Ancient Athletics and Memorializing the Dead in 1 Corinthians 4:9 and 9:24-27

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Abstract

In 1 Corinthians Paul imagines himself as participating in two types of competitions, that of the heroic athlete in the Greek stadium (9:24-27) and that of the gladiator/athlete as "one condemned to death" in the Roman arena (4:9). Paul's self-presentation as a victim in the arena projects a status of slavery, weakness and otherness, while his self-presentation as an athlete in the stadium projects a status of freedom, virtue and masculinity. Both the arena and the stadium originated as funeral rituals honouring the dead and are highly performative public expressions of identity. This thesis examines the shared features of the Greek athlete and Roman gladiator that served as useful analogies for Paul to describe early Christian identification with virtuous suffering and to memorialize Jesus' crucifixion. Paul draws from the metaphorical structure of athletic performance to establish a Greco-Roman understanding of how the memory of Jesus' crucifixion is actualized in the bodies of believers through somatic gesture.

Résumé

Dans la première épître aux Corinthiens, Paul s'imagine participant à deux types de compétition : celle d'un athlète héroïque dans le stade grec (9:24-27) et celle d'un gladiateur/athlète "condamné à mort" dans l'arène romaine (4:9). L'autoportrait de Paul en tant que victime dans l'arène projète une image d'esclavage, de faiblesse et d'altérité, tandis que sa représentation en athlète dans le stade projète une image de liberté, de vertu et de masculinité. L'arène et le stade ont tous deux pour origine les rituels funéraires honorant les morts, étant des expressions identitaires fortement performatives. Cette thèse examine les traits partagés entre l'athlète grec et le gladiateur romain ayant servi d'analogies utiles à Paul pour décrire l'identification des premiers Chrétiens à la souffrance vertueuse et pour se rappeler la crucifixion de Jésus. Paul s'appuie sur la structure métaphorique de la performance athlétique pour établir une compréhension greco-romaine du processus de concrétisation mémorielle de la crucifixion sur les corps des croyants à travers des gestes somatiques.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1 Corinthians 4:9, Paul makes a comparison between apostolic suffering and that of men "condemned to die in the arena… a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as men." This unusual description closes the letters opening argument (1:18-4:21) and creates a vivid demonstration of how Paul believes suffering and weakness are a display of one's membership in the Jesus movement.[1] The background of 4:9 has recently been interpreted as a Roman triumphal procession,[2] a mime performance,[3] and a gladiatorial show in the Roman arena.[4] Paul's explicit reference to death makes it likely he has Roman gladiator combat in mind.[5]

Paul's gladiator metaphor shares several features with other athletic images he uses often in his rhetorical arguments (Rom 9:16; 1 Cor 9:24; Gal 2:2, 5:7; Phil 2:16, 3:14). In 1 Cor 9:24-27, Paul compares his endurance and self-discipline for his faith to that of a heroic athlete in the Greek stadium. Paul's self-presentation as a victim in the arena projects a status of slavery, weakness and otherness, while his self-presentation as an athlete in the stadium projects a status of freedom, virtue and masculinity. As a result of the apparent contradiction between these two images, Paul's gladiator metaphor in 4:9 is often excluded from scholarship examining Paul's

[1] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 181.

[2] Fee*, The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 174-175.

[3] Lawrence L. Welborn, *Paul, The Fool of Christ: A Study of 1 Corinthians 1-4 in the Comic-Philosophic Tradition* (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

[4] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 359.

[5] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 360; Henry T. Nguyen, "God's Execution of His Condemned Apostles: Paul's Imagery of the Roman Arena in 1 Cor 4:9," *Zeitschrift fur die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Kunde der Alteren Kirche* 99:1 (2008), 488.

athletic language.[6] The Greek stadium and the Roman arena share intersecting features which suggests Paul's gladiator metaphor is a cohesive part of his athletic rhetoric.

The important role of athletics in identity formation has been a popular subject of recent classical scholarship but has not been adequately applied to the New Testament.[7] Donald G. Kyle is a leading figure in Classics whose work focuses on both sport and spectacle. The term ἀγων was used to refer to athletes who participated in several types of competitions. Spectacles could be any display meant for viewing. Both sport and spectacle shared an appreciation for competition and Greeks and Romans did not see the two athletic performances as mutually exclusive.[8] As Roman-style death spectacles moved into the Greek East, many of the Greek terms used to describe gladiatorial activity were borrowed from Greek athletic vocabulary.[9] There are many inscriptions where gladiators are presented as athletes and wealthy Greeks often sponsored gladiator combat.[10] The Roman arena and the Greek stadium were cultural displays of virtuous suffering.[11] I will use the phrase "athletic competition" when referring to events held in both the Greek stadium and the Roman arena.

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[6] Cavan W. Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath but Our Lives': Gladiators, Athletes, and Early Christian Bodies," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133:1 (2014), 193-241; Jason König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Robert Seesengood, *Competing Identities: The Athlete and the Gladiator in Early Christian Literature* (Scotland: T&T Clark, 2007); Victor C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature* (Brill Academic Pub., 1997).

[7] Donald G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* (Massachusetts: Blackwell publishing, 2007); Jason König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire*, 2005; Jerry Toner, *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009); Zahra Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World: Victory and Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[8] Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle,* 10.

[9] König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire,* 215.

[10] Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath but Our Lives,"198.

[11] Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath but Our Lives," 197.

Scholars who agree that that background of 4:9 is gladiatorial combat usually suggest Paul draws from this imagery to bolster the depth of his apostolic suffering,[12] or they discuss it as a "minor use" of athletic imagery and loosely connect it to idea of the apostles in an "ἀγωνίζομαι" (athletic struggle) (9:25).[13] A very recent exception is Cavan Concannon who examines how Paul draws from the overlap between the Greek athlete and the Roman gladiator in 1 Corinthians to construct an alternative identity in the Roman Empire. It is an image which demonstrates how Paul is "…all things to all people, in order that some might be saved" (τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα, ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω) (9:19-23).[14]

The closest literary parallel to Paul's use of the athletic struggle as a philosophical concept is the Cynic-Stoic diatribe. One of the leading scholars on Paul's use of athletic motifs, Victor Pfitzner, wrote to correct earlier scholars like Bergmann, Bonhoffer, Sevenster, Spicq and Stauffer who read Paul's athletic metaphors as one of several Stoic topoi as a model for self-discipline and self-exertion, adopted uncritically by Paul. According to Pfitzner, Paul's purpose was not to say that all of life is a struggle as the Stoics did. Rather, Paul makes a comparison between athletic training and his own self-restriction and training as an apostle.[15]

In response to Pfitzner, Robert Seesengood argues that Paul is like most Greco-Roman writers who adapted a common cultural trope to suit their own purpose and did so in order to create and maintain a subcultural community.[16] Seesengood draws from Homi Bhabha's idea of the "third space" of hybrid identities to argue that Paul's athletic tropes created a complex way of

[12] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 359; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 174-181.

[13] Seesengood, *Competing Identities*, 25; Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 77

[14] Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath but Our Lives," 205-209.

[15] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 87.

[16] Seesengood, *Competing Identities,* 28-30.

existing in the Empire.[17] Paradoxically, Paul's unique application of athletic imagery does not make him unique at all.[18] Seesengood only addresses the use of the *arena* as a space for displaying identity in later Christian martyr texts and does not include 4:9 in his discussion. Scholarship on 1 Corinthians generally pays little attention to the function of 4:9 within the letter as a whole. Failing to understand how the stadium and the arena intersect in Paul's arguments obscures the well-developed athletic topoi in the letter.

While Concannon's article does a fantastic job examining the overlap between the stadium and arena in terms of negotiating ethnic and social boundaries in 1 Corinthians, he and the scholars surveyed above fail to note a fundamental link between sport and spectacle in Paul's athletic imagery and that is their association with funerals and memorializing the dead. This is particularly important for 1 Cor 4:9 as the high point of Paul's introduction to his cross-centered gospel and the important role of suffering in actualizing the gospel.

As Paul unpacks the meaning of Jesus' death he draws from Greco-Roman sociological and literary tropes in order to construct an understanding of the cross for his Gentile audience at Corinth. In 4:9 and 9:24-27 Paul does this by using imagery from the Greek stadium and the Roman arena which were key elements in Greco-Roman identification with the mythic past and were a result of their obsession with legacy. Both athletic performances display the role of virtuous suffering and endurance *grounded in memory of the cross*. Paul's choice to demonstrate early Christian suffering through athletic performance will be examined within the framework of ritual and performance as a means to maintain an ongoing relationship between the living and the

[17] Seesengood, *Competing Identities,* 21; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (NY: Routledge, 1994).

[18] Seesengood, *Competing Identities,* 17.

dead. Thus, the overlapping features of the stadium and arena are a means to create a unified community of diverse members by analogy with athletic performance honouring the dead.

In chapter one, I will contextualize the topic of death and the body in 1 Corinthians within Greco-Roman memory, performance, and language theory, and discuss the importance of Corinth's hybrid Greco-Roman culture for interpreting Jesus' crucifixion. In chapter two, I will argue that the paradoxical status of the gladiator serves as an analogy for the paradoxical status of the early Christian community as those identifying with suffering and death. In chapter three, I will argue that the glory and virtue of the Greek athlete serves as an analogy for virtuous bodily suffering based on a performance memorializing the dead. In the conclusion, I will discuss how Paul's borrows the structural metaphor of athletic competition in order to communicate these analogies.

CHAPTER ONE: MEMORY, DEATH AND PERFORMANCE IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

1.1 Corinth in Context

First Corinthians is an early first-century biblical text (53-55 C.E) written by the apostle Paul to a community of Jesus devotees in the Roman colony of Corinth, over whom he claimed a position of authority. He maintained an authoritative relationship with the Corinthian community through a series of instructional letters over a period of roughly seven years. What we now know as 1 Corinthians is Paul's second letter to the community, the first being lost but referred to as his "previous letter" in 1 Cor 5:9.[19] The occasion of the letter is his response to a report from "Chloe's people" (1:10) that certain members of the community and/or visitors of the community are competing with each other for leadership, and is causing believers to be divided (1:10-17). Paul exhorts them not to be "puffed up" (φυσιόω) against one another (4:6) and he contrasts their arrogant behaviour with his self-example as suffering apostle. Paul identifies himself and the other apostles as slaves of Jesus Christ (4:1) and boasts of his suffering and weakness (2:1-4). He reminds the Corinthians that their imitation of these qualities separates them from other Greco-Roman institutions; the message of the cross is foolishness to this world (1:18), but Jesus' crucifixion is the wisdom of God (1:21).

First Corinthians is unusually long for the letter writing standards of the first-century, suggesting it may be a sort of "copy and paste" version of several letters. H. Hagge first raised the question of the letter's integrity in 1876. An early Greek manuscript dating from 200 C.E. (p46) contains an almost complete letter, suggesting 1 Corinthians was composed as a single unit.[20] Jerome Murphy O'Connor, Gordon D. Fee, and Margaret M. Mitchell argue for one letter,

[19] Carl R. Holladay, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 304.

[20] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 36.

and that a partition theory is only necessary if exegesis fails to demonstrate a logical coherence throughout the letter. The argument made here assumes that 1 Corinthians is a single unit.[21]

Corinth was originally a Greek city, sacked and re-founded as a Roman colony by Julius Caesar in 44 B.C.E. The new city was a mix of the former Greek culture and the new Roman settlers who came to Corinth because of a growing population problem in Italy. Civil disturbance caused thousands of peasants to move into cities, many settling in Rome.[22] In response to the population increase, Julius Caesar established *Colonia Julia Corinthiensis,* the city of Corinth, among other new colonies, which was settled by a large number of war veterans. Strabo visited Corinth at the time of its founding and said that it was settled mostly by freedmen (8.6.23). In addition, Corinth's location on the Isthmus made it a center for trade and it quickly became an economic center and imported labour from throughout the Mediterranean.[23] Despite Greek influence, Corinth was first and foremost a Roman colony that was Roman in administration and organization.[24]

Corinth was host to one of the four great Panhellenic games, the Isthmian games, second in popularity behind the Olympics. The Isthmian games were a distinctly Greek form of athletic competition held in the stadium, which was an important platform for the public recognition of honour and shame and a key source of mythic identity for Greeks. Nero proclaimed twice that the Isthmian games were a symbol of Greek freedom and self-goverment (Plutarch, *Life of*

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[21] Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 15-16; Jerome Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 253; Margaret Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*: *An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 186-192.

[22] John R. Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth: Rhetorical and Archaeological Approaches to Pauline Imagery* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1997), 26.

[23] John R. Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth,* 28.

[24] John R. Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth,* 29.

