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The *Logos tou Staurou* and Competing *Logoi*: Paul's Theology of the Cross for Christian Witness for an Algorithmic Public Square

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Abstract

The emergence of algorithmic authority has profoundly reshaped contemporary understandings of truth, knowledge, and human flourishing. As computational systems increasingly assume epistemic authority once entrusted to philosophical, religious, and civic institutions, the church faces a renewed challenge of bearing faithful witness within a culture governed by competing accounts of wisdom and power. This article argues that the apostle Paul's *logos tou staurou* constitutes a rival account of reality that reconfigures knowledge, the identity of God, human flourishing, apostolic mission, and ultimately Christian public witness through a distinctively cruciform rationality, thereby challenging both ancient philosophical rationalism and contemporary algorithmic authority. By focusing on 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16 and 9:19–23, this study demonstrates that the *logos tou staurou* ("word of the cross") reconfigures wisdom, power, human identity, and mission through God's self-revelation in the crucified Christ. Rather than presenting cruciformity as a secondary ethical consequence of salvation, Paul presents the cross as the self-revelation of God from which cruciform discipleship, apostolic mission, and faithful public witness necessarily flow. Bringing Paul's theology of the cross into conversation with both the Stoic *Logos* of the first century and contemporary algorithmic authority, this article argues that the *logos tou staurou* offers a comprehensive theological alternative to rival cultural *logoi* by relocating wisdom from autonomous rationality to God's cruciform self-revelation. While Stoicism and algorithmic systems promise human flourishing through rational autonomy and computational certainty, Paul locates divine wisdom in weakness, vulnerability, and self-giving love. The cross, therefore, provides the church with a distinctively cruciform rationality for faithful witness within an age increasingly shaped by algorithmic authority.

Keywords: Paul; 1 Corinthians; *Logos tou Staurou*; cruciformity; Stoicism; algorithmic authority; public square; cruciform rationality; Christian witness; public theology



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1. Introduction

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.—1 Corinthians 1:18¹.

A governing account of reality orders every civilization. Whether expressed through philosophy, religion, political ideology, or technological systems, societies inevitably construct an organizing principle that defines truth, legitimizes authority, shapes human identity, and directs the pursuit of human flourishing. Such accounts are never merely intellectual abstractions. They establish the interpretive framework through which communities understand the world, adjudicate competing truth claims, and determine what constitutes wisdom, virtue, and the common good (Taylor 2007). History may change

the vocabulary through which these claims are expressed, but the struggle over epistemic authority remains remarkably constant.

The twenty-first century is witnessing a profound relocation of that authority. Institutions that once functioned as society's principal arbiters of truth—including universities, religious communities, governments, scientific organizations, and the traditional press—no longer possess the uncontested cultural legitimacy they once enjoyed (Taylor 2007; Smith 2014). Increasingly, authority is mediated through computational systems (Pasquale 2015, p. 18; Noble 2018, pp. 2–3). Neil Postman anticipated this development decades earlier when he argued that the logic of Technopoly assumes that “technique of any kind can do our thinking for us,” thereby relocating human judgment from persons and institutions to technical systems (Postman 1993, pp. 51–52). Search engines, recommendation algorithms, artificial intelligence, and predictive analytics now do considerably more than organize information; they increasingly determine what individuals encounter, trust, and ultimately believe. Algorithmic systems, therefore, function not merely as technological tools but as epistemic authorities, mediating reality through mathematical processes that remain largely opaque to those they influence.

This transformation represents more than technological innovation. It reflects the emergence of a new cultural *logos*—a comprehensive rationality that privileges optimization, prediction, and computational certainty as the primary means by which truth is discerned and social life is ordered. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that algorithmic systems do not simply process information; they increasingly shape the conditions under which knowledge is produced, authority is legitimized, and human behavior is governed (Pasquale 2015, pp. 1–18; Zuboff 2020, pp. 8–11). The contemporary public square is, therefore, becoming an algorithmic public square, one in which computational rationality increasingly mediates both public discourse and the formation of human identity.

Although unprecedented in its technological expression, this epistemic struggle is not historically unique. The first-century Mediterranean world likewise witnessed competing claims regarding the nature of reality, wisdom, and human flourishing. Among the most influential was Stoicism, whose doctrine of the *Logos* offered a comprehensive account of cosmic order grounded in rational necessity (Laertius 1925, 7.134–138; Malherbe 1989, pp. 1–9; Engberg-Pedersen 2000, pp. 1–18; Engberg-Pedersen 2004, xv–xix). Human flourishing consisted in conforming one's life to this rational principle through self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια, *autarkeia*), freedom from disordered passions (ἀπάθεια, *apatheia*), and disciplined participation in the rational structure of the cosmos (Epictetus 1925, 1.1; Seneca 1917, 9; Laertius 1925, 7.87–89, 7.134–138; Krentz 2014, pp. 122–35). The Stoic *Logos*, therefore, functioned not merely as a philosophical concept but as an organizing vision of reality that shaped ethics, politics, education, and public life throughout the Roman world (Laertius 1925, 7.134–138; Engberg-Pedersen 2004, xv–xix).

It is precisely within this intellectual environment that the apostle Paul announces an altogether different *logos*: the *logos tou staurou* (ὁ λόγος τοῦ σταυροῦ), the “word of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18). Paul's proclamation is not merely the announcement of Christ's crucifixion as the means of salvation. It is the declaration of an entirely different account of reality (Hays 1996, pp. 29–46; Gorman 2001, pp. 1–17, 75–94). What both Jewish expectation and Greco-Roman philosophy regarded as weakness, folly, and shame, Paul identifies as the definitive revelation of divine wisdom and power (Thiselton 2000, pp. 154–88; Garland 2003, pp. 63–83). Conversely, the very systems that claimed to possess wisdom are exposed as incapable of recognizing God's self-disclosure in the crucified Messiah (Fee 2007, pp. 102–7; Hays 2011, pp. 28–38). The *logos tou staurou* thus confronts every competing claim to ultimate authority by redefining wisdom, power, identity, freedom, and human

flourishing through the self-emptying (*kenotic*) life of Jesus Christ (Gorman 2001, pp. 75–94, 155–77).

