presents Jesus, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and himself to the Philippians as examples of godly thinking and conduct. The specific examples prove that none of these people would have been considered exemplars by those who are not in Christ. Thus, the letter to the Philippians demonstrates that one of the facets of intellectual virtue unique to Christians is the specific exemplars they admire and imitate. In addition to practicing the virtues of love, discernment and practical wisdom, Christians are formed by imitating the intellectual virtues of Christian exemplars.

In order to discuss moral exemplarism, we need to understand Paul's vision of moral formation. In addition to what has already been shown in Romans and 1 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians offers an essential glimpse into the nature of intellectual formation, both because it is one of Paul's earlier letters, forming a nice bookend with Philippians, and because it so clearly portrays the process of life change that occurs among those who are in Christ. A brief discussion of 1 Thessalonians will set the stage for understanding Paul's teaching on moral exemplarism in Philippians.

## **Intellectual Formation**

### **Intellectual Formation in 1 Thessalonians**

James Thompson takes 1 Thessalonians as the template for Paul's vision of formation. The letter begins with an assessment of the moral progress in the church (chs. 1-3) and then turns to discuss instructions for the future (chs. 4-5).<sup>1</sup> This is the third episode of Paul's ongoing relationship with the church and he uses this letter to take an

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<sup>1</sup> The following paragraph is a summary of Thompson's research in chap. 3. *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 63–87.

assessment from the perspective of a parent raising children into maturity (2:9-13), using familial and peripatetic language instead of traditional parenetic instruction. After praying that God would “establish [their] hearts blameless in holiness (εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας ἀμέμπτους ἐν ἀγιωσύνη)” (3:13), at the end of the letter Paul prays again that God would “sanctify them completely (ἀγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὀλοτελείς)” (5:23).

Through the rest of the letter as well, holiness is the outer framework (4:7) and goal (4:3) for moral development. What’s unique in Paul’s language though, is that he repeatedly refers to them as “saints (ἅγιοι)” (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2), which Thompson takes to be an indication of the connection between identity and ethics.<sup>2</sup> As the Thessalonians continue to walk in faith, hope, and love, they continue to be formed into the image of Christ. Paul gives specific instruction for the way individual churches should go about doing this in the second half of his letters, but the pattern of formation is the same. The themes of abstaining from sexual immorality and the family metaphor for the church “remain a constant feature of Paul’s moral teaching.”<sup>3</sup> The moral practices are very different between Christians and non-Christians; this theme runs through all of Paul’s letters, but 1 Thessalonians shows that formation takes place differently for Christians as well, primarily because of the influence of the Holy Spirit.

### **Formation in the Ancient World**

Paul’s model in 1 Thessalonians shows similarities with other understandings of intellectual formation in the ancient world. Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics all had nuanced versions of the same general theory; put simply, education and practice will bring about virtue. They differed significantly in degrees and emphases, Aristotle pressing the importance of practice and the Stoics insisting on education, but they agreed

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<sup>2</sup> Thompson is by no means alone in this point. Dunn uses the terms indicative and imperative on this point, following Furnish Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 626–34; Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 224–27. Schnelle roots ethics and moral formation in the reality of the “new being.” Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, 546–58.

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 86.

on the central point that intellectual formation is a combination of determining a good and then learning and being taught how to pursue it.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle lays out a theory of moral formation that was extremely influential in the ancient world, and one that may provide clarity to the background in which Paul was writing. In Book I, Aristotle takes up the issue of whether or not virtue can be taught. This depends on where it comes from and where it is aimed. In the opening line, Aristotle writes, “Every skill (τέχνη) and every inquiry (μέθοδος), and similarly every action (πράξις) and rational choice (προαίρεσις), is thought to aim at some good; and so the good has been aptly described as that at which everything aims.”<sup>4</sup> He goes on to detail the nature of a good end, the way that ends are pursued, and how human beings are attenuated to that end, and as he does, a question arises: how do human beings know what the good is?

It is not an intuitive point that all human actions and desires aim at some good. In fact, it seems unlikely, anecdotally. However, this opening statement should be nuanced by two insights that emerge later in *Nicomachean Ethics*. First, this statement can be read aspirationally. Every human action should be directed toward *the* good, the one that Aristotle will go on to describe and define in book one; εὐδαιμονία, or the life of virtue. Second, every person moves toward what they think is the good. Whether they can articulate it or not, Aristotle believed that each person had a vision of the good that they pursue. Here, Aristotle makes a foundational point for his system of ethics. People learn what is good through education that comes by formal instruction and experience. This is the only way to overcome the passions.<sup>5</sup> It is also the only way to correct flawed visions of the good.

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<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2014, 1094a.

<sup>5</sup> “So, in any subject the person educated in it is a good judge of that subject, and the person educated in all subjects is a good judge without qualification.” Aristotle, 1094b28-1095a2. Aristotle also devotes Book 7 to the related problem of ἀκρασία, the weakness of the moral will. He concludes that the same person cannot be practically wise (φρόνιμος) and unrestrained (ἀκρατής). 1152a7-9.

According to Aristotle, virtue is a disposition, predicated on natural capacities and developed through education. The result of this education is that each person is attuned to the good, and has desires to pursue it. These moral intuitions, then, are even more deeply integrated than the practice of reason. Therefore, the good person takes pleasure in pursuing the good and practicing virtue. The habits learned through education are then utilized in developing virtuous character.<sup>6</sup>

For Aristotle, then, the end is fixed on the good. But how should each person pursue what is good? By practicing virtue, particularly the intellectual virtue of φρόνησις. For Aristotle, φρόνησις is the virtue that governs the process of deciding which means will lead to the fixed end of the good. The wise person is able to identify the destination of εὐδαιμονία and discern the most virtuous route to get there. The motivating factor for pursuing φρόνησις comes through philosophical education.

### **The Stoics on Epistemic Formation**

The Stoics present another important vision of epistemic formation in the ancient world. A survey of the differences between Aristotle and the Stoics will follow a summary of their unique contributions to moral formations.

The Stoics center their conception of virtue on the deliverances of reason. Moral lapses come from lapses in reason. The virtuous person reasons perfectly all the time. The biggest point of disagreement between Aristotle and many of the Stoics is the role of reason in virtue. Aristotle and Chrysippus agree that “right reason,” ὀρθός λόγος, is essential to virtue.<sup>7</sup> Cicero also emphasizes the role of “recta ratio” in the *Republic* and the *Laws*.<sup>8</sup> The difference is Chrysippus and later Stoics believed that reason alone was

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<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, 1095b14-1096a10; See John Cooper on this point; “They will thereby turn those early habits into fully virtuous states of character.” Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom*, 77–78; Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 136–38.

<sup>7</sup> See Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 1103b, 1114b-1114a; Chrysippus, *Stoicus* 3.4.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of Cicero’s view of reason in the context of natural law, see Brüllman, “The Stoics,” 11–14.

sufficient for virtue. In fact, the two become virtually synonymous. Aristotle believes that reason is necessary but not sufficient for virtue. This debate over the sufficiency of reason for virtue is one of the most important and enduring questions in ancient philosophy, and it is not easily settled.<sup>9</sup>

The Stoics bring another major contribution to moral formation. They believed virtue comes from living “according to nature,” as discussed in the section of chapter 3 on Romans 1:26-27. This idea is found in Plato but does not play a significant role in Aristotle.<sup>10</sup> In addition to Aristotle’s notion that education is the path to virtue, the Stoics asserted there was also something innate in humanity that was driven to virtue.

Against this backdrop, several similarities and differences emerge in 1 Thessalonians. Paul does not adopt either of these schemes directly. In 1 Thessalonians, though, he does exhibit a similar framework. Like the Greeks, Paul does believe that there is a defined moral end worth pursuing; “this is God’s will for you, your sanctification” (1 Thess 4:3).<sup>11</sup> Paul uses sanctification almost interchangeably with being conformed to Christ’s image and example (1 Cor 1:30). Paul ends the letter this way; “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely” (5:23). Paul’s moral vision is starkly different than Aristotle’s on one point. His vision is not of a static life of virtue or contemplation (*θεωρία*), but of a person. Becoming like Christ is the good. Here, Paul more closely resembles the Stoics. This is God’s will for Christians. The difficulty is discerning the means to that end. Paul emphasizes the process of discernment later when he tells the church, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything (*πάντα δὲ δοκιμάζετε*); hold fast what is good” (5:19-21). The process of testing and discerning is the means of sanctification, and this process is something only

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<sup>9</sup> For a summary of this question, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 370–90.

<sup>10</sup> Plato uses this in reference to sexuality. See *Phaedrus*, 250e and *Laws*, 636c.

<sup>11</sup> Sanctification is a common end goal in Paul’s letters for Christians to pursue. See especially Rom 6:19-22; 2 Cor 5:26; 2 Thess 2:13.

Christians can engage in (Rom 12:1-3).

The process of sanctification, which Paul gives a few specific examples of following his general statement in 1 Thess. 4:3, is a matter of discerning what to do to become more like Christ, or to walk in a manner worthy of this called as he says elsewhere, in everyday life.

On the structural level, this process is very similar to the philosophers, but the content is markedly different.<sup>12</sup> Although some of the Greeks conceived of divine intervention in moral formation, Epictetus being the most important example, there is no Greco-Roman equivalent for the way Paul describes the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Moral formation in Paul.** Philippians fits into this framework as well. In the beginning of the letter, Paul assures them that God will continue the work of formation he began in them (1:6), prays that they will be pure and blameless, filled with the fruit of righteousness on the day of Christ (1:10-11), and he exhorts them to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel (1:27). This opening chapter is the most overt statement of Paul's program of moral formation. Unlike 1 Thessalonians, though, in Philippians, Paul gives a detailed picture of the intervening stages of moral formation, specifically the imitation of godly exemplars.

### **Philippians and Epistemic Formation**

Like 1 Thessalonians, Philippians offers unique insights in the way Paul talked about intellectual formation. In particular, Philippians features some of Paul's most explicit discussion of the virtues of discernment and practical wisdom. In Philippians, moral formation is aimed at a uniquely Christian version of *φρόνησις* and it is developed by imitating Christ and other godly exemplars by the leading of the Spirit.

### **Epistemic Formation in Philippians**

How does Paul believe that Christians form and develop their epistemic

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<sup>12</sup> Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 227–41.



virtues? Formation is essential to the goal Paul sets forth in Philippians, to present the church blameless at the return of Christ (1:6, 10; 2:16-17). Indeed, this is his goal throughout all of his letters and in his church planting ministry (Col 1:28-29; Rom 1:5, 15:14-20).<sup>13</sup> The two central factors of formation that emerge in the letter are the Holy Spirit and suffering.<sup>14</sup> Both of these factors find their greatest exposition in the life of Christ, and Paul himself presents a compelling subordinate picture. Both of these factors characterize the Christian life.

This combination of the Spirit and suffering forms the seedbed for the believers' growth.<sup>15</sup> Holloway lists three implications prescient for Philippians.<sup>16</sup> First, the work of both factors leads to the same outcome, increasing Christ-likeness. Second, the end of this path in Christ's own life, death, and resurrection was glorification, and Paul sees every believer as moving toward this same goal.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Holloway argues that suffering and the Holy Spirit produce consolation. He sees grief at the center of Paul's dialogue with the Philippians over time.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Fee identifies this theme; "that the Philippians as a community of believers in Philippi will live the 'righteousness' of the gospel in the present as they await its consummation." Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 52.