Flaminius 12.8). Many philosophers who used athletic figures to describe the intellectual life used the Isthmian games as their setting (Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 8). However, as gladiator combat spread to the Greek East it became extremely popular and became integrated with Greek athletics. The third-century amphitheater is evidence of Corinth's love for Roman-style games, gladiatorial combat and beast fights.[25] Corinth has been called a small copy of Rome, and gladiator combat was one of many elements adopted from the center of the Empire.[26]

Corinth was probably the first Greek city-state to have its own amphitheatre because of its colony status in Greece. Corinth's gladiator combats were so famous that other Greek cities sought to emulate them (Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 31.121).[27] In Greco-Roman literature dealing with gladiator combat there is a repeated link to Corinth. A few Greek writers express criticism of gladiator games, often by comparing the subject of their criticism to their displeasure with the gladiatorial enthusiasm of the city of Corinth (Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 31.121; Lucian, *Demonax* 57; Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.22). This confirms that Corinth was a hybrid of Greek and Roman traditions, famous for its mixed spectacle culture, and that the city had an obvious enthusiasm for gladiator shows.[28]

John Lanci points out Corinth's Roman identity as an important factor for New Testament scholarship, which tends to ignore the implications of this identity for Paul and the first community of Jesus devotees there. Lanci does this by pointing out the presence of the imperial cult and other Roman religions. Greek temples and religions, and even the Isthmian

[25] Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth,* 2.

[26] Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth*, 28; Annette Hufloher, "A Small Copy of Rome? Religious Organization in Roman Corinth," *Pathways to Power. Civic Elites in the Eastern Part of the Roman Empire* (eds. Camia, F. and Rizakis: Athens 2008), 151-160.

[27] Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath but Our Lives," 199.

[28] König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire*, 215.

games, were re-cast in a Roman light.[29] The games drew tourists and labourers from all over the Mediterranean.[30] Symbols of the games could be found in Greek sanctuaries demonstrating the cultic purpose of the games and the link between religious traditions and festivals.[31]

In 1 Corinthians Paul compares the goal of resurrection to winning the victor's crown in a foot race and compares his self-discipline to that of a boxer (9:27). In both images the athlete is defined by his ability to endure suffering. Such dramatic imagery bolsters Paul's arguments by borrowing features from an institution that, like many Greco-Roman institutions, was not separate from religion, politics and social status.[32] Paul's lengthy presentation of his apostleship as multiple sporting events in 9:24-27 outlines the public display of virtues and self-discipline that would also become associated with the gladiator. The conflation of Greek and Roman cultural practices in first-century Corinth is essential for unpacking the athletic metaphors in Paul's rhetoric of the cross and the implications of Jesus' death for the community.[33]

[29] König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire,* 29.

[30] König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire,* 31-32.

[31] König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire,* 97.

[32] Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth*, 95-97, 127.

[33] For more on Corinth see Bruce W. Winter, "The enigma of imperial cultic activities and Paul in Corinth," *Greco-Roman Culture and the New Testament: Studies Commemorating the Centennial of the Pontifical Biblical Institute* (eds. David E. Aune, Frederick E. Brenk: Leiden : Brill, 2012); *Corinth in Context: Comparative Studies in Religion and Society* (eds. Steven J. Friesen, Daniel N. Schowalter and James C. Walters: Leiden: Brill, 2010); *Corinth in Contrast: Studies in Inequality* (eds. Steven J. Friesen, Sarah A. James, and Daniel N. Schowalter: Boston: Brill, 2014); *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune* (ed. John Fotopoulos: Leiden: Brill, 2006); *Urban Religion in Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (eds. Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen: Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005).

1.2 Funerary Performance and Memory

Both gladiator combat and the Isthmian games began as funeral rituals and are a product of the central role of legacy in Greco-Roman culture. As a hybrid city, the Corinthians would have been familiar with many different memorial practices including the use of monuments, inscriptions and funeral processions that revived the dead in a dramatic display of symbols and rituals.[34] The Corinthian community faced the challenge of maintaining their new identity grounded in the memory of Jesus' crucifixion and assimilating their understanding of the movement with a previously established collective memory.

Group identity is partially formed by a common collective memory. This means a cultural group usually has a similar idea of its past and origins that serves as the basis for present or future events, and is often expressed, preserved and changed through commemorative rituals.[35] Paul Connerton categorizes cultural practices of recollection in two distinctive forms: commemorative ceremonies and bodily gesture.[36] Both categories are useful but not separable in Paul's ministry. For example, the Lord's Supper tradition (1 Cor 11:23-26) is a commemorative ceremony, based on a historical narrative of Jesus' death that has been transformed into an authoritative ritual and narrative archetype for the Jesus community.[37] It also prescribes certain actions that are to be repeated which specifically remember Jesus' death (11:26).

Paul's athletic imagery is part of his argument that the Corinthians' identity is maintained through the archetypal narrative of Jesus' death and resurrection and within their own bodies

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[34] Emma-Jayne Graham, "Memory and Materiality: Re-embodying the Roman Funeral," *Memory and Mourning: Studies on Roman Death* (eds. Valerie M. Hope and Janet Huskinson: UK: Oxbow Books, 2011), 22.

[35] Graham, "Memory and Materiality," 17.

[36] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 7.

[37] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 20.

(6:13-20, 10:11:23-31, 12:17-27). Paul uses body rhetoric to describe the cohesiveness of the community, which is the many parts of one body (12:12-27). The focus on the body in Paul's rhetoric suggests that he draws a parallel between displaying the suffering body in athletic competition and displaying the cross in the living body of the community through public performance and gesture. Sport and spectacle are related to rituals like the Lord's Supper as "cultural performances," a system of meaning through which status, relationships and values are formed and communicated, and they include metaphor, mimesis and theatricality.[38] In other words, collective memory is cultivated in public performance.

Several Roman social practices depended on the public display of bodies. In the triumphal procession the commanding officer paraded his captives through the streets of Rome. The procession involved a number of visual images that provided public recognition of the officer's honour and public humiliation and shaming for the captives.[39] Roman funeral processions were also a highly embodied performances. At many funerals, the accomplishments of the deceased were displayed, making it appear as if they were an actor in their own funeral show. One of the most theatrical examples is Julius Caesar's funeral, which included a wax likeness of his body, including twenty three bloody stab wounds, placed on a mechanical device and spun before the audience.[40] The visual display shapes the memory of Julius Caesar's "type" of his former self.[41]

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[38] Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*, 17; D.H.J. Larmour, *Stage and Stadium: Drama and Athletics in Ancient Greece* (Hildesheim, 1999); *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle. Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* (ed. J.J MacAloon: Philadelphia, 1984).

[39] Ida Östenberg, *Staging the World: Spoils, Captives and Representations in the Roman Triumphal Procession* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 19-119, 128.

[40] Mario Erasmo, *Reading Death in Ancient Rome* (Ohio State University Press, 2008), 38.

[41] Erasmo, *Reading Death in Ancient Rome,* 157, 160, 205.

The relationship between performance and memorializing the dead applies to Paul's athletic references. Paul's heightened awareness of the role of the suffering fleshly body in attaining a resurrected spiritual body, often expressed through bodily suffering, is a somatic gesture that links the community with the deceased. Emma-Jayne Graham has recently noted that the body is a part of the material culture used to memorialize the dead. More importantly for this study, she emphasizes the need to recognize the *living body* as a site of memory, somatically displaying memories through ritual activities and behaviour.[42] In the case of 1 Corinthians, body rhetoric allows the community to re-present Jesus' death. For Paul, the Corinthians are set apart from the Gentile Empire not only because of their future participation in the resurrection, but their ambiguous status as those who identify themselves with Jesus' crucifixion. The Corinthians re-enact and participate in events or images from the deceased's life, in this case, in Jesus' suffering body. The body therefore becomes a vehicle of memory and identity.

1.3 Language and Memory

It is clear that for Paul and his community there was a link between narrative, embodiment and memory, but it is not clear what exactly Paul means when he says that the apostles are "*as*" men condemned to death (ὡς ἐπιθανατίους) and why language of suffering is such a pervasive part of Paul`s rhetoric. Paul`s community members were likely frequent spectators at the various types of spectacles held in Corinth. It cannot be assumed, however, that Paul or any members of the community actually participated in competitions, and it is nowhere evident that the community was actually suffering. First Corinthians was written before any

[42] Graham, "Memory and Materiality," 22; Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1998); Valerie M. Hope, *Death in Ancient Rome. A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2007); Valerie M. Hope. *Roman Death: Dying and the Dead in Ancient Rome* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009).

systematic Christian persecutions and the letter gives no indication that the community was being threatened by the civic or imperial authorities. What is the relationship between Paul`s rhetoric and how he believed this language had implications for the community? How does Paul's body rhetoric relate to the actual bodies of believers?

Paul amplifies the implications of Jesus' crucifixion for the community by borrowing the *metaphorical structure* of athletics. The result allows the audience to reflect on exactly how memory of Jesus' death manifests in their bodies and how that manifestation creates a coherent group. Lakoff and Johnson define a structural metaphor as a system of ideas that we take from one event or experience, to giving meaning and understanding to another.[43] Paul uses athletic events to systematically comprehend the meaning of Jesus' death narrative for Gentile community members.

Lakoff and Johnson point out that any metaphor inevitably highlights, hides and extends beyond its original meaning. Thus, we might ask: what parts of athletic competition is Paul highlighting? What aspects of athletics do these metaphors hide?[44] In what way does Paul's metaphorical language extend beyond the ordinary ways of thinking about athletics? Or thinking *with* athletics?[45] These questions will be considered in the conclusion.

Greco-Roman epistolary theory assumes that Greco-Roman letters were designed to be read out loud to their recipients.[46] Metaphor played an important role in making the oration as

[43] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), 77.

[44] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By,* 10.

[45] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By,* 13.

[46] William David Shiell, *Delivering from Memory: The Effect of Performance on the Early Christian Audience* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Pub., 2011); Linda C. Mitchell, *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2007).

effective as if the author was there in person and making a lasting impression on the audience.[47] In order to achieve the desired effect, ancient writers often linked an abstract concept with a vivid image in the form of metaphor. In his treatise on memory, Aristotle writes that "one cannot think without a mental image" (*On Memory and Recollection* 449b.31).[48] Elsewhere he defines a metaphor as bringing together the commonly understood world and the foreign (*Poetics* 21.7). While there must be an association, it cannot be too obvious, so the metaphor can shine through (*Rhet*oric 3.11.5). Quintilian identifies metaphor as a rhetorical figure by which the meaning of one word is transferred to another, and like Aristotle, says that metaphor is designed to "move feelings" (Aristotle, *Poetics* 8.6.4; 8.6.19; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 3.311). Cicero said that metaphors are most effective when they create a visual image of something one cannot really see (*On the Orator* 3.40.161).[49] These writers share Lakoff and Johnson's definition of metaphor as something necessarily linked to our sensory experience.

1.4 Conclusion

Examining how Paul uses structural metaphor in his rhetoric will contribute to this conversation by revealing the link between 4:9 and 9:24-27; that for Paul, suffering means participating in and memorializing Jesus' death in the body. Paul uses athletic imagery in other letters, with foot racing being his most common (Gal 2:2, 5:7; Phil 2:16; 2:17-30; Col 1:29-2:1, 4:12; minor uses: 1 Thess 2:2 2:19; Rom 15:30; Phil 4:1 4:3; Col 2:18 3:15). However, for Paul's audience in Corinth, athletics played a particularly key role in the city's cultural life.

[47] Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth*, 46.

[48] Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth,* 121.

[49] Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth,* 124.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PARADOXICAL GLADIATOR AND PAUL'S GOSPEL

2.1 Early Christianity and Death

In the first century C.E. and thereafter, Christians became known for their unusual attitude towards death.[50] Justin Martyr, an early Christian apologist (100-165 C.E), described his Jewish interlocutor as accusing Christians of having "invented a Christ for whom you give up your lives" (*Dialogue with Trypho* 8). In 248 C.E the theologian Origen rebuked the philosopher Celsus for accusing Christians of "being mad and stirring up for themselves tortures and death" (*Against Celsus* 8.65). Epictetus wrote in 108 C.E. that Christian courage when facing death was out of "habit," as if to suggest their contempt for death was unreflective (*Discourses* 4.7.6). Nothing could be further from the truth for Paul and his exhortation to the community at Corinth. Reflection on the implications of Jesus' death is the single most important element in cultivating a cohesive community.

In the opening section of 1 Corinthians Paul argues that the community should be united in a common identity based on the absolute centrality of the cross (1:10-4:21). The way in which Paul describes the role of bodily suffering in this identity sets the stage for his logic of suffering and death throughout the entire letter (6:19-20, 12:12-27, 11:23-32,15:1-58). After greetings from Paul and Sosthenes, (1:1-3) and thanksgivings (1:4-9), Paul introduces the opening section with the letter's thesis in 1:10, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no division among you, but that you are perfectly united in mind and thought" (Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ λέγητε πάντες, καὶ μὴ ᾖ

[50] Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995), 20.

ἐν ὑμῖν σχίσματα, ἦτε δὲ κατηρτισμένοι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ νοὶ καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ γνώμῃ).[51] Some members of the community and/or some visitors are competing for influence over the community, and others are elevating their status by showing allegiance to these competing individuals (1:11-13). Paul's task is to exhort the community to be united and understand their common identity within a soteriological framework; the community of believers have been "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) (1:2) and are those "being saved" (σῳζομένοις) (1:18). This status is what separates the Corinthians from the Greco-Roman landscape of the Empire (1:20, 2:15). For Paul, those who are being saved are not those who say they believe, but those who display the cross in their bodies (1:18, 6:20, 12:27).

