

# THE RHETORICAL STRATEGY OF 1 CORINTHIANS 15

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No doubt portions of 1 Cor 15, Paul's famous treatise on the resurrection, are read most frequently in the pastoral context of offering hope and sympathy to those who are grieving the death of a loved one. Church orders for funeral services regularly include quotations as part of the assigned ritual or as recommended lessons.

In such cases the rhetorical strategy is to provide consolation, not unlike Greco-Roman epideictic letters and speeches of condolence.

Alternatively, 1 Cor 15 is read liturgically in the context of the church's Easter holiday, celebrating the Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord. Surprisingly, however, the Revised Common Lectionary's three-year cycle includes texts from this chapter only twice during Eastertide, namely, on Easter Day itself in Years B and C. Elsewhere, also in Year C, pericopes from this chapter are appointed for the 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> Sundays after Epiphany and for a Sunday in late May.<sup>1</sup>

In this case the rhetorical strategy is to promote acknowledgment of the reality of Christ's resurrection, not unlike ancient judicial or forensic speeches. Such attempts to prove the resurrection are largely misplaced, however, since this was not Paul's goal.

Rather, in the context of his correspondence with the Corinthians, Paul's resurrection treatise serves neither the purposes of consolation or celebration. Rather, it is argumentative<sup>2</sup>. It is clearly intended to refute those who denied what is now known as the doctrine of the resurrection.

Paul's tone is in turn controversial and polemical. He wonders out loud whether his work or the Corinthians' response are pitiful and wasted effort (vv. 2, 14, 19), and he does not shy away from calling them "fools" (v. 36).

In this contentious context, his rhetorical strategy

is to convince those who hold an erroneous opinion to change their minds and adopt his position, which is not unlike the purpose of ancient deliberative discourse.

The purpose of this study is to identify more clearly the rhetorical outline and strategy of 1 Cor 15, and to clarify more precisely its likely impact on Paul's auditors as well as its potential impact on modern readers.

Good historical scholarship requires that we attempt to understand as clearly as possible how the ancient text would have been read and understood by its first century recipients. But good biblical scholarship also requires that we attempt to understand how the text can continue to be appreciated and endorsed by 21<sup>st</sup> century readers.

First will come an introduction to the components of an effective address, based on the guidelines of three representative ancient rhetoricians: Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian. Next, a *Forschungsbericht* will summarize the conclusions of a handful of scholars who have proposed similar rhetorical strategies during the past twenty years. Finally, I will offer my own proposal for modifying and sharpening our understanding of Paul's rhetorical strategy.

## ANCIENT RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

The prospect of analyzing Paul's arguments according to the standards of ancient rhetorical practices hinges on several key assumptions. One is that 1 Cor 15 "is a self-contained treatise on the resurrection of the dead,"<sup>3</sup> in other words, that it is a discrete, stand-alone item that can be considered independent of its immediate context in the epistle.

This is less problematical than assuming that Paul deliberately kept this issue until the end of his letter "because of its vital importance"<sup>4</sup> and in order that it could form the climax and therefore the theological

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<sup>1</sup>According to *Indexes for Worship Planning: Revised Common Lectionary, Lutheran Book of Worship, With One Voice* (comp. M. K. Stuliken & M. A. Seltz; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996) 182.

<sup>2</sup>An obvious but often overlooked point underscored by Prof. Charles B. Cousar at the Central Seminar of the Pastor-Theologian Program at Galena, IL, on Oct. 21, 2001. See also the chapter, "Jesus' Death and Resurrection," in his *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 88-108.

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<sup>3</sup>So H. Conzelmann, *I Corinthians* (trans. J. W. Leitch, ed. G. W. MacRae; Hermeneia, ed. H. Koester; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 249.

<sup>4</sup>So A. Robertson & A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914) 328.

grounding of all the subjects treated in 1 Cor. If that were the case, one would have to consider not only the rhetorical impact of the chapter by itself, but also its force as part of the overall rhetorical logic of Paul's entire epistle.<sup>5</sup>

However, it is not clear that 1 Cor 15 must carry this weight, simply because it is not certain that 1 Cor originated as a unified whole. One clue that 1 Cor may be a composite epistle, edited from two or more originally separate pieces of correspondence, is the way its various subjects are introduced.

Of the ten or eleven problems treated in this letter, five are introduced with the phrase *περὶ δὲ* (τῶν/ τῆς) ("now concerning"). This suggests Paul learned of these issues from written correspondence he had received directly from the Corinthian congregation (cf. 1 Cor 7:1, *περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε*, "now concerning the things you wrote about"). This letter most likely was sent and/or delivered by those identified as Chloe's people (1 Cor 1:11).

The issue of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15 is one of the subjects that is *not* introduced by *περὶ δὲ*. One reconstruction of the Corinthian correspondence suggests that Paul learned of the other five or six controverted topics, including the issue about the resurrection, from the visit of Stephanus and his friends (1 Cor 1:16, 16:17-18), and that he responded to those concerns in a separate letter.

In which case, we would have no way of knowing in what order Paul originally treated the various

subjects<sup>6</sup>.

Whether or not that reconstruction is accurate (and the majority of scholars, even those who partition 2 Cor into two or more sources, are inclined to affirm the unity of 1 Cor),<sup>7</sup> it suggests the possibility that placing the resurrection treatise at the conclusion of 1 Cor may be due to the work of the redactor of Paul's letters rather than to the rhetorical intention of the apostle himself.

Consequently we will treat 1 Cor 15 as an independent treatise, apart from its immediate context and penultimate position within the canonical book.

A second assumption is that Paul himself had been schooled in, or at least become familiar with, the conventions of Greco-Roman rhetoric as practiced by orators and authors in his day. The mere fact that Paul could write persuasively is not in itself sufficient evidence that he was familiar with the methods of classical rhetoric. In other words, the fact that his letters were preserved and shared beyond the circle of his original addressees proves he was effective, but not that he was a skilled rhetor.

Furthermore, Paul's seemingly negative assessment of "the debater of this age" (1:20) and "lofty words of wisdom" (2:1, 4) suggest that he would not

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<sup>5</sup>M. M. Mitchell (*Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* [HUT 28; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1991] undertakes such a holistic task and argues that 1 Cor is deliberative rhetoric designed to counteract the factionalism within the Corinthian community. According to her, 1 Cor 1:10 is the *πρόθεσις*; 1:11-17, the *δήγησις*; 1:18-15:57, the *πίστεις*; and 15:58, the *ἐπίλογος*. R. D. Anderson, Jr. (*Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul* [Biblical Exegesis & Theology 18; The Haag: CIP-Gegevens Koninkluke, 1996] 238) argues against Mitchell that 1 Cor "cannot be analyzed in terms of sustained rhetorical argumentation." B. Witherington III (*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995] also offers a rhetorical outline of the entire epistle: 1:10 is the *propositio*; 1:11-17, the *narratio*; 1:18-16:12 the *probatio*, with nine topics and two *eggressiones* (i.e. chs. 9 & 13); and 16:13-18, the *peroratio*.

