

Spiritually gifted and divided? A text-centred interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a



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This article interpreted the persuasion of the Corinthians who claimed to be spiritually gifted yet divided. This article showed how Paul persuaded them not to be divided in 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a from a text-centred rhetorical perspective, which is called a 'text-generated persuasion-interpretation' (TGPI). Text-generated persuasion-interpretation is not based on ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric; it differs from rhetorical analyses that impose rhetorical categories on the text by analysing it within the confines of those rhetorical categories or rhetorical analyses. These merely mention rhetorical stylistic devices and techniques that the author uses to persuade the audience. Instead, TGPI, as used in this study, reconstructed the rhetorical strategy from the text itself, including how Paul employed rhetorical arguments and rhetorical techniques to persuade the Corinthians. Paul persuaded the Corinthians to pursue unity in the church. He used the metaphor of a body in 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a to refer to the church and how each part of the body can serve the church with the diverse gifts they possess. To achieve this objective, Paul persuaded the Corinthians by means of four supportive rhetorical strategies, types of arguments, the employment of processes of argumentation, and various rhetorical techniques.

Contribution: Firstly, this article contributes to the rhetorical analysis of 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a, using a TGPI methodology that has not been implemented to interpret this text before. Secondly, this article contributes to the study and value of the rhetorical interpretation of biblical texts. Finally, this article demonstrates that the dominant rhetorical objective of a text, namely the persuasion of the audience by the author, can be constructed from the text without relying on ancient rhetoric; rather, it uses a text-centred methodology, new rhetorical arguments and rhetorical techniques that emerge from the text.

Keywords: Persuasion; text-generated persuasion-interpretation; rhetorical objective; rhetorical techniques; divided; unity.

Introduction

First Corinthians 12:1–31a is a beloved text about the practice of spiritual gifts. As such, it has enjoyed scholarly interpretation to understand how communities of believers ought to apply this text today. As an epistle that continues to be relevant for our time, the issues which Paul confronts in 1 Corinthians remain like issues churches face today (Dutch 2005:1). Consequently, it implies that this letter will continue to generate scholarly interest, which will continue to contribute to our understanding of Paul's epistle to the Corinthians. Of interest to this study are a plethora of rhetorical analyses of 1 Corinthians that have contributed significantly to our understanding of 1 Corinthians and the practice of spiritual gifts (*πνευματικῶν*).

When one surveys the existing rhetorical analyses of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians on spiritual gifts (*πνευματικῶν*), there appears to be a lack of consensus about the rhetorical approach to follow in analysing this letter. By focusing solely on the ancient Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition, scholars such as Keener (2005), Mitchell (1991), and Witherington (1995), contribute to an understanding of how 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a functions within the ancient rhetorical genres such as deliberative, judicial, and epideictic rhetoric (Aristotle 1947:1.3.1–5; Quintilian 1947:3.7–9). Although these scholars' efforts are greatly beneficial, it is difficult to overlook the lack of consensus and consistency among those who supposedly use the same tradition to analyse Paul's letter to the Corinthians (Prinsloo 2023:1–2). Within the structure of one particular family of scholars, we find one part of the family who regards the genre of 1 Corinthians as deliberative (Mitchell 1991:1; Schüssler-Fiorenza 1987; Witherington 1995:73–79), whereas the dissenting part of the family argues that 1 Corinthians is epideictic (Perelman & Olbrecht-Tyteca 1969; Wuellner 1979:177–188).

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Continuing with the trend of elusiveness in the Greco-Roman rhetorical approach, scholars interpret the structure of 1 Corinthians by identifying the different parts of speech – the *exordium*, *proposition*, *narratio*, *probatio* and *conclusion* of the letter (Aristotle 1947:3.14–19; Deissmann 1901:168; Doty 1973:27; Quintilian, *Institutio* 4, 1947; White 1984:1739–1749). It seems even more elusive that there is no consensus about how 1 Corinthians should be demarcated. The fruitless exercise upon which one embarks to deduce a solid application of a methodology, which will withstand intense scrutiny from those who rely on the same system to exegete the text, casts serious doubt upon the efficacy of ancient rhetorical categories that are imposed on the text. Forcing a text into a pre-existing ancient rhetorical model may result in missing the persuasion of the text due to the text not being allowed to delineate its own rhetorical logic (Meynet 1998:177).