In *The Suffering Self,* Judith Perkins notes that early Christians did not suffer more than anyone else in the Empire and asks why early Christians chose the suffering of their founder to emulate.[52] Asking why Paul chose the gladiator as an analogy for Christian suffering will help answer Perkin's essential question. By the first century, gladiators developed a paradoxical status as despised and condemned slaves and as emblems of Roman virtue and masculinity. They became symbols of Roman military power and eventually were granted the opportunity to achieve fame, fortune, and even freedom from slavery if they performed well for their audience.[53] The paradoxical status of the gladiator as despised slave who had the opportunity to gain glory and virtue in performance provides Paul with a useful framework for demonstrating what it means to belong to a community centered on a crucified hero. The paradoxical status of the gladiator is noted very briefly by Concannon, but even then, his analysis is only in the

[51] Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 1.

[52] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 19.

[53] Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 79-90; Nguyen, "God's Execution of His Condemned Apostles," 2008; Thomas Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators* (London: Routledge, 1992), 27-47.

context of 2 Cor 4:7-13. He does not analyze the significance of the relationship between Greek athletes and Roman gladiators within the athletic topoi of 1 Corinthians.[54] As we will see, the process of negotiating a social space for the early Christian community relies on the concept of mimicry or re-enactment, a concept widely available in Greco-Roman culture and in Paul's rhetoric in 1 Corinthians (4:16, 11:1).

This chapter will set Paul's gladiator metaphor within the context of 1 Cor 1-4 and unfold the evidence in the letter itself that the gladiator was a useful parallel for Paul to describe the paradoxical status of early Christians as those whose identity was based on recollecting the cross event. The importance of memory and performance in Greco-Roman culture serves as the background which illuminates how this phenomenon is at work in Paul's letter, first by elevating the status of crucifixion through analogy with the gladiator as an admired figure, and second, as a public performance that originated as a funerary ritual honouring the dead. In doing so, Paul glorifies an otherwise inglorious death.

2.2 The Roman Games

The scale of Roman death spectacles was extraordinary and their popularity only increased over time.[55] The games provided comfort to people of all classes by re-enforcing the social hierarchy and demonstrating Rome's ability to control and protect. Audiences were consoled by witnessing criminal punishment, interacting with the emperor and other powerful figures, or seeing exotic animals.[56] Tertullian (197-202 C.E.) said spectacles were for seeing and

[54] Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath but Our Lives," 211.

[55] Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 1, 34.

[56] Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 2-3.

being seen, for seeing performances of skill and punishments and domination (Tertullian, *On the Spectacles* 25). Not everyone shared an enthusiasm for the arena and certain authors like Cicero and Seneca criticized the games (Seneca, *Epistles* 7; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 2.41, *Pro Murena* 40). The opinion of these authors should not be treated as the majority opinion nor was their concern raise out of compassion, but a criticism of social behaviour at the games.[57]

The arena represented Rome's absolute power over the Empire, nature, and even death. The earliest gladiators were usually violent criminals and rebellious slaves and by the Late Republic most gladiators were prisoners of war.[58] Successful gladiators were admired for their skill and discipline and because of this they came to be tied up with war and politics in the third century B.C.E. After the defeat of Cannae in 216 B.C.E. the Empire realized its own vulnerability and the need for Rome to demonstrate control over criminals in the arena intensified. What it meant to be a Roman citizen and a successful Roman military leader was played out in the arena. What was originally a Roman symbol of controlling nature became a symbol of Roman control, period.[59]

The relationship between gladiator combat and military training led to the eventual conflation of originally separate types of spectacles by the first century B.C.E.[60] Spectacles became multi-dimensional entertainment shows. Different events were held in sequence throughout the day. *Venationes* usually took place in the morning and featured combat between men and animals (1 Cor 15:32). At midday there were executions of criminals. The *munus*, or

[57] Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 3-4.

[58] Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle,* 281; See Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath but Our Lives," 194-204 for an updated article on violent sport as cultural negotiation and the games from the first century B.C.E to the first century C.E.

[59] Kyle, *Spectacles of Death,* 47.

[60] K. Welch, "Roman Amphitheatres Revived," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 4 (1991), 272–81;

gladiator combat, followed in the afternoon. Such conglomerate spectacles became institutionalized by the autocracy and formerly separate elements were combined to demonstrate Rome's ultimate control over criminals, life, death, and reinforce the social hierarchy.

2.3 Gladiator Combat as Funeral Performance

Despite institutionalization and developing military symbolism, the funerary associations of gladiator combat were not lost by the first century C.E. The type of gladiator combat that became known in Rome as the *munus*, originated as a funeral display honouring a deceased family member.[61] Tertullian said the spectacles originated as sacrifices venerating the gods and rendering a service to the dead and, because of their association with the dead, claimed they were idolatrous (*On the Spectacles* 12). Servius (139-211 C.E.) wrote that "gladiators began as human sacrifice made for to the dead and through forced contests between prisoners of war at funerals" (*Ad Aen.* 3.67 quoting Varro; *Ad Aen*. 10.519-20).

The first gladiator *munus* was given by in 246 B.C.E by the sons of Decimus Junius Brutus Scaeva, a member of the Junii, to honour their dead father (Valerius Maximus 2, 4.7; Livy, *Periocha* 16).[62] The living often used the grandeur of funerary performance for their own political or personal benefits, surpassing the achievements of those that came before them.[63] Polybius writes on the dramatic display of wax ancestor masks at funerals, linking the deceased with the living, and attracting attention and prestige to the family (Polybius 6.53-54). Gladiator combat became an even more dramatic way of attracting attention. The most spectacular *munus*

[61] Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 5.

[62] Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 83.

[63] Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 6.

was given by Titus Flaminius at his father's funeral, where seventy-four men said to have fought over a period of three days (Livy 23, 30.15; 31, 50.4; 39, 46.2, 41, 20.10).

The *munera* were originally separate from the public Roman games, the *ludi*, and did not become a regular part of the official festival calendar until the late first century B.C.E. The *munera* were framed by the religious origins of the *ludi,* where rites and celebrations in the form of sports or shows honoured the gods for military success or deliverance from crises. They eventually become state-financed and institutionalized because they grew in popularity and included entertainment such as theatrical performances, as well as gladiator combat and chariot races.[64]

The funerary practice of gladiatorial combat has long been attributed to the Etruscans. This association has proven to be a modern sensibility, unwilling to associate the brutal violence of gladiatorial combat with the cradle of Western civilization. An early Etruscan tomb painting called the "Game of Phersu" depicts a blindfolded man being attacked by a dog. This and other similar funerary practices are thought to have had some influence on the origins of the Roman games. Scholarship on the subject has, however, proven the origins and development of gladiatorial combat to be much more complex.[65] In Rome, death spectacles are best considered as ritualized killings, embedded in religious ceremonies and considered a performance that is in one way or another related to the dead.[66]

[64] Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 41.

[65] Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 44.

[66] Kyle*, Spectacle of Death*, 40.

2.4 The Greco-Roman Suffering Body

The symbolic significance of the slave-gladiator was at its height in the cultural context of the first century when philosophical discourse, sophistic rhetoric and heroic tropes adopted the model of virtuous suffering.[67] In exploring where power was generated in Roman culture, Foucault found there was a new emphasis on the body in the late Republic and early Roman Empire and in the cultivation of the "self" as a body not liable to suffering.[68] Judith Perkins argues that the early Christian discourse of the self as a sufferer contributed to Christianity's growth and survival. The narrative of the persecuted community gave close attention to the body as a factor in the formation of identity.[69] This is especially true for martyr texts where death in the arena is a model for Christian suffering.

The gladiator was a useful analogy for Paul's portrayal of suffering bodies because, like slaves, gladiators were seen as bodies, not citizens.[70] This is suggested by the oath gladiators swore upon entering professional gladiator schools, to be "burned by fire, bound in chains, to be beaten, to die by the sword" (Petronius, *Satyrica* 117.5-6). All but death were severe affronts on the integrity of a citizen's body. Regardless of their origins, all gladiators were equal to slaves.[71]

The gladiator, however, became a symbolic paradox as both a despised entertainer and a celebrated symbol of Roman power by embodying the romantic vision of virtuous bodily

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[67] Bruce Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002); Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 1995; Also see Maud Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[68] Michael Foucault, *The Care of the Self in the History of Sexuality* (trans. R. Hurley, vol. 3 *of The History of Sexuality*: New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 42; Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 77.

[69] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 12.

[70] Jennifer Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

[71] Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle*, 282.

suffering.[72] Stoic sources praised the gladiator's soldierly self-discipline and acceptance of death (Seneca, *Epistles* 30).[73] Successful gladiators became famous, desirable for their masculinity and bravery. The Emperor Claudius (41-54 C.E.) handed gladiators pieces of gold and Nero (54-68 C.E.) is said to have given a gladiator his own palace (Seutonius, *Life of Claudius* 21.5; *Life of Nero* 30.2). Senators collected their armour and even emulated them in the area. The Emperor Commodus fought as a gladiator himself even though for a free Roman citizen to willingly become a gladiator was considered as shameful as becoming a slave.[74]

The trope of virtuous suffering appears frequently in Stoic literature. This is relevant because Paul's ethical discourse is often compared to that in Stoic literature, including the use of the ἀγων.[75] By the first century, Stoic philosophy had become widely known, and its tropes were used by those who did not necessarily subscribe to Stoicism itself. Brent Shaw has testified that Stoicism was, "…*the* idea system associated with most of the high period of the ancient classical world." Stoicism achieved its greatest point of influence in the early empire.[76]

For the Stoics virtue was a matter of self-mastery and gladiators exemplified self-mastery in the face of death. The virtue found through self-mastery was, according to Epictetus, to live in accordance with one's nature (*Handbook* 8). This meant controlling one's passions and attitudes. This worldview is similar to Paul's talk of self-mastery in 1 Cor 9:25-27.

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[72] Mark Golden, *Greek Sport and Social Status* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 72.

[73] Wiedemann , *Emperors and Gladiators*, 128-53.

[74] Golden, *Greek Sport and Social Status*, 72; Kyle, *Spectacles of Death,* 28; See Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 1-47 for more on free citizens emulating gladiatorial virtues.

[75] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 1967; Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

[76] Brent Shaw, "The Divine Economy: Stoicism as Ideology," *Latomus* 64 (1985), 16-54.

An important difference between Paul and Epictetus is the treatment of the body. Epictetus believed the body was out of one's control and therefore indifferent (*Discourses* 3.1.40). The only thing man could control was his intellect. Paul's body rhetoric can be misleading as he often used the term σάρξ to refer to the flesh in a negative or indifferent way (1 Cor 3:3, Rom 7-8, Col 2:11) while he uses the term σῶμα to speak of the body in a positive way, as a house for the spirit of God and as the site of honouring Christ (1 Cor 6:19-20, 11:23-26, 12:27).[77] Paul describes the community as those who share an identity as "the body of Christ" (σῶμα Χριστοῦ) (12:27). The Stoics used the figure of the gladiator as an example of a brave death; Paul's use of the figure of the gladiator includes the role of the suffering σῶμα in achieving it.

One way the virtue of bodily suffering is emphasized in Paul's gladiator metaphor is through his call to imitation (4:16). The emphasis in the following analysis will be on how Paul's gladiator imagery contributes to his expectation that the community embody the cross through virtuous suffering. For Paul, displaying this paradoxical status is a re-enactment, or re-collection, of the cross through imitation.

2.5 1 Corinthians 1-4: Paul's Gospel

Margaret Mitchell argues that 1 Corinthians is an example of a deliberative rhetorical letter and has divided 1 Corinthians into four sections of rhetorical arguments; 1:18-4:21, 5:1-11:1, 11:2-14:40 and 15:1-57.[78] The first section concerns the inverted status of Paul's cross-

[77] Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Vincent Branick, "The Sinful Flesh of the Son of God (Rom 8:3): A Key Image in Pauline Theology," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47:2(1985), 246-262.

[78] Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 84-186.

centred gospel. In other Pauline letters the cross is understood as a self-giving act (Gal 2:20), other times as God's giving act (Rom 8:32). Sometimes Paul uses language of crucifixion (1 Cor 1:23) and sometimes Jesus' death is discussed only in light of the resurrection (Rom 4:25).[79] In 1 Corinthians Paul speaks of Jesus' death as "the cross of Christ" (σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ) (1 Cor 1:17), "the cross" (σταυρός) (1 Cor 1:18), and uses the verb "to crucify" (σταυρόω) (1 Cor 1:23, 2:2, 13:4).