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<sup>6</sup>W. Schmithals (*Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* [trans. J. E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1971] 87-113) argues that the Corinthian correspondence originally consisted of six individual letters. R. Jewett ("The Redaction of I Corinthians and the Trajectory of the Pauline School," *JAARSup* 44 [1978] 390-435) offers a revision of Schmithals' hypothesis which posits seven original Corinthians letters. E. S. Fiorenza ("Rhetorical Situation and Historical Reconstruction in 1 Corinthians," *NTS* 33 [1987] 386-403) agrees that Chloe's people were the official representatives and brought the letter to Paul and that Stephanus brought the oral gossip; she notes, however, that many other scholars reverse the two, with Stephanus as the letter carrier and Chloe's group as the oral reporters. For a significantly different reconstruction see J. M. Gilchrist, "Paul and the Corinthians—The Sequence of Letters and Visits," *JSNT* 34 (1988) 47-69.

<sup>7</sup>J. C. Hurd, Jr. (*The Origin of 1 Corinthians* [new ed.; Macon, GA: Mercer, 1983]) offers a comprehensive survey of all previous partition theories, and then argues that 1 Cor is a unified whole. As such it responds to information Paul received in both written and oral forms, from several parties—Stephanus, Fortunatus, Achaicus, and Chloe. They, in turn, were responding to a previous letter, now lost, which Paul had sent to the Corinthians to supplement his original preaching when he had founded the congregation.

have valued a rhetorician's skills too highly.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, several factors increase the probability that Paul had more than a passing acquaintance with rhetorical praxis: He was not only (and obviously) well read in the Jewish literature, as evidenced by his ability to quote and discuss biblical texts, but he could also allude to non-biblical authors such as Menander (in 1 Cor 15:33). He frequently used such commonplace devices as rhetorical questions and other characteristic elements of diatribes.

As a result, in recent decades scholars have found enough parallels between Paul's style and other ancient authors that they have warranted exploring Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon and Romans, as well as the Corinthian correspondence, from the perspective of rhetorical conventions<sup>9</sup>. In other words, while one cannot prove that Paul studied classical rhetoric, it seems more than likely that he consciously used common rhetorical devices in his writings.<sup>10</sup>

A third assumption at work here is that rhetorical analysis originally intended for oral discourse can legitimately be applied to written texts. In other words, is it fair to treat letters as though they were speeches? For it is not necessarily self evident that epistles and orations function in the same way.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>H. D. Betz, "The Problem of Rhetoric and Theology according to the Apostle Paul," in *L'Apôtre Paul: Personnalité, Style et Conception du Ministère* (ed. A. Vanhoye; Leuven, 1986) 16-48.

<sup>9</sup>For a summary of such attempts see S. E. Porter, "Paul of Tarsus and His Letters," ch. 18 in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* (ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 533-585. See also C. J. Classen, "Paul and the Terminology of Ancient Greek Rhetoric," ch. 2 in *Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament* (WUNT 128; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 29-44.

<sup>10</sup>Anderson (*Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul*) concludes, "It would seem rather unlikely that Paul enjoyed a formal rhetorical training (249)," but adds, "Even if Paul himself did not consciously think or write in rhetorical categories, his letters may still, with profit, be analyzed in terms of relevant aspects of rhetorical theory (255)."

<sup>11</sup>The question was debated in ancient times; see J. T. Reed, "The Epistle," ch. 7 in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric*, 171-193. Two volumes in Fortress Press' popular *Guides to Biblical Scholarship* series illustrate the difference between the two approaches. W. B. Doty's *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (GBS:NT Series, ed. D.

Nevertheless, the broad spectrum of ancient letters ranges from those that are purely personal and occasional (some of which are "popular" in the sense that they exhibit the grammar and style of a less educated populace) all the way to those that are clearly meant to be read by a wider public (some of which are "literary" in the sense that their diction is highly sophisticated).

Whether Paul's writings should be placed nearer the "popular letter" end of the continuum or more towards the "literary epistle" end may be debated. But the current consensus rightly holds that scholars are justified in using ancient rhetorical categories to interpret his letters.<sup>12</sup>

Since this is the case, the next step is to determine more precisely the genre within which Paul's argument(s) can reasonably be categorized. From the time of Aristotle virtually all of the rhetorical handbooks replicated his three-fold distinction between deliberative (δημηγορικόν or συμβουλευτικόν), epideictic (επιδεικτικόν) and forensic (δικαικόν) oratory (*Rhetoric to Alexander* 1.7-15; *Art of Rhetoric* 1.3.1-6)<sup>13</sup>.

Judicial or **forensic speeches** are oriented to the past; they function in courtroom settings and answer questions of fact: "What has happened?" Their purpose is to argue for a guilty verdict or for an acquittal. The orator accuses or defends someone; the auditors play the role of judges.

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O. Via, Jr.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) places Paul's correspondence within the realm of "epistolary literature in Hellenism." B. L. Mack's *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (GBS:NT, ed. D. O. Via, Jr.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) places Paul's argumentation within the tradition of classical Greek oratory. The seventeen-year hiatus between the two illustrates the belated interest in rhetorical theory.

<sup>12</sup>J. T. Reed, "Using Ancient Rhetorical Categories to Interpret Paul's Letters: A Question of Genre," in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (ed. S. E. Porter & T. H. Olbricht; JSNTSup 90) 292-324. Also, W. Wuellner, "Greek Rhetoric and Pauline Argumentation," in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition: In Honorem Robert M. Grant* (ed. W. R. Schoedel & R. L. Wilken; *Théologie Historique* 54; Paris: Beauchesne, 1979) 177-188.

<sup>13</sup>References are to *Aristotle: Rhetoric to Alexander* (trans. H. Rackham; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard, 1965), and *Aristotle: Art of Rhetoric* (trans. J. H. Freese; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard, 1926).

Ceremonial or **epideictic speeches** are oriented to the present; they function in public rituals and answer questions of moral value: “What is this worth?” Their purpose is to assign honor or dishonor. The orator praises or blames someone; the auditors play the role of spectators.

Persuasive or **deliberative speeches** are oriented toward the future; they function in political assemblies and answer questions of expediency: “What shall we do?” The orator persuades or dissuades someone, to argue for or against adopting a proposed opinion or course of action; the auditors play the role of critics.

Paul’s resurrection chapter clearly belongs in the deliberative category, even though it contains elements of the other two genres. Although the bulk of the verbs in the chapter are not cast in the future tense, the entire outlook of the subject is future oriented.