<sup>14</sup> Holloway roots both of these factors in Paul's study of the prophets, suffering in the book of Daniel and extending throughout the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, and the Holy Spirit from Ezekiel, specifically 36:27f. Paul A. Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 27–28. For a comprehensive overview of suffering in the context of this letter, see Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 29–34.

<sup>15</sup> "At this point what is theologically at stake in Philippians is the twin reality of the Philippians' present suffering and of the (apparent) diminution of their clear vision of the sure future that awaits." Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 28–29.

<sup>17</sup> Holloway also proposes less plausible interpretations. For example, that believers undergo an "angelomorphic transformation" drawing on Daniel's apocalyptic prophecies. He makes the excellent point that there is more going on in believers than moral improvement, but risks losing the thread suggesting that Christ-likeness involves becoming an angel. For example, "Paul did not mean by this, however, that the transformation of Christ-believers in this life was simply moral—an all-too-common rationalizing interpretation of Paul's thoroughly mythological thinking—but rather that Christ-believers were becoming angels as it were from the inside out." Holloway, 48–52.

<sup>18</sup> This point will be considered below, but it's worth mentioning now that here and other places in Paul's letters, grief and consolation do take on a unique role against the popular consolations of the Greco-Roman world. Seneca, for example, while similar to Paul on many questions of morality, could not be more different in his letters of comfort. See the collection of consolations included in Seneca:

**Community and intellectual formation.** Another theme must be added to the discussion of Spirit and suffering to round out Paul’s exhortations to the Philippians. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, Paul conceived of spiritual growth and the practice of intellectual virtues in community. Philippians exhibits this same conclusion. Paul’s goal is not just that each individual would behave in a more unifying way, but that the community of believers might actually be unified. Indeed, it is impossible to carry out many of the commands and examples in Philippians in isolation. Paul conceives of love, discernment, and practical wisdom lived out in the relationships and community of the church.

This theme is embodied in the way Paul emphasizes the *κοινωνία* of the believers in this letter (1:5, 7; 2:1, 3:10; 4:14-15).<sup>19</sup> The mutual sharing embodied in the way Paul uses the word, *κοινωνία*, is a central part not just of the existence of the church, but of the reflexive relationship between the growth of the church and the growth of the individual Christians within the church.<sup>20</sup>

Some commentators have identified Philippians as a “family letter” because of

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Hardship and Happiness, specifically his consolation to his mother Helvia. In noticing the similarities between Philippians and Seneca’s Consolation to Helvia, Holloway writes, “I would even go so far as to argue that Philippians is not simply a letter of consolation but a particular type of letter of consolation in which a sufferer writes to console those grieved by the sufferer’s own misfortune.” Holloway, 34–35; Seneca, *Hardship and Happiness*, trans. Elaine Fantham et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Martin discusses the different ways that *κοινωνία* should be understood in Philippians ranging from “generosity” to “fellowship.” Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 51–56.

<sup>20</sup> Thompson gives an extended and excellent remark on the importance of fellowship and community; “Paul describes this communal consciousness twice with forms of *koinōnia* (1:5, 7), a term that was familiar to readers who would have probably associated the term with a partnership among friends. As Paul’s usage throughout Philippians indicates (see 3:10; 4:14–15), the term takes on a new meaning in Christ. It is not the normal partnership between friends who choose each other but a partnership only through Jesus Christ. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer declares, ‘Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ’ (1954, 21). As Paul indicates, partnership involves participating in the sufferings of Christ (cf. 3:10; 4:14), which is inseparable from partnership in his grace (1:7). It results in the warm affections (1:7–8; 4:1) within the community and the sharing of financial resources (1:5; 4:15).” James W. Thompson, *Philippians and Philemon*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 34.

the tone and familiarity Paul employs.<sup>21</sup> The themes of the letter suit this classification too. Fee observes, “in terms of *content* it carries on conversation at a much deeper level of friendship” than Paul’s other letters, excluding the letters to Timothy.<sup>22</sup>

Communal identity, then, is a major factor in formation as well. Groups are bound together by shared stories and purposes. In Philippians, specifically, Fee points out that theology is cast in narrative form.<sup>23</sup> Again, this is virtually equivalent to asserting that theology in Philippians is exemplary. In Paul’s theology, the church is bound together by a shared person - or rather by being the share of a person. All Christians are in Christ and all Christians imitate Christ. This is the most fundamental source of group identity. It is this shared community identity that develops φρόνησις.<sup>24</sup>

### **Discernment in Philippians**

As we’ve seen in Romans and 1 Corinthians, discernment, the process of determining God’s will and his voice, is one of the virtues that Christians can practice in Christ by the work of the Spirit. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul exhorts the church to discern the specific things that God has called them to in the course of their sanctification. Philippians reveals continuity with this use of the virtue of discernment and also offers some unique insights in the way Paul describes the process of discernment and the way he might contrast with the philosophers of his day.

In the opening paragraph of his letter to the Philippians, Paul assures the Philippians of their moral formation in Christ. He thanks God in his prayers for them and assures them God will bring the work he began to completion (ἐπιτελέσει) (1:6). This

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<sup>21</sup> For the origin and evidence for this form in the papyri, see Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 32–38; Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 2–4; Thompson, *Philippians and Philemon*, 10–14.

<sup>22</sup> Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Fee, 47. The main impetus for this suggestion is the large portion of Philippians that is illustrated by events from Paul’s own life and ministry. It’s interesting that Philippians and 1 Thessalonians are both heavily illustrated by personal example.

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, *Philippians and Philemon*, 19.

idea of bringing something to completion, to its end, is a familiar idea in Greek moral development. As has already been seen in Romans and 1 Corinthians, one of the unique features of this vision of moral formation is the guidance and the assurance of the Holy Spirit toward the end that he desires.<sup>25</sup> Only God can bring about this change through his Spirit. No human being can practice φρόνησις or learn to discern on their own.

One of essential questions is whether or not God guides individual transformation and sanctification.<sup>26</sup> The whole of Paul's work indicates that while Paul may be referring to the church as a whole, here, he does believe that God works on the individual level to bring about transformation. The secondary question, then, is whether or not Paul is in fact asserting that here. It's clear from other texts like 2 Cor 5:17, Gal 2:20, and later in Phil 3:7-11 that God does guide transformation on the individual level. It's difficult to tell whether Paul means to apply this promise to each individual believer in Philippi.<sup>27</sup>

The closest parallel is probably Galatians 3:3 which adds another important aspect to this assurance.<sup>28</sup> The transformation of believes begins, continues, and ends through the work of the Spirit. He will guarantee this good work, individually or collectively, toward its completion.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Thompson, 29–30.

<sup>26</sup> It's important to stop and consider who God is going to bring to completion. Is this the church or the individual Christians? The plural pronouns in many places in Paul's letters can give rise to this question. Holloway argues that this passage should be read with the individual Christians in mind, both on the merits of this individual assertion and on similar passages elsewhere; "The phrase I have translated 'within you' (ἐν ὑμῖν) might also be translated 'among you.' It would then convey a corporate meaning, something like: 'he who began a good work at Philippi.' I have translated it as I have because of Paul's characteristic emphasis on the transformation of the individual. Paul returns to this theme in 2:13: 'for God is the one working within you [ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν].' The correlatives ἐναρξάμενος ('began') and ἐπιτελέσει ('will continue to perfect') reflect Paul's belief that God is involved in the Christ-believer's transformation from beginning to end." Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 75.

<sup>27</sup> Thompson argues this should be read corporately, not just in this particular church, but in the whole church, emphasizing the narrative lifespan of the church, guided by God from beginning to end. Thompson, *Philippians and Philemon*, 29–30.

<sup>28</sup> Compare "ὁ ἐναρξάμενος ἐν ὑμῖν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐπιτελέσει" in Phil 1:6 with "ἐναρξάμενοι πνεύματι νῦν σαρκὶ ἐπιτελείσθε" in Gal 3:3. These are the only two places where Paul uses ἐνάρχομαι.

<sup>29</sup> "The perseverance of the saints rests on the perseverance of God with the saints." J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press,

What is the end of this good work that Paul describes to the Philippians?

Commentators have proposed various offerings for what this good work might be, including salvation, the use of spiritual gifts, and transformation into the image of Christ.<sup>30</sup>

As important as the nature of the good work is, even if it is unclear, the implications of God's work of bringing it to completion are very clear later in this pericope. In vs. 9-11, Paul writes that his prayer is for their love to abound in knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις) and discernment (αἴσθησις) in order to discern, or approve, the things of the highest worth (εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα).<sup>31</sup> Paul prays nearly the exact same prayer in Colossians 1:9 “ἵνα πληρωθῆτε τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ συνέσει πνευματικῇ” and again in Ephesians 1:8, “ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ φρονήσει.” Once again, Paul is asserting that discernment comes through the work of God and is unique to believers.<sup>32</sup> Notice how close these prayers are to the standard list of intellectual virtues in Greco-Roman philosophy.<sup>33</sup> Paul prays that Christians would

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1984), 45.

<sup>30</sup> For examples of these positions, see; “Most likely, therefore, the term points to their ‘salvation in Christ,’ and in this case is yet another way of speaking about their ‘participating in the gospel’—not so much about their sharing it, but about their experiencing it and living it out in Philippi,” Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 87. “It is possible to take a good work as an allusion to the Philippians’ participation in the apostolic ministry by their gifts.” Martin also recognizes that this participation either in the gifts or in financial support of Paul’s ministry flows from the good work of God in bringing them to salvation. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction*, 66–67. J.B. Lightfoot shares this position. J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913), 83–84. “God will bring the church to an end at the day of Christ (1:6; cf. 1:10). In the present, the church is being transformed into the image of God’s son (cf. Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 3:18) and sanctified by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Thess. 3:11–13),” Thompson, *Philippians and Philemon*, 30; Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 75.

<sup>31</sup> Paul prays almost the exact same thing in Colossians 1:9. There is a subtle, but helpful difference in the way Paul uses and contrasts ἐπίγνωσις and γνώσις in his letters. Lightfoot observes that ἐπίγνωσις denotes a “larger and more thorough knowledge.” J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 8th ed (London: Macmillan and Co, 1886), 136; In places, ἐπίγνωσις takes on a more specific referent to the perfection of knowledge, which is found in the knowledge of God. Thompson, *Philippians and Philemon*, 32; Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 99–100.

<sup>32</sup> This is very similar to the argument Paul makes in Romans 12:2, “εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον.” See chapter 4 for a discussion of this statement and Paul’s use of the word, δοκιμάζω.

<sup>33</sup> In Book VI of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle includes skill (τέχνη), scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), practical wisdom (φρόνησις), wisdom (σοφία), and reason (νοῦς). Cicero shortens the list of virtues to four all of which lead to wisdom (sapiential): practical wisdom (prudentia) or wisdom, justice

practice three out of the four within these three prayers; σοφία, φρόνησις, and σύνεσις, are all present in this list. The components of Paul’s understanding of Christian epistemology comes through again in this opening section. Those who are in Christ, by the work of the Holy Spirit, are capable of discerning the will of God.