This article argues that the *logos tou staurou* functions as Paul’s governing account of reality, one that necessarily gives rise to a distinctively cruciform rationality (Gorman 2001, pp. 1–17).² By bringing 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16 and 9:19–23 into conversation with Stoic philosophy and the contemporary algorithmic culture, it contends that Paul’s theology of the cross is not merely the content of Christian proclamation but the interpretive framework that redefines wisdom, identity, mission, and public witness. Consequently, the *logos tou staurou* stands as a rival account of reality that equips the church for faithful witness within the contemporary public square.

This proposal also enters a longstanding conversation within Pauline theology concerning the coherence of Paul’s thought. As Thomas R. Schreiner observes, the task of Pauline theology is not merely to catalog Paul’s teaching on various topics but to discern his worldview by identifying what is most important in his thought and the inner connections that unite its various themes (Schreiner 2001, pp. 15–16). Building upon Timothy A. Brookins’ observation that the *logos tou staurou* contrasts competing “accounts” of reality (Brookins 2020a, p. 21), the present study proposes that, within 1 Corinthians, the *logos tou staurou* functions as the governing theological account of reality through which Paul reconfigures wisdom, identity, mission, and public witness.

The discussion proceeds in five movements. First, it examines Paul’s theology of the cross in 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16 as an *epistemological revolution*³ that redefines wisdom, power, and human identity. Second, it explores cruciformity as participation in the life of the crucified God, drawing particularly upon the work of Michael J. Gorman. Third, it situates Paul’s proclamation within the broader context of Stoic philosophy before tracing its contemporary analog in algorithmic authority. Fourth, it demonstrates how 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 embodies the theology articulated in the epistle’s opening chapters through Paul’s cruciform missionary practice. Finally, it argues that the *logos tou staurou* offers a comprehensive theological framework for Christian witness within the algorithmic public square.

2. The *Logos tou Staurou*: The Cross as Paul’s Governing Account of Reality

Paul’s declaration that “the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18) serves as considerably more than the thematic introduction to his correspondence with the Corinthian church (Fee 1987, pp. 70–74; Thiselton 2000, pp. 155–61). It announces the existence of two fundamentally irreconcilable ways of construing reality.⁴ The apostle does not merely contrast belief and unbelief or faith and skepticism; he presents two rival epistemic worlds, each governed by a different understanding of wisdom, power, and truth (Conzelmann 1976, pp. 44–52). Consequently, the *logos tou staurou* is not simply the content of Christian proclamation (Gorman 2001, pp. 75–94). It is Paul’s governing theological account of reality—the interpretive framework through which wisdom, identity, mission, and human flourishing are understood.⁵

James D. G. Dunn observes that Paul rarely pauses to expound the theology of the cross in sustained detail, relying instead on brief creedal, kerygmatic, and allusive references because its significance was already shared between the apostle and his congregations (Dunn 1998, pp. 211–12; Ridderbos 1958, pp. 65–83). Rather than suggesting that the cross occupied only a peripheral place in Paul’s thought, this literary pattern indicates that the cross functioned as a theological foundation already assumed by Paul’s congregations and therefore requiring little sustained explanation. (Ridderbos 1997, pp. 45–55; Hays 2011,

pp. 28–35). Building on Dunn’s observation, the present study argues that the *logos tou staurou* functions as Paul’s governing rationality—a theological reality so fundamental that it informs the entirety of his argument without requiring continual restatement.

This observation is frequently obscured when Paul’s language is reduced to a discussion of atonement or of evangelistic proclamation (Cousar 1990, pp. 1–18; Gorman 2001, pp. 75–94). While the cross undoubtedly occupies the center of Paul’s soteriology, 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16 demonstrates that it also functions as the center of his epistemology (Thiselton 2000, pp. 166–84; Hays 2011, pp. 31–38). The crucified Christ is not merely the object of saving faith; he is the criterion by which every competing claim to wisdom is evaluated (Fee 2007, pp. 355–68). Paul’s concern extends beyond explaining how sinners are reconciled to God. He seeks to redefine how God’s people understand power, authority, identity, and truth itself.

The opening chapters of 1 Corinthians reveal that the crisis confronting the Corinthian church was fundamentally epistemological before it was ethical (Thiselton 2000, pp. 155–72; Malcolm 2013, pp. 166–67). Their divisions, boasting, factionalism, and attraction to rhetorical sophistication were not isolated ethical failures but symptoms of a deeper allegiance to competing standards of wisdom (Malcolm 2013, pp. 166–67). The Corinthians continued to evaluate Christian leaders according to Greco-Roman assumptions regarding eloquence, philosophical sophistication, social prestige, and cultural honor (Pickett 1997, p. 33; Winter 2001, pp. 31–57). In doing so, they interpreted the gospel through the categories of the surrounding culture rather than allowing the gospel to reconstruct those categories altogether.

Paul, therefore, begins not by offering practical solutions to ecclesial division but by dismantling the intellectual architecture that produced it (Thiselton 2000, pp. 155–72; Malcolm 2013, pp. 166–67). His argument unfolds through a sustained inversion of accepted cultural assumptions that governed Corinthian understandings of wisdom, power, and status. The world identifies wisdom with rhetorical brilliance, social prominence, philosophical coherence, and visible strength. Paul responds by locating God’s definitive self-revelation in the shameful execution of a crucified Messiah. What appears to human judgment as folly (*μωρία*, *mōria*) is revealed to be the power of God (*δύναμις θεοῦ*, *dynamis theou*). At the same time, the very systems that claim wisdom are exposed as incapable of recognizing God’s activity in history.

