

A TALE OF TWO WISDOMS:
READING 1 COR 1–4 IN LIGHT OF SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE*

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Paul's letters were not received in a vacuum.¹ They were read in a diverse cultural matrix. Resonances with the Pauline text extend beyond the often studied quotations, allusions, and echoes of Scripture. Scholars have sought to understand and hear Paul through Greco-Roman philosophy, various forms of Judaism, as well as through specific cultural institutions.

Some scholars have plumbed the depths of the Greek theater and the plays performed on the stage to understand how Paul presents himself and how his readers may view him. These elements appear in different ways. Paul may offer a speech in character in Romans 7 and allude to Euripides' *Bacchae* in Philipians.² Michael Cover argues that 1 Cor 5–16 not only contains the only Pauline quotation of a verse of poetry but also may be ordered with reference to New Comedy.³ 1 Cor 1–4, the focus of this present study, has not escaped such examination. With reference to 1 Cor 1–4 two different relations to Greek drama have been proposed.⁴ First, Larry Welborn argues that Paul's reference to himself and the other apostles as fools (μωροί) in 1 Cor and the other language of foolishness pulls from popular mime-performances. Welborn reads 1 Cor 1–4 in a largely comic light.⁵ Second, Courtney Friesen, in a comparison of Paul's writing

¹ This paper is a draft of a potential further project, written to be presented on April 5, 2019 at the Stone-Campbell Journal Conference. As such, it presents preliminary conclusions. The author welcomes critical feedback on all parts of the paper.

² Stanley K. Stowers, "Romans 7.7–25 as a Speech-in-Character (Προσωποποιία)," in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 180–202; Michael Benjamin Cover, "The Death of Tragedy: The Form of God in Euripides's *Bacchae* and Paul's Carmen Christi," *HTR* 111.1 (2018): 66–89.

³ Michael Benjamin Cover, "The Divine Comedy at Corinth: Paul, Menander, and the Rhetoric of Resurrection," *NTS* 64 (2018): 532–50.

⁴ Michael Cover argues that 1 Cor 5–16 should be read in a comic light through comparison with Menander and New Comedy. The presence of comic or tragic elements do not negate the presence of the other genre. Rather, as Cover notes, Greek drama has developed into hybrid genres with elements of both tragedy and comedy appearing in the same text; idem, "The Divine Comedy at Corinth," 535. See also Kathryn Gutzwiller, "The Tragic Mask of Comedy: Metatheatricality in Menander," *ClAnt* 19, no. 1 (2000): 102–37; Matthew C. Farmer, *Tragedy on the Comic Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); James Redfield, "Comedy, Tragedy, and Politics in Aristophanes' 'Frogs,'" *Chicago Review* 15, no. 4 (1962): 107–21; Mario Telò, "Embodying the Tragic Father(s): Autobiography and Intertextuality in Aristophanes," *ClAnt* 29, no. 2 (2010): 278–326.

⁵ L. L. Welborn, *Paul, the Fool of Christ: A Study of 1 Corinthians 1-4 in the Comic-Philosophic Tradition*, JSNTSup 293 (New York: T&T Clark, 2005).

with Stoic discourse and two Greek tragedies (the *Bacchae* and *Oedipus Rex*) establishes a tragic reading of these chapters.⁶ Both Greek tragedy and Paul's writing provide a discourse on wisdom and foolishness. Moreover, Paul's reference to the *θέατρον* in 1 Cor 4:9 evokes tragic plays, depicting the suffering of the apostles and urging the Corinthians to avoid continuing in their tragic misconception of considering their foolishness to be wisdom before the final reversal at the end of the age. For Friesen, the Paul of 1 Cor 1–4 is *Paulus Tragicus*.

In this paper, I will build upon Friesen's argument that in 1 Cor 1–4 Paul evokes a resonance with Greek tragedy. I will develop this through an examination of a connection between Paul's writing and Sophocles' play *Antigone*. This popular and evocative play provides various levels of resonance with the text of 1 Cor 1–4 as well as a connection to the political sphere. *Antigone* has been recognized as a political tragedy and was soon adopted in Greek political speeches.⁷ Such similarities may have caused the Corinthians to hear Paul's letter in light of this drama. This resonance with tragedy does more than undercut the false allusion of security of the Corinthian Christians, it serves Paul's rhetorical purpose of establishing in himself and the other apostles' the modes of proper leadership for the Corinthian Church.