After moving through this first part of the prayer, Paul describes the goal of growing in knowledge and wisdom; to approve what is excellent. This is another familiar phrase in 1:10; “δοκιμάζειν τὰ διαφέροντα” is found in Rom 2:18. Here, Paul makes it clear that discernment is one of the goals of the Christian life; it’s something he prays that God would give to the Christians in Philippi. By implication, he urges the church in Corinth to use this kind of discernment. In Romans, he makes clear that this is a pinnacle of Christian transformation.

This is a difficult phrase to grasp in the way that Paul uses it. This case, unclouded by the rhetorical puzzles of Rom 2:18, presents the likeliest instance that Paul is directly referencing Stoic doctrine. Just as the Stoic sage must differentiate between things that matter (τὰ ἀδιάφορα) and things that do not (τὰ διαφέροντα), Christians must be able to discern what is most important. Here Paul commends to the church learning to discern things that matter most. Conceptually, this passage evokes one of Paul’s final encouragements to the church in this letter, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (4:8).

### **Practical Wisdom in Philippians**

Of all of Paul’s letters, Philippians has the most prominent and thorough treatment of intellectual virtue, guided by Paul’s repetitive use of the verb φρονέω. Ralph Martin deems it Paul’s favorite verb in this letter, and it would be hard to disagree. Paul

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(iustitia), fortitude (fortitūdō), and temperance (temperantia). *De Officiis*, 1.15.

not only uses the word ten times in this short letter, but more significantly, he utilizes it in every discussion and in every chapter. The themes of Philippians are coiled around this Christian intellectual virtue. Paul's concern is not just that the Philippians stand united in their doctrine, humility, pursuit of Christ, or their financial support of his ministry, but that they band together with one mind, thinking the way Christians think, and having the very mindset of Christ. Thompson summarizes this point in Philippians, but could be speaking of Christian intellectual formation in totality, "Just as knowledge without love is not edifying (see 1 Cor. 8:1; 13:2), love without knowledge is not beneficial... for formation involves continued conceptual understanding of the will of God."<sup>34</sup> The combination of love and knowledge is a core fusion that produces all of Christian intellectual virtue.

One of Paul's most prominent goals in Philippians is to encourage the church to continue developing a Christian *φρόνησις*. Thompson focuses on this central aspect of moral and intellectual formation in Philippians; "In the first argument, he appeals not to Scripture but to the community's story, indicating that the community can be of one mind if it recalls the mind it has in Christ. Paul's desire is to develop a common *phronēsis*, or moral reasoning, that is contrary to the dominant *phronēsis* in the society. He argues both from example and from the new *phronēsis* that comes with the story of Christ."<sup>35</sup> This theme occupies the body of the letter (2:1-4:1) and emerges as the dominant theme in Paul's examples and exhortations.

It is possible to be even more specific about Paul's method than Thompson. His two categories are actually a single technique Paul uses to foster the intellectual

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<sup>34</sup> Thompson, *Philippians and Philemon*, 32; On this same point, Holloway points out that Paul does not set love and knowledge in opposition here as he does in 1 Cor 1:8, for example, but that he sees mature discernment as an outgrowth of love. Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 77–78; On the connection of love to the intellectual virtues, Lightfoot remarks, "Love imparts a sensitiveness of touch, gives a keen edge to the discriminating faculty, in things moral and spiritual." Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, 86.

<sup>35</sup> Thompson, *Philippians and Philemon*, 16.

formation of the believers in Philippi: exemplarism. The passages Thompson points to as “the story of Christ” actually exhibit the example of Christ. Of course, the story of Christ is both significant and powerful, but it is not the main factor in Paul’s moral teaching. He uses the direct action of Christ to call his churches to live like Christ lived. As is the case in Romans 6:11, Paul is not just calling his Christian readers to reflect on a set of historical facts, but to act on a present reality, to think in a new way. Here, Paul gives them the example of Christ’s actions and his mindset so that they have a moral exemplar to imitate. Paul calls on the Philippians to act out their part in the style of Christ, who when faced with similar circumstances humbled himself and considered others more significant than himself (2:4-11).

It’s easy to miss the central pastoral concern of the letter to the Philippians, which Paul does not get to until the first verses of the fourth chapter. On a practical note, he exhorts Euodia and Syntyche to agree (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν) in the Lord. “Agree” might obscure the similarity this encouragement has with the rest of the letter. Paul asks them to “think the same” or to “have the same mindset” in the Lord.<sup>36</sup> This is exactly the same thing he tells the congregation generally in 1:27 and 2:2, “πληρώσατέ μου τὴν χαρὰν ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε,” and serves as a theme through the letter. Paul wants them to think and reason in line with what he prayed for them in the opening verses.<sup>37</sup>

Paul gives little indication as to the nature of their dispute, and interestingly, does not offer any specific mediation.<sup>38</sup> He summarily exhorts them to agree *in the Lord*.

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<sup>36</sup> Mitchell discusses the similarity between Paul’s phrase in 1 Corinthians 1:10, “τῷ αὐτῷ νοῷ” and the popular technical term, “ὁμόνοια.” This term connoted political unity and stability in the polis. Here, Paul uses different terms, “τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε” and “τὸ ἐν φρονοῦντες” but invokes a similar meaning. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 76.

<sup>37</sup> This is not uncommon in Paul. The opening prayers often serve as a preview of the contents of the letter.

<sup>38</sup> Commentators have offered varying guesses as to what the situation might have been. Clearly these two women were familiar to Paul, as was their situation, likely from Epaphroditus’ report. Lightfoot suggests that these women may have been deaconesses, certainly leaders of some kind. *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians*, 158. See Fee for a thorough discussion of this specific situation in Philippi. *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 389–91.



This parameter is not simply a way of speaking, but the condition under which he envisions the conflict being solved.

In the example Paul gives of Jesus in 2:4-11 consideration for others can be viewed as a potential aid to conflict management. This exhortation is also presented in terms of thinking. Humility is a “mindset” or a “way of thinking” as well, “τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ” and it is also confined, *in the Lord*. What is evident in both of these exhortations is that the mindset Paul appeals to can only be had in Christ, and second, that it’s not just a way of acting but a way of thinking that Paul expects Christians to practice; he wants them to practice intellectual virtues among and toward one another.

The same thing occurs when Paul uses his own thoughts and actions as examples, and when he uses Timothy and Epaphroditus. “Argument from example” was a common way of teaching in the ancient world, and Paul utilizes it here, and elsewhere, as an aid to moral and intellectual formation by the power of the Spirit.<sup>39</sup>

## Exemplarism

### Exemplarism in the Ancient World

To understand the various conceptions of moral formation in the ancient world, we must understand their exemplars and heroes. Who did the ancients admire? The most obvious and prominent examples are the heroes in the great epics, Achilles, Odysseus, and Aeneas, the characters of legend and myth like Diomedes and Theseus who display the virtues of courage and honor, and even those like Agamemnon, Ajax, and Prometheus who serve as warnings either through their vices or misfortunes. For hundreds of years

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<sup>39</sup> “At this point what is theologically at stake in Philippians is the twin reality of the Philippians’ present suffering and of the (apparent) diminution of their clear vision of the sure future that awaits.” Great example in 3:18-19 of the danger of a false mindset. Thompson, *Philippians and Philemon*, 16–17.

the Homeric epics served as a treasury of moral exemplars in the ancient world and a standard for the moral virtues.

Even in the time of Aristotle, these epics and others served as templates and common references to appeal to, and many of these same men and women remain exemplary today.

Some of the clearest instances of exemplarism in the ancient come in the dedications and intentions of moral works. Many authors dedicated their *magna opi* to their children, in the hope that their sons would follow their example and their moral advice. Aristotle dedicated his great ethical work, *Nicomachean Ethics*, to his son Nicomachus. Cicero wrote *On Duties* to and for his son Marcus.

Marcus Aurelius opened the *Meditations* thanking his exemplars and mentors for their role in forming his moral character. He thanks his mentors in the beginning of the *Meditations*, but he also includes the gods, for the gift of grandfathers, fortune, and guidance. This tradition in the later Stoics which is exemplified in Rufus and Epictetus, closely resembles the Christian understanding of God's role in moral formation and as has been detailed in Paul's writings the role of the Spirit in the moral formation of believers.

### **Plutarch and Epistemic Exemplarism**

Dating back to the Homeric epics, moral examples served as commonly as ethical instruction as sources of moral instruction.<sup>40</sup> These stories and common exemplars played the role of moral education Aristotle discusses in Books 1-2 of *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to Aristotle, moral education builds upon emotions and desires that have been educated to desire the good. This is done through looking up to the right

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<sup>40</sup> For a more complete discussion of the role of history in ancient moral instruction, see Charles W. Hedrick, Jr., "Imitating Virtue and Avoiding Vice: Ethical Functions of Biography, History, and Philosophy," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought*, by Ryan K. Balot (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 421–39; M. J. Edwards and Simon Swain, eds., *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

exemplars. It may have been that Aristotle saw the way Socrates had been revered and portrayed in the decades after his death as both Plato and Xenophon presented portraits of their teacher to the masses.<sup>41</sup>

More than any other writer in antiquity, Plutarch offers an example of moral formation through exemplarism. Biography was a common form of moral teaching in the ancient world and was given its fullest exposition in Plutarch's *Lives of Noble Greeks and Romans*, written in the early second century AD. Plutarch refined extant concepts of moral formation by developing a new genre of exemplary storytelling, the "life," which consisted of a short biography of a Greek and a Roman followed by a short essay comparing the two and making moral observations. What's most important about Plutarch's portraits is not their deeds done, battles won, or mark on history, but their virtues and vices.<sup>42</sup> Each figure is "evaluated according to the manner in which he has led his life, not – or at least not simply – in terms of what he has accomplished."<sup>43</sup> Diogenes Laertius did something similar in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, but concentrated on philosophers and idealized his subjects. Not so with Plutarch. The humanness of Plutarch's portraits is second only to real friendship. In the opening of the lives of Timoleon and Aemilius Paulus, Plutarch writes, "I have continued... using the narrative as a kind of mirror in some way to improve and assimilate my life to the virtue of these men."<sup>44</sup>

In "Can Virtue Be Taught" Plutarch draws from the Platonic tradition, of which he considered himself a part, and the broader Socratic school. Like Aristotle and

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<sup>41</sup> Portraits of Socrates certainly influenced Plutarch's thinking and style. See the discussion around the example of Alcibiades in Sophia Xenophontos, *Ethical Education in Plutarch: Moralising Agents and Contexts* (Göttingen: De Gruyter, 2016), 11–17.

<sup>42</sup> For the best examination of Plutarch's interest in virtue, see Philip A. Stadter, *Plutarch and His Roman Readers* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), especially, 214f.

<sup>43</sup> Stadter, 216.

<sup>44</sup> Translated in Stadter, 231.

the Stoics, he concludes that virtue can and must be taught, in contrast to two prominent Socratic philosophers, Crito and Simon.<sup>45</sup>

In this essay, Plutarch treats virtue (*ἀρετή*), the good life (*ὁ εὖ βίος*), and practical wisdom (*φρόνησις*) interchangeably. They all describe the praiseworthy life, the one of nobility and virtue. While neither of these essays is technical philosophy and Plutarch never lectured like the Stoic philosophers, they both encompass the themes of moral education common in the Greco-Roman world of the first century.