This inversion is neither rhetorical exaggeration nor paradox for its own sake. Rather, Paul presents the cross as God’s decisive critique of every human system that seeks ultimate authority apart from divine revelation (Thiselton 2000, pp. 170–75). His quotation of Isaiah 29:14 (“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise”) establishes that God’s judgment falls not simply upon individual acts of unbelief but upon autonomous claims to wisdom themselves. The repeated rhetorical questions—“Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?” (1 Cor 1:20)—are, therefore, judicial rather than merely stylistic. They announce the collapse of every epistemic system that attempts to comprehend God on its own terms (Longenecker and Still 2014, p. 118).

This is why Paul’s argument cannot be reduced to anti-intellectualism. He does not reject reason; he rejects *autonomous reason*. Nor does he oppose wisdom itself; he redefines wisdom in light of the self-disclosure of God in Christ crucified (Hays 1996, pp. 29–46). The *logos tou staurou* does not abolish rational inquiry but relocates its foundation. Human understanding no longer begins with autonomous observation or philosophical speculation but with God’s unexpected revelation in the crucified Messiah. Consequently, the cross becomes the hermeneutical center from which all Christian knowledge proceeds.

The implications extend far beyond theology proper. If the cross reveals the true character of divine wisdom, then it simultaneously redefines every category through which

reality has previously been understood (Gorman 2001, pp. 75–94). Power is revealed through self-giving rather than domination. Glory is disclosed through humiliation rather than status. Freedom is expressed through voluntary self-emptying rather than autonomous self-assertion. Human flourishing is discovered not through self-sufficiency but through participation in the crucified and risen Christ. In Paul's thought, these are not ethical consequences added to the gospel; they are the inevitable outworking of the gospel's own epistemic logic.

It is precisely this logic that later becomes embodied in Paul's own apostolic ministry. Before demonstrating how the *logos tou staurou* takes concrete form in the apostle's missionary practice (1 Cor 9:19–23), however, it is necessary to examine more closely the theological architecture of 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16. Within this passage, Paul constructs an entirely new account of wisdom, one that systematically overturns both Jewish expectations of divine power and Greco-Roman confidence in philosophical rationality. The cross is, therefore, not merely the center of Christian proclamation; it is the grammar through which Christian reality itself is spoken.

3. Theofority: Participation in the Cruciform Life of God

If the *logos tou staurou* constitutes Paul's rival account of reality, then an unavoidable theological question follows: What kind of God is revealed by such a *Logos*? The answer determines whether the cross functions merely as the instrument of redemption or as the definitive disclosure of God's own character (Gorman 2009, pp. 1–24). For Paul, the latter is unmistakably the case. The crucifixion of Christ is not simply an event through which God accomplishes salvation; it is the supreme revelation of who God eternally is. Consequently, the theology of the cross cannot remain confined to soteriology. It necessarily becomes theology proper.

This observation represents one of the most significant developments in recent Pauline scholarship. Michael J. Gorman has argued persuasively that Paul's understanding of the cross is fundamentally *theoformative* (Gorman 2009, pp. 1–24). Gorman notes that "Theosis is transformative participation in the kenotic, cruciform character of God through Spirit-enabled conformity to the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected/glorified Christ" (Gorman 2009, p. 7). Thus, the cross not only reconciles believers to God but also unveils God's own identity as self-giving, self-emptying love. The resulting pattern of participation is what Gorman describes as *cruciformity*.⁶ Cruciformity, therefore, is not merely ethical imitation (*imitatio Christi*) but participation in the very life of the crucified God (Gorman 2001, pp. 9–18). As Gorman concludes, cruciformity is ultimately theofority—the transformative participation in God's own cruciform character because the cross is theophanic, unmasking divine omnipotence not as coercive force but as self-giving, suffering love (Gorman 2009, pp. 27–34).

Such a claim fundamentally alters how Paul's ethics should be understood. If the cross merely establishes a moral example, Christian discipleship risks becoming little more than heroic imitation (Gorman 2001, pp. 35–52). Believers attempt to reproduce Christ's humility through moral determination, while God's own nature remains conceptually detached from the pattern they imitate. Paul envisions something considerably more profound. Union with Christ incorporates believers into the life of the crucified and risen God, such that conformity to Christ becomes participation in the divine life rather than external moral performance.

This participatory framework appears throughout Paul's correspondence (Macaskill 2013, pp. 1–20). Those who have been "crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20), "buried with him" (Rom 6:4), and who now seek to "know him and the power of his resurrection" through "sharing in his sufferings" (Phil 3:10) are not simply remembering Christ's past actions.

They are being incorporated into the continuing reality of God's cruciform work within the world. Paul's language consistently moves beyond imitation toward participation, beyond external conformity toward ontological transformation (Macaskill 2013, pp. 219–50).

Participation in the crucified and risen Christ also reconstitutes Christian identity (Campbell 2012, pp. 381–405). For Paul, to be “in Christ” is not merely to adopt a new religious affiliation but to receive an entirely new mode of existence grounded in God's self-giving life. Ethnic, social, and cultural identities are not abolished, but they are decisively subordinated to this new identity in Christ (Campbell 2012, pp. 381–405). Consequently, Christian identity is no longer secured by the preservation of status, privilege, or autonomous self-definition but by participation in the cruciform life of God. This transformed identity becomes the theological foundation from which cruciform discipleship and public witness naturally emerge.