A methodological solution

This study proposes a distinct approach to the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a by not imposing ancient rhetorical genres and parts of speech to identify persuasion strategies and stylistic devices in the text. Tolmie (2004:13–39) pioneered this approach, which introduced a break-away from the Greco-Roman rhetoric used to interpret Paul's texts by developing a 'text-centred' approach. A text-centred approach aims to prioritise the identification of the dominant rhetorical strategy of the text by prioritising the text, which is followed by a text-centred descriptive interpretation of the way in which the author persuades his audience. Moreover, this interpretation fundamentally assumes that the author's objective in a particular text is to use all means available to best persuade his readers of his argument. To this end, the author uses supportive rhetorical strategies, arguments, and techniques to achieve the dominant rhetorical objective and to enhance the effectiveness of his communication. These devices, which can be identified, described in detail, and shown to contribute to the author's dominant rhetorical strategy, are located within the text itself (Genade 2015:24; Snyman 2009b:1).

To interpret 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a by remaining within its parameters, Tolmie's (2004:37–39) text-centred descriptive analysis, as adapted by Genade (2015:24), is used. Tolmie has formulated a minimal theoretical framework approach to analyse the rhetoric of the text by using a five-step guide of all the ingredients involved in the analysis of the author's dominant rhetorical strategy. Genade (2015:21–22) has attributed the name 'text-generated persuasion-analysis' (TGPA)¹ to this methodology and he has formalised the guidelines sequentially for the sake of orderly presentation.

These guidelines include the following steps:

- Identifying the dominant rhetorical strategy.
- Creating a detailed analysis of the author's rhetorical strategy.

1. Contra Genade, in this study 'text-generated persuasion-interpretation' (TGPI) is the preferred name that will be used.

- Identifying the supportive rhetorical strategies.
- Identifying the rhetorical techniques.

This methodology has never been employed to interpret 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a before. The understanding of the rhetorical situation that led to the writing of 1 Corinthians must be understood first, before TGPI can be done. To understand the situation that occasioned the writing of 1 Corinthians, hints of why it was written, should be traced from the letter. This will be briefly done by looking at hints of the rhetorical situation in 1 Corinthians as a whole. This is premised upon the understanding that the situation, which occasioned the writing of 1 Corinthians, may have directed Paul's persuasion.

The situation that occasioned the writing of 1 Corinthians as understood from a rhetorical perspective

There are two main passages that scholars rely on to give us hints of the situation that has led to the writing of 1 Corinthians (Kennedy 1984:87; Pogoloff 1992:273–274; Schüssler-Fiorenza 1987:395; Snyman 2009a:132). These are:

- 1 Corinthians 1:11, where Paul says, 'for I have been informed concerning you, my brothers, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you' [ἐδηλώθη γάρ μοι περι ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί μου, ὑπὸ τῶν Χλόης ὅτι ἔριδες ἐν ὑμῖν εἰσιν]. Paul indicates that he has been informed by Chloe's people about the existing 'quarrels' [ἔριδες], which Louw and Wolvaardt (2015; 1 Cor 1:11b) describe as conflict that leads to antagonism, unnecessary rivalry, and discord.
- 1 Corinthians 7:1, where Paul says, 'now in response to the matters you wrote about: it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman' [περι δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε, καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεσθαι]. Paul further responds to other matters about which they wrote in chapters to follow 1 Corinthians 7; one has an issue concerning spirituals or spiritual gifts [περι δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν 1 Cor 12:1] that introduces the main section of this study, namely 1 Corinthians 12:1–12:31a.

On the one hand, some scholars claim that Chloe's people reported the discord and factionalism, which had arisen in the Corinthian church, to Paul (Biatoma 2010:27; Collins 2016:78; Snyman 2009a:2). Subsequently, they delivered a letter to Paul from the Corinthians that contained an array of questions or complaints. The conclusion based on this claim is that Paul addresses their written communication to him as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:1, 25; 8:1, 4; 12:1; 16:1 and 12. Paul introduces all of these questions or complaints with the transitory phrase *now concerning* [περι δὲ].² On the other hand, Fee (2014:5) and Mitchell (1989:256) acknowledge that although Paul undeniably addresses a letter written to him