First performed in 442 BCE, *Antigone* retained popularity for centuries. It was in the repertoire of tragedy commonly performed throughout the Greek-speaking world.⁸ In Rome, *Antigone* was one of the most important tragic characters.⁹ Beyond the tragic stage, *Antigone's* burial of her brother and her subsequent death were taken up by pantomimes across the Roman

⁶ Courtney J P Friesen, "Paulus Tragicus: Staging Apostolic Adversity in First Corinthians," *JBL* 134.4 (2015): 813–32.

⁷ W. M. Calder, "Sophokles' Political Tragedy, *Antigone*," *GRBS* 9 (1968): 389–407; Edith Hall, "Antigone and the Internalization of Theatre in Antiquity," in *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage*, ed. Erin B. Mee and Helene P. Foley, Classical Presences (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 56–58.

⁸ Hall, "Antigone," 56.

⁹ Juvenal, *Sat.* 8.229; Hall, "Antigone," 62–63.

Empire as well as represented in artwork.¹⁰ It also inspired other plays of similar themes by Aristophanes, Astydamas the Younger, as well as a version written by Euripides.¹¹ The popularity of the Sophoclean version even caused a copyist to revise the ending of Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* to match the beginning of Sophocles' play.¹² Aristotle also references the play in his work on rhetoric.¹³ The wide-ranging influence of the play and its dispersion across the Greek speaking world increases the probability of both Corinthian and Pauline familiarity with the work.

Common Frameworks: *Antigone* and 1 Corinthians

Now I will focus on the connections between *Antigone* and 1 Corinthians. These connections will coalesce around the theme of wisdom. The vocabulary of wisdom, however, is noticeably different in these two texts. The range of vocabulary used to describe both wisdom and foolishness is quite larger in the *Antigone* than in 1 Cor 1–4. Moreover, as Rosanna Lauriola notes, in *Antigone* there is almost a complete absence of the most common terms to address wisdom “that everybody would expect, such as σοφία, σοφός.”¹⁴ These are the most prevalent words in 1 Cor 1–4 for describing wisdom. However, their prevalence in 1 Cor 1–4 does not necessitate a stability of meaning. As C. K. Barrett notes, “It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that there is a different shade of meaning in the word σοφία (and σοφός) every time it occurs.”¹⁵ In 1 Cor 4:10, Paul changes his language of wisdom which is opposed to foolishness from σοφός

¹⁰ Hall, “Antigone,” 63; Lucian, *Salt.*, 43; Philostratus, *Imag.*, 2.29.

¹¹ Maria de Fátima Silva, “Antigone,” in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Sophocles*, ed. Rosanna Lauriola and Kyriakos N. Dēmētrίου (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 394–95.

¹² Silva, “Antigone,” 394.

¹³ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1373b.12–13 (*Ant.* 456–7); 1375b.1–2 (*Ant.* 456–8); 1415b.20 (*Ant.* 223); 1417a.32–3 (*Ant.* 911–12); 1418b.32 (*Ant.* 688–700). See also Hall, “Antigone,” 56–57.

¹⁴ Rosanna Lauriola, “Wisdom and Foolishness: A Further Point in the Interpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone*,” *Hermes* 4 (2007): 395.

¹⁵ C. K. Barrett, “Christianity at Corinth,” in *Essays on Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 7–8.

to φρόνιμος. It may be significant, if Paul has the *Antigone* in mind, that this change comes immediately after Paul's reference to the θέατρον in verse 9 since φρόνιμος and those words belonging to the same stem are Sophocles' most commonly used words for wisdom in this play.¹⁶ In the choice of using both σοφός and φρόνιμος to be pitted against μωρός Paul demonstrates that σοφός and φρόνιμος have semantic overlap.¹⁷ Their synonymy provides a foundation for the comparison of thoughts on wisdom and foolishness between these two works. Additionally, because of these differences in vocabulary I will further argue for the connection between *Antigone* and 1 Cor 1–4 through their shared frameworks of thought more than the exact words used to convey them. These share frameworks will be explored in three areas. First, the conflict between two wisdoms. Second, the differing perceptions of each wisdom. Third, the contrasting ethics of each wisdom.