Such participation simultaneously redefines the Christian understanding of power. Throughout Greco-Roman culture, divine power was ordinarily associated with transcendence, invulnerability, sovereignty, and visible triumph (Malherbe 1989, pp. 31–52). The gods demonstrated their supremacy through domination rather than vulnerability. Paul's proclamation overturns these assumptions entirely. Divine omnipotence is revealed most fully not through coercive force but through voluntary self-giving (Gorman 2009, pp. 27–34). God's power reaches its fullest expression precisely where human wisdom perceives weakness. The cross, therefore, does not conceal divine glory beneath apparent defeat; it reveals that glory in its truest form.

Consequently, Paul's theology challenges more than human ethics. It challenges inherited conceptions of God himself. The *logos tou staurou* discloses a God whose very identity is characterized by self-emptying love. This is why the paradoxes throughout 1 Corinthians 1 are not merely rhetorical devices. They are theological necessities. If God has revealed himself decisively in Christ crucified, then wisdom must appear foolish, strength must appear weak, and glory must appear hidden according to the standards of every competing *logos*. The paradox belongs not to Paul's literary style but to God's own self-disclosure.

This theological vision also explains why cruciformity cannot be reduced to asceticism, suffering, or self-denial considered independently (Gorman 2001, pp. 155–77). The Christian life is not cross-shaped because suffering possesses intrinsic spiritual value. Rather, suffering becomes meaningful insofar as it participates in the self-giving life of God revealed through Christ. Cruciformity, therefore, derives entirely from theoformity. Ethics flows from ontology. Christian existence assumes the shape of the cross because the God into whose life believers are incorporated has revealed himself through the cross.

This distinction becomes especially significant for the argument of the present study. If Paul's theology merely encouraged humility or sacrificial service, it would offer little more than an alternative moral philosophy alongside Stoicism or other ancient ethical systems. Paul's claim is considerably more radical. The *logos tou staurou* reveals an entirely different reality because it offers a distinct revelation of God himself. Every subsequent ethical implication—including Paul's missionary adaptability, his voluntary renunciation of rights, and his identification with the weak—flows from participation in this cruciform divine life rather than from strategic calculation or moral idealism.

The movement from theology to mission is, therefore, not incidental but inevitable. Before Paul becomes “all things to all people,” he first becomes a participant in the cruciform life of God disclosed through Christ. His apostolic ministry is not the application of an ethical principle but the embodiment of a theological reality. The missionary flexibility of 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 is intelligible only because the theology of 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16 has already redefined both God and the nature of true wisdom.

This movement from theology to ministry has likewise been recognized by D. A. Carson, who argues that the cross not only determines the content of Christian proclamation but also the very character of Christian ministry. Paul's resolve to know nothing except Christ crucified therefore shapes not merely what he proclaims but how he serves, revealing that the cross functions as the governing pattern of apostolic existence rather than merely the subject of apostolic preaching (Carson 1993, pp. 9–10).

Having established the theological character of the *logos tou staurou*, the discussion now turns to the first sustained rival account of reality confronting Paul's proclamation: the Stoic *Logos*. Only by understanding the philosophical rationality that shaped Corinth's intellectual environment can the radical character of Paul's cruciform rationality be fully appreciated.

4. The Stoic *Logos* and the *Logos tou Staurou*: Competing Rationalities

If the *logos tou staurou* discloses a fundamentally different account of God, reality, and human flourishing, then its radical character can only be fully appreciated against the intellectual world into which Paul proclaimed it. The apostle's language does not emerge within an ideological vacuum. Rather, his proclamation enters a cultural landscape already inhabited by sophisticated philosophical traditions that offered comprehensive accounts of the cosmos, human nature, and the good life (Malherbe 1989, pp. 1–24). Among these, Stoicism exercised profound influence throughout the eastern Mediterranean, including the social and intellectual environment of Corinth (Engberg-Pedersen 2000, pp. 13–32). Consequently, Paul's theology of the cross should be read not merely as a theological affirmation but also as an implicit challenge to one of antiquity's most influential accounts of rational order.

Central to Stoic philosophy was the doctrine of the *Logos* (Long 2002, pp. 144–58). For the Stoics, the *Logos* represented the rational principle permeating and ordering the entire cosmos (Engberg-Pedersen 2000, pp. 15–22). Reality was neither chaotic nor arbitrary but governed by an intelligible rationality in which all things participated. To live wisely was therefore to live according to nature (κατὰ φύσιν, *kata physin*), conforming one's life to the rational order embedded within creation itself (Epictetus 1925, 1.6; Sellars 2006, pp. 101–15). Human flourishing was understood to emerge through disciplined reason, self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια, *autarkeia*), emotional equilibrium (ἀπάθεια, *apatheia*), and acceptance of providential necessity (Sellars 2006, pp. 116–33). Wisdom consisted not in resisting the rational structure of reality but in harmonizing oneself with it.

The Stoic *Logos* thus functioned as considerably more than a metaphysical doctrine (Engberg-Pedersen 2000, pp. 17–25). It provided a comprehensive account of knowledge, humanity, and ethics simultaneously. Knowledge, virtue, and human identity were inseparable from participation in the rational order governing the universe (Long 2002, pp. 194–208). The wise person became increasingly free precisely by becoming increasingly rational. Freedom meant liberation from disordered passions through disciplined conformity to universal reason (Epictetus 1925, 1.1). Human excellence was measured by one's capacity for self-mastery, autonomy, and interior stability amid changing external circumstances.

Such themes would have resonated deeply within Corinth. Although the city was characterized by remarkable cultural diversity, Roman influence, and social stratification, it also participated in the broader intellectual currents of the Greco-Roman world (Winter 2001, pp. 21–42). Philosophical schools, public rhetoric, patronage, and the pursuit of honor shaped the assumptions through which wisdom and authority were commonly understood (Malherbe 1989, pp. 42–62). The Corinthians' attraction to eloquence, status, and competing leaders reflects more than local ecclesial dysfunction; it reveals the continuing influence

of a rival cultural rationality that evaluated persons according to accepted standards of wisdom and honor (Pickett 1997, pp. 32–36).