The chapter begins with a narration of sorts (15:3-11), which is a typical feature of forensic speeches, but in this case the *narratio* is necessary to establish the essential basis of Paul’s argument.

In the context of a deliberative speech, Paul’s purpose is to move his auditors from the position they hold to the position he espouses. Both Paul and some of his auditors—it may not be accurate to refer to them as his “opponents”—apparently agree on the proposition that Jesus rose from the dead; what they disagree on is whether others will also be raised.

Paul’s task is to convince them to conclude that the resurrection of Christ’s people logically follows from affirming the resurrection of Christ himself. But more about that later. Here it is important to place 1 Cor 15 within the genre of deliberative rhetoric.

Within the deliberative genre it is then necessary to consider more precisely how such an argument is to be structured. One must determine the logical steps an orator should pursue in order to be convincing. Three representative rhetoricians will demonstrate how effective deliberative arguments are structured. These are Aristotle (384-322 BCE), Marcus Tullus Cicero (106-43 BCE) and Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (c.35-c. 95 CE).

Aristotle holds pride of place among the instructors in rhetoric; his principles, though not necessarily followed by later orators, were largely replicated by succeeding generations of instructors. Cicero, the famous Roman politician and orator, set the tone for Latin rhetoric in the century before Paul. Quintilian, a younger contemporary of the apostle, summarized and elaborated the subject in seven volumes. We use Latin sources such as Cicero and Quintilian because their Hellenistic models are now lost; both of them based

their work upon Greek originals.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike the Sophists, for whom the art of rhetoric was primarily a matter of using words skillfully to persuade an audience, Aristotle (and his mentor Plato) grounded his rhetorical theory in his philosophical understanding of what is good and true.

If it is correct, as he argued, that “rhetoric is useful, because the true and the just are naturally superior to their opposites,” then it follows that “generally speaking, that which is true and better is naturally always easier to prove and more likely to persuade” (*Art of Rhetoric* 1.1.12). According to him, deliberative and forensic rhetoric employ essentially the same methods (1.1.10, 2.1.1-4), the aim of both is persuasion (1.2.1), and the two most persuasive types of proofs are enthymemes or syllogisms, which argue deductively, and examples, which argue inductively (1.2.8, 2.20.1).

Essentially there are only two necessary parts to an effective speech: the statement of the case, followed by its proof. If an introduction and a conclusion are added as aids to memory, a good speech has four parts: (a) an introductory exordium or *προοίμιον*, (b) the statement of the thesis or *πρόθεσις*, (c) a demonstration of proof or *πίστις*, and (d) a concluding epilogue or *ἐπίλογος*.

Additional elements may include (e) a narrative or *διήγησις*, (f) a comparison or *ἀντιπαραβολή*, and (g) a refutation or *ἀντίδικον* or *ἔλεγχος* (in the sense of “reproof”), but these merely augment the demonstration of proof and are not properly considered separate parts of the speech (3:13.1-5).

Cicero’s earlier and most extensive discussion of rhetoric, *De Oratore*, written by 55 BCE, does not treat the subject in the customary categories.<sup>15</sup> Instead, in the form of a symposium with other orators, he elaborates on the qualities of an effective speaker and an effective speech. Nevertheless, in several places he names and deals with the various parts of a speech.

In two or three short paragraphs he acknowledges the customary three types of orations—in courts of law, in deliberations, and for praising or reviling others (*Oratore* 1.31.141)—and lists these six parts of a speech: (a) an introduction which gains the good will of the auditors, (b) a *demonstranda* which states the

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<sup>14</sup>For summaries of other ancient rhetorical outlines see W. Wuellner, “Arrangement,” ch. 3 in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric*, 51-87.

<sup>15</sup>References are to *Cicero: De Oratore* and *De Partitione Oratoria* (trans. E. W. Sutton & H. Rackham; 2 vols.; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard, 1942).

case, (c) a *controversia* which defines the issues in the dispute, (d) a *confirmanda* which establishes proofs for the case, (e) a *refellenda* which disproves the opposing side, and (f) a closing which summarizes the argument (1.31.143).

Later in the dialogue Cicero expands on a few of these ideas (2.76.307-2.83.340). He suggests that a speech should not be structured according to a rigid formula, that more important arguments should be placed first, and that one can use any of three methods of convincing an audience: instruction in matters they do not already know, logical persuasion, and appeals to emotion (309-313). Also, he elaborates at some length on three of the standard parts of a speech, the *exordium* (315-325), the *narratio* (326-330), and the statement of the case (331-337).

Cicero's later *De Partitione Oratoria*, written around 46 BCE, is in the form of a dialogue in which he answers his sons's questions with more conventional advice suitable to a 19-year-old beginning his formal education.

He acknowledges that well-constructed speeches have four parts (*Partitione* 8.27). First comes (a) an introduction or *exordium* designed to secure a favorable hearing (8:28-30). Second is (b) the *narratio*, a clear statement of the case which is to establish the basis for believing the subsequent argument (9.31-32). The third section consists of two moves: (c) a *confirmatio* which presents proofs for the argument, which are based on probabilities, definitions and the quality of the proposed action (9:33-12:43), followed by (d) a *reprehensio* or refutation of opposing arguments (12.44-14.51). Finally comes (e) the *peroratio* which concludes by arousing the auditors' emotions; it may include enlargements (*amplificatio*) of the theme or summaries (*enumeratio*) of the main points, as well as exhortations (*cohortatio*) to hold fast to the speaker's conclusion.

Quintilian deals with the practical aspects of outlining a speech in Books 3-7 of his massive *Institutio Oratoria*, which were written under contract to a benefactor over the space of several years<sup>16</sup>. There he proposes that a successful oration, particularly one delivered in a court of law, should be ordered in the following fivefold fashion (3.9.1-5).

First (a) a *proemium* or *exordium* will prepare the audience to give the speech a careful and sympathetic

hearing (4.1.1-5). Then (b) a *narratio* or statement of facts will relate all the pertinent issues and evidence (4.2.1-4). This will be followed by (c) a *probatio* or *propositio*, which will offer a series of proofs which confirm and verify the truth of the case (4.3.1-5; 4.4.1-4). Next (d) a *refutatio* or *partitio* will list the arguments of the speaker and/or the opponent (4.5.1-3). And finally (e) a *peroratio* will conclude the speech by summarizing the argument or by appealing to the emotions of the audience (6.1.1-8).

In addition, (f) an *egressio* or digression may occasionally be inserted for rhetorical purposes but, strictly speaking, is not to be considered part of the overall structure (4.3.12-17).