Conflict

Sophocles' *Antigone* and 1 Corinthians 1–4 develop from the confrontation of two wisdoms. In both instances, the wisdoms at odds reflect the wisdom of the gods and the wisdom of the ruler(s) of this world. In *Antigone*, Creon establishes his wisdom as reflecting the governments of the world. In his inaugural address he states, “There is no way of getting to know a man's spirit (ψυχή) and thought (φρόνημα) and judgment (γνώμη), until he has been seen to be versed in government (ἀρχαῖς) and the laws” (*Ant.* 175–178). For Creon, wise actions are demonstrated through political effectiveness. Success and accomplishments reveal wisdom. He recently has acquired (λαμβών) the all-powerful monarchy (παντελῆ μοναρχίαν) and begun to

¹⁶ Lauriola, “Wisdom and Foolishness,” 396–399.

¹⁷ Although, this synonymy is not always present in 1 Cor 1–4. In 1 Cor 3:10 Paul uses the term σοφός in the “traditional anthropological usage” to describe his ability as a craftsman; Ulrich Wilckens and Georg Fohrer, “Σοφία, Σοφός, Σοφίζω,” *TDNT* 7:517.

reign. Such people as him enjoy great wealth (πλούτει) and live as kings (lit. tyrants, τύραννον) (*Ant.* 1160–1171). No one in the play fits these descriptors better than Creon. As Knapp notes, for Creon “he is the fount of all wisdom for Thebes and its people.”¹⁸ Additionally, the goodness of both rulers and subjects are manifested in one’s conduct in battle (*Ant.* 668–671). Creon’s wisdom proceeds with a verifiable rubric based upon worldly success.

Likewise, Paul presents the world’s wisdom as relying on outward status markers.¹⁹ The wise men of this age are marked with their σοφίας λόγοις. Whether Paul is referring to Sophistic Rhetoric, Stoic Philosophy, or Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom is beyond the scope of this paper. However, proficiency in each is established through eloquent discourse.²⁰ The position of being wise is a status manifested from the opinion of others. Such status invariably comes with other discrete markers, namely wealth and power. These are the very descriptors Paul gives the Corinthians when deriding them for operating out of the wisdom of the world. The Corinthians claimed to be full (κεκορησμένοι), to have begun to reign (ἐβασιλεύσατε), and to be rich (ἐπλουτήσατε). These terms are connected to the pride of earthly rulers.²¹ This pride manifests itself in boasting (1 Cor 3:21) and great lofty words. The presence of these status claims motivates the Corinthians to assume maturity and spirituality. Functioning within the world’s wisdom, they equate external markers with the possession of wisdom.

¹⁸ Charles Knapp, “A Point in the Interpretation of the Antigone of Sophocles,” *The American Journal of Philology* 37.3 (1916): 301.

¹⁹ Stephen M Pogoloff calls lofty rhetoric “the status indicator of eloquence;” idem, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians*, SBLDS 134 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 119.

²⁰ For an overview of scholarship on the identification of these terms in 1 Cor 1–4 see Oh-Young Kwon, “A Critical Review of Recent Scholarship on the Pauline Opposition and the Nature of Its Wisdom (Σοφία) in 1 Corinthians 1–4,” *CBR* 8.3 (2010): 386–427. Larissa Atkinson argues that *Antigone* is a play about the use and abuse of rhetoric above all else; idem, “Tragic Rhetoric: Sophocles and the Politics of Good Sense” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2013), 32.

²¹ Peter Marshall, “Hybrists Not Gnostics in Corinth,” *SBLSP* 23 (1984): 278. John Fitzgerald also links *koros* with *hybris*; idem, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence*, SBLDS 99 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 133.

In 1 Cor 1–4, one half of the dichotomy of wisdom is the wisdom of the world or in 1 Cor 2:7, a wisdom of this age or the rulers of this age. Paul rejects the positions of such wisdom and establishes himself as representing the θεοῦ σοφίαν which is manifested not in a symbol of status but one of sacrifice (1 Cor 1:17, 24). He also rejects the methods through which the world establishes status. Paul’s ministry among the Corinthians exuded weakness not power. Paul uses tragic emotions to describe his state among them: weakness, fear, and much trembling (1 Cor 2:3).²² Because of the repudiation of the markers of status and methods of power of the world, the possession of the wisdom of God results in the accusation of foolishness from those who possess the wisdom of the world.