It is significant that in 1 Corinthians Paul uses language of crucifixion more than any other letter and that the importance of Jesus' death in 1 Cor 1-4 is not overshadowed by the resurrection. The focus on Jesus' death suggests that Paul's example of apostolic suffering is framed by the act of remembering and the ongoing influence of the dead on the living community. In Greco-Roman culture, crucifixion was a shameful and dishonourable death, normally reserved for criminals and slaves.[80] Through the acts of Jesus' death and resurrection God made the wisdom of this world "foolish" (μωραίνω) (1:20) and raised what is foolish to shame the strong and wise (2:6; 1:26-28, 3:18). This act inverts a shameful death on the cross to an honourable demonstration of God's power (1:29). Those who are sanctified in Christ have his "spirit" (πνεῦμα) and the spirit reveals this truth to them (2:10-16).

The context immediately preceding the gladiator metaphor is Paul's self-example as a servant of Jesus Christ (4:1), while the Corinthians reign as if they were kings (4:8). Paul says he did not come to them with rhetoric of the wise (2:1) but he came in much fear, trembling and weakness (2:3), because he knew nothing but Christ crucified (2:2). Paul gives his example as

[79] Charles B. Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 2.

[80] See Catherine Edwards *Death in Ancient Rome* (Yale University Press, 2007), for information on disposing of the dead, including victims of the arena; John Granger Cook, "Roman Crucifixions: From the Second Punic War to Constantine," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 104:1 (2013): 1-32; Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

suffering and weak apostle so that they will not be "puffed up" (φυσιόω) against one another (4:6). The Corinthians see themselves as secure, while the weak apostles practice endurance and self-exertion so as to not face defeat in the ἀγων (9:24-27).[81]

At the high point of the opening section Paul says "I think God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death, we have become a spectacle the world of angels and men" (δοκῶ γάρ, ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀποστόλους ἐσχάτους ἀπέδειξεν ὡς ἐπιθανατίους, ὅτι θέατρον ἐγενήθημεν τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ ἀγγέλοις καὶ ἀνθρώποις) (4:9). Following 4:9, Paul lists the hardships the apostles endure in the so-called "catalogue of afflictions" in 4:10-13 which they "endure" (ἀνέχομαι) (4:12). Paul says he is a slave of Christ and then changes his role to that of the Corinthians' father figure (4:14), and exhorts them to imitate him (4:15).

Paul's logic of body participation is a key factor in how Jesus' death continues to influence the community. For Paul, to accept the message of the gospel is to take on the role of sufferer and to suffer means to *share* in Christ's death (4:1-2). This logic is one that links the dead with the living through gesture. The Greek word Paul uses to describe God's power, δύναμις (1:18), is unlike the modern concept of power that carries a meaning of degree of force, but in the New Testament has a meaning of *performing* some kind of function (Luke 1:51; Acts 2:22, 18:24). For Paul, proclamation is the means by which God's power becomes operative and transformative in the world and δύναμις is how one reaches the Kingdom of God (4:20). The operative event of God's δύναμις is the cross.[82] The gospel is both performative and communicative and Paul imagines this performance as a death spectacle in the Roman arena.

[81] John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthians Correspondence* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1988), 139.

[82] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 155.

Henry T. Nguyen argues that 4:9 refers to condemned criminals called *noxii,* executed in the arena.[83] Rome executed criminals in a formal, public show, by exposure to wild beasts, crucifixion, or by burning them alive. *Noxii* were untrained slaves who had no chance of survival. [84] Lawrence Welborn's book on 1 Cor 1-4 identifies 4:9 as a mime performance, a low class of the acting profession.[85] Theater actors lost certain political rights social status (*infamia*) because they displayed their bodies for the pleasure of others, and because of this exposure they were often associated with prostitutes. Nguyen argues it is unlikely Paul chose a figure associated so strongly with sexual imagery for his self-presentation.[86] Some scholars identify 4:9 as a Roman triumphal procession, which appears to be the background of 2 Corinthians 2:14. In 1 Cor 4:9 the apostles are executed rather than moved along a procession.[87]

Nguyen says that there are two problems with assuming gladiator combat as the background for 1 Corinthians 4:9. First, there is no indication of a fight or a struggle as there is with Paul's reference to a beast fight in 15:32. Second, as we have already established, gladiators had the opportunity to gain glory and fame and Nguyen finds it doubtful Paul would want to portray these positive features in his metaphor.[88] Nguyen based his conclusion on Donald G. Kyle who highlights the social hierarchy within the arena, pointing out that the *noxii* were the

[83] Henry T. Nguyen, "The Identification of Paul's Spectacle of Death Metaphor in 4:9," *New Testament Studies* 53.4 (2007), 489.

[84] Nguyen, "The Identification of Paul's Spectacle of Death Metaphor in 4:9," 490.

[85] Nguyen, "The Identification of Paul's Spectacle of Death Metaphor in 4:9," 493.

[86] Nguyen, "The Identification of Paul's Spectacle of Death Metaphor in 4:9," 493.

[87] Nguyen, "The Identification of Paul's Spectacle of Death Metaphor in 4:9," 494.

[88] Nguyen, "The Identification of Paul's Spectacle of Death Metaphor in 4:9," 497.

lowest of the low.[89] Paul would find this metaphor appropriate for demonstrating the lowliness of the apostles.[90]

It is the positive features of the gladiator that Nguyen argues make it an unlikely choice for Paul's self-presentation, which I argue is the reason Paul chose it. These paradoxical characteristics of Paul's gladiator metaphor are similar to his use of slave imagery. In Romans, Paul contrasts the slavery and freedom of those outside the community, under the control of sin, and those inside the community, free from sin (Rom 6:22). Paul contrasts slavery/freedom to argue that the community has been freed from one master and have become slaves of Christ, which Paul considered freedom (Rom 6:18). In the Greco-Roman world slaves had no legal or social recognition. They were at the complete disposal of their masters.[91] Paul uses the lowliness of slaves in order to articulate the positive outcome of the believer's freedom in Christ. That Paul sees a similarity in his slavery trope and athletic imagery is obvious in 9:27 where Paul says "I punish my body and enslave it (δουλαγωγῶ) in order to win the prize" (9:27). It is therefore very unlikely Paul would not use gladiatorial imagery because of its positive features. In fact, it is the paradoxical status of the gladiator as a slave who can attain freedom and glory that is useful for Paul. We will see below that Paul's gladiator metaphor also includes the idea of struggle evident in the "catalogue of afflictions" that follows (4:10-13).

89 Kyle, *Spectacles of Death,* 91-95.

90 Nguyen, "The Identification of Paul's Spectacle of Death Metaphor in 4:9," 499.

91 Jennifer A. Glancy, "Obstacles to Slave's Participation in the Corinthians Church" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117:3 (1998), 481-501.

2.6 "Imitate me": Paul's Christology and Gladiatorial Suffering in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13

In 1:18-25 Paul asserts that God has revealed himself in the crucifixion, then he turns to his own imitation of the cross in 2:1-5. Paul's ministry is a demonstration of God's power because he knew nothing but Christ crucified (2:2), he came in weakness and fear (2:3), and his preaching was not in lofty tongue or eloquence (2:1). Paul understands his weakness and suffering as an extension of his Christology.[92] Paul says he does this "on your account" (δι' ὑμᾶς) (4:6). The preposition with the accusative suggests Paul's self-example is meant for the Corinthians to imitate; they honour Christ's crucifixion by claiming their position as suffering servants (4:1-5, 16).[93] Paul's emphasis on bodily suffering in his call to imitation (μιμητής 4:16) suggests that the gladiator metaphor is part of his agenda to extend this Christology to his community through the same means. In 4:8 Paul juxtaposes their attitude that they reign as kings with apostolic suffering that comes as a result of their lowly status.[94]

In 3:5-4:13 the anthropocentric attitude of the Corinthians is contrasted to the theocentric examples Paul gives; the apostles are servants who answer to the Lord (3:12-15) and service is the cornerstone of the apostles who live the message of the gospel (4:1-7). God is the planter (3:5-7) and the master builder (3:10-15). Both images are meant to illustrate the common purpose of the cosmological hierarchy (3:8).[95] Jesus' crucifixion is the foundation that has been laid and upon which Paul builds (3:1). Paul says "do you not know you yourselves are God's temple, and his spirit dwells in you?" (Οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ναὸς θεοῦ ἐστε καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ

[92] Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross,* 174.

[93] Barry D. Smith, *Paul's Seven Explanations of the Suffering of the Righteous* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc,. 2002), 157; Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 244.

[94] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 357.

[95] Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord,* 243.

θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν), thereby transforming the status of the communal body "you" (ἐστε) as that which contains Jesus' πνεῦμα.

1 Cor 4:7-13 can be divided into four subsections: vv.7-8; 9; 10; and 11-13. The Corinthians are the subject of the first section, the apostles of the second, and the two groups are contrasted in the third. The fourth elaborates the description of the apostles in the previous sections. The first sub-section, vv. 7-8, is tied to 4:6 by the conjunction γάρ, where Paul says he has applied all this to himself and Apollos for their benefit, and 4:9 is connected by the same conjunction to 4:8 where Paul criticises the Corinthians' arrogant attitude. This suggests that the gladiatorial metaphor belongs to Paul's pedagogical agenda. Fitzgerald argues that 4:6-13 are to be interpreted through the warnings of 4:6 and 4:14, where Paul responds to the arrogance of Paul's "children" and he rebukes them as their "father".[96]

In the second subsection (v. 9), Paul imagines the apostles who suffer for the gospel as those "appointed to death" (ἐπιθανάτιος). Paul characterizes himself as suffering in the θέατρον and establishes this suffering within the eschatological framework of a cosmic performance. The θέατρον can mean the amphitheater where spectacles were held or the spectacle itself.[97] Here, Paul refers to the fact that he and the apostles are put on display (ἀποδείκνυμι) in the amphitheater for the world to see**.**

Paul's gladiator metaphor is a sort of staging image that prepares the audience for the catalogue of afflictions to follow. Paul expresses his opinion "I think" (δοκῶ) about how God has displayed the gospel through the apostles' actions and gives reasons (ὅτι) for those actions.[98]

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[96] Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel,* 117-118; See Karl A. Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 13-25, who argues that this section is not an admonition but an accusation against the Corinthians.

[97] *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Simon Wallenberg Press, 2007), 813.

[98] Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel,* 130.

The main verb of the image is "to display" (ἀποδείκνυμι).[99] The Corinthians are spectators in the stands and the apostles are the spectacle. Paul's placement of the Corinthians as the spectators is a vivid criticism against them in light of the Stoic intellectual tradition Paul's metaphor shares. The same philosophers, who applaud the bravery of the gladiator, criticize the spectators in the stands who lose control over their emotions (Martial, *On the Spectacles* 3).

Thiselton argues that Paul's description of the apostles as last of all is a reference to the resurrection and the eschatological context of 1-4.[100] That Paul has the resurrection in mind is clear from his description of the apostle's exhibition as a cosmic spectacle to angels and men. The order refers more specifically, however, to the fact that the *munus* was the last event of the Roman spectacle.[101] Paul does not give a chronology of the resurrection and imply that the apostles will be resurrected last at any point in the letter.

Nguyen suggests that the background of Paul self-identification as a spectacle in the amphitheatre is *noxii,* criminals thrown into the arena with no chance of survival, no skills, and no glory.[102] Paul's cosmological framework suggests otherwise. In 1 Cor 1-4 Paul does not seek to construct an identity of the Corinthians as those who have shame; he seeks to invert the status of *what* brings shame, what *appears* shameful, and say it is actually honourable. When evaluated by the Corinthian's worldly criteria Paul is weak, but by God's criteria he suffers virtuously. The source of virtue comes from suffering and death, interpreted through Christ's resurrection (15:13-14). For Paul, suffering is a precursor to the resurrection. Thus, the paradigm of suffering

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[99] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 360; Nguyen, "God's Execution of His Condemned Apostles," 488.

[100] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 359.

[101] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 360.

[102] Nguyen, "The Identification of Paul's Spectacle of Death Metaphor in 4:9," 489.

expressed in 4:9 cannot be the *noxii* who have no chance of glory, as Nguyen suggests, but the paradoxical gladiator.

This does not mean, however, that Paul claims to be a skilled gladiator. This is evident from his previous claim to be without eloquence and wisdom. Gladiatorial virtue came from two sources: one, in their skill in battle and, two, in the bravery with which they face their death. Paul's claim to virtue in suffering comes from his willingness to play the part. This connects the imagery to 1 Corinthians 9 where Paul says he punishes and enslaves his body (9:27). The focus is on the wilful embodiment of the cross.[103]

Paul's "catalogue of suffering" in 4:10-13 closely resembles the catalogues of Greco-Roman texts, most commonly in Stoic philosophy (Epictetus, *Dissertations* 1.24.1).[104] The sage gave a list of hardships to demonstrate that his/her virtue does not depend on material possessions, and that physical suffering is endured for intellectual virtue.[105] J.T. Fitzgerald argues that Paul's list of hardships in 1 Cor 4:10-13 is comparable to such a list.[106] Epictetus, for example, contrasts "boasting" with exhibiting the virtue of suffering. He says "bring on the hardships, bring on imprisonment, bring on disrepute, bring on condemnation. This is the proper exhibition" (*Discourses* 2.1.35). Fitzgerald notes the similarity in Paul's catalogue of hardships and Epictetus' because both authors contrast human arrogance with the suffering of the sage on exhibition. It is indeed significant that Epictetus also chose performance language insofar as both authors consider virtuous suffering as a performance.[107]

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[103] Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath but Our Lives," 210-211.