2. See Mitchell (1989) for a comprehensive rebuttal of those who rely on the *περι δὲ* as a formula that supposedly introduces responses to the Corinthians' questions to Paul in a letter sent to him. Her contention is that *περι δὲ* does provide a composition of 1 Corinthians, but it cannot be textually substantiated that it points to questions the Corinthians had asked Paul, as some scholars claim.

by the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 7:1, it cannot be said with certainty that the rest of the sections where the formula [περὶ δέ] appears, refer to other aspects in the 1 Corinthians 7:1 letter. Furthermore, they regard 1 Corinthians 1:11; 5:1; 11:18 and 16:17 as referring to oral reports with which Paul was furnished and to which he responds in these texts. Rhetorically, this gives credence to the fact that Paul may have had an accurate picture of the situation in the Corinthian church.

Although it cannot be argued with certainty that all the occurrences of the formula [περὶ δέ] refer to things that the Corinthians wrote to Paul, we may still conclude that 1 Corinthians 7:1 and the supplementary oral reports in 1 Corinthians 1:11; 5:1; 11:18 and 16:17 placed Paul in a situation that made him well acquainted with the situation in Corinth. This means that Paul's letter to the Corinthians was based on a credible, factual portrayal of the situation in Corinth. At the heart of this situation was the fact that there was conflict in the Corinthian church. The conflict in the Corinthian church to which Paul alludes in 1 Corinthians 1:11, seems to have arisen from factionalism, which Paul details in 1 Corinthians 1:12–17. In his reconstruction of the situation, Fee (2014:6) claims that the great problem of factionalism has led to anti-Pauline sentiments in the church. This developed into conflict between Paul and the anti-Pauline group, which eventually resulted in the Corinthian church questioning whether Paul was spiritual [πνευματικός]. Evidently, this caused division in the Corinthian church. Despite there being no scholarly consensus regarding the exact situation that caused the divisions in the Corinthian church (Lamp 1995:118; Mitchell 1993:820; Pogoloff 1992), there is enough evidence to deduce from the letter-body that Paul is responding to a myriad of issues that plagued the church.

If one accepts that Paul understood the rhetorical situation in Corinth, we may accept the construction of the rhetorical situation of 1 Corinthians. Therefore it appeared feasible to understand the rhetorical situation. Paul was acquainted with the disturbing situation in the Corinthian church. Therefore, the dominant rhetorical objective of 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a may be reconstructed from the context showing what exactly Paul intends to persuade the Corinthians of in this text.

Interpretation of the rhetoric of 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a

The dominant rhetorical strategy will be constructed from the text by answering the following questions about Paul's primary objective in this section namely, to persuade the Corinthians to use their gifts to unify the church:

- How does he use supportive rhetorical objectives?
- What types of arguments does he employ?
- In which way does he employ the process of argumentation?
- Which rhetorical techniques does he use?

The dominant rhetorical strategy

Paul's dominant rhetorical strategy in 1 Corinthians 12 can be described as persuading the Corinthians to unify the body.³ The Corinthians are to do so by serving the body with their diverse gifts for the common good. The main text that captures the end goal of this dominant rhetorical objective is 1 Corinthians 12:7 [ἐκάστω δὲ δίδοται ἡ φανερώσις τοῦ πνεύματος πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον]. To achieve this objective, Paul persuades the Corinthians by using the following supportive strategies, adapted from Kukuni (2023a:21–31):

- saying spiritual persons cannot say that Jesus is accursed or Lord, except by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:1–3).
- saying the Spirit distributes and works all the gifts according to his will (1 Cor 12:4–11).
- saying the many members of one body are one (1 Cor 12:12–26).
- reinforcing that the different parts in the church body function equally as one (1 Cor 12:27–31a).

Persuading by saying spiritual persons cannot say that Jesus is accursed or Lord except by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:1–3)

This strategy commences with a phrase about which scholars' translations differ. A lively scholarly debate accentuates the contentious nature of the translation of this phrase. Scholars differ about whether the phrase τῶν πνευματικῶν should be translated as 'the spirituals', referring to people or to 'the spiritual gifts'. The solution is arrived at either by translating the phrase in the masculine-genitive-plural or in the neuter-genitive-plural. Keener (2005:100) concludes that it is immaterial how it should be translated. According to him, 'the spirituals and the spiritual gifts' refer to the same thing; so, the difference is immaterial. Carson (1987:108) takes it to refer to the so-called 'spiritual' people; therefore, Paul is directing his attention to these individuals. Suurmond (1998:103–106) concurs by concluding that Paul is addressing the spiritual individuals in the Corinthian church who were supposed to conduct themselves in accordance with the 'gifts' they possessed, as though they were the gifts themselves – metaphorically speaking.