In *Antigone*, Antigone acts upon the wisdom of the gods.²³ In the opening scene of the play, Antigone presents her plan to bury her brother as a holy crime (*Ant.* 73–74). While it violates the justice of the state, she claims that it is honorable among the gods (*Ant.* 76–77). Ismene, her sister who rejects Antigone’s request for help, considers her to be foolish (ἄνοος) (*Ant.* 98–99) as she herself will not go against the will of the city (*Ant.* 78–79). When confronted by Creon after her arrest, Creon asks Antigone if she transgressed the laws, that is Creon’s prohibition of burying her brother who fought against Thebes in the battle of the seven gates. Antigone replies:

Yes, for it was not Zeus who made this proclamation, nor was it Justice who lives with the gods below that established such laws among men, nor did I think your proclamations strong enough to have power to overrule, mortal as they were, the

²² Paul’s self-imagery of his original preaching to the Corinthians could evoke pity as he came with weakness, fear, and much trembling (1 Cor 2:3). Terror (fear) and pity are listed by Aristotle as tragic emotions Aristotle, *Poet.* 1452b.1; 1453a2–6.

²³ That the burial of Polyneices was the correct thing to do after his death is not contested. The internal structure of the play labels Creon’s decree as unjust, since this action is the beginning of his ruin. However, some scholars have not freed Antigone from all error. Her stubbornness, pride, and willful disobedience of both Creon’s decree as king and his role as patriarch of the family have caused many to find in Antigone as many flaws as, if not more than, Creon. For example, see Philip Holt, “Polis and Tragedy in the ‘Antigone,’” *Mnemosyne* 52.6 (1999): 658–90.

unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods. For these have life, not simply today and yesterday, but forever, and no one knows how long ago they were revealed. For this I did not intend to pay the penalty among the gods for fear of any man's pride. (*Ant.* 450–460)

With this response, Antigone establishes her position as one who follows the unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods. This claim mirrors Paul's assertion concerning the wisdom of God ordained before the ages. Antigone's claim is taken up by Aristotle as the supreme example of appealing to eternal decrees (*Rhet.* 3.1417a). Moreover, Antigone's connection to the divine is also reinforced when the guard compares her with a bird (*Ant.* 424). Tyrell and Bennett note, "Athenians, at least when listening to the tales of singers and powers, were always alert to birds coming to humans as vehicles of the divine will. Sophocles could expect his original audience to seek meaning through this connotation."²⁴ In her claim of divine wisdom, Antigone therefore stands against the mortal decrees of human rulers. She disregards human pride in order to carry out the will of the gods.

Perception

This conflict between Antigone and Creon manifests itself in the clash of perceptions, often depicted through the use of *δοκέω*. This clash of perceptions is common in tragic plays, as Friesen notes.²⁵ In *Antigone*, each wisdom has its own epistemology which categorizes the other wisdom as foolishness. Antigone knows her actions will be categorized as foolish by Creon when she says to Creon:

σοὶ δ' εἰ **δοκῶ** νῦν μῶρα δρῶσα τυγχάνειν,
 σχεδόν τι μῶρῳ μωρίαν ὀφλισκάνω.

And if you think my actions foolish,

²⁴ William Blake Tyrell and Larry J. Bennett, *Recapturing Sophocles' Antigone*, Greek Studies (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 19.

²⁵ Friesen, "Paulus Tragicus," 828.

that amounts to a charge of folly by a fool! (*Ant.* 469–470)

The wisdom of Creon and the rulers of the world are incapable of considering Antigone’s wisdom anything but foolishness. The very statement Creon would use to assert his wisdom is understood by Antigone as revealing his folly. The conflict between two wisdom is highlighted in this conflict of perceptions. As Rosanna Lauriola argues, *Antigone* is “a tragedy about wisdom and foolishness, a motif subtly unfolded through the antithesis Antigone–Creon in terms of a contrast between truth and appearance.”²⁶

In the same way as Antigone’s actions evoke contrary opinions, Paul focuses on the message of the cross as the crisis point between worldly and godly wisdom when he writes “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). Moreover, Paul’s admonition to the Corinthian Christians contains a reevaluation of what it means to be foolish. Paul writes:

Μηδεις εαυτον εξαπατατω· ει τις **δοκει** σοφος ει̃ναι εν υμιν εν τῷ αι̃ωνι του̃τω, μωρο̃ς γενε̃σθω, ι̃να γενηται σοφο̃ς.