[104] Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross,* 1990; Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel,* 1988).

[105] Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel,* 112.

[106] Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, 117-148.

[107] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 366.

Unlike Paul, the Stoics equated God with reason (λόγος), which is found within a person's intellect. For Paul, God is outside man. Paul criticizes the Corinthians' arrogance for acting as though what they have they did not receive (4:7). The emphasis in the catalogue of afflictions is, then, on the apostles' dishonour as a result of their lowly status and on *God's choice* to invert the status of suffering and weakness.[108] Paul's language is ironic, using catchwords of Stoics, and does not necessarily mean that the Corinthians community was a community of Stoic philosophers.[109]

In 1 Cor 4:10 Paul continues the irony of inversion. He gives three antitheses, related to his initial introduction in 1:26-28; the apostles are fools, weak, and dishonoured, the Corinthians are wise, strong and honoured.[110] Lawrence Welborn argues that background of "fools" (μωρός) in v.10 and previous uses in 1:25, 27, and 3:18, locate him in the intellectual tradition of the "comic-philosophic" of the mime, the lowest members of the acting class.[111] This provides a better framework for the metaphor than Nguyen's theory, since like gladiators, actors were despised but had the opportunity to gain fame and fortune through their performances. Yet this explanation falls short because Paul's metaphor is explicitly set within the context of a death spectacle.

Like vv. 1:25 and 27 Paul again closely relates the word "weak" (ἀσθενής) with the cross as a critique of social status by referring to the apostle's servitude. The verb κολαφίζω (v.11) may refer to mob violence, malice, to strike with a first, or sometimes in Paul's letters it is used

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[108] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 140.

[109] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 357; Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (ed. Daniel J Harrington: Minnesota: Michael Glazier, 2006), 183,186-188.

[110] Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction,* 47.

[111] Welborn, *Paul, the Fool of Christ,* 12.

metaphorically of the messengers of Satan (2 Cor 12:7). In this context it likely means that the apostles have been treated poorly as a result of their apparent weakness. The verb meaning "we wander homeless" (ἀστατέω) in Greco-Roman culture suggests a poor social status, as respectable citizens have suitable living accommodations.[112] Paul contrasts the abundance of the Corinthians (v.8) with the hunger and thirst of the apostles, and does so again in v. 11 where he emphasizes the physical abuse the apostle's experience.[113]

The verb κοπιάω in v. 12 meaning "grow weary" or "hard toil" also has to do with social status. This may refer to the fact that Paul worked with his hands for a living (v.12), which was considered shameful in Greco-Roman culture. The author of Acts 18:3 suggests that Paul was a tentmaker which, if true, would be a suitable explanation for why Paul chose an arena metaphor as he would likely be involved in accommodating the influx of tourists who came to see the games. The claim to Paul's profession as tentmaker in Acts is only speculative and therefore cannot contribute to our understanding of Paul's exposure to the Roman games.[114]

Nguyen translates γυμνητεύω as " be naked" and argues that the *noxii* were sent into the ring without clothing (v.11).[115] The word γυμνητεύω can also mean "without proper garments" (Rev. 3:17, 16:15).[116] The phrase περικαθάρματα τοῦ κόσμου is translated as "the world's scum" (4:13). Epictetus describes the off-coursing of humanity as removing scum (*Discourses* 3.22.78),

[112] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 362.

[113] Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel,* 134.

[114] *Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 363.

[115] Nguyen, "The Identification of Paul's Spectacle of Death Metaphor in 4:9," 499.

[116] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 361.

and the context of Paul's social references suggests he is referring to the apostle's social status in the same way.[117]

The third section in v.13 brings to a close that which was begun in v. 9. The "we have become refuse to the world" (περικαθάρματαοῦ κόσμου ἐγενήθημεν) of v. 13 corresponds to "we have become a spectacle to the world" (θέατρον ἐγενήθημεν τῷ κόσμῳ) of v. 9. The description of the apostles as "scum" or "filth" (περικαθάρματα) in v. 13 recalls the beginning of the depiction of the apostles in v. 9 "as those sentenced to death" (ὡς ἐπιθανατίους). As a result, the statement in v. 9 becomes the thesis sentence of all of verses 9-13. The "until now" (ἕως ἄρτι) is placed at the end so that it corresponds to the "until the present hour" (ἄχρι τῆς ἄρτι ὥρας) that began in v. 11, emphasising the ongoing meaning of the cross for inverting social norms and the present state of the community.[118]

Paul's self-discipline while suffering draws from the admiration of a gladiator who is without skill but faces death bravely.[119] Thus, the function of Paul's catalogue of afflictions in 4:10-13 is to give himself as a counter-example to the Corinthians' behaviour, and convince them to imitate correct conduct.[120] The gladiator metaphor in 4:9 serves to heighten his argument that suffering is a paradoxical demonstration of God's power that appears foolish to this world. Paul's emphasis on the ongoing link between the past and present through the catalogue of inflictions cultivates the community's understanding of the self as sufferer. Paul's call for imitation is key in his argument; the community imitates his suffering as he imitates Christ's. In

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[117] C.K.Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 112; Hans Conzelmann*, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (eds. George W and S.J. MccRae: Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 90; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 180; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 364.

[118] Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel,* 131.

[119] Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath but Our Lives," 211.

[120] Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel,* 122.

other words, the emphasis is on *action* and *performance* grounded in the memory of the gospel event.

Thiselton argues that Paul uses the gladiator as the embodiment of death because they cannot win every fight.[121] Using the gladiator as a symbol of inevitable death is certainly justifiable since the cross is, at this point in the letter, the central feature of the Jesus community. A better explanation is the paradoxical status of the gladiator as one who gains virtue in a performance of suffering. Gladiators who performed well had the opportunity to pass from criminal status to a Roman citizen, from social death to reintegration.[122] The association between death, suffering and freedom fits well into Paul's paradigm of the cross, the suffering community, and the resurrection. The catalogue of afflictions is an extension of Paul's contrast between God's power displayed in the cross and the Corinthians' attitude throughout all of 1 Cor 1-4. Thus, the gladiator metaphor belongs to Paul's contrast of human-wisdom/ gospel, strong/weak, rich/poor and virtuous suffering paradigm.

2.7 Conclusion

Paul's gladiator metaphor is a demonstration of the inverted status of the cross. There are two meanings embedded in this metaphor and its effect on the community; the first is the paradoxical status of the gladiators themselves as slaves who are capable of attaining glory. The second is the gladiator's performance honouring the dead. Paul's metaphor utilizes both aspects in an effort to highlight the physicality of the gospel through the arena as an imagined space where the apostles display their identification with the gospel. In Paul's argument there is a close

[121] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 360.

[122] Kyle, *Spectacles of Death,* 81.

relationship between death, suffering and slavery. To die on the cross was to suffer as a slave. This explains Paul's idea that the Corinthians are those who suffer while not evidently experiencing any dramatic events of persecution or suffering.

Paul is conscious of the funerary associations of gladiatorial virtue as a performance honouring the dead. That Paul uses the gladiator metaphor as a consciously performative facet of Rome's visual culture is suggested by fact that "to display" is the main verb of the sentence. That he chose a performance grounded in funerary honours is suggested by the focus on the cross as the source for virtuous suffering. Paul is very aware of the role of ritual, re-enacting and remembering when creating a cohesive community and imagery from the arena highlights the centrality of memory within the community. The performative nature of Paul's argument is also suggested by the importance of imitation in his argument. What he expects the Corinthians to imitate is the apostle's participation in suffering and lowly social status as they embody the gospel

CHAPTER 3: ATHLETIC VIRTUE AND SUFFERING

3.1 Paul's Athletic Motif

> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Cor 9:24-27).

The image of running (τρέχω) in 1 Cor 9:24 is the most commonly used athletic image in the Pauline epistles (Rom 9:16, 1 Cor 9:24, Gal 2:2, 5:7, Phil 2:16, 2 Thess 3:1, 2 Tim 4:7). Paul imagines himself in race in the "στάδιον" (9:24), which has special meaning for Corinth as host of the famous Isthmian games and which provide the backdrop for 1 Cor 9:24-27.[123] That Paul is making a specific reference to the Isthmian games is suggested by the importance of the games in Corinthian and Greek life, a fact which could hardly be ignored by Paul, and by the range of images in these verses that relate to the sporting events of the games, such as prize (βραβεῖον) (9:24), crown (στέφανος) (9:25), boxing (πυκτεύω) (9:26), and being disqualified (ἀδόκιμος) (9:27).[124] Many scholars agree that in 1 Corinthians Paul borrows language of the games to exhort the community to practice self-control.[125]

The way Paul uses athletic imagery is very similar to that of the Cynic-Stoic diatribe, which portrays the intellectual life as a moral "struggle".[126] Rudolph Bultmann argued that

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[123] Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 (2004), 344.

[124] Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," 343.

[125] Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," 343; Seesengood, *Competing Identities*, 2007; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 2000; Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 2000.

[126] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 2; Philip F. Esler, *Picturing the New Testament* (eds. Annette Weissenrieder, Friederike Wendy and Petra Von Gemünden: Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 360. Also see Abraham J. Malherbe,

Paul's intention was also moral exhortation, calling the Corinthians to exert themselves for Christ the way the moral sage does for intellectual virtue.[127] One of the most extensive books dedicated solely to the subject of Paul's athletic imagery is Victor Pfitzner's *Paul and the Agon Motif,* in which he argues the primary purpose of 9:24-27 is self-renunciation rather than self-exertion. Pfitzner's analysis is based on his interpretation of 1 Cor 9:1-23 where Paul gives himself as an example of self-renunciation for the sake of the gospel. Pfitzner argues that because of God's free grace, human effort cannot "win the prize" (9:24). Therefore, the central function of the athletic motif cannot be self-exertion.[128] I will argue that 9:24-27 is not the conclusion to 9:1-23 but the introduction to 10:1-13, which recalls Israel's cult-legend and illustrates Moses' death as a type (τύπος) for Jesus' death. For Paul, Jesus' death has become the main means of entering Israel's covenant for non-Jews and the new criteria for maintaining Israel's covenant for Jewish Jesus devotees (Gal 3:28).

Two questions will determine our interpretation of 9:24-27 within the larger context of the letter. The first is how vv. 24-27 fit within 1 Cor 10, and the second is how 1 Cor 10 fits within the discussion of food sacrificed to idols in 1 Cor 8-11. In 1 Cor 8 Paul voices his concern that the Corinthians are consuming meat sacrificed to Gentile gods. In 1 Cor 9:1-23 the apostle abruptly changes the topic from food to his apostolic freedom and self-renunciation for the gospel. He returns to the topic of food in 10:1-31 where he gives examples from Israel's history of participating in meals dedicated to idols (10:1-13). In 10:14-21 Paul invokes a pre-Pauline

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"The Beat at Ephesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87:1 (1968), 71-80 for a discussion on the use of the Cynic-Stoic diatribe in 1 Cor 15:29-34.

[127] Rudolf Bultmann, "Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe," *FRLANT* (Gottingen, 1910).

[128] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 87.

tradition concerning the meal which, much like the Lord's Supper tradition in 11:23-26, connects memorializing Jesus' death with the proper practice of cult.[129]

The following analysis will unpack an unexplored aspect of Paul's athletic imagery; that of the Isthmian game's origins as a hero-cult funeral ritual, and I will argue that Paul understands the physical body of individual believers as living memorials of Jesus' crucifixion (1 Cor 6:15, 20, 12:27; 2 Cor 4:10). The broader context of 1 Cor 8-11, in which the topic is cult ritual and Israel's covenantal history, suggests that Paul uses imagery from the Isthmian games as a myth akin to Israel's cult legend (10:1-13), borrowing a vocabulary with which to understand Jesus' death. The account of the Isthmian games given by the fifth-century poet Pindar describes its origins as a celebratory funeral ritual of the child cult-hero Melikertes at the Isthmian Sanctuary.[130] Paul adopts language from Israel's cult legend in order to construct an understanding of Jesus' death as part of Jewish covenantal history and, in the same way, applies language of the Isthmian hero-cult to construct a *Greco-Roman* understanding of the community as those who participate in Israel's covenant through the cross. Israel's cult legend and the Isthmian games are somatic performances that remember and re-enact. By using diction from these performances Paul creates an ongoing memory of Jesus' death for both Jews and Gentiles. This interpretation retains the traditional ideals of the athletic motif, such as self-discipline and endurance, but examines the motif from the neglected point of view of funeral performance.

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[129] Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, *Jesus' Death in Early Christian Memory: The Poetics of the Passion* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 35.