Against this backdrop, Paul's proclamation of the *logos tou staurou* appears astonishing. The apostle neither modifies nor supplements the Stoic account of reality (Engberg-Pedersen 2000, pp. 1–12). He overturns its governing account of reality. Where Stoicism locates wisdom within the rational coherence of the cosmos, Paul locates wisdom within the apparent absurdity of a crucified Messiah. Where Stoicism seeks freedom through self-sufficiency, Paul proclaims freedom through self-emptying participation in Christ. Where Stoicism esteems the disciplined autonomy of the sage, Paul points to the voluntary weakness of the crucified Lord as the definitive revelation of divine power. These are not merely contrasting ethical ideals; they represent rival rationalities through which reality itself is construed.

This distinction deserves careful qualification. Paul does not reject reason as such, nor does he advocate irrationalism (Thiselton 2000, pp. 172–95). Indeed, his letters exhibit sustained theological argumentation, careful rhetorical construction, and profound engagement with Scripture. His critique is directed instead toward every claim that autonomous human rationality can secure ultimate knowledge of God apart from God's own self-revelation (Hays 1996, pp. 17–35). The issue is, therefore, not reason versus faith but autonomous rationality versus God's cruciform self-revelation. The *logos tou staurou* relocates the foundation of wisdom from humanity's capacity to reason upward toward God to God's gracious descent in the crucified Christ.

This relocation carries profound anthropological implications. The Stoic sage becomes fully human through the achievement of rational autonomy (Long 2002, pp. 186–208). Paul's believer becomes fully human through participation in the crucified Messiah. The former seeks mastery of the self; the latter receives the self as a gift transformed through union with Christ. One pursues invulnerability; the other embraces vulnerability as the place where divine power is perfected. One ascends through disciplined rationality; the other descends with Christ into self-giving love. These differing visions produce not simply alternative moral systems but fundamentally different understandings of what it means to be human.

Recognizing this contrast also clarifies the contemporary significance of Paul's theology. Although few modern readers consciously inhabit Stoic philosophy, the assumptions underlying Stoic rationality continue to reappear in new cultural forms (Taylor 2007, pp. 539–93). Every age develops rival accounts of reality that promise certainty through increasingly comprehensive systems of explanation. The contemporary algorithmic environment represents one such development. While separated from Stoicism by nearly two millennia and radically different technological circumstances, algorithmic authority similarly locates confidence in systems capable of organizing knowledge, predicting outcomes, and directing human behavior through increasingly sophisticated forms of rational calculation (Pasquale 2015, pp. 3–18). The continuity lies not in historical dependence but in the recurring human aspiration to secure wisdom through comprehensive rational systems.

It is precisely at this point that Paul's *logos tou staurou* once again emerges as a rival account of reality. Before considering the relationship between Stoic and algorithmic rationality in greater detail, however, it is necessary to examine how Paul's own apostolic life inhabits the cruciform rationality he proclaims. His missionary practice demonstrates that the theology of the cross is not merely believed; it is embodied.

5. The Embodied Logos: Paul's Cruciform Rationality in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23

If the *logos tou staurou* constitutes Paul's rival account of reality, then its significance cannot remain confined to theological proclamation. A rationality that merely informs

belief without transforming life would fail to embody the very reality disclosed by the logos it proclaims (Gorman 2015, pp. 1–18). Throughout 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16, Paul argues that the cross redefines wisdom, power, and human flourishing according to God’s own self-revelation in Christ crucified. The natural question that follows is whether such a cruciform rationality can actually be inhabited. First Corinthians 9:19–23 answers that question. Here, Paul does not simply explain the *logos tou staurou*; he inhabits it.

This observation is frequently obscured when the passage is read primarily as a paradigm for missionary contextualization (Gorman 2015, pp. 50–62). Certainly, Paul’s willingness to become “all things to all people” has long served as a foundational text for missiology and intercultural ministry (Thiselton 2000, pp. 698–708). Yet to isolate the passage from the larger argument of 1 Corinthians risks reducing Paul’s actions to a pragmatic evangelistic strategy. Read within the epistle’s literary and theological flow, Paul’s missionary flexibility emerges as considerably more profound. His conduct is not merely effective; it is first theological and consequently missiological. The apostle’s life assumes the very shape of the crucified Christ whose wisdom he proclaims.

The literary and historical context of 1 Corinthians 8–9 likewise deserves careful attention. Abraham J. Malherbe argues that Paul’s discussion of freedom and voluntary self-limitation participates in broader Hellenistic conversations concerning freedom, determinism, and moral agency. Read against this background, Paul’s repeated emphasis upon becoming a servant to all cannot be dismissed as mere rhetorical accommodation or pragmatic flexibility. His language addresses contemporary philosophical conceptions of freedom while simultaneously redefining them through the paradox of voluntary self-giving. Yet while Malherbe illuminates the historical–philosophical context of Paul’s argument, the present study contends that Paul’s distinctive account of freedom is ultimately intelligible only within the cruciform rationality established in 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16 (Malherbe 2004, pp. 231–55).

This missiological reading has made an enduring contribution to Pauline scholarship. David J. Bosch (Bosch 1991, pp. 129–39) and Eckhard J. Schnabel (Schnabel 2008, pp. 34–37), among others, rightly emphasize Paul’s remarkable missionary adaptability and contextual sensitivity as defining features of his apostolic ministry. The present study does not reject this interpretation but seeks to locate its deeper theological foundation. Hence, these characteristics should be understood as the theological consequence of Paul’s cruciform vision rather than as an independent missionary strategy. Paul’s flexibility is not primarily a missionary strategy; it is the embodied consequence of the *logos tou staurou* already established in 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16 (Gorman 2015, pp. 50–62). Mission, therefore, is the public embodiment of Paul’s cruciform rationality rather than its primary explanation.