The use of “lives” to teach virtue became common in Greco-Roman literature and is not totally foreign in the New Testament gospels.<sup>46</sup> Sookgoo Shin has applied this framework of moral progress in Plutarch to the gospel of John.<sup>47</sup> Combining Plutarch’s earlier work, the *Moralia*, with the *Lives*, he argues that the purpose of the *Lives* is to illustrate concepts the readers are already familiar with and encourage them to imitate the moral qualities over time.<sup>48</sup> One commonality between Plutarch and John is that both authors saw moral progress as a journey over time. In his analysis of the gospel of John, he finds evidence of progress in the disciples based on their imitation of Jesus and their obedience to his teaching.<sup>49</sup>

These similarities are instructive in the way that ancient authors thought about

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<sup>45</sup> Hembold makes this point in his introduction to the essay. Crito wrote an essay titled, “That Men Are Not Made Good by Instruction” and Simon wrote, “That Virtue Cannot Be Taught,” each mentioned by Diogenes Laertius, 2.121-122. All translations of “Can Virtue Be Taught” will be taken from this volume. Plutarch, *Moralia*, trans. W. C. Helmbold, vol. 4, LCL 337 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), 2–3.

<sup>46</sup> This is not to say that the Plutarch knew of or copied the style of the gospel writers, who also pioneered new genres. One other key difference is the difference in time. Plutarch did not write about living people but focused on well-known figures of Greek and Roman history. The most recent of his subjects died in the first century BCE; Caesar, Brutus, Pompey, Marc Antony, Cicero. The gospel writers were within a generation of the death of Christ, within a century by even the latest proposals.

<sup>47</sup> Sookgoo Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

<sup>48</sup> Shin, 45–47.

<sup>49</sup> “What these contrasts between chs. 1-12 and chs. 13-17 show is that the author of John’s Gospel clearly portrays discipleship as a journey progressing towards the goal of imitating Jesus.” For a summary of Shin’s comparison between moral progress in John and Plutarch, see Shin, 47–50.

moral formation through the use of exemplars. Philippians and 1 Thessalonians both display similar characteristics. Paul knew the people in each of these churches and commends his own life to them as an example. He draws moral lessons from his decisions and behavior while he was there and builds on that common trust and experience to continue to instruct them by using his own life as an example while he is away from the church.

### **Modern Theories of Moral Exemplarism**

Similar themes and techniques have been used by modern epistemologists to develop formal theories of moral exemplars. Linda Zagzebski's book, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, is currently the most sophisticated system of exemplarist epistemology.<sup>50</sup> Zagzebski's system is brilliantly simple: virtue is developed by imitating admirable exemplars. These two components do require some nuance. Human beings admire exemplars for their virtues, which Zagzebski defines with two stipulations: they possess deep and enduring moral traits that endure through future reflections and they have reliable success in achieving and displaying virtuous ends.<sup>51</sup> People who possess these qualities inspire admiration in others and that turns into a desire to emulate. Human beings are emotionally and cognitively drawn to emulate those who they admire. During this process of admiration, the emulators develop an ideal vision of their own virtue and

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<sup>50</sup> Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*; Though there is a tradition of exemplarism in philosophy and ethics, there are few as robust and philosophically rigorous as Zagzebski's work. She lists the following as dialogue partners: J. O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," in *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed. A. I. Melden (Seattle: Washington University Press, 1958), 198–216; A. I. Melden, "Saints and Supererogation," in *Philosophy and Life: Essays on John Wisdom*, ed. Ilham Dilman (The Hague: Kluwer Academics, 1984), 61–79; Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8 (1982): 419–39; Larissa MacFarquhar, *Strangers Drowning: Grappling with Impossible Idealism, Drastic Choices, and the Overpowering Urge to Help* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015); Exemplarism has a wide treatment in the psychological literature. For an overview and bibliography, see Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Christian B. Miller, eds., *Virtue and Character*, *Moral Psychology* 5 (Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books, 2017); Exemplarist theory plays a large role in history and leadership as well beginning with Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840); For more recent studies and the pushback to the "great man theory" see B. A. Spector, "Carlyle, Freud, and the Great Man Theory More Fully Considered," *Leadership* 12, no. 2 (2016): 250–60.

<sup>51</sup> For discussions of these two stipulations of virtuous exemplars, see Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 99–110.

begin to act in pursuit of it.<sup>52</sup> This is a common point among the ancient philosophers, beginning with Aristotle and going through the late Stoics.<sup>53</sup> Rationalization of the virtues follows the emotional impulse to admire exemplars and over time, people re-evaluate their exemplary role models through the lens of this developing understanding of virtue.

In Zagzebski's account φρόνησις plays a central role. Because of the overarching and mediatorial role this virtue plays for Aristotle, and in Zagzebski's own system on intellectual virtue, it can only be partially acquired through emulation, for no one exemplar perfectly embodies it.<sup>54</sup> Personal reflection and growth are required to learn φρόνησις, in addition to imitating exemplars.

The process of admiration and emulation serves as a useful scaffolding for understanding Paul's theory of moral exemplarism, particularly in Philippians. He asserts that Christians both admire and seek to emulate Christ and those who act like him because of the leading of the Holy Spirit.

### **Moral Exemplarism in Philippians**

The one pastoral concern in Philippians is personal strife that has arisen between two of the prominent women in the church. Paul does not even mention this until the fourth chapter, and then only for two verses. From a broader standpoint, though, he addresses a general situation of disunity throughout the letter, but unlike his other epistles, this disunity is not rooted in doctrinal difference, false teaching, or church

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<sup>52</sup> Zagzebski, 134–39.

<sup>53</sup> For two examinations of this feature within Greco-Roman philosophy, see Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom*; Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, and Fate* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> Throughout her account, Zagzebski resists naming one virtue as the most important to emulate. She considers φρόνησις in Aristotle, ren in Confucianism, and charity in Christianity with equal deference. This is one of the major distinctions between Zagzebski's theory and one derived from the New Testament, as will be shown later in this chapter. These higher virtues require a personal synthesis, since they cannot be found in one person; "At some point in our moral development, we will do less emulating and more self-reflective management." Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 155.

discipline; the issue in Philippi is personal.<sup>55</sup>

It is in this context, that Paul's exemplars make the most sense. He utilizes the examples that come to mind in his own life and those of his associates that display the unity that can only be found in Christ. In the most powerful exemplary exhortation of the letter, he reminds them of Jesus' own example of humility and self-sacrifice. Paul knows that these examples not only appeal to the Philippians because of their admiration of Christ and their affection for Paul and his partners, but because they appeal to the work of the Spirit already going on in their hearts. Here, in brief, is the power of Christian formation through exemplarism; the Holy Spirit is often doing the same work on both sides of the example.

Paul does not countenance any distinction between believing and doing. His own example prohibits this kind of hypocritical or casual religiosity.<sup>56</sup> The following five examples of consolation, humility, faithfulness, relationship, and contentment all show the way in which Paul uses exemplars to spur the church on to intellectual virtue. As short studies, they reveal the uniqueness of the Christian exemplars and the unique ability to practice discernment and practical wisdom in Christ.

### **The Example of Consolation**

Keeping with his trend in other places, Paul puts himself before the Philippians as an example of reasoning and thinking like Christ. In 1:12-18, for example, Paul models suffering for the community in Philippi. He wants them to know he is suffering for the sake of Christ. The way that he introduces this news belies the counterintuitive

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<sup>55</sup> Commentators are largely agreed on this point as Paul's central motivation for writing. Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 27; Fee groups these themes differently but agrees with the centrality of friendship, Epaphroditus' visit, and strife as the major reasons for writing. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 37-38; *Philippians: An Introduction*, 43-47.

<sup>56</sup> Lightfoot finds this especially prominent in Paul's warning in 3:1-11. As he turns his attention to those who might threaten the Philippian church's purity and vibrancy, he focuses on the disparity between belief and action. Those false teachers say one thing and do another. Paul believes that sanctification, moral progress, is the imperative and the natural course of every Christian life. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, 69-70.

way that Paul is viewing his own suffering. One of the unique circumstances in Philippians is that the church does not seem to be suffering at the time. Unlike many of Paul's other churches, there is little evidence, outside of the references Paul makes to false teaching in 1:28 and 3:2-3, that the church is being persecuted or suffering in any way in their present circumstances. The only source of suffering Paul identifies is the grief that the church is feeling over his imprisonment (1:12-14; 4:10) and Epaphroditus' sickness (2:25-28). Paul is using these circumstances of his own suffering to prepare them for suffering well in the future.

Among the Stoics and Epicureans, consolations based on the joy of memory were common.<sup>57</sup> Both Seneca and Epicurus assure their disciples that they take joy in their sufferings because of the memories they have of them or the ideas that they are contemplating.<sup>58</sup> But Paul is not just comforted by his memory of the Philippians. As he tells them later in 3:8-11 he is comforted in his sufferings by knowing Christ, laying hold of him, being united with him in his death and in the hope of resurrection of Christ.

As mentioned above, Holloway sees the issue of consolation at the heart of the letter to the Philippians. He finds precedence in the fathers for viewing Paul's attempts to comfort the Philippians in their grief over his imprisonment and persecution through the lens of the ancient Roman consolations, specifically Seneca's numerous letters of comfort.<sup>59</sup> It might seem that Paul, imprisoned on capital charges and facing his own

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<sup>57</sup> See the discussion of Epicurus in Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 73; See Seneca's consolations and the excellent introductions included in Seneca, *Hardship and Happiness*, 3–104; Additionally, see Brian Tabb's two essays on the subject of Paul and Seneca on suffering; Brian J. Tabb, "It's the Hard Knock Life," in *Paul and the Giants of Philosophy: Reading the Apostles in Greco-Roman Context*, ed. Joseph R. Dodson and David E. Briones (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2019), 146–54; Brian J. Tabb, "Paul and Seneca on Suffering," in *Paul and Seneca in Dialogue*, ed. David E. Briones and Joseph R. Dodson (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 88–108.

<sup>58</sup> Two of Epicurus' letters of consolation are preserved in Cicero, *On Ends*, 2.96 and Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 10.22.

<sup>59</sup> For the following analysis, see Holloway's discussion. He finds early support for this view in Chrysostom *Homilies* 4.66.16, Theodoret *On Philippians* 1:12-13, *Patrologiae Graeca* 82.564.2-3, Jerome *Patrologiae Latina* 30.881.15, and Calvin's *Commentary on Philippians*. 29-31, 33-35. Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 33–35.



death, would be the one experiencing grief, but it is actually the Philippians' grief that Holloway finds central. They have had much more difficulty reacting to Paul's circumstances than he has. Although there are indications that Paul seeks mutual consolation by writing to the church (1:12-26; 2:19). Paul's opening prayer gives an indication as to how he hopes to console them. Holloway finds a connection between Paul's prayer that the Philippians would "approve what is excellent" in 1:10 and his attempt to console. This is not because of the broader context of this specific prayer, but because of the thematic similarity to the way the Stoics sought to console their readers; by focusing on the most important things. Here, also, is the connection between consolation and intellectual virtue. Both Paul and Seneca, in different ways, see consolation coming through the practice of the intellectual virtue of discernment. In each case, they remind their readers to see the situation clearly and to focus on the most important things.