[130] Pindar, *Isthmian Ode* 6.5(1) as quoted in Elizabeth R. Gebhard and Matthew W. Dickie, "Melikertes-Palimon, Hero of the Isthiman Games*," Ancient Greek Hero Cult: Proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult* (ed. Robin Hagg: Stokholm: Åströms, 1999), 161.

3.2 Isthmian Funeral Games

The Isthmian games were the second most prestigious of the Panhellenic games behind the Olympics.[131] People from all over the Mediterranean came to see the games and to be seen at them. Nero, who was Roman Emperor from 54-68 C.E., proclaimed that the Isthmian games were a symbol of Greek freedom (Plutarch, *Life of Titus Flamininus* 12.8). This suggests that Paul's imagery is a significant cultural reference that has a deeply rooted history and meaning for his Corinthian audience.

One of the most important examples of early Greek athletic competition is in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey.* In the *Iliad* Book 23 Odysseus honours the death of his cousin Patroclus with athletic competition. In the *Odyssey* Book 8, Odysseus, guised as a stranger, proves his identity as a Greek of status by excelling in athletic competition. Homer's writing is one of the earliest and most influential accounts of funeral games and was still active in the memory of first-century Greek culture. In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* the dead did not interact with the living. By the fifth century B.C.E., when the poet Pindar was writing about the games at Isthmia, the dead had acquired a vitality of their own and many myths describe the dead interfering with the affairs of the living.[132]

In addition to Pindar's account from the fifth century B.C.E, the origin of the Isthmian hero-cult is also recorded by Pausanias in the second century C.E. While on his way from Megara to Corinth, Pausanias describes the many legends of the rocky shores. One legend tells how a woman named Ino and her young child Melikertes were escaping the grip of her husband Athamas, who had killed the elder of their two sons. In order to escape, Ino and Melikertes leapt

[131] Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," 344.

[132] Bruno Currie, *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 31-40.

into the sea and a dolphin carried the child's body to Corinth (1.44.7-8). An altar marked the spot where Sisyphus, said to be the King who founded Corinth (Homer, *Odyssey* 11.593-600), buried Melikertes on the Isthmus and held the first Isthmian games in his honour (2.1.3).[133] Although there are no remains of a shrine to Melikertes, there is archaeological evidence of three sacrificial pits and two temples dedicated to the hero.[134] The Isthmian sanctuary was abandoned when the city was sacked in 146 B.C.E. and some scholars believe the cult of Melikertes was a later Roman invention.[135] Even if this is so, it is significant that not only the Greeks but the Romans understood the game's origins as a performance memorializing the dead, and that this meaning was retained over a long period of time, from Pindar to Pausanias.

Two of the four Panhellenic games have shrines to the heroes in whose honour they were founded. The Olympic Games were founded as funeral games for Pelops, and the Nemean games as funeral games for Opheltes. Both contained hero cults and included tomb sacrifices. It is likely, then, that Melikertes also had a tomb and that sacrifices were made to it.[136]

It is also likely that when Gentile Corinthians first heard of Jesus' miraculous deeds, death and resurrection, they associated Jesus with Greco-Roman hero-cults.[137] It is unlikely, however, that the community thought of Jesus *as* a Greco-Roman hero because the early traditions about Jesus do not include the common hero-cult practice of tomb worship.[138] Jesus'

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[133] Pausanias as summarized in Gebhard and Dickie, "Melikertes-Palimon, Hero of the Isthiman Games," 159.

[134] Gebhard and Dickie, "Melikertes-Palimon, Hero of the Isthiman Games," 159.

[135] Gebhard and Dickie, "Melikertes-Palimon, Hero of the Isthiman Games," 160.

[136] Gebhard and Dickie, "Melikertes-Palimon, Hero of the Isthiman Games," 162.

[137] Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean, "Jesus as Cult Hero in the Fourth Gospel," *Phiostratus's Heroikos: Religion and Cultural Identity in the Third Century C.E.,* (eds. Ellen Bradshaw Aitken and Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 198.

[138] Berenson Maclean, "Jesus as Cult Hero," 200.

tomb is found empty.[139] Instead, Paul borrows the meaning and language of the cult-hero to communicate the implications of Jesus' death for Gentiles.

3.3 1 Corinthians 8-11: Somatic Gesture and Cult

The similarity of Paul's imagery and Stoic literature has cause 9:24-27 to be examined mainly within the framework of Stoic ethical discourse. Victor Pfitzner argues, however, that this is to miss the point of Paul's metaphor. Paul's application of athletic imagery is not a matter of morals or ethics but is a comparison made between Stoic training and apostolic training.[140] Nevertheless, Stoic philosophy was widespread in the first century and is essential for illuminating how the Corinthians would have interpreted Paul's letters.[141]

One aspect of Stoicism that I argue is important for unpacking Paul's athletic imagery is undertanding death as performance. For Stoics, death was an opportunity for a dramatic display of bravery and courage. These narratives became "cultural scripts" that were remembered and re-enacted by the living.[142] A close exegesis of Paul's athletic imagery reveals the important role of performance and memory in athletics and the depth to which Paul incorporates the association of athletics and funeral performance into his Stoic-like rhetoric. Paul adapts athletic motifs to a Jewish eschatological context in order to contrast earthly life that, for Paul, is defined by Jesus'

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[139] Hans Dieter Betz, "Hero Worship and Christian Beliefs," *Philostratus's Heroikos: Religion and Cultural Identity in the Third Century C.E.* (eds. Ellen Bradshaw Aitken and Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 46-47; Helmut Koester, "On Heroes, Tombs, and Early Christianity: An Epilogue," *Flavius Philostratus: Heroikos* (trans. Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean and Ellen Bradshaw Aitken; Atlantic: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 257-64.

[140] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 87.

[141] Diana Swancutt, "Sexy Stoics and the Re-Reading of Romans 1:18-2:16," *A Feminist Companion to Paul* (eds. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff: Pilgrims Press, 2004), 48-65.

[142] Catharine Edwards, "Acting and Self-Actualization in Imperial Rome," *Greek and Roman Actors* (eds. Pat Easterling and Edith Hall: US: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 370-398; Catharine Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome*, 114-145.

death and resurrection which is the eternal prize for self-discipline and endurance (9:27). Describing the cross in this way is extraordinary in a Greco-Roman context where crucifixion did not provide any opportunity for glory.

Re-enacting and remembering the past were important in Jewish and Greco-Roman culture. Aristotle defined this phenomena in his *Poetics,* where describes μίμησις, or "this is that" (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448b17). Re-enactment is not an inefficacious repetition of a past event but makes that event present and effective in the present.[143] In Israel's scripture the term "remembering" (ἀνάμνησις) is closely bound with the actions of the cult, including meals, sacrifice and offerings (Lev 24:7 LXX).[144] Israel's self-definition is shaped by remembrance. For example, Exodus 12:14 reads, "this day shall be for you a memorial (μνημόσυνον) day, you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance forever." In scriptures, memory is an act ordained for each generation whose memory is rooted in salvation history.[145]

The body is a key factor in bringing the past to life in cult and memorial rituals. For Paul, the cultic meal is a participation in the body and blood of Christ (10:16). Paul warns the Corinthians that "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons" (οὐ δύνασθε ποτήριον κυρίου πίνειν καὶ ποτήριον δαιμονίων· οὐ δύνασθε τραπέζης κυρίου μετέχειν καὶ τραπέζης δαιμονίων) (10:21). The body logic that guides his warning comes from the Greco-Roman understanding of the body as a permeable entity susceptible to pollution. When community members eat meat

[143] Bradshaw Aitken, *Poetics*, 26.

[144] Ray Carlton Jones, "The Lord's Supper and the Concept of Anamnesis," *Word & World* 6:4 (1986), 434.

[145] Carlton Jones, "The Lord's Supper," 437.

sacrificed to idols and then eat the Eucharistic elements, they mingle Christ's body with demons.[146] In 1 Cor 6:15 Paul equates the bodies of the believers with the body of Christ and exhorts them to honour God in their bodies (6:20). For Paul, and in Greco-Roman memorial practices, the body was a vehicle for honouring the dead hero through gesture. Paul employs athletic imagery within the context of using the body in a ritual performance that re-enacts Jesus' death as the foundational event defining communal identity. The meal is a site where this identity is actualized.

In Paul's recollection of the Eucharistic tradition the meal is explicitly described as a performance remembering Jesus' death. First Corinthians 11:23-26 narrates Jesus' last meal with his disciples on the night he was "handed over" (παρεδίδετο) (11:23). The meaning of παραδίδωμι is not clear and unlike the gospels Paul's text does not associate it with the stories of Judas (Matt 26:47-56, Mk 14:43-51, Lk 22:47-53, Jn 18:2-12). The only other letter to use the word is Rom 4:25 where Jesus is handed over "for our trespasses" (διά παράπτωμα). We should conclude that Paul's use of the verb refers to Jesus' capture or arrest late at night.[147] The tradition has Jesus tell his disciples that the meal is to be repeated and each time it is a proclamation of his death until the resurrection (11:26).

The meal establishes the role of proper performance in maintaining membership in God's covenant. Paul's Jewish audience would view the meal as a site where they participate in and re-enact Israel's history, suggesting that somatic gesture and memory was an essential part of Jewish identity and culture. Paul's scriptural allusion to the memory of Moses' death and proper performance of the cultic meal in 1 Cor 10:1-13 shares many parallel features with the meaning

[146] Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 161-168.

[147] Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 401.

and origins of the Isthmian games in 9:24-27. By using Jewish and Gentile analogies Paul was able to construct an understanding of Jesus' death through memory and re-enacting for his Corinthian community.

3.4 The Place of 9:24-27 in 1 Corinthians 8-11

The role of athletic performance in maintaining the memory of the dead is woven into Paul's discussion of ritual meals, but this relationship is often overlooked. Margaret Mitchell titles the section of 9:1-27 "The Proper Use of Freedom for the Common Good," where Paul names the apostolic freedoms he has given up for the sake of the gospel in order to convince the Corinthians to refrain from participating in idol meals.[148] First Corinthians 9:24-27 is Paul's self-example of the discipline he instructed the Corinthians to maintain in regards to consuming food sacrifice to idols, not an apology as believed by Pfitzner.[149] Neither Mitchell nor Pfitzner recognizes the pivotal role of actualizing memory of the dead in somatic gesture which links Paul's discussion of meals and his athletic imagery.

Furthermore, the explanation that Paul's athletic imagery is only an example of self-discipline does not adequately reconcile the motif with the context of 1 Cor 9. This discrepancy has led scholars like Walter Schmithals and Johannes Weiss to separate these verses and connect them with 1 Cor 10. Schmithals put them as the introduction to 10:1-13,[150] while Weiss moved them to the conclusion of 10:1-22.[151]

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[148] Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation,* 185.

[149] See the outline in Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation,* 184-86.

[150] Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to Corinth* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 93-95.

[151] Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief,* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1910) as summarized in Sumney, "The Place of 1 Cor 9:24-27 in Paul's Argument," 329.

In 9:1-23 Paul presents himself as an example of giving up his rights for the good of the community. This does not adequately explain the emphasis on self-discipline and endurance in 9:24-27.[152] These verses are better explained as the introduction to the examples from Israel history that follows in 10:1-13.[153] Paul gives examples from Israel's covenantal failure to illustrate that the Corinthians are in danger of the same fate. Athletic imagery is the most vivid example from Greco-Roman cultural tropes that communicates the discipline needed to keep God's covenant; the members' success depends on their ability to run the course. For Paul, running the right course is inextricably tied to participation in Jesus' death and he communicates this by remembering Moses' death in the wilderness. Paul's imagery may suggest he is using the athletic motif as metaphor for self-renunciation or asceticism when he says that he "punishes" (ὑπωπιάζω) his body and "enslaves it" (δουλαγωγέω). This can be explained with reference to the important role of the suffering body in Pauline thought, discussed further below, and is not sufficient reason to argue that Paul's athletic imagery is explained fully by the motif of self-renunciation.

Οὐκ οἴδατε (v.24) often introduces a new argument in diatribal literature.[154] The themes of self-discipline and not losing the contest set the stage for Paul's discussion of Israel's failure as an example for Corinthian community. The following analysis will demonstrate the possible implications for interpreting 9:24-27 as an introduction to 10:1-13 and argue that the entire section of 9:24-10:13 purposefully recalls funeral games in conjunction with memory of Israel's cult hero Moses and his death.

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[152] Sumney, "The Place of 1 Cor 9:24-27 in Paul's Argument," 330.

[153] Sumney, "The Place of 1 Cor 9:24-27 in Paul's Argument," 330.

[154] Sumney, "The Place of 1 Cor 9:24-27 in Paul's Argument," 331. Also see pp. 331-332 where he argues that v.23 concludes 1 Corinthians 9.