At the risk of constructing a list of rhetorical moves that none of the classical orators would have recognized *en toto*, the items named above fall into a recognizable pattern. Accordingly, a well-outlined persuasive speech would include these steps:

- (1) An *exordium* (or προοίμιον or *proemium*) which is designed to attract the audience's attention and gain a sympathetic hearing.
- (2) A *narratio* (or διήγησις) that relates the events leading to the situation at hand.
- (3) A *propositio* (or πρόθεσις or *demonstranda*) which presents the thesis or states the case.
- (4) A *probatio* (or πίστις or *confirmatio*) which presents a series of proofs which confirm the thesis. These may include enthymemes or syllogisms (ἐθύμημα, συλλογισμός), examples (ἐπαγωγή or *exempla*), comparisons (ἀντιπαραβολή), digressions (*egressio*), and other rhetorical strategies.
- (5) A *refutatio* (or ἀντίδικον or ἔλεγχος or *refellenda* or *reprehensio*) to forestall objections or refute an opponent's arguments.
- (6) A *peroratio* (or ἐπίλογος) which will conclude the speech, by emphasizing the main point (*amplificatio*), or by summarizing the arguments (*enumeratio*), or by appealing to the auditors' emotions, or by exhorting them to action (*exhortatio*).

Now it remains to be seen whether these moves appear to underlie Paul's argument in 1 Cor 15.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>References are to *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian* (trans. H. E. Butler; 4 vols; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard, 1921-1922) and to Quintilian, *The Orator's Education* (trans. D. A. Russell, 5 vols; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard, 2001).

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<sup>17</sup>B. Mack (*Rhetoric and NT*, 42) summarizes a standard speech that includes seven or eight items in a four-point outline: (1) *exordium*, (a) the introduction; (2) *narratio*, with (b) a proposition and (c) the rationale or

## PREVIOUS RECONSTRUCTIONS OF PAUL'S RESURRECTION RHETORIC

Burton Mack's 1990 handbook on rhetorical criticism avers that "Paul's famous chapter on the resurrection of the dead is a perfect example of rhetorical argumentation" which interweaves elements from judicial or forensic arguments into an essentially deliberative speech<sup>18</sup>. According to his outline, each section except the conclusion includes both a positive argument and a negative refutation.

### 1 Cor 15

1-2	<b>Exordium</b>	How the Corinthians received the gospel
3-11	<b>Narratio</b>	How the resurrection kerygma came to them
12-19	Issue	Some deny the resurrection
20	Fact & Thesis	Christ was raised, the first-fruits of the dead
21-50	<b>Argument</b>	

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reason; (3) *confirmatio*, with (d) opposites or contraries, (e) analogies or comparisons, (f) examples, and (g) citations of authority; and (4) *conclusio*, (h) the conclusion. **G. A. Kennedy** (*New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1984] 23-25) lists these eight components of a judicial speech: (a) a *proem* or *exordium*, (b) a *narration*, (c) a *proposition*, (d) a *partition*, (e) the *proof*, (f) a *refutation*, (g) a *digression*, and (h) an *epilogue* or *peroratio*. See also Kennedy's historical surveys of the subject: *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton University, 1994), and *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999).

**C. Perelman & L. Olbrechts-Tyteca** (*The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* [trans. J. Wilkinson & P. Weaver; Notre Dame, 1969] 495) summarize the traditional (but not rigid) order of a speech with these moves: (a) *exordium*, (b) *narration*, (c) *proposition*, (d) *proof*, (e) *refutation*, (f) *conclusion*, and (g) *epilogue*. **H. Lausberg** (*Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study* [fwd. G. A. Kennedy; trans. M. T. Bliss et al; ed. D. E. Orton & R. D. Anderson; Leiden: Brill, 1998] 112-208) elaborates on four essential rhetorical moves: (a) *exordium*, (b) *narratio*, (c) *argumentatio*, and (d) *peroratio*, but he also discusses several optional or subordinate moves, including (e) *proemium*, (f) *insinuatio*, (g) *initium*, (h) *digressio*, (i) *transitus*, (j) *amplificatio*, (k) *exempla*, and (l) *recapitulatio*.

<sup>18</sup>Rhetoric and NT, 56-59.

21-28	Paradigms	As Adam brought death so Christ brought life
	Opposite	Each in their own order
29-34	Examples	Baptizing for the dead; dying for the gospel; fighting beasts at Ephesus
35-44	Analogies	Seed dies and comes alive; different kinds of bodies
45-50	Citation	Genesis account of creation of Adam
51-58	<b>Conclusion</b>	Narrative of eschatological resurrection; scriptural citation; thanksgiving; exhortation

A particular value of Mack's analysis is his penchant for noting where Paul's argument is less than adequate. The series of examples—proxy baptisms, daily dying, fighting beasts—is a weak link; they work better as questions than as proofs. The citations of Adam are nearly self-contradictory; first he is the harbinger of death, then he is the bringer of life. The analogy of the seed is logically inconsistent insofar as a plant's "resurrection" is a natural phenomenon, whereas the resurrection of a dead person would be an eschatological miracle.

Duane Watson made a major move to clarify more precisely the rhetorical arrangement of 1 Cor 15 in his 1992 contribution to a conference in Heidelberg<sup>19</sup>. He concludes that Paul incorporated a sophisticated arrangement which includes double *refutatio-confirmatio-peroratio* sequences.

### 1 Cor 15

1-2	<b>Exordium</b>	introduces the topics to be developed in the remainder
3-11	<b>Narratio</b>	lists past events to reach decisions about future events

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<sup>19</sup>D. F. Watson, "Paul's Rhetorical Strategy in 1 Corinthians 15," in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (ed. S. E. Porter & T. H. Olbricht; JSNTSupp 90; 1993) 231-249.

12-34	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Refutatio-Confirmatio/Probatio</b>	
12-19	<i>Refutatio</i>	denies the “fact” proposed by the opposition
20-28	<i>Confirmatio</i>	uses a “complete argument” to amplify the main theme
29-34	<i>Peroratio</i>	summarizes the main points and arouses pathos for the case
35-37	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Refutatio-Confirmatio/Probatio</b>	
35-44a	<i>Refutatio</i>	begins with two rhetorical questions of the opponents
44b-49	<i>Confirmatio</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> Part proves with examples based on the Adam vs. Christ
50-57	<i>Confirmatio</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Part another “complete argument” proves the theme
58	<i>Peroratio</i>	again summarizes and arouses emotion <sup>20</sup>

Insawn Saw’s 1993 dissertation<sup>21</sup> agrees with the common understanding that 1 Cor 15 is deliberative speech, that Paul sought to persuade the Corinthians to agree with him, and that the issue was primarily a matter of fact: Is there or is there not resurrection of the dead?