The opening declaration establishes the paradox that governs the entire passage: “Though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all” (1 Cor 9:19) (Thiselton 2000, pp. 698–701). This statement should not be interpreted merely as voluntary self-denial or missionary accommodation (Gorman 2015, pp. 50–62). Rather, it expresses the fundamental inversion already established by the *logos tou staurou*. Freedom is not exercised through autonomous self-assertion but through cruciform self-giving. Just as divine power is revealed through apparent weakness, authentic freedom is revealed through loving servitude. Paul’s paradox is, therefore, neither a rhetorical flourish nor pastoral advice; it is the lived expression of cruciform rationality, for it is the ontological consequence of the *logos tou staurou*.

The repeated formula that follows—“to the Jews I became as a Jew . . . to those under the law . . . to those outside the law . . . to the weak I became weak” (9:20–22)—should likewise be understood christologically before it is understood missiologically (Thiselton 2000, pp. 701–8). Paul’s adaptability does not arise from strategic calculation designed to

maximize evangelistic success. Rather, it reflects participation in the self-emptying life of Christ. His flexibility is, therefore, not compromise but cruciform fidelity.

Paul's remarkable adaptability is possible precisely because his eschatological identity is no longer grounded in ethnicity, social status, rhetorical competence, or religious achievement (Campbell 2012, pp. 67–198). These markers of identity are not erased but relativized through his union with Christ (Macaskill 2013, pp. 219–50). Because Paul's primary identity is determined by participation in the crucified and risen Messiah, he is free to enter the social worlds of both Jew and Gentile without anxiety over preserving his own status or privilege. His flexibility, therefore, reflects not uncertainty of conviction but the security of an identity rooted in Christ. The more deeply Paul participates in the life of the crucified Messiah, the more freely he relinquishes every secondary claim to identity for the sake of the gospel. In this way, Paul's missionary adaptability is not strategic accommodation but the natural outworking of the *logos tou staurou* embodied in apostolic life.

This distinction is essential. Strategic adaptation can be motivated by effectiveness, influence, or numerical success. Cruciform adaptation is motivated by participation in God's self-giving life. Outwardly, the two may appear remarkably similar. Inwardly, however, they arise from fundamentally different rationalities. One seeks the optimization of outcomes; the other embodies the logic of the cross. Paul's missionary practice, therefore, cannot be reduced to technique. It is ontology enacted through mission. Furnish identifies this very relationship as the central problem of Pauline ethics, arguing that the decisive question is not whether theology and ethics coexist in Paul's thought but whether there exists an "inner, essential relationship" between theological proclamation and moral exhortation. For Furnish, the indicative–imperative relation constitutes the crucial interpretive problem in understanding Paul's ethic (Furnish 2009, pp. xiv–xv). Paul's missionary practice in 1 Corinthians 9 is best understood as precisely such an expression of theology embodied in life. This understanding is reinforced by Raymond Pickett's observation that the cross functions as a "foundational symbol" that "relate[s] an ontology to morality." For Paul, the cross is not a static dogma but the "ontological reality which is the ground of [communal] unity," defining the very basis of "mutual responsibility" and obligation among members (Pickett 1997, pp. 116–17). Schreiner similarly argues that Paul's suffering was not an incidental consequence of his ministry but an essential dimension of his apostolic vocation. Indeed, "the advance of Paul's mission . . . occurred through his suffering," as weakness became "the means by which the powerful word of the cross took effect in people's lives" (Schreiner 2001, p. 99). Consequently, Paul's voluntary self-emptying is a symbolic act intended to effect change, directly challenging the prevailing Greco-Roman status system by inverting notions of power and honor.

This explains why Paul's language consistently emphasizes becoming rather than merely doing. He does not simply employ different methods for different audiences. He enters their social locations, voluntarily relinquishing privileges that might otherwise define his identity (Thiselton 2000, pp. 702–6). Such self-emptying does not erase theological conviction but demonstrates that Christian identity has already been relocated into Christ. Because Paul's life is hidden with Christ (cf. Col 3:3), he is no longer compelled to preserve status, rights, or cultural superiority. The apostle's adaptability thus reveals not uncertainty about the gospel but profound confidence in its capacity to transcend every human boundary.

The climax of the passage appears in Paul's well-known declaration: "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some" (9:22) (Thiselton 2000, pp. 705–7). This statement has often been interpreted as the apostle's missionary motto (Bosch 1991, pp. 129–39). While not incorrect, such an interpretation remains incomplete. Within the

larger argument of 1 Corinthians, this declaration functions as the practical embodiment of the *logos tou staurou*. Paul becomes “all things” because Christ first became the crucified one.

His missionary flexibility is intelligible only as participation in the self-giving movement of God’s own life revealed through the cross. Mission, therefore, becomes the public embodiment of the cruciform rationality disclosed through the *logos tou staurou*. The final verse confirms this theological orientation: “I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings” (9:23). The gospel is not merely the message Paul proclaims; it is the reality he inhabits. His ministry, therefore, refuses every distinction between proclamation and embodiment. The apostle’s life becomes the visible grammar of the gospel he preaches.

Recognizing this relationship fundamentally alters the interpretation of Paul’s missionary practice. First Corinthians 9:19–23 is not an interruption within the epistle’s argument but its theological culmination. Chapters 1:18–2:16 establish the cruciform rationality of God’s wisdom; chapter 9:19–23 demonstrates that such wisdom can indeed be lived. Paul’s apostleship becomes the first sustained interpretation of the *logos tou staurou*. His life demonstrates that the cross is not merely proclaimed or believed; it is inhabited.