Contrarily, Thiselton (2000:901–902) reasons that the translation of the phrase τῶν πνευματικῶν should be determined by the exegesis of the text in its context. In his exegesis of this phrase in its context, he convincingly argues that spiritual people exercise spiritual gifts. Therefore, whether Paul refers to people or gifts, the two exist in tandem and you cannot have one without the other. This study contributes to the discussion that the rhetorical intent of the use of the aforementioned phrase is more pivotal than the contention about how it should be translated, even though it favours the feasibility of translating the phrase as either spiritual people or gifts; therefore, concurring in part with

³The metaphor of 'body' in 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a and in this article, refers to the church.

Thiselton (2000) and Keener (2005). Consequently, the phrase τῶν πνευματικῶν will be used interchangeably in this study.

Paul's primary concern is with the so-called spirituals who questioned whether he was spiritual [πνευματικός]. Evidence in the text suggests that they had departed from exercising spiritual gifts in line with the only purpose why spiritual gifts were bestowed on individuals. These were bestowed to edify the church and for the common good. Yet, this noble cause disintegrated in the Corinthian church because of 'the spirituals' [τῶν πνευματικῶν]. This caused Paul great concern, which required him to chide the Corinthians for their conduct.

The phrase *now concerning the spirituals* [περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν] in 1 Corinthians 12:1 is said with a hint of rhetorical sarcasm. This is made clear in the next phrase where Paul says, 'I do not want you to be ignorant' [οὐ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν]. Arndt, Danker and Bauer [BDAG] (2000:13) discuss the nuances of the verb ἀγνοεῖν. They explain that it could refer to one's lack of capacity to understand or be unaware of one's sin, thereby committing sin unintentionally. It could also indicate that one is paying little regard and no attention to something that is vital (BDAG 2000:13). As it applies to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 12:1, it shows that Paul is hinting at their disregard of one another and the importance of using their gifts for the good of others.

In their discussion of the implication of the phrase 'I do not want you to be ignorant' [οὐ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν] in 1 Cor 12:1, Thiselton (2000:911) and James (2004:4) claim that this phrase implies that the Corinthians had quickly become ignorant to the fact that when they were pagans, they were led astray to sacrifice to mute idols (1 Cor 8:1–6; 12:2). Their ignorance made them oblivious to the fact that they have a distorted view of God. For this reason, Paul makes them aware that 'no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit' [γνωρίζω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ λαλῶν λέγει Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς, καὶ οὐδεὶς δύναται εἰπεῖν· Κύριος Ἰησοῦς εἰ μὴ ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ] – (1 Cor 12:3).

Therefore, we find Paul employing various rhetorical devices in this section to persuade the Corinthians to accept his correction.

- He uses an argument based on affection by calling them brothers [ἀδελφοί]⁴ (1 Cor 12:1). This further elucidates his special regard for the Corinthians in addition to his calling them saints [κλητοῖς ἀγίοις] (1 Cor 1:2). His close relationship to the Corinthians and the affection he had for them may also be seen in how he uses the language of inclusivity, namely 'our brother' [ὁ ἀδελφός] (1 Cor 1:1),

⁴Paul uses the word ἀδελφοί 20 times in 1 Corinthians (1:10, 11, 26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24, 29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6, 20, 26, 39; 15:1, 31, 50, 58 and 16:15). Its main occurrence is in the masculine plural form, which normally renders its translation as 'brothers'. Louw and Nida (1996:124) observe that, in these instances, it commonly refers to those who believe in Christ irrespective of gender. In this study, the phrase *brothers and sisters* is fitting to use. Collins (2016:70) and Fee (2014:53) support this rendering; they are of the view that in its vocative, masculine, plural form, it refers to 'brothers and sisters'. Additionally, Paul uses it to refer to both female and male audience in the Corinthian church, which shows he is not concerned with an anthropological distinction between female and male.

'our Lord' [κυρίου ἡμῶν] (1 Cor 1:2), 'God our Father' [θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν] (1 Cor 1:3), 'our glory' [δόξαν ἡμῶν] (1 Cor 2:7) and 'our instruction' [νουθεσίαν ἡμῶν] (1 Cor 10:11).