Paul's logic in 1:10 resembles Seneca's in *Ep.* 107 to Lucilius. As Holloway points out, Seneca begins in a way that seems to mirror Paul's use of discernment, "Where is that practical knowledge of yours? Where is that facility of mind that allows you to make the necessary distinctions? Where is that ability to rise above circumstance? Does a matter of such insignificance affect you so much?"<sup>60</sup>

Additionally, he makes the connection for them that his suffering is a model of boldness for others (1:14), and by implication, should be for them as well. The issue Paul is addressing in the Philippian community is discouragement. They are worried about Paul's arrest and the implications that might have for his missionary work, which they were the only church in Macedonia to fund his work (4:15). The church was concerned about Paul's work and faced the confusion surrounding Paul's imprisonment.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> This is Holloway's own translation. Holloway, 79.

<sup>61</sup> Thompson reads the whole opening of Philippians under this heading, "Paul's imprisonment and the Philippians' distress will not prevent God from bringing the community to the ultimate goal."

What's clear from further examination, though, is that Paul and Seneca look more like photo negatives than kindred spirits. Whereas Seneca consoles by telling his friends not to focus on things that are unimportant, Paul almost always speaks of discernment in the context of focusing on the most important things.<sup>62</sup>

There is an interesting connection here with intellectual virtue. At the end of Paul's exemplary exhortation in 3:1-4:1, he makes a very significant comment, "Let those of us who are mature (τέλειοι) think this way (τοῦτο φρονῶμεν), and if in anything you think otherwise (ἐτέρως φρονεῖτε), God will reveal that also to you" (3:15). Consolation is not a matter of information, but of intellectual virtue. Christians are called to think a new way about their suffering, a Christ-like way, and one that requires them to evaluate their life using the same process that Paul does.

### **The Example of Humility: 2:1-18**

One of the most famous and exemplary passages in all of Scripture is found in Philippians 2:5-11. In fact, the whole letter revolves around this image of Christ and the exhortations Paul makes to practice his same mindset.<sup>63</sup> Though it's often remembered for the startling picture of Jesus emptying himself and making himself nothing in the incarnation, within the broader context, Paul is using this example of Christ's humility (ταπεινοφροσύνη) to inspire the Philippians to act likewise.<sup>64</sup> 2:1-11 is an exposition and

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Thompson, *Philippians and Philemon*, 29.

<sup>62</sup> See Phil 1:10, Rom 1:18-32, 12:1-3 as prime examples.

<sup>63</sup> "What is more, verse 5 is in many ways the linchpin of the whole argument of 1:27-2:18: the key to a citizenship 'worthy of the gospel of Christ' is in fact none other than to adopt the mind of Christ." Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 121; Mark J. Keown, *Philippians*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 381.

<sup>64</sup> For an excellent treatment of the various theological and Christological issues associated with this passage, see Fee's commentary. He concludes, "In sum: In Christ Jesus God has thus shown his true nature; this is what it means for Christ to be 'equal with God'—to pour himself out for the sake of others and to do so by taking the role of a slave. Hereby he not only reveals the character of God, but from the perspective of the present context also reveals what it means for us to be created in God's image, to bear his likeness and have his 'mindset.' It means taking the role of the slave for the sake of others, the contours of which are what the next clause will spell out." *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 214, 197-218.

illustration of the command Paul gives in 1:27, to stand firm in one mind and one purpose.

This summary leads to a question, why would anyone want to imitate Christ? Stepping back from the familiar picture of Christ's sacrifice, why should Paul's readers consider this an example worth following? His description reads far more like humiliation than humility. It would have sounded preposterously weak to Paul's contemporaries, both Jew and Greek, or as he says in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "foolishness to those who are perishing." So why does he expect that this example will inspire the Christians to imitate Christ?<sup>65</sup>

Humility was not a virtue in the ancient world. Aristotle, for example, in his great list of virtues does not consider humility as a virtue, but as a vice. One of highest virtues, greatness of soul (*μεγαλοψυχία*), is the mean between smallness of soul (*μικροψυχία*) and vanity (*χαυνότης*).<sup>66</sup> Aristotle considers the humble (*ταπεινοί*) to be weak and lowly, flatterers, more acquainted with dishonor than honor and not in any position to help others.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, the great-souled person asks much and deserves much, particularly with regard to honor and dignity, and helps others readily.<sup>68</sup> It is not just Aristotle who thought this way. The entire dynamic of honor in the ancient world would prohibit anyone from a higher station seeking something less than they deserve. Humility, in essence, uses a completely different criterion to evaluate standing than was common in the ancient world. Paul's contemporaries would not have seen Christ's example as something worth imitating, but as something backwards and pitiable.

Paul's logic in this section is unmistakable. Jesus was humble, so Christians

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<sup>65</sup> For the radical role of humility in the Christian faith, see Grant Macaskill's work, *The New Testament and Intellectual Humility*. He provides a short summary of his findings in the introduction, 6-8.

<sup>66</sup> Aristotle discusses greatness of soul in *Nic. Eth.* 4.3-4. See 1125a27-35, specifically.

<sup>67</sup> *Nic. Eth.* 1125a2, Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 106-7.

<sup>68</sup> *Nic. Eth.* 1124b17-20.

should be humble.<sup>69</sup> There is an element in which Paul and Aristotle may agree, though. Paul acknowledges the world's standards of greatness; the ταπεινοί, the humble and lowly, do not have much to offer. This is what makes Jesus' humility so exemplary within the paradigm of the cross.

There are a few examples of this same use in the ancient world, one of which captures the same surprise and emotion that Paul conveys in the example of Christ. In the *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon tells a story of young Assyrian woman who, although she was undistinguished, dressed as a servant, and lowly in stature (ἐν ταπεινῷ σχήματι) astonished Cyrus' messenger with the dignity and grace of her presence. When he returned to tell Cyrus, the messenger proclaimed that "there never was so beautiful a woman of mortal birth in Asia."<sup>70</sup> This same kind of surprise is captured in Paul's description of Jesus' humility.

Paul rightly places the cross at the center of this example. Christ's death and resurrection are the central events in the history of the world for Paul, and in his view everything in reference to that event. However, the cross is a singularly negative event in the eyes of those who are not in Christ. The mockery Christ endured while he was hanging on the cross is a small sample of the scorn with which crucifixion was viewed in the first century.

So, why does Paul use this example to call the Philippians to action? Moral exemplarism, and here intellectual exemplarism, rests on the assumption that people imitate those they admire, for whatever reason. Remembering Zagzebski's claim that admiration is the primary motivation for imitation, Paul must be depending on a very different reaction among the Philippian Christians than he might have expected among the Greek philosophers. The humility of Christ serves as an example of the mindset, the

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<sup>69</sup> Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 106; Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 116; Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 198–201.

<sup>70</sup> Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 5.1-8.

way of thinking, all Christians should imitate. This is the mind of Christ.

### **The Example of Faithfulness: 2:19-30**

In the second half of chapter 2, Paul puts forward two exemplars for the Philippians, his fellow workers Timothy and Epaphroditus, both of whom he plans to send to them, Epaphroditus with the letter and Timothy shortly after. The elements of their character, and their mindsets, that Paul emphasizes shows that he intends them to be an example of intellectual virtue for the church.

**Timothy (2:19-24).** Timothy, who Paul describes with uniquely affectionate language here and elsewhere, is held up as someone who looks after the interests of Jesus Christ.<sup>71</sup> In fact, among Paul's companions, only Timothy can play the role Paul assigns him, because of his mindset.<sup>72</sup> By contrast, the others think about their own concerns, "οἱ πάντες γὰρ τὰ ἑαυτῶν ζητοῦσιν" and not those of Jesus Christ. Who are these others? As Fee remarks, the reader is "poorly prepared for this sentence," with no clear reference for "οἱ πάντες."<sup>73</sup> It's likely one of two groups, either another group of Christian teachers the Philippians would be familiar with, maybe those mentioned in 1:15 or 3:2, or a group familiar to Paul.<sup>74</sup>

Whichever group this might be, the clear implication of Paul's statement is that Timothy is to be imitated and honored and the others are not. Interestingly, like-mindedness (ἰσόψυχος) is the quality Paul mentions to distinguish Timothy. Nowhere in Philippians does Paul balk at the assertion that there are better ways for Christians to think than others. Timothy's example of thinking about the things of Christ, and not

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<sup>71</sup> Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 164–66.

<sup>72</sup> "Indeed, only Timothy has the mind of Christ (2:5) that is embodied in the poetic narrative of 2:6–11." Thompson, *Philippians and Philemon*, 87; Similarly, Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 262–63.

<sup>73</sup> Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 267.

<sup>74</sup> Fee suggests that this refers to those in 1:15, 17 who may have been part of Paul's missionary team, but who preach the gospel out of their own selfish motives. Fee, 267–68.

about himself, is one of these better ways of thinking. It conforms to the way Christ thought, and in this sense, Timothy is showing that he has the mind of Christ. It is as if Paul is saying, “Follow Timothy as he thinks like Christ.” Paul writes, “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (2:19-21).

First, Timothy’s concern for the things of Christ is paradigmatic for the entire letter.<sup>75</sup> Paul’s way of thinking, and the one he commends to the Philippians is centered on Christ, determined by the priorities of Christ, and striving toward the end of knowing Christ, being found in him, and attaining the resurrection from the dead (3:10-11). This is the way mature people think (3:15).

Second, Timothy follows Christ’s own example earlier in the chapter. Like Paul, he too has served as a slave for Christ (2:22). He has followed Christ’s example (2:4-11) and now Paul is presenting him as an aid to follow this example as well. Paul reminds them that they know Timothy’s proven character, his “δοκιμή.” There is a syntactical connection here with the family of words Paul has been using to describe the process of discernment. The context, here, indicates that this is another nod to Timothy’s intellectual virtue.

Why would Paul be sending Timothy in addition to Epaphroditus? If he had only to deliver the letter, Epaphroditus will take care of that and thank the church for their generosity. Timothy is coming as Paul’s own representative.<sup>76</sup> He is an extension of Paul’s ministry and of his own judgment. He models the very thing Paul prayed for in 1:10 and will be invaluable in the sanctification of the church. Timothy’s character has

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<sup>75</sup> For the thematic resonance of this verse, see Fee; “This is what the letter to this point has been all about, Paul’s own ‘seeking the interests of Christ Jesus,’ as he appeals to the Philippians to work out—among themselves and in Philippi—the salvation that Christ has brought them.” Fee, 266.

<sup>76</sup> Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 166–67; Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction*, 134–35; Holloway suggests that Timothy is coming as a surrogate to comfort the church on Paul’s behalf. Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 139–40.

been tested, and this word gives the sense, in the flow of this paragraph, that it is Timothy's intellectual character that is included in this assessment.