“Thus Paul sought to prove that there was the resurrection of the dead throughout the chapter.”<sup>22</sup> His proposed arrangement includes these steps:

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<sup>20</sup>A. C. Thiselton (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000] 1169-1313) replicates Watson’s outline with minor modifications.

1 Cor 15

1-11	<i>Narratio</i>
12-19	First <i>Refutatio</i>
20	First <i>Propositio</i>
21-34	First <i>Confirmatio</i>
35-49	Second <i>Refutatio</i>
50	Second <i>Propositio</i>
51-57	Second <i>Confirmatio</i>
58	<i>Peroratio</i>

<sup>21</sup>Later published as I. Saw, *Paul’s Rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 15: An Analysis Utilizing the Theories of Classical Rhetoric* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1995).

<sup>22</sup>Saw, 279.

1 Cor 15 An Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead

1-2	<i>Exordium</i>	preparations for the proof: the shared gospel
3-11	<i>Narratio</i>	of the resurrection of Christ
12	<i>Partitio</i>	arguments
13-32a	<i>Probatio</i>	for the resurrection
32b-34	<i>Exhortatio</i>	of the dead
35-49	<i>Refutatio</i>	refutation of the difficulties of arguing for the resurrection
50-57	<i>Peroratio</i>	final argument based on the necessity of our change
58	<i>Exhortatio</i>	conclusion

Saw notes the effective ways Paul built up his own *ethos*, primarily by calling the Corinthians his ἀδελφοί and by citing his own experiences. Similarly, he also impacted the *pathos* of his auditors by arousing them to emotions of anger, fear, pity and shame.

Clinton Johnson, Jr.’s 1994 dissertation may be the most extended discussion to date of Paul’s rhetorical strategy in 1 Cor 15. Specifically, he attempts to show “how the words of the text act to move the implied audience [Paul] constructs from one place to another.”<sup>23</sup> Both Paul and “some of the Corinthians,” according to Johnson, share a belief in the past resurrection of Christ. What they do not agree on is whether there will be a future resurrection for anyone else.

From a strictly logical standpoint, one simply cannot infer from the resurrection of one person the future resurrection of others. The rhetorical problem Paul faces, then, is constructing the middle term/connection between Christ’s resurrection and a future embodied resurrection that will compel the ‘some’ to transfer the adherence they grant to the thesis that Christ is raised to the conclusion that there will be a future bodily resurrection.<sup>24</sup>

Johnson emphasizes that 1 Cor 15 is a species of *practical argumentation*. That is, Paul’s discussion is not merely a sequence of theological propositions, but

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<sup>23</sup>C. A. Johnson, Jr., “Resurrection Rhetoric: A Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 15” (Th.D. diss., Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, 1994) 18. See also his “Firstfruits and Death’s Defeat: Metaphor in Paul’s Rhetorical Strategy in 1 Cor 15:20-28,” *WW* 16 (1996) 456-464.

<sup>24</sup>Johnson, “Resurrection Rhetoric,” 308.

a skilled piece of persuasion that argues from common assumptions and leads to real life consequences for Christian praxis. Regrettably, however, Johnson does not explicitly base his analysis of the chapter's structure on the familiar categories of classical rhetoric. Rather, he uses a topical approach to outline the argument.

#### 1 Cor 15

1-11	The basis of the argument
12-19	The issue and its consequences
20-28	Firstfruits and warfare
29-34	Futility of action and bad morals
35-49	The "how" of the resurrection
50-58	Transformation, victory, and labor with a purpose

These four proposed reconstructions of Paul's rhetorical outline show that no clear consensus has yet surfaced that adequately accounts for the effectiveness of his logic and argumentation<sup>25</sup>. Clearly there is room for another proposal.

### **Proposal for a More Sophisticated Rhetorical Strategy**

The following proposal maintains that v. 12 provides the key to understanding the strategy of the entire chapter. "If Christ is proclaimed that 'he was aroused from [the] dead ones,'" he asks rhetorically, "how do some of you say that 'there is not a resurrection of dead ones'?" In an unusual but effective fashion, Paul uses a rhetorical question to state his thesis<sup>26</sup>.

The obvious rejoinder, of course, is that what "some of you say" is an illogical and illegitimate conclusion.

The crux of the matter, as others have acknowledged, is not a debate about the reality of Christ's resurrection. All parties are apparently agreed on the

facts narrated in vv. 3-7/8, which establish the resurrection of Jesus and his post-resurrection appearances. What is at stake is whether any one else, particularly those who believe in and who follow Christ, will also experience a resurrection and life after death.

The burden of Paul's argument is to prove that those who deny the future resurrection of Christians are wrong. Note this subtle but important distinction: Paul is not initially arguing *for* the resurrection of believers; rather, he is arguing *against* the denial of their future resurrection.

Speaking *logically*, of course, the results are the same. To prove A, or to disprove not-A, amounts to the same conclusion; in either case, A stands affirmed. But *rhetorically* the practical effects of the two approaches can be strikingly different.

If Paul had said, "I will prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that there will be a future resurrection for us who are Christ's people," when he had concluded it would have been all too easy for his auditors to nod their heads in agreement, yawn, and listen for the next reading.

But because he in effect says, "I will prove that those who deny the resurrection are wrong," he virtually compels his auditors to draw the positive conclusion for themselves. "If those who deny the resurrection are wrong," they are forced to admit, "then there must be a future resurrection for us."

The rhetorical impact of refuting the negative may in this case be stronger and more effective than merely affirming the positive.

Accordingly, the resurrection treatise may be structured according to the outline on the following page.

To appreciate more fully Paul's rhetorical logic, several items need additional comment. First, considerations of vocabulary and translation: Nuances in the terminology related to death and resurrection are not replicated as easily in English as in Greek. Paul uses both ἀποθνήσκω / θνήσκω/ θανατάω / θανατός / θνητός ("to die, be dead," "death," "mortal") and νεκρόω / νεκρός ("to kill, make dead," "dead"), as well as his favorite euphemism, κοιμάομαι ("to sleep, fall asleep").

Likewise, he uses two terms for the reversal of death—ἐγείρω ("to wake, arouse, raise") and ἀνίστημι / ἀνάστασις ("to raise up," "resurrection")—as well as ζῶοποιέω ("to make alive").

In the context of 1 Cor 15, Paul uses the "fall asleep" (κοιμάομαι) metaphor only to refer to Christians who have died (15:6, 20, 51). He uses the θανα- / θνη- stem to refer to a person's cessation of life (15:3, 22, 31) and to the power of death, Death-

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<sup>25</sup>Saw (*Paul's Rhetoric*, 31-63) and Johnson ("Resurrection Rhetoric," 4-18) both review several additional analyses, some of which outline 1 Cor 15 in accordance with familiar classical rhetorical terms.