- The argument based on affection is enhanced by the rhetorical technique called emphatic clustering (Genade 2007:79, 183–184). By using emphatic clustering, Paul aims to persuade the Corinthians of their shared identity and commonality that proceeds exclusively from God. The rhetorical effectiveness of the technique of emphatic clustering is seen in Paul assuring the Corinthians that, although he criticises them for their shortcomings, he nonetheless regards them as fellow ministry partners. He uses the rhetorical strategy in 1 Corinthians 1:1–3 that elucidates this. In it, he explains that his apostolic calling is divinely sanctioned, together with the Corinthians' calling and their sanctification.
- Paul enhances his persuasion using the rhetorical technique called *Accumulatio*, which is a combination of both praise and accusation to emphasise the point which he is making (Lanham 1991:1). Although he accuses the Corinthians of being ignorant in 1 Corinthians 12:1, casting doubt on whether they are spiritual as they claim to be, owing to their regress to actions tantamount to paganism, he nonetheless shows them compassion and affection by addressing them as 'fellow believers' [ἀδελφοί] (1 Cor 12:1).

Thus, Paul concludes the strategy of persuading the Corinthians that no spiritual person can say that Jesus is accursed or Lord except by the Spirit. The Corinthians were ignorant of the information that the Spirit imparts, thereby regressing in their understanding of his purpose. Paul mocks them while showing affection by using a language of inclusivity to emphasise that they share in the same calling of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are his 'brothers' [ἀδελφοί]; he does not wish to see them revert to a doctrine that he did not teach them. He now shifts in his strategy. After having corrected their understanding of the information that proceeds from the Spirit, he turns their attention to how the Spirit works in the use of spiritual gifts.

Persuading by saying the Spirit distributes and works all the gifts according to his will (1 Cor 12:4–11)

The shift in Paul's persuasive strategy is marked by the postpositive particle *now* [δὲ] which marks the sequence of events that are closely related, like the shift from the previous rhetorical strategy to the following one (Louw & Wolvaardt 2015; 1 Cor. 12:4a). After this shift, Paul continues to build the correct understanding of the true God and how he operates. This is contrary to how the Corinthians had regressed in their understanding of who God is and what information he imparts to his people to know how spiritual gifts operate in the body. In their delusion, the Corinthians conjured up the idea that 'Jesus is cursed' [ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς] (1 Cor 12:3) and attributed the source of that information to the Spirit.

Thomas (1978:11) contends that the source of such information cannot be the Spirit, because the Spirit should have informed them that Jesus is Lord. Being Lord is not for the mere sake of information but to make known to the Corinthians that the Spirit serves the purpose of showing that Jesus is Lord; therefore, as Lord he collaborates with the Spirit to impart spiritual gifts to the Corinthians for the edification of the church (Keener 2005:100).

Consequently, we find Paul enhancing his persuasion with the argument based on correction. He corrects the Corinthians about the information that comes from the Spirit and for what purpose he dispenses such information. He further uses various rhetorical techniques to persuade them of God's disposition and why he gives the gifts.

1. *Repetition*. Tolmie (2004:149, 178) explains that there are two kinds of repetition that serve to enhance the significance of what is being relayed to the readers. There is the repetition of words and the repetition of sounds or phrases. Because of its glaring nature, the readers are expected not to miss the repetition. Even when they observe it, it should cause them to inquire into the reason behind the author repeating something. It should be obvious that it is not arbitrary, because the author takes great care to ensure that the readers do not miss the point of the communication. Nida et al. (1983:24) point out that the technique of repetition is used to play similar words and their similar meaning as evident in the triple usage of 'varieties' (διαρέσεις) in 1 Corinthians 12:4, 5, 6.

Furthermore, according to Biatoma (2010:74–75), repetition serves a cohesive purpose. Van Neste (2002:121) adds that the significance of the repetitions is only worth considering as vital if the author adds an important point following the repetitions. What stands out in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 in the tripartite repetition, following the plural noun *varieties* [διαρέσεις], is the employment of three nouns, namely *gifts* [χαρισμάτων] (1 Cor 12:4), *ministries* [διακονιών] (1 Cor 12:5) and *activities* [ἐνεργημάτων] (1 Cor 12:6). The purpose is to emphasise that, although we see three different nouns referring to three different spiritual gifts, the chief aim lies in the fact that they manifest themselves differently for the common good [ἐκάστω δὲ δίδοται ἢ φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον] (1 Corinthians 12:7). They are a cohesive unit.