Do not deceive yourselves. If anyone among you thinks to be wise in this age, let him become a fool, in order that he may become wise. (1 Cor 3:18)

Paul undermines the Corinthian assertion of wisdom with the understanding that it is merely their opinion. Paul lends his own perspective: the Corinthian’s “wisdom” is folly. The contrast between these two perspectives of wisdom and the actions that arise from them is the conflict exhibited in the texts of Corinthians and the *Antigone*.

Ethical Conflicts

²⁶ Lauriola, “Wisdom and Foolishness,” 405.

The two wisdoms at conflict in both *Antigone* and 1 Corinthians are depicted with contrasting sets of ethics. The wisdom of the world focuses on power. Divine wisdom, on the other hand, embraces suffering. Moreover, the conflict between these two wisdoms provides the wisdom of the world the opportunity to exert its power against the divine wisdom, which labels it as foolishness, and subjects it to suffering. These ethical distinctions arise from the spheres in which the wisdoms reside. *Antigone* and Paul share ethical structures focused on love, the gods, and kinship (or in the case of Paul's ecclesiology, fictive kinship) ties.²⁷ Creon and the rulers of the world create an ethic based of the needs of the polis, the culturally determined markers of status, and the authority of the polis to use force. One of the "fundamental differences" in ethics in *Antigone* is highlighted in *Antigone's* response to Creon concerning the correct actions to take toward her fallen brother Polyneices, "It is my nature not to share in hating, but to share in loving" (*Ant.* 523).²⁸

The hatred of Creon's ethic arises from the wisdom of the world grounded in the needs of the polis.²⁹ He seeks the peace and stability of the polis at all costs. The play begins just after the battle of the seven gates. After the previous ruler is slain in the battle, Creon is hailed as the new king of the land. The Chorus remains expectant to see what he will do. The motivation of peace and order directs Creon's attitudes toward Polyneices. Polyneices, formerly a prince of Thebes returned with the enemy forces to fight against the city. Through Creon's political ethic such traitors and those who would dare to honor them deserve to die. The violence of Creon's wisdom is epitomized in his response to *Antigone*. At the end of their initial confrontation when *Antigone*

²⁷ For *Antigone* see Helene P. Foley, "Antigone as Moral Agent," in *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*, ed. M. S. Silk (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 49–73.

²⁸ Charles Paul Segal, "Sophocles' Praise of Man and the Conflicts of the 'Antigone,'" *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 3.2 (1964): 46–66.

²⁹ Foley, "Antigone as Moral Agent," 59.

has been found guilty of breaking the law she asks Creon, “Do you wish for anything more than to take me and kill me” (*Ant.* 497). To which he replies, “Not I! When I have that, I have everything (ἅπαντ’ ἔχῃ)” (*Ant.* 498).

In Paul’s formulation, the rulers of the world mitigate violence and mockery against that which they do not understand. They failed to recognize the wisdom of Jesus and so crucified him. The apostles who have received the spirit of God which reveals the knowledge of God are labeled as fools. They are mocked, scorned, and considered the refuse of the world. The cross which undermines the wisdom of the world is considered the epitome of foolishness. Rather than share in the hating of the world, the apostles on the other hand, return blessing for insults, endurance for persecution, and kind language for slander (1 Cor 4:12–13). While their presence is perceived as a threat to the rulers and powers of the world, they refuse to give into conforming to ethic reflected in the wisdom of this world.