*Epaphroditus (2:25-30).* Epaphroditus, who had brought news and financial support from Philippi, also serves as an exemplar. He has been longing and praying for the Philippians during his time away and Paul reminds them that his work for the gospel is worth honoring. He risked his life for the work of Christ, like Timothy, proving that Christians should focus on the priorities of Jesus Christ and not on their own comfort and safety.

Both of these qualities Paul extols in Timothy and Epaphroditus fit the broader category of the way Paul uses exemplars other than Christ. In each case, he links the behavior or disposition of a Christian to the character of Christ. In the paradigmatic verse for this kind of exemplarism Paul tells the Corinthians, "follow me as I follow Christ" ("μιμηταί μου γίνεσθε καθὼς καὶ γὼ Χριστοῦ," 1 Cor 11:1). Human exemplars are not worthy exemplars in their own right, but only insofar as they point toward the way of Christ (Eph 4:1; Col 2:6). In the most reductive sense, Paul does not use humans as exemplars, but as ways to point to Christ as the exemplar. More broadly, Paul points to honorable men and women who model the qualities that should be admirable and imitable because they are qualities that display Christ and the Spirit's work of transformation.

### **The Example of Relationship: 3:1-4:1**

One of the most extended autobiographical passages in all of Paul's writings is found in 3:1-4:1. Paul uses this technique commonly in his letters (Gal 1:11-2:14; 1 Thess 2:1-12; 2 Cor 11:16-12:10). In 3:1-2, Paul reminds them of the contrasting way of life, probably familiar to the church either because they had seen them in person or in Paul's previous teaching. Then he lists his own accomplishments to show that ethnic heritage and religious zeal are the wrong criteria with which to judge the work of God.

Instead, Paul argues in 3:7-4:1 that it is the relationship with Christ that comes through faith that is the measure.

Building upon the final phrase in vs. 7, Paul launches into an explanation of his priorities. For someone used to measuring accomplishments by the standards of his day, counting everything as loss for the sake of Christ sounds like a poor exchange. Paul lists the aspects of being in Christ that cannot compare to an honorable reputation. The worth of the knowledge of Christ surpasses the worth of everything else (3:8). Suffering the loss of all things but gaining Christ (*ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω*) and being found in him, is the true profit. Again, knowing him, experiencing the power of his resurrection, becoming like him, and rising with him from the dead are the ultimate ends (3:9-11).

In the middle of this long sentence that runs from vs. 8-11, Paul gives a distinguishing reason for his perspective. In vs. 9, he interjects, “not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.” As he repeatedly makes clear other places, it is faith, and beyond that, the unity with Christ that faith brings, that accounts for his mindset. The righteousness of God, he says, that depends on faith (3:9), is the cause of being found in him, knowing him, and seeking after him.

This pursuit is both grounded in Christ (3:8-11) and ongoing (3:12-14) in and towards him. Paul encourages the Philippians to follow him as he strains forward toward the prize. The example he’s setting here is how to discern value. Paul rejects the evaluation of his former life and has discerned what is truly excellent; “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (3:7-8).

In verses 15-16, Paul makes the intellectual aspect of this perspective clear. This is a mindset, a way of thinking, a *φρόνησις* as he’s described elsewhere. Paul includes himself in this group; those who are mature (*ὄσοι τέλειοι*) think (*φρονῶμεν*) this



way.<sup>77</sup> As he did throughout the Corinthians letters, Paul models Christian intellectual virtue and then exhorts those who are in Christ to follow his lead. Here again, there is a clear emphasis not just on the content of Paul's thinking, but in the *way* that he thinks. He does not want them to think about Christ more often, but to think like him by ordering their priorities and reckoning their accomplishments and losses using the framework of being in Christ.

In the next sentence, Paul continues to present himself as an intellectual exemplar. Paul explicitly calls the Philippians to imitate him in 3:17 and the others he works with. Does this exhortation go beyond what he has already written? Verses 15 and 17 reveal Paul's paradigm for intellectual exemplarism. Following his example will lead to mature thinking, because he is standing firm in the Lord. He presents himself and his coworkers as a “τύπος” for them to follow.<sup>78</sup>

### **The Example of Contentment: 4:10-20**

In the final prominent exemplary section of Philippians, Paul uses his own example to call the church to contentment. As is the case with the other places in which Paul uses his own life to model faithful Christian living, he builds on the church's favorable view of his life to call them to a different way of living, in this case, radical contentment.

Paul already referenced his financial partnership with the church in his opening thanksgiving and prayer (1:5). The comments here should be read in light of the fact that

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<sup>77</sup> For a similar statement, see Galatians 5:10. There Paul is pleading with the Galatians to cast away false teaching and return to the only true gospel. He writes, “ἐγὼ πέποιθα εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν κυρίῳ ὅτι οὐδὲν ἄλλο φρονήσετε.” Here, it is not even a matter of wisdom as much as it is a matter of the gospel that has been revealed. Those who disagree may have been blinded, as he says in 2 Cor 3:12-18, but they are certainly not practicing the mind of Christ.

<sup>78</sup> Paul uses this term several times to talk about moral exemplars. In the 1 Thessalonians 1:7, he tells the church that they have become examples across all of Macedonia. In 2 Thessalonians 3:9, he tells them to follow his example. Paul reminds both Timothy and Titus to set an example for other Christians to imitate (1 Tim 4:12; Tit 2:7). Aristotle uses τύπος eleven times in *Nicomachean Ethics*, but always to summarize an outline or a sketch, as opposed to an exhaustive treatment. For examples, see 1094b21; 1104a1-2; 1179a33.

the church has been supporting Paul's missionary work from the very beginning of his time in Greece. With this in mind, Paul does not view his relationship with the church as a financial transaction, nor is this a standard fundraising pitch. In both the opening thanksgiving and here, Paul uses the language of friendship, not patronage, to describe his relationship with the church.

The unity of their *κοινωνία* does more than unite them in a common cause. Because they Philippians have shared in the sufferings of Christ, and because they are united with Paul in the body of Christ, *κοινωνία* brings them into "the total participation in the marginalization that Paul experiences."<sup>79</sup> In light of this reality, Paul's example of contentment becomes even more potent. As he points out in 1:14, the knowledge of Paul's suffering inspires a kind of transfer courage; because they see Paul suffering and God providing for his needs, they too vow to suffer well.

### **Moral Exemplarism and Intellectual Virtue**

These five exemplary vignettes present Paul's system of moral exemplarism in miniature. Paul shares his suffering verbally with the Philippians, but whereas many modern accounts attribute the growth that comes by watching moral exemplars to admiration and emulation, Paul conceives of an additional component of spiritual formation. The Holy Spirit is the catalyst for Christian growth both in planting the admiration for the right exemplars, which grows out of a love for Christ, and in empowering people to set Christ-like examples which models the way to live like Christ.

What these vignettes also show is that Christians have different exemplars, and different qualities they find exemplary than others. Paul would not have expected unbelievers to admire and emulate Christ's example of humility and servitude. Those were not praiseworthy qualities in that time. In the same way, he holds Timothy and

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<sup>79</sup> Thompson puts a prominent emphasis on this theme throughout the letter. See especially, Thompson, *Philippians and Philemon*, 28–29, 140–44.

Epaphroditus up as exemplars for reasons only Christians could truly admire; Timothy as one who prized the interests of Christ and Epaphroditus as one who risked his life for the gospel. Though there may always be overlapping qualities that appeal to believers and unbelievers alike, the ones Paul praises them for would have only been appealing to the believers.

Finally, the model of his own life is a proof of the unique appeal of his example. He has completely reversed the way he evaluates everything in his life because of his encounter with Christ. He sees everything weighted according to knowing Christ.

In Paul's case in particular, there is a relationship that forms between his example and the work the Spirit does in the other believers in Philippi. As Thompson notes, Paul believes that the Philippians share in his sufferings, and on the reverse, they are bolstered by his faithfulness and contentment. How does this happen?

While it is unusual to speak this way about Paul and other Christians, it's perfectly normal to speak this way about Paul and Christ. In several places, Paul takes the notion that he is a member of Christ's body literally – to the extent that he believes that his actions contribute corporately to the body.

The mutual indwelling of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit enable believers to benefit from the work of other Christians. This isn't quite as mystical as it sounds. How else can the "one another" commands be explained? When Paul says in Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens," or a few verses later, "Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches," how can he not be intimating that the work of one believer might somehow affect the soul of another?

Often the Spirit uses people, through their teaching, actions, and here, their examples to accomplish his work. He utilizes one person's obedience to encourage another. It's as if the Spirit, in producing fruit in one person's life, takes that very fruit and uses it to nourish the growth of another. This is the very essence of *κοινωνία* and it is what makes moral formation and exemplarism possible.

## Pauline Moral Exemplarism

After surveying Paul's appeal to Christ-like examples in Philippians, key differences emerge between the way Paul understands moral formation and the way Zagzebski construes it. First, one of the core claims of *Exemplarist Moral Theory* is that there is no single telos, or *εὐδαιμονία*, for all people. Zagzebski rejects Alasdair MacIntyre's observation that humanity has lost its telos; she claims it does not have one.<sup>80</sup> She also argues on the basis that her theory of moral exemplarism does not need one central virtue to anchor it, nor do all human beings need to admire the same characteristics. This is an important conviction in order to develop an overarching theory, but it is not at all the way Paul understands exemplarism.<sup>81</sup> Paul sees Jesus Christ as the central example which all Christians should pursue. In fact, he believes that Christians will pursue this example, which is why he introduces the examples that he does about Christ, particularly 2:5-11. He believes that the Spirit brings about transformation into the image and likeness of Christ, but he speaks more often in Philippians of imitating Christ because of being in a relationship with him (1:9-11, 21; 3:8-11, 21; 4:13). The motive for transformation in Philippians lines up with Zagzebski's model: "I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (3:12). It is an admiration for Christ – in Paul's case a personal admiration through a relationship with him – that drives imitation, and this transformation is powered by the Spirit.

## Conclusion

What emerges from Paul's teaching on epistemic formation and his use of exemplars in Philippians is a vision of the way Christians can go about growing in the

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<sup>80</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, Third Edition*, 3rd ed (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 181–243; Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 230–35.

<sup>81</sup> This is not to say that Zagzebski is attempting to follow Paul, or even take a "Christian" position in any sense, only to point out that Paul differs in the way he appraises moral exemplars. She does not make a significant distinction between Jesus Christ as an exemplar and others like Confucius. She does divide exemplars into three categories: hero, saint, and sage, but this is based on the virtues they embody, not the scale of admirability. Zagzebski, 96-96, 171-178.

intellectual virtues. One of the final exhortations of the letter summarizes all of Paul's teaching on moral formation and moral exemplarism. In 4:8-9, Paul writes,

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

This is the only mention of virtue (*ἀρετή*) in Paul's letters and it is the closest he comes to listing the classical Greek virtues together. Thompson writes, "Concluding a letter that has focused on the development of the proper frame of mind (*phronēsis*), Paul challenges the readers, 'Think on (*logizesthe*) these things.'"<sup>82</sup>

The key in this parting encouragement is to practice these things, the very kind of formation Paul has been describing through the letter, pointing to Christ's example, holding up godly exemplars, and using his own life to illustrate the way to imitate Christ. By doing this, Christians become virtuous because they become more like Jesus Christ. As Paul mentions repeatedly in *Philippians*, and in a way that is consistent with what he teaches elsewhere, this begins with *φρόνησις* and it is only Christians who can develop it.