The repetition in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 is as follows:

- διαρέσεις δὲ χαρισμάτων εἰσὶν [there are different gifts]
 - διαρέσεις διακονιών εἰσιν [there are different ministries]; καὶ [but]
 - διαρέσεις ἐνεργημάτων εἰσὶν [there are different activities].
2. *Anaphora*. According to Keener (2010:100), Paul uses the rhetorical technique of *anaphora* to clarify to the Corinthians that, just as much as God is gracious in distributing the gifts to different people, he considers the variety that is needed for everybody to be served by the gifts. This technique is defined by Lanham (1991:11, 190) as 'a repetition of the same word at the beginning of successive

clauses or verses'. The point, which is clearly made, is that diversity does not carry any negative connotations or implications for the church. Unity in diversity is essential for the church (Fee 2014:646). Furthermore, Fee (2014:647–648) reasons that the unity in diversity is anchored in the importance of the theology of the Godhead. Unity is rooted in and modelled for the Corinthians who have diverse gifts by the triune God (1 Cor 12:4–6). They are three distinct persons in the one divine essence; yet there is distinction between the person of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

It permeates 1 Corinthians 12 that unity in diversity for the common good is God's design for the church. God distributes gifts to individuals as he wills:

- there are different activities, but the same God produces each gift in each person [διαρέσεις ἐνεργημάτων εἰσὶν, ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς θεὸς ὁ ἐνεργῶν τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν] (1 Cor 12:6)
- a manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good [ἐκάστω δὲ δίδοται ἢ φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον] (1 Cor 12:7)
- one and the same Spirit is active in all of these, distributing to each person as he desires [πάντα δὲ ταῦτα ἐνεργεῖ τὸ ἐν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα διαροῦν ἰδίᾳ ἐκάστω καθὼς βούλεται] (1 Cor 12:11).

After having corrected the Corinthians about the kind of information the Spirit imparts, Paul corrects them about how the Spirit uses spiritual gifts. He dispenses the gifts to whoever he desires for the purpose of achieving the common good of all the members of the Corinthian church. The fact that he gives a variety of the gifts, yet for the same purpose, should also function to unite the Corinthians who have diverse gifts. They should use the gifts they have for the good of all. The greatest model to learn how to do this united in diversity, is the triune God who exists in three distinct persons; yet they are united in blessing the Corinthians indiscriminately. The oneness that Paul introduces in this strategy is further elaborated on in the next strategy.

Persuading by saying the many members of one body are one (1 Cor 12:12–26)

The indispensability of 'the common good', together with the idea of 'oneness', are key to understanding Paul's overall rhetorical strategy in the broader context of 1 Corinthians 12–14. To achieve his persuasion, Paul uses a metaphor that should reasonably resonate with the members of the Corinthian church. He uses the metaphor of the human body and its anatomy. Although it has many parts, all the parts work together as one and they all need one another.

As it relates to the understanding of the oneness of the body, Paul refers to theological truths that should amplify his objective. He says there is:

- one body (1 Cor 12:6) (1 Cor 12:12)
- one Christ (1 Cor 12:6) (1 Cor 12:12)
- one Spirit (1 Cor 12:6) (1 Cor 12:13).

In relation to the metaphor of the body, specifically as a figure of speech, Paul intends to use it to perform a particular function in his persuasion. The use of a metaphor in speech, creates a shift of expectancy (Tolmie 1992:408). Quintilian (35–95 BC) and Aristotle (384–322 BC) see the function of metaphor as providing clarity. When one sees a metaphor in a text, the reference and inference are usually conspicuous. Seeing that the rhetorical strategy in 1 Corinthians 12:12–26 builds on the preceding strategies, the idea of unity is reinforced by the introduction of the ‘body’ [σῶμα] language. The different body parts function together as a unit, also depending on the function of other parts (Fetherolf 2010:97–89, 97).

If the use of ‘body’ [σῶμα] will convince the Corinthians of the interdependence of the different parts of the body, Paul now further enhances his strategy using this metaphor. In the first instance, he says, ‘For just as the body is one and has many parts’ [καθόπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα ἓν ἐστὶν καὶ μέλη πολλὰ ἔχει] (1 Cor 12:12), it should be presumed that they make it clear that the body is one. In the second instance, Paul persuades the Corinthians that, just as they were baptised into one body [ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν] (1 Cor 12:13), they should see themselves as members of one unified body.