<sup>26</sup>W. Wuellner ("Paul as Pastor: the Function of Rhetorical Questions in First Corinthians," in *L'Apôtre Paul: Personnalité, Style et Conception du Ministère* [ed. A. Vanhoye; Leuven, 1986] 49-77) observes that "Paul is not so much answering questions as questioning answers (73)." Unfortunately, Wuellner analyzes *every* rhetorical question in 1 Cor *except* 15:12, which is never mentioned!



with-a-capital-D (15:21, 26, 53-56). But he uses νεκρός to refer to what remains after a person has died, that is, a “dead body” or “corpse” (15:12-21, 29, 32, 35). (One difficulty with translating νεκρός as “corpse” is the fact that another NT term, πτώμα, is almost a technical term for “corpse,” cf. Mark 15:45.)

Furthermore, Paul uses “awaken” or “arouse” or “raise” (ἐγείρω) first in reference to the past for Christ (1:4, 12-17, 20) and then in reference to the future for Christians (15:16, 29, 32). But he uses “resurrection” (ἀνάστασις) only in reference to the general principle of the “resurrection of dead ones” (15:12-13, 42).

1 Cor 15		A Refutation of the Denial of the Resurrection of the Dead
1-2	<b>Exordium</b>	<i>Introduction</i>
	appeal	Remember the Gospel I preached and you received.
3-11	<b>Narratio</b>	<i>Statement of the facts</i>
3-8	narration	Christ rose from the dead and was seen by many people.
9-11	example	I [Paul] was the last to whom Christ appeared.
12	<b>Propositio</b>	<i>Thesis expressed in negative terms</i>
	question	If Christ rose, how can there be “no resurrection”?
13-34	<b>Probatio</b>	<i>Demonstration of proofs</i>
13-19	sylogism	If Christ were not raised, our religion and life are futile and pitiful.
20-25	comparison	As all died “in Adam,” so all “in Christ” will be raised.
26-28	citation	At Christ’s coming, “death” will be the last enemy to be destroyed.
29-34	examples	You would not “baptize for the dead” and I would not risk my life if we didn’t believe in a resurrection.
35-49	<b>Refutatio</b>	<i>Refutation of potential objections</i>
35-38	diatribe	It is foolish to try to figure out what kind of body we will have after the resurrection.
39-41	analogy	We will be “sown terrestrial” and “raised heavenly.”
42-44a	comparison	What is sown perishable, dishonored, weak and “physical” will be raised imperishable, glorious, powerful and “spiritual.”
44b-45	citation	The “first Adam” was physical and earthly;
46-49	comparison	the “second Adam” is spiritual and heavenly, and we are in his image.
50-57	<b>Peroratio</b>	<i>Conclusion expressed in positive terms</i>
50-53	amplification	At the end, God will change us; we will put on immortality.
54-57	citation	Then death, sin and law will be overcome through Christ.
58	<b>Exhortatio</b>	<i>Final appeal</i>
	exhortation	So keep on working confidently.

Consequently, an overly literal translation of the thesis and the first proof (15:12-19) would look like this:

<sup>12</sup> If Christ is proclaimed that “he was raised” from [the realm of the] dead ones, how do some of you say that “there is not a resurrection of dead ones”?

<sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of dead ones,

neither was Christ raised.

<sup>14</sup> If Christ was not raised, then our proclamation, too, is vain; vain also [is] your belief.

<sup>15</sup> We are recognized as false witnesses, since we witnessed about God that “he raised the Christ,”

whom he did not raise, if [it is] such [that]  
“dead ones are not raised.”

<sup>16</sup> For if dead ones are not raised,  
neither was Christ raised.

<sup>17</sup> If Christ was not raised—your belief [being]  
worthless—  
you are still in your sins.

<sup>18</sup> And consequently those asleep in Christ  
are lost.

<sup>19</sup> If only in this life we are hopers in Christ,  
we are of all people most pitiful.

Second, the precise nature of what it is that “some” of the Corinthians deny is not entirely clear. Did they deny the possibility of any future existence after death? Did they affirm that the resurrection has already occurred, perhaps at baptism? Did they maintain that any future life after death pertains only to the “soul,” not to the “body”?

The fact that Paul’s *refutatio* (15:35-49) goes to such lengths to affirm a *bodily* resurrection, of whatever sort, suggests that the chief point of contention for “some” had to do with what happens after a “body” (σῶμα) dies and the person becomes a “dead one,” a “corpse” (νεκρός).<sup>27</sup>

People in the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s day held an almost bewildering variety of views about what could or could not happen after death. Some gave credence to stories about resuscitated bodies; some imagined the souls of the dead existing as shades in the underworld; some held to the extinction of both soul and body.

But for all educated inhabitants of the Roman Empire, one point was clear: any notion of a resurrection of the body would have been not only ridiculous but objectionable on philosophical grounds<sup>28</sup>.

If the self-styled “wise” members of the Corinthian community (cp. 1:18-31) are identical with the “some of you” with whom Paul is dialoguing (15:12), the argument about the resurrection of bodies is not just about hopes for life after death. It is also about the class divisions within the Corinthian church.

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<sup>27</sup> See *inter alios* J. S. Vos, “Argumentation und Situation im 1 Kor. 15,” *NovT* 41 (1999) 313-333.

<sup>28</sup> D. B. Martin (*The Corinthian Body* [New Haven: Yale, 1995]) avers that “whatever one believed about life after death, promises of resurrected bodies were not to be given any credence. Such gullibility was reserved for the uneducated—that is, for the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Empire (114).”

According to a common line of Greek thought, later adopted by the Gnostics, the body (σῶμα) is the prison of the soul (ψυχή); at death the soul shakes off the confining clothing of the body and in a “naked” state (γυμνός) enjoys eternal life and freedom. Paul stands that logic on its head. In his analogy of bodies and seeds, it is the seed that is “naked” (15:37), not the soul.

Furthermore, “soul” is associated with the body that is “sown” or buried; the body that is raised, on the other hand, is associated with “spirit” (15:44). This results in an antithesis between the earthly “soul-directed body” (σῶμα ψυχικόν) and the heavenly “spirit-directed body” (σῶμα πνευματικόν). (The NRSV translation of the former as a “physical body” is misleading.)

The concept of a “spiritual body,” of course, is an oxymoron, which Paul apparently uses effectively to underscore the radical eschatological nature of his resurrection teaching.

This explains why “flesh and blood” (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα, 15:50) are not able to “inherit” (κληρονομέω) God’s kingdom. To inherit something implies a natural order of things, whereby one receives something as a matter of course. What is required for a resurrection, however, is not the normal process of inheriting but a radical moment of alteration and changing (ἀλλάσσω, 15:51).