This reading finds significant support in Timothy A. Brookins’ interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1:10–4:21. He argues that the coherence of Paul’s argument lies in the inseparability of the apostle’s proclamation and his apostolic example. The wisdom of Christ crucified presented in the opening chapters is the same wisdom embodied in Paul’s “ways in Christ Jesus,” making his life itself an expression of the gospel he proclaims and the pattern the Corinthians are called to imitate (Brookins 2020b, pp. 153–54).

This embodied rationality also prepares the way for the article’s contemporary argument. If Paul’s missionary life represents the public enactment of the *logos tou staurou* within the philosophical and social structures of the Roman world, then the question naturally arises whether an analogous cruciform witness remains possible within today’s algorithmically mediated public square. Before addressing that question directly, however, it is necessary to consider how the rationality embodied by Paul confronts a new claimant to epistemic authority: the Algorithmic *Logos*.⁷

6. The Algorithmic Logos: A Contemporary Rival Rationality

The comparison between the Stoic *Logos* and the *logos tou staurou* does not merely illuminate the historical world of first-century Corinth. It also provides a theological framework for interpreting contemporary claims to epistemic authority. Although separated from antiquity by nearly two millennia, the modern West continues to construct rival accounts of reality that promise certainty, coherence, and human flourishing (Taylor 2007, pp. 539–93). The contemporary algorithmic environment represents one of the most influential expressions of this enduring human aspiration (Pasquale 2015, pp. 3–18).

The phrase Algorithmic *Logos* is employed in this study as a heuristic construct rather than a historical or philosophical category. It denotes the growing tendency of algorithmically mediated systems—including search engines, recommendation platforms, predictive analytics, and generative artificial intelligence—to function as organizing authorities for knowledge and social life that increasingly shape how truth is encountered, knowledge is evaluated, identities are formed, and public discourse is conducted (Pasquale 2015, pp. 3–18). The comparison does not suggest that modern computational systems are equivalent to the Stoic doctrine of the *Logos*. Rather, both represent comprehensive rationalities that claim the capacity to render reality intelligible on the basis of internally coherent principles (Taylor 2007, pp. 539–93).

Algorithmic systems possess remarkable capacities for processing information, identifying patterns, and generating predictions that often exceed those of unaided humans.

Consequently, they have become indispensable within medicine, education, commerce, communication, scientific research, and countless other domains of contemporary life (Maslej et al. 2025). The present study does not question the legitimacy or value of such technological developments. Rather, it asks a different theological question: *What occurs when computational rationality begins to function not merely as a tool but as an authority governing the conditions under which truth, wisdom, and human flourishing are understood?*

This distinction is critical. Technologies are never merely instrumental. They shape habits of perception, patterns of attention, and assumptions regarding what counts as reliable knowledge. Increasingly, algorithmic systems determine which voices are amplified, which narratives become visible, and which forms of expertise are regarded as trustworthy (Pasquale 2015, pp. 8–25). Recommendation engines influence cultural consumption, predictive systems shape institutional decision-making, and generative artificial intelligence increasingly mediates the production and interpretation of knowledge itself (Maslej et al. 2025). In this sense, algorithms do not simply organize information; they participate in constructing the epistemic environment within which contemporary societies deliberate, decide, and act.

Algorithmic systems increasingly participate in the formation of personal identity as well as the mediation of knowledge. Through personalization, recommendation, digital representation, and predictive modeling, individuals are continually invited to understand themselves according to algorithmically curated patterns of preference, behavior, and social recognition (Zuboff 2020, pp. 254–327). Identity thus becomes increasingly shaped by external systems of computational interpretation rather than by communities of faith or participation in Christ. The theological question is, therefore, not simply what algorithms know about us, but what kind of people they are quietly forming us to become.

Yet the most significant theological question concerns neither efficiency nor technological capability. It concerns formation. Every governing rationality forms a particular kind of person because every account of wisdom embodies a corresponding vision of human flourishing. The Stoic *Logos* sought to cultivate the rational sage characterized by autonomy, self-mastery, and conformity to cosmic reason. Algorithmically mediated systems likewise tend to encourage particular habits of life: optimization over contemplation, prediction over discernment, personalization over communal formation, efficiency over wisdom, and computational certainty over faithful dependence. These tendencies need not be consciously embraced to become spiritually formative. They emerge gradually through repeated participation in digitally mediated patterns of knowing and acting. Paul likewise understands wisdom not merely as a body of ideas but as a way of life that forms communities according to the pattern of the crucified Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 1–3).

It is precisely here that Paul's *logos tou staurou* confronts the Algorithmic *Logos*. The cross refuses to locate wisdom in optimization, identity in data, or authority in computational mastery. Instead, it reorients human existence around divine self-disclosure in the crucified Christ. Whereas algorithmic rationality seeks increasingly comprehensive systems capable of predicting and managing reality, cruciform rationality receives reality as the gift of the God who reveals himself through weakness, vulnerability, and self-giving love. The issue, therefore, is not whether Christians should employ artificial intelligence but whether the church's understanding of truth, identity, and human flourishing will ultimately be governed by Algorithmic *Logos* or by the *logos tou staurou*.

Such a distinction should not be misunderstood as advocating technological withdrawal or cultural disengagement. Paul did not retreat from the philosophical world of Corinth, nor did he reject reason itself. Instead, he entered the public square while inhabiting an entirely different rationality. Likewise, faithful Christian witness within an algorithmically mediated society requires neither uncritical technological optimism nor

reactionary resistance. Rather, it demands communities whose lives are so thoroughly shaped by the *logos tou staurou* that they embody a rival account of wisdom, authority, and human flourishing within the very environments where competing rationalities contend for allegiance.