This action of being made one body embeds the truth that the agency through which the Corinthians came to be one body, was by God (Bartling 1969:74; Keener 2005:101). The argument Paul uses to enhance his persuasion is based on divine agency. This argument serves to solidify the fact that one ‘God the Spirit’ baptised each member into the body, making them one with the body. Moreover, this argument emphasises that individuals need other members of the body to function optimally as God designed.⁵ The Spirit did not only baptise them into the body to make them one body but imparted to them spiritual gifts to use to preserve the unity of the body and to serve the common good of the one body (Swindoll 2017:183).

Persuading by using rhetorical techniques

To further elucidate the persuasiveness of his point, Paul makes use of rhetorical techniques that should serve to amplify the understanding of the *body* metaphor pertaining to the use of spiritual gifts:

1. *Prosopopoeia*.⁶ With the rhetorical technique of *prosopopoeia*, Paul personifies the body parts by stating that they speak by having contentious debates about their functions. He points this out to accentuate the fruitlessness of the disunity that emanates from a fractured body. This negative attitude may be present if members of one body do not understand that spiritual gifts are not innate, nor do they originate from individuals. Furthermore, the gifts

5.This may further allude to the discovery of a new argument this study makes. The argument may be called ‘argument based on divine design’.

6.*Prosopopoeia* means the personification of the body parts.

are not indicative of one’s spiritual achievements (Garland 2003:453).

2. *Reductio ad absurdum*. This technique is used to encourage the readers to apply logic to their situation to test whether it would lead to a solid conclusion. If the logic is fallacious, that which will be reduced from the logic, will be absurd and ridiculous (Kukuni 2023b:72; Lanham 1998:128). The analogy that Paul provides about what would transpire if the body parts were not to work in unison, paints a dim picture. In *reductio*, Paul wants the Corinthians to discover the *ad absurdum* the body parts will be committing if they contended that they had no need of one another. It will only lead to *ad ridiculum* if the foot says, ‘because I am not a hand, I do not belong to this body’ [ὅτι οὐκ εἰμι χεῖρ, οὐκ εἰμι ἐκ τοῦ σώματος] (1 Cor 12:15) or if the ear says, ‘because I am not an eye, I do not belong to this body’ [ὅτι οὐκ εἰμι ὀφθαλμός, οὐκ εἰμι ἐκ τοῦ σώματος] (1 Cor 12:16).⁷

The *absurdum* and *ridiculum* of the body parts taking this stance, should be clear for the Corinthians to see. Indirectly, Paul is referring to them and their conduct in their practice of spiritual gifts. Later in 1 Corinthians, particularly in 1 Corinthians 12:31b–13:13, Paul is going to show the Corinthians the climax of their practising spiritual gifts without the purpose of the common good. He is going to say they are without love. Without love, spiritual gifts and practitioners are nothing (Prior 1993:228; Soards 2011: 270–271; Verbrugge & Harris 2008). Therefore, if the Corinthians are persuaded to turn away from practising and viewing spiritual gifts wrongly, they will keep the unity of the body.

Besides the body parts speaking about how they do not belong to the body because they are not certain parts, the regression worsens when they then address other body parts by saying they have no need of them. The eye says to the hand, ‘I don’t need you’ [χρείαν σου οὐκ ἔχω] (1 Cor 12:21). Conversely, the head says to the feet, ‘I don’t need you’ [χρείαν ὑμῶν οὐκ ἔχω] (1 Cor 12:13). In 1 Corinthians 12:17, Paul offers a reply to the personification in a few rhetorical questions: If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? [εἰ ὅλον τὸ σῶμα ὀφθαλμός, ποῦ ἡ ἀκοή]; and if the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? [εἰ ὅλον ἀκοή, ποῦ ἡ ὄσφρησις;].