Because of these contrasting ethics, the world cannot understand the wisdom of God nor how it can be manifested in suffering. Creon’s proclamation after the battle is that anyone who would bury the corpse of Polyneices is to be stoned. Such a punishment was expected to dissuade all potential members of the burial party as is noted in the Chorus’s statement concerning the possibility of disobedience to Creon’s decree, “There is no one foolish enough to desire death” (*Ant.* 220). Antigone, motivated by a different ethic and wisdom, proves to be the exception. Likewise, in contrast to the Corinthians clamoring for external status symbols, Paul accepts suffering, and even death, as the probable consequence of adhering to divine wisdom. This appearance of wisdom in suffering was shocking both to Creon and to the Corinthians. However, the attitude toward suffering is the manifestation of the deeply contrasted versions of wisdom present in both texts. The wisdom of the rulers seeks affirmation through external status

markers and power over suffering. The wisdom of the gods is willing to suffer for what is right. Faithfulness to eternal decrees takes precedence over newly established notions of morality. Both wisdoms self-identity as such and view the other as foolishness. As these conflicts unfold in both *Antigone* and 1 Cor 1–4, it becomes clear that both texts contain a tale of two wisdoms.

Conclusion

Having established the common frameworks of competing wisdoms in both *Antigone* and 1 Cor 1–4, what then are the interpretive payoffs for this reading? First, this reading deepens the possible connection of Paul’s writing with the tragic sphere. In Friesen’s article he uses as a case study the *Bacchae* and the Oedipus cycle, in order to examine the relationship of tragedy to 1 Cor 1–4. These connections are rooted in the language of wisdom and foolishness, in order to persuade those claiming to be well established in this world of their imminent downfall. Through the connections explored above I have demonstrated that these connections are also indeed true of *Antigone* as well, thus moving beyond the Euripedean corpus. However, more than a deepening of the connections with tragedy, I believe that reading 1 Cor 1–4 with *Antigone* helps to solve one of the problematic readings of Friesen’s argument, Paul’s statement of being condemned to die in the theater in 1 Cor 4:9.

In 1 Cor 4:9 Paul presents his view of the current situation.³⁰ God has displayed his apostles as the last ones who are also condemned to die. There is a “widespread exegetical tradition” that links these two modifiers of the apostles into a compound picture of the apostles as marching at the end of a triumphal procession, the position of those condemned to die.³¹

³⁰ Δοκέω here refers not only to a consideration, but Paul’s own perception of the situation. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, 130.

³¹ Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, 136n58.

However, the conjunction ὡς should probably be taken as an indication of manner likening the two terms together without necessitating the image of a triumphal procession.³² The apostles are displayed as last in that they are condemned to die. Additionally, the word meaning “condemned to die,” ἐπιθανάτιος, does not in itself necessitate the action of death.³³ It refers to the liminal state of the condemned between their sentencing and the execution of the sentence.³⁴ For the majority of her lines, this is the same state that Antigone has on the stage.

In the second part of 1 Cor 4:9 Paul’s states of himself and the apostles that they have become a θέατρον in the view of the cosmos, angels, and humans.³⁵ This reference to the theatre and the subsequent mocking and scorning that Paul describes having received in vv. 10–13, has led Friesen to suggest that Teiresias, the blind prophet and a stock character in tragic plays including *Antigone*, could be mapped onto Paul.³⁶ Both are entrusted with the oracles of God and proclaim the tragic downfall of those pitted against them in their respective narratives. However, while Teiresias is often mocked by the tragic protagonists, he is never sentenced to death.³⁷ Therefore, I propose that Antigone is a more likely candidate within a tragic reading of 1 Cor 1–4. The image of one standing in the theater, as one condemned to die and representing the

³² The use of ὡς as an indication of manner or a point of comparison is the most common usage in this letter and the Pauline corpus (e.g., 1 Cor 3:15; 4:13; 9:26; 13:11a). But it can be used to introduce an example (for Pauline literature see Rom 9:25).

³³ Contra Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner who assert that this word refers “to those thrown to the lions” citing Bell and the Dragon 31; idem, Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 180; see also Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 174. No specific sentencing is implied in the term, nor does the term necessitate the carrying out of the sentencing, see below.

³⁴ Dionysius of Halicarnassus uses this term when speaking about the means of killing those condemned to death (*Ant. rom.* VII.35.4) as well as the releasing of men previously sentenced to death (*Ant. rom.* VII.7.4). The latter clearly establishes ἐπιθανάτιος as a term that does necessitate the action of death, although it is the typical outcome.