The challenge facing the contemporary church is, therefore, not fundamentally technological but theological. Every public square is ordered by the rationality it inhabits. If today's public square is increasingly mediated through algorithmic systems, then Christian witness must ask not merely how to communicate effectively within those systems but how to inhabit them without surrendering the cruciform rationality revealed in Christ. The question is no longer whether algorithms influence public life—that reality is already evident—but whether the church will remain governed by the *logos tou staurou* while bearing faithful witness within an algorithmic public square.

7. Conclusions

The question confronting the contemporary church is not fundamentally whether artificial intelligence should be embraced or resisted. Nor is it whether algorithmic technologies may be employed responsibly in service to the gospel. Those questions remain important, but they are secondary to a more fundamental theological concern. Every public square is ultimately shaped by the governing rationality through which it understands truth, authority, identity, and human flourishing. The decisive question, therefore, is which *logos* will order the church's life and witness.

This study has argued that Paul's *logos tou staurou* constitutes precisely such a governing rationality. Through his exposition of 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16, Paul presents the cross not merely as the means of salvation but as God's definitive revelation of wisdom, power, and reality itself. The crucified Christ overturns conventional understandings of strength, status, autonomy, and human flourishing by revealing divine glory through self-emptying love. The cross thus functions not simply as the content of Christian proclamation but as the interpretive grammar of Christian existence.

This cruciform rationality is not confined to theological reflection. As demonstrated through 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, Paul embodies the *logos tou staurou* in his own apostolic life. His voluntary relinquishment of rights, identification with the weak, and missionary adaptability are not strategies for maximizing evangelistic success. Rather, they are the visible expression of participation in the cruciform life of God. Paul's witness confirms that the *logos tou staurou* is not merely proclaimed or believed; it is inhabited.

The comparison between Stoic philosophy and contemporary algorithmic authority seeks to demonstrate that historical circumstances may change while the underlying theological challenge remains remarkably consistent. Both the Stoic Logos and the heuristic construct termed the Algorithmic Logos offer comprehensive accounts of reality that promise human flourishing through increasingly coherent rational systems. Yet both locate ultimate authority within structures of human rationality. Paul's proclamation directs attention elsewhere. The *logos tou staurou* grounds wisdom not in autonomous reason or computational certainty but in God's self-disclosure through the crucified Messiah.

For this reason, Christian witness in the contemporary public square cannot be reduced to ethical engagement with emerging technologies. The deeper challenge concerns spiritual formation. The church must continually discern whether its understanding of truth, identity, and faithfulness is being shaped primarily by the cruciform rationality revealed in Christ or by competing cultural rationalities that quietly redefine human flourishing according to different standards of wisdom and power. For Paul, to be "in Christ" is to inhabit the cruciform life of God revealed in the cross. Faithful witness, therefore, depends not

merely upon communicating the gospel effectively but upon embodying the gospel's own grammar of reality.

The algorithmic public square presents new opportunities, new complexities, and new responsibilities. Yet the church's vocation remains fundamentally unchanged. Just as Paul inhabited the *logos tou staurou* within the philosophical world of first-century Corinth, so the contemporary church is called to inhabit that same cruciform rationality within societies increasingly mediated by algorithmic authority. Christian witness becomes credible not because it offers superior techniques of persuasion or more sophisticated technological strategies, but because it offers the cruciform account of reality disclosed in the crucified and risen Christ.

As Michael J. Gorman observes, the church, in other words, should be living as a "living exegesis of the cross; or better, a living exegesis of the Crucified, who is the image of God" (Gorman 2009, p. 172). Every age constructs its own *logos* through which reality is interpreted and human flourishing pursued. Paul's answer is neither nostalgic withdrawal from culture nor uncritical accommodation to it. Instead, he invites the church to inhabit the *logos tou staurou*—to participate in the self-giving life of the crucified God and thereby bear witness to a kingdom whose wisdom continues to appear as folly to every competing rationality. In an age increasingly ordered by algorithmic authority, the enduring task of the church is not merely to proclaim the cross but to live according to its rationality before the world.

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Notes

- ¹ Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- ² On the cross as the paradigmatic center of Paul's theology and the pattern of Christian existence, see (Hays 1996, pp. 29–46; Gorman 2001, pp. 1–17, 75–94).
- ³ An epistemological revolution is a profound, sudden shift in how society or a discipline defines what counts as knowledge and how truth is validated. It is a change not just in *what* we know, but in the *fundamental rules by which we know it*.
- ⁴ Richard B. Hays emphasizes that Paul's gospel establishes an entirely different way of seeing the world (Hays 2011, pp. 26–34).
- ⁵ While previous scholarship has emphasized the centrality of the cross for Paul's theology (e.g., Gorman; Hays), the present study argues that the *logos tou staurou* functions as Paul's governing account of reality from which his epistemology, anthropology, ethics, mission, and public witness coherently emerge.
- ⁶ The adjective *cruciform* derives from the Latin *crux* ("cross") and *forma* ("shape" or "form"), literally denoting that which is "cross-shaped." While cruciform language appears in earlier theological traditions—notably in Vladimir Lossky's discussion of "The Economy of the Son" in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Lossky 1976, pp. 135–55)—this study follows Michael J. Gorman's distinctive application of *cruciformity* as a Pauline theological category denoting participation in the self-giving life revealed in Christ's crucifixion. Building upon Gorman's framework, the present study argues that cruciformity is the embodied expression of the *logos tou staurou* as a rival epistemology and public witness.
- ⁷ The term "Algorithmic Logos" is employed heuristically throughout this study to describe algorithmically mediated systems that increasingly function as organizing epistemic authorities. The comparison is analogical rather than historical and is intended to illuminate structural similarities between competing accounts of rational order rather than suggest direct philosophical continuity.

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