Third, the conceptual context of Paul’s argument must be clarified. He was not arguing in a general way about the possibility or likelihood that all human beings will experience a resurrection from the state of death.

Rather, he was more of a narrator than a philosopher. That is, he was not so much concerned to establish a belief in life-after-death as a kind of universal truth, as he was to insist that for those who are “in Christ” there will be a raising of *their* bodies, a resurrection of *their* corpses. In other words, the story of Christ will be replicated in the stories of those who belong to him: both move toward resurrection.

Consequently, Paul’s hope for resurrection is anchored in his eschatological perspective: everything is moving towards an ultimate goal, in which God is the consummation (15:20-28).

This eschatological perspective also accounts for the way he describes the conclusion of the story in apocalyptic terms (15:50-56): This is all a “mystery,” which will be signaled by trumpet blasts, and which will result in the ultimate victory over Death.

The point is that “immortality” (ἀθανασία, literally “non-deadness”) will be predicated of believers’ bodies *after* the resurrection, when all are to be

“changed” (ἀλλαγῆσομαι). By implication, immortality is thus not a natural quality of souls, which enables souls to exist even after death.<sup>29</sup>

To summarize, the rhetorical impact of 1 Cor 15 derives from the way it follows the conventional

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<sup>29</sup>In addition to the commentaries and studies cited previously, the following studies offer valuable insights into the content of 1 Cor 15: **M. E. Dahl**, *The Resurrection of the Body: A Study of I Corinthians 15* (SBT; London: SCM Press, 1962) 74-89; **B. A. Pearson**, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology in I Corinthians, a Study in the Theology of the Corinthian Opponents of Paul and Its Relation to Gnosticism* (SBLDS 12; Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973); **H. C. C. Cavalin**, *Life After Death: Paul's Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead in I Cor 15: Part I, An Enquiry into the Jewish Background* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1974); **E. H. Pagels**, “‘The Mystery of the Resurrection’: A Gnostic Reading of 1 Corinthians 15,” *JBL* 93 (1974) 276-288; **C. H. Talbert**, “The Human Transformation Yet to Come,” in *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 96-104; **J. N. Vorster**, “Resurrection Faith in 1 Cor 15,” *Neotestamentica* 23 (1989) 287-307; **A. C. Wire**, “Women Risen to New Life in Christ,” ch. 8 in *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 159-180; **J. Moiser**, “1 Corinthians 15,” *IBS* 14 (1992) 10-30; **B. Witherington III**, “Rising to the Occasion,” in *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 291-312; **J. Holleman**, *Resurrection and Parousia: A Traditio-Historical Study of Paul's Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15* (NovTSup 84; ed. C. K. Barrett; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); **S. Brodeur**, *The Holy Spirit's Agency in the Resurrection of the Dead: An Exegetico-Theological Study of 1 Corinthians 15, 44b-49 and Romans 8, 9-13* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1996); **R. B. Hays**, “The Resurrection of the Body,” in *First Corinthians* (Interpretation; ed. J. L. Mays; Louisville: John Knox, 1997) 252-282; **S. M. Lewis**, “So That God May Be All in All”: *The Apocalyptic Message of 1 Corinthians 15, 12-34* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1998); **R. A. Horsley**, “Argument(s) for the Resurrection,” in *1 Corinthians* (ANTC; Nashville, Abingdon, 1998) 197-220; and **W. Schrage**, “Die Auferweckung Jesus Christi und der Toten 15,1-58,” ch. 6 in *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther* (EKKNT; Düsseldorf: Benzinger/ Neukirchener, 2001) 4:3-421; **P. Lampe**, “Paul's Concept of a Spiritual Body,” in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments* (ed. T. Peters et al; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002) 103-114; **N. T. Wright**, “Resurrection in Paul,” part 2 in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 207-398.

strategy of a Greco-Roman deliberative treatise or speech.

After narrating the events of Christ's resurrection, about which both Paul and “all” of the Corinthians are in agreement, he uses a rhetorical question to establish his thesis, namely, that “some” who deny the possibility of a resurrection of dead people are wrong.

This is followed by a series of proofs: A syllogistic argument shows that such a denial leads to a pitiful predicament for all concerned; a comparison between Adam who brings death and Christ who brings life shows that Christ's rising is the “firstfruits” for all his people; a citation of Ps 8:6 supports the contention that death will be the last enemy destroyed by Christ; and a pair of *ad hominem* examples suggest that the Corinthians' vicarious baptisms<sup>30</sup> and Paul's own risk-taking would be pointless without the prospect of resurrection.

At that point the argument turns into a refutation of a potential objection. In the style of a diatribe Paul rebukes an imaginary opponent who implies that one cannot define the kind of bodies which resurrected dead people would have.

An analogy from nature compares seeds that are sown to bodies that are buried; in both cases an “earthly sowing” is followed by a “heavenly raising.”

An extended comparison asserts that “ensouled” bodies will be raised as “inspired” bodies, and a contrived citation of Gen 2:7 continues the comparison to affirm that those who bear the image of the “second man” who is spiritual and heavenly are no longer in the realm of the “first man” who was merely “ensouled” and earthly.

The conclusion is a positive argument, based on conflated citations of Is 25:8 and Hos 13:14, that uses the images of apocalyptic mysteries to affirm that in the end those who are in Christ will be changed and will put on immortality, and the victory will be Christ's.

So the final exhortation is an appeal for the auditors to remain faithful in “the work of the Lord.”

### The Continuing Rhetorical Impact of 1 Cor 15

No additional evidence exists to determine whether Paul's rhetorical strategy worked. Both he

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<sup>30</sup>R. E. DeMaris, “Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead (1 Corinthians 15:20): Insights from Archaeology and Anthropology,” *JBL* 114 (1995) 661-682; and J. R. White, “‘Baptized on account of the Dead’: The Meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:29 in its Context,” *JBL* 116 (1997) 487-499.

and those who are merely identified as “some of you” apparently were in agreement in asserting that Christ had been “raised on the third day” after he had died.

Some of his auditors, however, did not share his belief that those who are in Christ will also experience a resurrection at some point in the future after they have died. His goal, then, was to argue in such a way that they would change their minds and agree with his belief. Whether his strategy was successful remains undetermined.

However, the fact that his resurrection treatise was retained as part of the redaction of his correspondence indicates that Paul’s rhetoric was persuasive, at least to some members of the Corinthian community. (In fact, if 2 Cor 5—with its language about “putting off this earthly tent” in order to “put on the heavenly building”—is to some degree a corrective to the way the Corinthians understood 1 Cor 15, Paul may have been *too* persuasive!)<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the fact that these heavily redacted Pauline epistles were included within the canonical collection of Christian scriptures indicates that his resurrection beliefs have validity beyond the immediate situation in Corinth that occasioned the apostle’s response. The question is whether Paul’s arguments remain persuasive today.