³⁵ Some translations remove the notion of the causal clause by leaving ὅτι untranslated, e.g., NIV, NLT, HCSB.

³⁶ Friesen, “*Paulus Tragicus*,” 830.

³⁷ Friesen uses Teiresias as one whom Paul mirrors in delivering the divine oracles; idem, “*Paulus Tragicus*,” 830.

wisdom of the Gods is the image of Antigone before she is lead offstage to be put to death. Antigone’s monologues before her death set forth the tragic emotions of pity and compassion as she calls the crowd to look upon her. She is displayed before the audience in being sentenced to death. Antigone addresses both the land of Thebes, the gods of her forbearers, and the rulers of the cities with the implication that all are able to see her (*Ant.* 937). She is mocked and insulted (*Ant.* 838–841). She describes herself as the last of her lineage (*Ant.* 941). The last time the audience sees her in the play is as she is led away to her inevitable death. In this way, Paul’s reference to the *θέατρον* is in the context of being displayed as condemned to die. Antigone, therefore, emerges as a more viable candidate in the tragic repertoire for one who represents the wisdom of the gods and is condemned to die in the extant Greek tragic literature. In both 1 Cor 1–4 and *Antigone*, godly wisdom suffers at the hand of the rulers of the world because these rulers cannot comprehend the wisdom of the gods.

This reading of 1 Cor 1–4 in light of *Antigone*, as well as the possibility of seeing Paul as an Antigone-like figure in 1 Cor 4:9–13, leads to an additional implication, this one concerning the political readings of these chapters. If Paul is Antigone, then who are the Corinthians? As noted above, their description maps well onto the description of Creon as newly ruling, rich, and a tyrant. This is not to deny the connection with other tragic protagonists that Friesen has noted either. Both Antigone and 1 Cor 1–4 have been recognized for their political topoi and concerns about proper leadership.³⁸ Antigone has been read as a political tragedy and Creon has been envisioned as a faction leader.³⁹ Greek political speeches have referred to the play *Antigone* with

³⁸ For Corinthians see Bradley J. Bitner, *Paul’s Political Strategy in 1 Corinthians 1–4: Constitution and Covenant*, SNTSMS 163 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

³⁹ D. M. Juffras, “Friendship and Faction in Sophocles: Greek Political Thinking in the *Ajax*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan: 1988).

Creon being the paradigm of an ineffective and bad leader. In Demosthenes' work *On the False Embassy* he accuses Aeschines of corrupt conduct and misleading the people. Part of his rhetorical move is to connect this former actor with one of the roles he has played, that of Creon.

To quote Edith Hall at length:

What sticks in Demosthenes' audience's memory is not that Aeschines had failed to live up to some of the sentiments Creon expresses in his very speech, but that Aeschines had played Creon, the greatest failure as a civic leader in all the Greek tragic repertoire. The socio-political stereotype of the self-seeking and incompetent ruler who leads his people into injustice, death, and destruction has by the 340s clearly found, in Demosthenes' Athens, its most conspicuous and immediately recognizable literary prototype in the Creon of Sophocles's *Antigone*.⁴⁰

By imbuing his description of the Corinthian with language mirroring Creon, Paul implicates that the Corinthian leadership is simply "playing Creon." Their assertion of wisdom, wealth, and power is a façade that will soon come crashing down. By envisioning their situation through the lens of this well-known play, Paul attempts to persuade the Corinthians to see their own situation in a tragic light. He urges them to change, lest they follow the path of Creon into despair and sorrow. Moreover, by undercutting the Corinthian's claims to wisdom in the guise of a ruler, Paul affirms his own position, along with the apostles with whom he has communion in suffering, as the proper leaders of the Corinthian Church (1 Cor 3:5–9). Throughout 1 Cor 1–4 Paul undermines Corinthian notions of factionalism with a described unity between Paul's and other's works. As long as they are following the wisdom of God, as evidenced in their suffering, these other leaders are not competing against Paul for a position of authority. Rather, Paul's tragic vision of the Corinthian's circumstances is a rhetorical move in order for the Corinthians to be united under leaders who adhere to God's wisdom and embody the suffering of Jesus.

⁴⁰ Hall, "Antigone," 58–59.