3.5 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

In her work on memory and poetics, Ellen Aitken has demonstrated that the material in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 is an early interpretation of the passion narrative, where Jesus' death is shaped and interpreted through the diction of Israel's covenantal history. By using certain words and images, Paul is prescribing the elements necessary for the proper performance of cult in order to connect the ritual participants to the past.[155] The cult-legend which underlies 1 Cor 10:1-13 includes Israel's exodus, covenant at Sinai, time in the wilderness and entry into the promised land.[156] Here, the foundational narrative of Israel is actualized with specific reference to the cultic meal.[157] In 1 Cor 10:1 Paul discloses Israel's cult-legend to his Gentile audience as that which happened to "our ancestors," thereby incorporating Gentile Corinthians into Israel's history by portraying Jesus' death as the new means of entering God's covenant.

The material in 1 Cor 10:1-13 is an argument concerning food sacrificed to idols.[158] This is suggested by the direct quotation from the Septuagint book of Exodus 32.6, "the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play" (Ἐκάθισεν ὁ λαὸς φαγεῖν καὶ πεῖν, καὶ ἀνέστησαν παίζειν) which is in the context of the ritual meal following a sacrifice made to a golden calf. The Israelites failed to keep God's covenant by making sacrifices to other gods, and is thus a cultic meal in idolatrous circumstances.[159] Aitken argues that this meal is contrasted with a proper cultic meal, submerged in the Greek θυσία σωτηρίου, or "a sacrifice of well-being," which is the

[155] Bradshaw Aitken, *Poetics,* 34.

[156] Bradshaw Aitken, *Poetics,* 35.

[157] Bradshaw Aitken, *Poetics,* 36.

[158] Bradshaw Aitken, *Poetics,* 40.

[159] Bradshaw Aitken, *Poetics*, 37.

word used for the offerings given to the golden calf in Ex 32:6.[160] The only other occurrence is in Ex 24, which calls the ratification of the covenant at Sinai θυσία σωτηρίου.[161] First Corinthians 10:1-13 contrasts a meal properly performed and one improperly performed and the danger of failing to keep the covenant.

In an allusion to Ex 24 Paul says "our ancestors…were baptized into Moses" (10:1) (καὶ πάντες εἰς τὸν Μωϋσῆν ἐβαπτίσαντο) and that this is a τύπος for the Corinthian community. This baptismal formula parallels the phrase "to be baptized into Christ" (ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε) that Paul uses elsewhere (Gal 3:27 and Rom 6:3) and in Pauline usage denotes entry into the covenant through participation in Jesus' death. Paul reinterprets Israel's baptism into Moses and the entry into the Sinai covenant as baptism into Christ and the new covenant.[162]

This is evident in the Eucharistic tradition and the saying over the cup which defines the cultic act in relation to the covenant at Sinai in Ex 24. "In my blood" (ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι) (11:25) locates Jesus and his death as a new foundational moment in the re-enactment of the cult legend and the new ritual demand for continuing its re-enactment for this particular community who are commissioned to "do this in my memory" (τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὁσάκις ἐὰν πίνητε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν). Israel's covenant is renewed with Christ as the figurehead and participating in his death the condition for belonging to the community. The "this" (τοῦτο) in "do this in remembrance of me" refers to the whole administration (11:24-25).[163] Therefore both the commemoration of the "cup which is the new covenant in my blood" (Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ

[160] Bradshaw Aitken, *Poetics,* 38.

[161] Bradshaw Aitken, *Poetics,* 40.

[162] Bradshaw Aitken, *Poetics,* 41.

[163] Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 198.

καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι) (11:25) and the bread that "is my body" (Τοῦτό μού ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα) (11:24) are socially and theologically transformative for the community.

The verb in 1 Cor 10:5 (καταστρώννυμι) recalls Moses' intercession for the Israelites following their complaints against God in Numbers 14. Moses tries to persuade God not to kill his people but his plea was unsuccessful and Moses was among those in that generation to die. God allows the next generation led by Joshua and Caleb to enter the Promised Land (Num 14:20-35). Paul's plea for the Corinthians not to "do as they did" (10:6) suggests they now have the opportunity as the new generation to enter the Promised Land. In other words, they can have membership in God's covenant, if they can give a proper cult performance.[164]

That Paul has ritual performance and memory in mind is further suggested by his allusion to the Song of Moses from Deuteronomy 32 in 1 Cor 10:20, which continues the theme of idolatrous meals, "…what they sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God" (Deut 32:17a). Reciting the Song of Moses is frequently tied to episodes involving the covenant in Israel's narrative, and is closely linked to the death of Moses as one of Moses' last acts. The Song is frequently used when describing Jesus' death in covenantal terms.[165] The Song serves as a reminder to the Corinthians of what happens when Israel fails to keep the covenant.[166]

By drawing from the wilderness story and the episode of the golden calf, Paul is making certain claims about the person of Jesus and his death which co-exist with the Isthmian hero cult. In the conclusion of the warnings from Israel, Paul says that God will not allow the Corinthians to be tempted so that "you will be able to endure it" (δύνασθαι ὑπενεγκεῖν) (10:13). Israel's

[164] Bradshaw Aitken, *Poetics*, 44.

[165],Bradshaw Aitken, *Poetics*, 42.

[166] Bradshaw Aitken, *Poetics,* 43.

covenantal history is re-cast to be consistent with the theme of endurance that Paul began in 9:12 and has continued until 10:13.

Richard Hays argues that when Paul makes an allusion to Israel's scripture he recalls not only the material quoted but "echoes of scripture," where words and narratives recall and activate other words and narratives in scripture.[167] The examples from Israel demonstrate how Paul draws from scripture in order to activate memory and meaning from a broader narrative. The same phenomenon is true of Greco-Roman narratives and images and is particularly present in funerary rituals.[168] By drawing a parallel between Israel's cult-legend and the Isthmian games, Paul interprets Jesus' death within the entire narrative framework of the Isthmian games and their origins in funerary ritual.

3.6 1 Corinthians 9:24-27: Athletic Suffering and Memory

The previous section demonstrated that in 10:1-13 Paul constructs a Jewish understanding of proper somatic performance in order to memorialize Jesus' death, using the diction of Israel's cult-legend. The final section will take a closer look at the specific images in the athletic motif and how that athletic language also shapes Gentile Corinthian's perception of Jesus' death. Athletic endurance is akin to suffering, and for Paul, suffering is a participation in the saving power of Christ's death and resurrection. The individual motifs of the Isthmian games, such as endurance, self-discipline and the victor's crown, implies that the Corinthians' identity as those who belong to the crucified hero is founded on their ability to display endurance and self-discipline on behalf of the dead.

[167] Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

[168] Erasmo, *Reading Death in Ancient Rome*, 2008.

Paul found the Isthmian games to be an appropriate analogy for memorializing the cross because of their origins in funerary celebrations. The Corinthians would unquestionably interpret Paul's imagery as having an emphasis on honouring the dead. This is suggested not only by the funerary associations of the Isthmian games but the rites and rituals of the other Panhellenic heroes which often involved their tomb sites. In the Fourth Nemean Ode, Pindar says that the victor was crowned beside the Tomb of Amphitryon (19-22). Funerary games were not limited to the panhellenic sanctuaries but involved other tombs as well. In the Fourth Isthmian Ode Pindar describes how the rites dedicated to Heracles' eight murdered sons were celebrated (61-73). The rituals were carried out from dawn till dusk and included feasting and sacrifices all within the vicinity of an altar memorializing the dead sons. On the second day of the Nemean celebrations the victor was crowned with a wreath made of myrtle, the characteristic plant of the underworld (1.4.70). Athletic suffering and memory of the dead are inextricably linked.

In 9:27 Paul says that he "punishes" (ὑπωπιάζω) his body and "enslaves it" (δουλαγωγέω) so as to not be disqualified from the eschatological race. Significantly, Paul's presentation as suffering apostle precedes the athletic metaphors of 9:24-27 and 4:9 and he twice calls for the Corinthian community to "imitate" (μιμητής) him (4:16, 11:1; cf. Phil 3:17). Scholars have often struggled to explain why Paul uses the third person singular in v.24 "only one receives the prize" (εἷς δὲ λαμβάνει τὸ βραβεῖον) (9:24). The answer lies in imitation. Paul imitates the suffering of Christ, and the community imitates Paul's suffering. Paul considers his own suffering a bodily representation of the cross (2 Cor 4:10), that is conditional for the benefits of resurrection (Rom 8:17-18; Eph. 3:13; 2 Cor 4:8-10, 4:14; 1 Cor 4:6, 9:23, 27). Thus, the community is defined as those whose claim to a position of poverty and suffering is *because* of God's demonstration of virtuous suffering on the cross (1:18-25). This identification separates

those who are being saved and those who are not (1 Cor 1:18). The implications of Paul's athletic metaphors for the community's cohesion will be discussed in the conclusion.

The phrase πᾶς ἀγωνίζομαι in 1 Cor 9:25 falls somewhere between meaning an "athlete" and "man who strives for the mastery of something". It refers to a person engaging in a struggle or contest of weaponry, wrestling or boxing. As a concept, the word was also used to refer to the endurance or struggle required to live the intellectual life of a Stoic sage (Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.22.56, 29.2-7). Paul's choice of words implies a sense of struggle and conflict not rendered in the modern reading of the term "athlete".[169] As early as 9:12 Paul uses language that foreshadows his portrayal of athletic struggle. Paul says that he "endures" (στέγω) all for the gospel. If he does this on his own free will he has a "reward" (μισθός). Pfitzner is correct when he observes that Paul's practice of "self-control" (ἐγκρατεύομαι) in 9:25 is all for the gospel.[170] The content of the gospel is Jesus' death and resurrection (15:1-4).

Paul's concept of suffering in this passage draws on the cultural expectations of Greek athletes, whose endurance and self-discipline led to severe suffering and in some cases, death. Suffering was necessary to gain fame, fortune and to be memorialized. Paul changes imagery from racing to boxing in v. 27. He says that he hits so as not to miss in order to win the prize. It is likely that Paul has the Greco-Roman practice of shadow boxing in mind. Boxing was one of the most dangerous sporting events held in the stadium and boxers were known above all athletes to endure severe pain, occasionally to the point of death.[171]

[169] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the* Corinthians, 712.

[170] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 92-93.

[171] Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," 354.

Pindar wrote that "the athlete delights in the toil and the cost" (Pindar, *The Olympian Odes*, 1.4.10).[172] Philo wrote

> I know wrestlers and pankratiasts often persevere out of love for honour and zeal for victory to the point of death, when their bodies are giving up and they keep drawing breath and struggling on spirit alone…Among these competitors, death for the sake of an olive or celery crown if glorious (*Every Good Man Is Free* 110.113).

The Stoic Philosopher Epictetus (55-135 C.E) wrote,

> In the Olympic Games you cannot just be beaten and then depart, but first of all, you will be disgraced not only before the people of Athens or Sparta or Nikopolis but before the whole world. In the second place, if you withdraw without sufficient reason you will be whipped. And this whipping comes after your training which involves thirst and broiling heat and swallowing handfuls of sand (*Discourses* 3.22.52).[173]

The athlete's performance depended entirely on properly training the body in order to endure strict athletic training. The serious nature of athletics explains why Stoic philosophers used athletics as a metaphor for the intellectual life and why Paul felt it was an appropriate metaphor for the cross.

The eternal prize rewarded for suffering is part of the letter's eschatological argument. Paul uses similar imagery in Philippians 3:14 where he speaks of the "goal" (σκοπός) of the race. The goal is most likely a reference to the square pillars located at each end of the track.[174] The σκοπός for Paul is eternal life which encourages the community maintain self-discipline and endurance. Although Paul is concerned about the "then and there" of future resurrection, the Corinthians' participation in the resurrection is contingent on the "here and now," which is

[172] Pindar as quoted in Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," 349.

[173] Epictetus as quoted in Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," 349.

[174] Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," 348.

determined by the cross. The here and now requires endurance in order to reach the goal. This suggests that Paul, like the Stoics, did intend to portray all of early Christian life as a struggle.

A second metaphor in 9:24-27 that connects Paul's athletic imagery with the Isthmian hero-cult is the "crown" (στέφανος) given to the competition victor. In classical usage στέφανος could referred to an army, the wall around a city, the crown or wreath won at various athletic contests or anything that encircled something.[175] In the Septuagint the word is used to refer to a royal crown (2 Sam 12:30) and a festal ornament (Prov 1:9; 4:9; Song of Sol 3:11; Isa 28:1). In the New Testament the word appears 18 times, most frequently in the book of Revelation. Most often, the crown is used as a metaphor for eternal reward of the faithful, just as in 1 Corinthians (2 Tim 2:5, James 1:12, 1 Peter 5:4, Rev 3:11, 4:4. 10).[176]

Paul compares the perishable crown (φθαρτὸν στέφανον) of the athletic games to the imperishable (ἄφθαρτον) crown of the Corinthians, which is eternal life. On the last day of the funeral games at Isthmia, the victors were crowned at a public ceremony and at the moment of crowing the victor was linked with the gods. This ceremony signified not only spiritual well-being but provided emotional, financial and social benefits as well. The wreath was made of simple materials but was valued for these social benefits and the lasting honour it gave. As Herodotus says,

> ...they deem it a reward worthy of their virtue not to have their name destroyed along with their body…you see what hardships these athletic competitors endure while training…often choosing to die in the very midst of the games. Why is it? If we were to abolish the crown for the sake of which they strive, and the inscription which will commemorate their victory at the…games, do you think they would endure for even one day the heat of the sun?