The answer to these questions is resoundingly negative. There would be no hearing nor smell. All the parts of the body are interdependent and indispensable. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul expands his implied answer by arguing that even,

[T]hose parts of the body that are weaker are indispensable. And those parts of the body that we consider less honourable, we clothe these with greater honour, and our unrespectable parts are treated with greater respect, which our respectable parts do not need [ἀλλὰ πολλῶ μᾶλλον τὰ δοκοῦντα μέλη τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενέστερα ὑπάρχειν ἀναγκαῖά ἐστὶν, καὶ ἃ δοκοῦμεν ἀτιμότερα εἶναι

7.The positive aspect that can be deduced from the employment of the rhetorical technique of *reductio ad absurdum* is that the reader benefits from the exercise that the author encourages them to embark upon. It may lead to encouragement when the reader arrives at the logical conclusion themselves rather than the conclusion that the author provides.

τοῦ σώματος τούτοις τιμὴν περισσοτέραν περιτίθεμεν, καὶ τὰ ἀσχήμονα ἡμῶν εὐσχημοσύνην περισσοτέραν ἔχει, τὰ δὲ εὐσχήμονα ἡμῶν οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχει. Ἄλλ’ ὁ θεὸς συνεκέρασεν τὸ σῶμα τῷ ὑστερουμένῳ περισσοτέραν δόξιν τιμῆν]. (vv. 22–24)

Thiselton (2000:1006–1010) regards this text as all-encompassing; it implies that internal organs and private parts are equally indispensable.

There should be no division in the body concerning the different parts, just as spiritual gifts should not divide the body. All are indispensable. Furthermore, Paul concludes his persuasion of the Corinthians in this chapter by arguing that there is no gift that is greater than another, and no one has all the spiritual gifts.

Persuading by reinforcing that the different parts in the church body function equally as one (1 Cor 12:27–31a)

The shift in the rhetorical strategy is introduced by seven rhetorical questions which bring Paul’s dominant rhetorical strategy to a full circle. At this stage, the Corinthians should be somewhat convinced that they are one body with diverse spiritual gifts. Paul reinforces this objective by persuading the Corinthians that the church body functions equally as one, although with different parts. As different parts, they are not all the same evidenced by the following rhetorical questions which all require a resounding ‘no’:

- Are all apostles? [μὴ πάντες ἀπόστολοι] (1 Cor 12:29)
- Are all prophets? [μὴ πάντες προφήται] (1 Cor 12:29)
- Are all teachers? [μὴ πάντες διδάσκαλοι] (1 Cor 12:29)
- Do all do miracles? [μὴ πάντες δυνάμεις] (1 Cor 12:29)
- Do all have the gifts of healing? [μὴ πάντες χαρίσματα ἔχουσιν ἰαμάτων] (1 Cor 12:30)
- Do all speak in tongues? [μὴ πάντες γλώσσαις λαλοῦσιν] (1 Cor 12:30)
- Do all interpret? [μὴ πάντες διερμηνεύουσιν] (1 Cor 12:30).

Paul concludes the rhetorical objective with these rhetorical questions which emphasise that not all members have the same gifts. All the various gifts are indispensable, and they cannot function as one united body without one another (Keener 2005:104). The emphatic ‘surely not’ [μὴ] with which all seven rhetorical questions begin, requires a negative answer. It summarises the fact that no compelling case can be made that members can function without one another (Dominy 1983:56). From Paul, the Corinthians found no support that their disunity and disregard for one another can build and edify the church. Paul dispenses with that attitude by providing a general guide about the purpose of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a, which is to exercise them for the common good of all (1 Cor 12:7).

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to interpret Paul’s dominant rhetorical strategy of persuading the Corinthians to unify the body by serving the body with their diverse gifts for the common good. This study interpreted Paul’s strategy from a rhetorical perspective called ‘a text-generated persuasion-interpretation’ (TGPI), which differs from ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric that has been used by many scholars to interpret 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a. After having surveyed the existing rhetorical analyses of 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a, this study found that the methodology used here, has not been used to interpret this text before. Therefore, this study contributes to the discussion and value of the rhetorical interpretation of biblical texts, especially Pauline texts. This was done through a rhetorical approach that reconstructed Paul’s dominant rhetorical strategy and supportive strategies from the text itself, thereby demonstrating that there is no need to rely on Greco-Roman rhetoric to interpret Paul’s letters rhetorically. This analysis shows how Paul employs rhetorical arguments and rhetorical techniques to persuade the Corinthians. To achieve his dominant objective, Paul has used four supportive rhetorical strategies, types of arguments, processes of argumentation and various rhetorical techniques to persuade the Corinthians.

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