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<sup>82</sup> Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 107.

CHAPTER 8  
CONCLUSION

**Summary**

Paul has a lot to say about epistemology. This survey of his letters shows that he does speak often and directly about what and how Christians know. Like many of his contemporaries, Paul focuses on the process of knowing, not just individual propositions. Read against the backdrop of his contemporaries, he discusses the mind within the framework of intellectual virtue, particularly through the crowning intellectual virtue of *φρόνησις*. By tracing this theme through Paul's letters, it is possible to sketch a distinctly Christian epistemology.

*Paul understands φρόνησις to be similar to the way Aristotle and the Stoics conceive of the chief and mediating intellectual virtue.* Reading Paul in conversation with the philosophers reveals that Paul is not interested in the technical disputes of Greco-Roman philosophy and rhetoric, but that he does provide a rival vision of the good. He also charts a course to get there. Though he too utilizes *φρόνησις* as an intellectual virtue, he redefines it for his own purposes.

*Paul only attributes the practice of φρόνησις to those who are in Christ.* In the book of Romans, Paul includes epistemic virtue with his broader description of the noetic effects of sin, proving that those who are outside of Christ cannot practice *φρόνησις*, because they cannot discern the will of God and they cannot do what is right. This inability can only be cured by the work of the Holy Spirit. Those who are in Christ, having been reconciled to God, can discern his will and fulfill the law of love by having their minds transformed. There is only one way for this to happen; being in Christ.

One of the key connections between Romans and 1 Corinthians is Paul's

quotation of Isaiah 40:13 (LXX) in Rom. 11:34 and 1 Cor. 2:16. In both contexts, Paul asks the question posed by Isaiah: who has known the mind of the Lord? And in both cases he answers, in Rom. 12:2 and 1 Cor. 2:16, Christians do. Those who know by the Spirit can discern God's will. It's important to reemphasize that this cannot mean the propositional truths that God knows; instead, it must be referring to the kind of thinking Christians employ as Paul describes in 1 Cor. 2:13, "And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual." It is the unique capacity of those who in Christ to pursue this way of thinking.

*Practicing φρόνησις is both an individual and a community process with the goal of discerning God's will and knowing the right thing to do.* In 1 Corinthians, Paul doubly demonstrates what this virtue looks like in practice. The nature of the letter, being deliberative rhetoric and focused on discerning God's will in the church, lends itself to teaching on φρόνησις, but by writing the letter the way he does, Paul actually demonstrates the practice of φρόνησις before the Corinthians and encourages them several times to imitate his example.

In the opening section of the letter, Paul contrasts the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God. By their own wisdom, the people of the world think the cross if foolishness (1:18), like the people Paul describes in Romans 1:28, they do not rightly consider God or his son Jesus Christ, in fact they cannot. Paul explains why in 2:6-16. The wisdom of God is discerned spiritually by those who have the mind of Christ.

In the rest of the letter, Paul expects the church to operate with the mind of Christ, spiritually discerning God's will for the church. In particular, Paul instructs the church to handle their legal disputes internally. Instead of going before a judge, Christians should exercise φρόνησις and discern what is right in order to mediate between one another. If the body of Christ will judge the angels in the eschaton, they can judge disputes among themselves.

In the section of the letter devoted to the spiritual gifts (12-14), Paul mentions another aspect of discerning God's will, the practice of the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and interpretation. The spiritual gifts are given for the building up of the church and the gifts of prophecy and tongues in particular involve the kind of discernment Paul described in 2:16.

*The virtue of φρόνησις can be learned by imitating Christ-like moral exemplars.* In 1 Thessalonians and Philippians, Paul traces the contours of intellectual formation through the work of the Spirit and through moral exemplars. In these two letters Paul shares his own example with the churches. In each case, Paul points the readers to the example of Christ and those who imitate it. In Philippians particularly, Paul repeatedly uses exemplars to demonstrate the way to practice of φρόνησις.

## Future Research

### Epistemology

There are lots of avenues to pursue further in epistemology, specifically on two related fronts. First, other individual intellectual virtues can be pursued in Paul's letters and in the New Testament more broadly.<sup>1</sup> Second, more work can and should be done to develop an understanding of biblical epistemology, particularly the epistemic differences between believers and unbelievers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are a few examples of this kind of work in addition to this dissertation. Engberg-Pedersen, *John and Philosophy*; Macaskill, *The New Testament and Intellectual Humility*.

<sup>2</sup> This project will require addressing those who do not believe there can be a single or overarching epistemology of Scripture, including the Radical Orthodoxy group led by John Milbank and the Canonical Theism project led by William Abraham. See, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, ed. *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1998). James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); William J. Abraham, "Canonical Theism: Thirty Theses," in *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church*, ed. William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1–10; William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk, eds., *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).



Exploring love as an intellectual virtue stands out as an opportunity to tie both of these projects together. The centrality of love, specifically ἀγάπη, distinguished Paul from his contemporaries, particularly the Stoics.<sup>3</sup> Nowhere else do we encounter statements like the ones Paul makes in 2 Cor. 5:14, “For the love of Christ controls us” or in Rom. 8:38-39 that nothing in all of creation, “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Love is the central tenet of Paul’s theology, and he eagerly desires that it be the central feature of Christian communities. In fact, the overwhelming presence of the language and power of love can have a numbing effect to its potency in his thought. The study of any Pauline doctrine must be informed by his central concerns that “the love of Christ controls us,” that we should be “rooted and grounded in love,” that above everything else, love “binds everything together in perfect harmony.”<sup>4</sup> This is particularly true when he speaks of knowledge. As we’ve seen particularly in Romans and 1 Corinthians, Paul conceives of love as the foundational characteristic of the mind of believers and their regard for one another.

How does love guide epistemology? In *History and Eschatology*, N. T. Wright

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<sup>3</sup> The difference between the center of Paul’s ethic and that of the Stoics is not controversial. Whether or not they shared an understanding of love for others, inside and outside of their specific groups, is debated, particularly in Romans 12:9-21. Esler claims Paul advocates a unique kind of love, one that applies to all people inside and outside of the church. Philip F. Esler, “Paul and Stoicism: Romans 12 as a Test Case,” *New Testament Studies* 50, no. 1 (2004): 106–24. Engberg-Pedersen and Thorsteinsson have responded to Esler citing examples of ἀγάπη-type love in the Stoics and arguing that Paul never exhorts Christians to love their enemies. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “The Relationship with Others: Similarities and Differences Between Paul and Stoicism,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 96, no. 1–2 (2005): 35–60; Runar M. Thorsteinsson, “Paul and Roman Stoicism : Romans 12 and Contemporary Stoic Ethics,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29, no. 2 (2006): 139–61; Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism: A Comparative Study of Ancient Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Oxford University Press, 2010). Hubbard has summarized the dispute and argues that Paul has a distinct ethic of love. Though Thorsteinsson and Engberg-Pedersen argue that Paul never explicitly repeats Jesus’ teaching to love your enemies, he shows that Paul’s ethic is permeated by this same impulse, particularly in the exhortations in Romans 12. He concludes emphatically and correctly, “This kind of attentive, careful reading of Paul in comparison with his Stoic contemporaries on this topic reveals some genuine parallels, but at the same time we also hear a pounding drum in Paul’s letters that is only dimly echoed in the writings of Roman Stoics.” Moyer V. Hubbard, “Enemy Love in Paul: Probing the Engberg-Pedersen and Thorsteinsson Thesis,” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 6, no. 1 (2016): 115–35.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 3:17; Col. 3:14 serve as a few examples. See also, Rom 13:10; 1 Cor 8:1, 14:1; Gal 5:6; 1 Thess 3:12.

constructs his critical realist historical method around the centerpiece of the “epistemology of love.” In the historical context, this means taking sources on their own terms, “allowing sources to be themselves,” as Wright puts it.<sup>5</sup> In the process of assessing the sources, building hypotheses, and testing them against other interpretations of the data, the regard for sources, voices, and narratives is the staying mechanism that both prevents the historian from falling into alternative types of subjectivism and finding real meaning in narratives drawn from ancient events.

Wright’s critical realism is downstream from Paul’s epistemic assessment of new creation, but it reminds us of something very important about the way Paul conceives of love’s epistemic role. Wright proposes that the historian should approach ancient sources relationally, “allowing them to be themselves,” in a way very similar to how the apostle Paul describes our knowledge of the world. Indeed, other scholars have proposed similar epistemic systems. Esther Meek’s proposal in *Loving to Know* is that all knowledge flowers in the seedbed of the knowledge, not *about* God, but *of* him. As she puts it in common refrain, “*Knowing the world is correlative with knowing God.*”<sup>6</sup>

Meek questions whether justification theories of knowledge can deliver on their promises. Certainty, even in these rigorous systems, she argues, is “illusory,” for no person can defend the justification of each one of their beliefs.<sup>7</sup> The merits of these systems aside, this simply is not the way people acquire knowledge. Instead, she proposes that knowledge is more like a relationship or a covenant than a certification process. The transformative power of knowing comes from this relational aspect, “Knowing is perhaps a bit like a marriage. First you bind yourself with promises to love, honor, and obey. Only then does reality really unfold itself to you.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For a very concise summary of the epistemology of love, see *History and Eschatology*, 102.

<sup>6</sup> Meek, *Loving to Know*, 160.

<sup>7</sup> Meek, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Meek, 37.

One of the most interesting and significant features of Meek’s project is that she maintains a correspondence theory of knowledge in her virtue system. Drawing on the work of Michael Polanyi, she is an epistemic realist. She believes that covenant epistemology offers “contact with reality.”<sup>9</sup>

The concept of relational knowledge holds promise as an epistemic system for two reasons; first, it explains the way people understand their own acquisition of knowledge; second, it explains the way the Bible speaks of knowledge, particularly in terms of the way that humans’ relationship with God leads to knowledge. However, the concept of covenantal knowing has one notable hole. Meek describes covenantal knowing in terms of the most intimate relationships, using the examples of marriage and friendship, but especially in terms of the way we know and are known by God. In an illuminating passage, she describes the kind of intimacy that leads to knowledge, “The goal of covenant is intimacy, friendship, communion, the richest of interpersonal relationships, in which persons are persons to the full, as is the communion between them.”<sup>10</sup> This sounds like the relationship Christians have with God because of Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup> Meek actually makes this point in her interaction with James Loder’s work; “Second, he develops the profound claim that all human knowing, understood transformatively, prefigures and anticipates and ultimately is itself transformed as the Holy Spirit co-opts a human knowing event to bring the knower into face-to-face encounter with the Holy.”<sup>12</sup> How could a non-believer, then, have this kind of relationship with God?<sup>13</sup> How can non-believers know, at least in the way Meek

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<sup>9</sup> In *Loving to Know*, Meek loosely defines epistemic realism as maintaining “contact with reality.” Meek, 75. For a defense of this position, see especially, 277f. She followed this work with a recent book on this topic, *Contact with Reality* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Meek, *Loving to Know*, 198.

<sup>11</sup> Think of the way Paul puts this in Romans 5:1, “Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The restoration of relationship is one of the foundational pieces of Paul’s understanding of salvation.