[175] Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," 350-351.

[176] Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," 550-551.

Paul's use of the crown metaphor is directly linked to suffering and conflict.[177]

Paul also alludes to the crown as an object linking the victors with the cult-hero. This becomes clear from the special kind of wreath given at the Isthmian games, made of selinon, a celery plant used in funerary wreaths worn by mourners and hung on tombs (Duris, FGrH 76 F 1l Pindar, *Olympian* 13.33; *Nemean* 4.88; *Isthmian* 2.16; 8.64).[178] If the selinon wreath symbolized funerary honours, then it is likely the selinon Isthmian crown was a given in honour of Melikertes.

3.7 Conclusion

Bruce Winter suggests Paul's self-presentation in 1 Cor 4:9 and 9:24-27 is a response to Sophistic opponents at Corinth. In 9:24-27 Paul contrasts his own self-discipline with the self-indulgence of the Sophists.[179] It is significant for this study that Winter identifies a relationship between 4:9 and 9:24-27. The conclusions of the above analysis are not contrary to a Sophistic background for Paul's stadium imagery. Rather, I have only attempted to reveal an unexplored aspect of Paul's rhetoric that carries multiple meanings and cultural references.

It is undeniable that the athletic language in 9:24-27 is more than an image of self-discipline. Pfitzner claims that it is clear that the central point of the image must lie in the self-control for all things (πάντα ἐγκρατεύεται) in v. 25 and that it is false to assign an independent (metaphorical) weight to individual features of the images.[180] On the contrary, it is the

[177] Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," 353.

[178] O. Broneer, "The Isthmian victory crown," *AJA* 66 (1962), 259-268; on the change of crowns, E.R. Gebhard, "The early stadium at Isthmia and the founding of the Isthmian games," *Proceedings of an International Symposium on the Olympic games* (eds. W, Coulson & H. Kyrieleis: Athens 1992), 73-80.

[179] Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophist,* 170.

[180] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif* , 85.

metaphorical meaning of honouring the hero with the στέφανος as the βραβεῖον of the race that Paul draws from the victor's crown.[181]

Athletics were a Greco-Roman cultural script that shaped the lives of the living by reviving the dead. Paul creates a cultural script for the Corinthians through Israel's cult-legend and through Greco-Roman language of the Isthmian funerary games. The central role of suffering in Pauline thought and the close association between suffering, the body and Jesus' death, demonstrates that the Corinthian community defined itself through memory of the cross and that this memory was actualized in bodily performance. The structural metaphor of the Isthmian games serves to create a type of Jesus' former self, that is, as one who displays virtuous bodily suffering. It is this aspect of athletic performance that most clearly links 9:24-27 and the gladiator metaphor of 4:9.

[181] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 86

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the funerary origins of the Isthmian games and Roman style-gladiator combat and the implications of their funerary associations for the Corinthians' interpretation of the Jesus movement. The paradoxical status of the gladiator serves as an analogy for the paradoxical status of the early Christian community as those identifying with suffering and death. The glory and virtue of the Greek athlete serves as an analogy for virtuous bodily suffering based on a performance memorializing the dead. These observations were framed by Greco-Roman visual culture and the role of bodily performance in actualizing memory of the dead. To conclude, it is necessary to re-visit the relationship between metaphor and body rhetoric and discuss the implications Paul's athletic metaphors have for reading 1 Corinthians.

4.1 Paul's Athletic Imagery as Structural Metaphors

In the first chapter I gave Lakoff and Johnson's definition of *structural metaphor* as a system of ideas that are taken from one event or experience, to give meaning and understanding to another.[182] I presented a few questions that come from this definition. By doing so I wanted to make clear the multifaceted way a metaphor or image can be used by a speaker or an author to simultaneously employ a cultural understanding of an image and transform that image by changing the context in which it is used. I have argued that Paul draws from the intersecting features of the gladiator and the athlete as models for endurance and virtuous suffering based on a performance memorializing the dead.

[182] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live* By, 77.

We can now attempt to answer the questions raised in the introduction. First, what elements of Greco-Roman competitive sports do Paul's metaphors highlight?[183] Each metaphor has its own emphasis, yet both share an interest in the embodiment of virtuous suffering that is associated with legacy. Paul's heightened awareness of the role of the suffering fleshly body in imitation of the cross is compared to the suffering body in athletic performance.

There are two common theories as to the relationship between Christ's suffering and that of Paul's community. The first is that the community suffers as disciples in imitation of Christ. The second is that there is a real physical participation in Christ's suffering based on a spiritual union, therefore the believer's afflictions and Christ's afflictions are one in the same.[184] We have seen that Paul operates from a paradigm of imitation and that this imitation lends itself to the idea that the community has a share in Jesus' suffering body. The fame and admiration of both Greek athletes and successful gladiators was emulated by the Roman population and Paul draws from athletics as a well-known cultural script. The idea of re-enactment or emulation allows Paul's metaphors to highlight the *ongoing* relationship between the dead and the living. Displays of virtuous suffering in athletic performance are part of Greco-Roman visual culture that is deeply concerned with the legacy.

Second, what aspects of athletics do Paul's metaphors hide?[185] The answer to this question is much more complicated and involves a vast number of meanings that come with all social institutions. It is clear, however, that Paul's use of athletic metaphors has a very specific agenda, which is similar to the Stoic use of athletic imagery. Paul purposefully highlights the

[183] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live* By, 10.

[184] Cousar, *A Theology of the* Cross, 175.

[185] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live* By, 10.

elements of athletics that display virtue and self-discipline. This is not the only possible model of athletics available in the Roman Empire. For example, a later text by Lucian (125-180 C.E) uses athletics to mock the Greeks and their attachment to the mythic past (*Anacharsis*). We have seen Cicero and other writers criticise the emotional display of spectators at the amphitheater (Seneca, *Epistles* 7; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 2.41, *Pro Murena* 40). Paul has a particular agenda that draws from the positive features of athletics and as a result overlooks other available meanings of the games.

Paul's metaphors also deliberately and strategically overlook the difference between Greek athletes and Roman gladiators, which leads us to the final question, how do Paul's metaphors extend beyond the usual way of thinking about athletics?[186] Despite certain intersecting features, Greco-Roman's would find important differences between Roman gladiators and Greek athletes. For example, the Greek athlete was not associated with the social ambiguity of the gladiator. Corinth, nevertheless, was aware perhaps more than any other colony of the increasing hybridization of both athletic figures as the embodiment of virtuous suffering. Paul deliberately refers to the intersecting features because his Corinthian audience would find them intelligible to one another. My purpose has not been to suggest the two were indistinguishable but highlight their overlapping features as they were useful to Paul as an author *adapting* his understanding of athletics. The cross event *transformed* the status of crucifixion from a shameful dishonourable death to an honourable demonstration of God's power. Paul emphasizes the overlapping features of Greek athletes and Roman gladiators in order to conflate images of virtue, weakness, suffering and poverty that have become visible signs of faith (1:18-31, 9:12).

[186] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live* By, 13.

Finally, Paul's athletic metaphors extend beyond regular ways of "thinking with athletics" by framing athletic performance with the goal of resurrection. Although this thesis has focused on memory of Jesus' *death*, the soteriological framework of Paul's letter ultimately puts his athletic metaphors in a Jewish eschatological context. Athletic performance is directly linked with the eschaton (15:20-28) when those who already have a share in Christ's spirit will be fully transformed (15:53-54). This is evident in the image of the prize in 4:9 and in 9:24 which establishes the apostle's performance as a cosmic one, looking forward to the resurrection.

Paul employs a third athletic metaphor in his lengthy discussion of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Wishing to emphasize the ongoing implications of the cross, Paul says "I die every day!" (καθ' ἡμέραν ἀποθνήσκω) (15:31) and then demonstrates this daily battle by remembering that in Ephesus he was thrown in the arena to fight wild beats (θηριομαχέω) (15:32). Several sources say that fighting with wild animals was a punishment for criminals and was part of the conglomerate entertainment spectacles of the first century (Diodorus Siculus 3.43.7, Josephus, *Wars* 7.38, Ignatius, *Ephesians* 1.2). That Paul actually experienced this is highly unlikely if he was a Roman citizen and therefore was not subject to such punishments. It is likely Paul is continuing the structural metaphor of the arena only this time he imagines a beast fight. Paul may be using another model for arena combat, or he may be continuing his gladiator metaphor, as over time many gladiators fought wild animals and even became specifically trained beast-gladiators.[187] The connection of v.30 to v.32 suggests dying is more than metaphorical in the sense of relation to events in the public sphere of social life.[188] His metaphor places the implications of the arena in the cosmic realm reaching the ultimate goal of a spiritual

[187] Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome*, 80.

[188] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the* Corinthians, 1249.

body at the resurrection. For a third time Paul's athletic imagery is connected to the daily lives of believers as they display the cross in their bodies as a necessary precursor to the ultimate prize of resurrection.

4.2 Paul's Athletic Metaphors as Communal Identity

I will close by discussing how the argument made here fits within the recent interest in the overlap between the arena and stadium and its implications for the social boundaries of the Corinthian community.[189] Cavan Concannan complicates classical scholarship which in the past has seen sports in ethnic terms, rigidly defining the idealism of the heroic and cultured Greek games over and against the barbaric Roman arena.[190] The presence of Roman gladiator combat in the Greek East has been seen as a representation of the "Romanization" of Greece. In reality, Greeks related to these spectacles because they shared an ideology of virtue. By adapting Roman style gladiator combat into Greek athletic life, Corinth blurred such binary distinctions.[191] Concannan suggests that several of the terms Paul uses in 9:24-27 such as punching, enslavement, disqualification and crown were also used of gladiators.[192] The explicit reference to enslavement in 9:27 further suggests Paul conflates the two athletic figures in an effort to blur the binary distinction between Greeks and Romans.

[189] Onno Van Nijf, "Athletics, Festivals and Greek Identity in the Roman East," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 45(2000): 176-200; König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire*, 2005.

[190] Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath but Our Lives," 194.

[191] Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath but Our Lives," 197.

[192] Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath but Our Lives," 206.

New Testament scholarship often divides Paul's communities into two groups, Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.[193] As a result, individual features of Paul's letters, including metaphor, are seen as belonging to Jewish culture or to Greco-Roman culture. Paul uses athletic metaphors as a means of bringing attention to the fact that the so-called Gentile audience at Corinth included Greeks, Romans and others ethnicities from across the Empire.

In the greeting section of 1 Corinthians Paul established the community's alternative identity as those "sanctified in the name of Christ" (ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) (1:2) and who "are of Christ" (ὑμεῖς δὲ Χριστοῦ) (3:23). In 1:18-25 Paul divides humanity into two groups: those who are being saved and those who are not.[194] For those not being saved, Paul says that "God gave them up" (1:24, 26, 28).[195] Paul goes to great lengths to establish a shared communal identity, where ethnic and gender distinctions are irrelevant for entering the movement (12:13). Paul gives his own example, as he became "all things to all people" (τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα). At the same time, he establishes communal boundaries for those within the movement. The hybrid culture of Greeks and Romans in first century Corinth is essential for understanding the early Christian movement there.

[193] Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): Jack T. Sanders, "Between Jew and Gentile in Corinth," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 19:65 (1997), 67-83; Jerry L. Sumney, "Baths, Baptism, and Patronage : The Continuing Role of Roman Social Identity in Corinth," *Reading Paul in Context: Explorations in Identity Formation, Essays in Honour of William S. Campbell* (eds. Kathy Ehrensperger and J. Brian Tucket: London T&T Clark International, 2010; R.D. Kaylor, *Paul's Covenant Community: Jew and Gentile in Romans* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988).

[194] Cousar, *A Theology of the* Cross, 28.

[195] Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross,* 30.

4.3 Final Remarks

Paul's athletic metaphors must be understood as a product of the visual culture of Roman Corinth where procession, performance, and theatrical displays were main features of the social landscape that allowed the dead to maintain a certain level of influence. Greek athletics and Roman gladiator combat emphasizes the physical aspect of re-enacting mythic death narratives that were central in Greco-Roman memorial practices. Examining the commonality of athletic topoi and body rhetoric in 1 Corinthians highlights the relationship between somatic gesture and collective memory evident throughout 1 Corinthians, such as at the Lord's Supper (11:24-26), temple worship (8:1-13) and body rhetoric (12:12-27). There is need for further research examining the implications of memorializing the dead in athletic performance as a means of negotiating Greek and Roman identities and how this changes the way we read 1 Corinthians as a letter written not just to "Jews" and "Gentiles" but two multifaceted cultural groups interpreting memory of the cross. Drawing from classical scholarship on funerary rituals and memory as a framework for examining 1 Corinthians demonstrates the process of how a community can be grounded in a past event and how that is enacted in the living community.

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