<sup>12</sup> Meek, *Loving to Know*, 273.

<sup>13</sup> She makes this distinction even more stark, “The goal is communion – the communion of

describes, if they do not have this kind of relationship with God?

On the surface, it appears that Meeks has constructed two epistemic tiers. If true knowledge comes through an intimate covenantal relationship with God, then believers and non-believers know differently, or at minimum, know in different degrees. This is not, however, the way Meek understands her project. She believes that she has constructed a universal system of knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

Meek does recognize that there is an epistemic difference between Christians and non-Christians, but it is unclear how she approaches this difference with regard to her system. "As a result of my epistemology, I tend not to make the matter of whether a person is a Christian believer or not into a determinative divide with respect to knowing... Yes, the redemption by Christ of creation is the answer, the beginning and sine qua none for ultimately and thoroughly getting knowing right."<sup>15</sup> This might be simply to highlight the important point that she is not arguing that non-believers cannot know anything. However, it does follow from her proposal that their knowledge is limited. A few sentences later, she retreats into ambiguity over whether individual people know God and makes the case that because of this point, we cannot truly assess the epistemic state outside of a relationship with God. "But at this point in history we cannot, with respect to any person knowing a particular thing, conclude with finality, on the one hand, that if he or she is unbelieving, he or she does not know the thing in good measure, or does not to that extent know God."<sup>16</sup> At the end of *Loving to Know*, she optimistically recasts these statements by wondering if epistemic fruit might begin to form even before

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knower and known. Communion is the fulfillment of love. The goal is ongoing friendship. Friendship requires our ongoing pledge." Meek, *A Little Manual for Knowing*, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Meek, *Loving to Know*, 177. She makes this point most explicit elsewhere, "So this is a manual for all knowing ventures for all persons, no matter their religious orientation. For all that, if you are looking for it, covenant epistemology signposts knowing this God, and can lead you to him. Every act of insight suggests his giving, his coming, his redemptive knowing of us. And knowing him actually can make you better at knowing anything." *A Little Manual for Knowing*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Meek, *Loving to Know*, 177.

<sup>16</sup> Meek, 177.

the knower knows that they know God; “That does not mean that people may not evidence [epistemic fruits] in advance of explicit relationship to him.” This does not seem to fit with what Paul describes about the epistemic status of those who are outside of Christ.

In an article titled, “A Polanyian Interpretation of Calvin’s *Sensus Divinitatis*,” Meek addresses this issue.<sup>17</sup> She argues that the *sensus divinitatis* allows for believers and non-believers to be grouped together epistemically. The *sensus* is a God given awareness of divinity, that can be found in all human beings apart from teaching.<sup>18</sup> Combining the work of Polanyi with Calvin, she creates the following synthesis, “I would like to suggest that the universal awareness of God can be construed as a subsidiary awareness of the intimation of a hidden coherence, of a set of particulars, curious and explainable in light of a presently empty focus... Thus human awareness of God amounts to a person’s perhaps still-hidden disturbance resulting from things about the universe and about himself that can only be explained in terms of God.”<sup>19</sup> She concludes that the Holy Spirit is involved in every act of knowing.

It is inescapable, though, that those who have had the love of God poured into their hearts (Rom. 5:5) love differently than those who would scarcely die for a righteous man (Rom. 5:7), for example. Surely, those who are compelled by the love of Christ will love differently than those who are not (2 Cor. 5:14).

## **Theology**

There are several very prominent theologians who have operated under similar assumptions about the virtue of *φρόνησις*. Kevin Vanhoozer’s *Drama of Doctrine* is a

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<sup>17</sup> Meek, “A Polanyian Interpretation of Calvin’s *Sensus Divinitatis*.”

<sup>18</sup> In this article, she does mention the effects of sin, “Human reaction to God is unavoidable, and now, due to human sin, knowledge of God untouched by Word and Spirit issues in rebellion,” 14. However, it remains unclear how non-believers are able to overcome this and attain the same kind of knowing as a believer. Meek, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Meek, 18.

very fitting example.<sup>20</sup> In this book, Vanhoozer offers a very similar thesis to the one argued here: “Theological competence is ultimately a matter of being able to make judgments that display the mind of Christ.”<sup>21</sup> Among other approaches, Vanhoozer “seeks to move theology away from theoretical knowledge in order to reorient it toward wisdom.”<sup>22</sup> This way of approaching theology as wisdom and as practicing judgment that evidences the mind of Christ fits the approach outlined in Paul’s letters. Vanhoozer and Wright both make the connection that what theology does, the former focusing on theology abstractly and the latter as Paul developed and used it in the first century, is support the work of transformation that the Spirit carries out within the body of Christ. Vanhoozer’s work is practically focused, leading Christians to understand how to play their part in the drama of the world utilizing the Scriptures as a script and various dramaturges as exemplary guides.<sup>23</sup>

Another important similarity is Vanhoozer’s concept of fittingness: “the supreme criterion for knowledge, goodness, beauty, and truth is Christo-dramatic fittingness.”<sup>24</sup> He approaches this concept through the lens of aesthetics, drawing on philosophical aesthetics, hermeneutics, and the philosophical tradition of φρόνησις.<sup>25</sup> With

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<sup>20</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005). For other works in the same vein, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016); Michael J. Thate, “Paul, Φρόνησις, and Participation: The Shape of Space and the Reconfiguration of Place in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians,” in *“In Christ” in Paul: Explorations in Paul’s Theology of Union and Participation*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Constantine R. Campbell, and Michael J. Thate (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 281–329; Varma, “Fitting Participation: From the Holy Trinity to Christian Virtue.”

<sup>21</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Vanhoozer, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Here are two summaries of this approach: “The canonical-linguistic approach to theology has as its goal the training of competent and truthful witnesses who can themselves incarnate, in a variety of situations, the wisdom of Christ gleaned from indwelling canonical practices and their ecclesial continuations,” and “Right participation requires more than the right information; we need the right ways of processing the information, the right ways of feeling the information. We need, in short, right minds, right imaginations, right hearts.” Vanhoozer, 25, 240.

<sup>24</sup> Vanhoozer, 256.

<sup>25</sup> Vanhoozer, 256–63, specifically 257n50.

Scripture as a guide, the wise Christian must discern what is fitting to do in today's cultural environment. This process is the impetus for Vanhoozer's governing metaphor of life as a drama. Actors must do what is fitting on stage, meaning what is scripted, but also what they judge to be fitting given the role, the contemporary context of the performance, the notes of the dramaturge, and the audience.

Phronetic theology, as Vanhoozer calls it, relies on sapiential intellectual virtues, which lead to "effective pneumatic consciousness."<sup>26</sup> Being apprenticed to Scripture brings about this kind of Christian judgment; so the believer learns to practice the wisdom of the mind of Christ.

Vanhoozer's understanding of φρόνησις deals primarily with bridging the gap between the texts of Scriptures and contemporary contexts.<sup>27</sup> Though he is reasoning theologically and arguing a narrow thesis about the function of doctrine, his account could be expanded further by looking at the way Paul spoke about φρόνησις in the context of the spiritual gifts. This topic is notably missing from Vanhoozer's work but fits naturally with the concepts of fittingness and improvising.

### **Pastoral Ministry**

Finally, there are rich implications in this study for pastoral ministry. In the same way that Paul encouraged his congregations to practice Christian φρόνησις, pastors should teach their congregations to discern God's will and his voice by practicing φρόνησις today. In the latest volume of the Theopolitan Fundamentals series, *Theopolitan Reading*, Peter Leithart encourages his readers to learn to read Scripture from a wise mentor.<sup>28</sup> The Bible does not directly speak to every issue that might arise in the

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<sup>26</sup> Vanhoozer, 331.

<sup>27</sup> In a summary statement, he writes, "Canonical-linguistic theology is phronetic twice over, for good judgment is needed to discern what is theologically at stake (1) in particular canonical texts and (2) in particular contemporary contexts." Vanhoozer, 342.

<sup>28</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *Theopolitan Reading*, Theopolitan Fundamentals 3 (West Monroe, LA: Theopolis Books, 2020).

Christian life. In the same way that the Corinthians did not know how to discern what God's will was for their life together, readers today have trouble in the discernment process. Leithart offers a Pauline model of exemplarism to learn to discern: "That's what I have to offer, myself as a mentor and model. I ask you, as Paul does, to imitate me insofar as I imitate Jesus, the Model Reader. If I am truly reading in the Spirit, following me will keep you in step with the Spirit. And then you will mature, with your senses trained to know good and evil."<sup>29</sup> Though he does not use this word, what he's modeling is Christian *φρόνησις*. He's using his example to show the way of spiritual wisdom, with the end goal of discerning the will of God, knowing good and evil.

As Paul shows in the explanations he gives for holding up Timothy and Epaphroditus in Philippians 2, there are well-defined limits on exemplars, they must model Christ; Paul's principle for his own example as well (1 Cor. 11:1). As Leithart makes clear in the opening and the closing of the book, models are not replacements to following Christ, or building our own abilities to discern, but guides to the growing process.<sup>30</sup>

In other areas besides reading Scripture, pastors and Christian leaders should be sensitive to the fact that their example is a significant factor in the moral and intellectual formation of those who are watching them. By walking in the Spirit, they contribute to the growth of others.

### Conclusion

In sum, Paul calls believers to imitate Christ with their minds by practicing the virtue of *φρόνησις*. Learning to discern God's will and to do it in the community of the

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<sup>29</sup> Leithart, xix. Karen Swallow Prior has taken this approach with classic literature, teaching the virtues by showcasing the way she reads these books. Karen Swallow Prior, *On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life through Great Books* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2018). Miroslav Volf exhibits a way of reading the book of 1 Peter in a way that is conversant with modern culture in Miroslav Volf, *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Leithart, *Theopolitan Reading*, 111–12.



saints constitutes a broad vision for life in Christ. Though this is a difficult task, one that can only be accomplished by walking in the Spirit, it is something every Christian is called to do and capable of doing. To Christians, a fountain of spiritual wisdom has been opened, the very will of God, and that wisdom must be discerned spiritually by spiritual people. Though this is an impossible task for the flesh, Paul reminds every believer, “we have the mind of Christ.”

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## ABSTRACT

### THE MIND OF CHRIST: THE INTELLECTUAL VIRTUE OF ΦΡΟΝΗΣΙΣ IN PAUL'S LETTERS

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In Paul's letters there is an epistemic difference between those who are in Christ and those who are not, characterized by the uniquely Christian practice of the intellectual virtue of *φρόνησις*, or practical wisdom. Over the course of his letters, Paul defines the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom as a part of the broader transformation of sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Practical wisdom is a quality of the mind of Christ, and since only Christians have the mind of Christ, only Christians can practice the virtue of practical wisdom. Paul makes it clear in Romans 1-7 that without the Spirit no one can know the will of God or practice *φρόνησις*. Then in Romans 8-12, 1 Corinthians 2:5-16, and 12-14, Paul models and exhorts Christians to practice practical wisdom. In 1 Thessalonians and Philippians, Paul calls believers to *φρόνησις* by holding up moral exemplars for them to imitate. By doing so, Christians in the churches can learn to practice *φρόνησις*.

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