On the one hand, because portions of 1 Cor 15 continue to be quoted both at funerals and at Easter celebrations one may assume that contemporary communities still resonate with Paul’s words and find them helpful.

These quotations are usually of the sections which affirm the resurrection, whether of Christ himself or of Christians in general, or which describe the nature of the believers’ resurrection bodies, or which anticipate the eschatological victory over death. They are quoted because they support and affirm conventional hopes for life after death.

On the other hand, it is not clear that Paul’s rhetoric would persuade anyone who did not already agree both with his premise (namely, that Christ was raised) and with his conclusion (namely, that Christians will also be raised).

In today’s modern world rigorous historical research rightly questions whether Jesus’ purported resurrection can be in any sense considered a *factum* in history.

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<sup>31</sup>My thanks to Richard I. Pervo for drawing my attention to this possibility, and for offering helpful suggestions after reading an earlier draft of this study. See also J. Gillman, “A Thematic Comparison: 1 Cor 15:50-57 and 2 Cor 5:1-5,” *JBL* (1988) 439-454.

Likewise, more sophisticated bio-medical research into cell structure, DNA and the human genome, and the electro-chemical workings of the human brain questions whether it makes any sense to imagine that the *matériel* of a physical human body could ever be made alive again after heart, lung and brain functions have ceased.

If human personality is a function of the thought processes encoded in the neurons of the brain, in what sense can it reasonably be said that a “person” somehow survives the cessation of life, the experience of death? And in what sense could such a survived or revived personality be “embodied”?<sup>32</sup>

The likelihood that Paul’s rhetoric could be persuasive in such a context is no doubt minimal.

Nevertheless, it may be that Paul’s rhetorical strategy can still be persuasive on another level. To the degree that one can use descriptive language in an “illogical” yet compelling way to express personal resolve or commitment, Paul’s resurrection language may be the most effective way of expressing one’s determination to live *as if* Christ has been raised and *as if* his people can anticipate their own resurrection(s).

The fact that Paul used apocalyptic analogies to discuss this subject indicates that straightforward “scientific” description is not adequate to the task. Thus, resurrected bodies will be like seeds sown and sprouting, only more so, and with a difference. In the present condition human bodies are inferior, earthly,

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<sup>32</sup>Lampe (“Paul’s Concept,” *Resurrection*, 105) summarizes the issue appropriately from the theological side: “. . . God’s salvation, including the raising of the dead, grasps more than just parts of a human being, than just a soul or a spirit. It grasps the entire person and subjects this person to a transforming and newly creating act called ‘resurrection.’ Consequently, the resurrected person will have a bodily existence.” Peters (“Resurrection: The Conceptual Challenge,” *Resurrection*, 307-308) clarifies the issue from the scientific side: “This theological commitment to a resurrected body appears to be dissonant with scientific understandings of present embodiment. This is especially the case for contemporary scientists who reduce all that we as persons are to our biological substrate. Molecular biologist Francis Crick, famed for his role in the discovery of the double helix structure of DNA, flies the flag of reductionism: ‘You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.’” (Cf. F. Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* [New York: Scribner’s, 1994] 3.)

physical, etc.; in the eschatological transformation they will be superior, heavenly, spiritual, etc.

As a way of affirming both the continuity between life in the here-and-now and life in the hereafter, as well as the radical difference between the two states, resurrection-of-the-body language may be the best alternative available.

Furthermore, because Paul structures his entire argument within an existential narrative context (rather than framing it in philosophical ontological terms), and because he limits his focus to the future of those people who are “in Christ” (rather than discussing the after-death fate of all people in general), his rhetoric remains persuasive to those who at some level share his affection for Christ and his commitment to the radical impact of the Gospel.

The result is that Paul’s argument may not be “persuasive” in the sense that it would compel non-believers to change their opinion and to adopt a posture of faith. Nevertheless, his discussion may serve to inform and support those who are inclined to affirm or who want to believe in the hope of life after death. In this case, his treatise would serve to emphasize the “embodied” character of that future life and thereby give such hope a greater degree of substance.

### HERMENEUTICAL POSTSCRIPT

This study is a project inspired by the 2001-2002 Pastor-Theologian Program of the Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton. The theme for the year’s discussions was a “Theological Reading of Scripture—Especially Its Witness to the Resurrection.” The choice of 1 Cor 15, the only chapter in the Christian Scriptures that discusses the resurrection at significant length, is obvious. The choice of a *rhetorical* analysis of this chapter (rather than an overtly *theological* analysis, for example) invites an explanation.

The theme was occasioned by what some would call a “crisis of faith in the contemporary church,” which in large part is due to a significant loss of biblical literacy, both within the church as well as throughout our so-called “post-Christian” and “post-modern” society.

One imagines that in previous generations Americans generally had a working knowledge of the narrative flow of the Bible. They may not have *believed* the stories or even held to traditional doctrinal systems, but by and large they knew the Scriptures’ leading characters and many of the key stories.

Conventional wisdom has it that members of the Baby Boomer generation (born roughly between 1945 and 1965) abandoned the churches of their parents’

Builder generation (born before 1945), although they retained a memory of the church and its traditions.

However, the Boomers’ children, popularly called the Baby Buster generation (born between 1965 and 1985), has grown up without significant involvement in the church, and consequently has little memory of the church’s beliefs or its biblical heritage.

No one realistically expects conditions to improve for the emerging Bridge generation (born between 1985 and 2005). As a result we no longer possess the two key ingredients necessary for forming a cohesive society, namely, a heritage of stories and songs we all share in common.

Furthermore, within the span of fifty years, from the end of the World Wars to the turn of the new century, academic biblical studies themselves have undergone a significant evolution. Using the techniques of source-criticism and form-criticism, historical-critical scholarship analyzed biblical pericopes and looked *through* them to reconstruct the history of the traditions that lay behind the canonical documents.

In reaction, the synthesizing approaches of the 1960s and 1970s used redaction-critical analysis to bring the focus back onto the broader scope and the theological impact of the Scriptural documents.

Within the past twenty years the techniques of narrative-criticism and rhetorical-criticism have led to a true literary-critical brand of scholarship that allows us to focus on the aesthetic world created by the texts themselves. Such literary analysis, especially the sub-species known as reader-response criticism, holds great promise for helping contemporary Americans recapture the vision that comes from a sympathetic reading of the Bible.

Furthermore, understanding how narratives and rhetorical arguments work helps us better appreciate how the biblical documents function in an authoritative way in the life of the church. For a good story well told has an inherent power for capturing an auditor’s imagination and taking hold in one’s life.

Similarly, the logic in a well crafted discourse has the innate capacity to affect one’s way of thinking. In the present case, paying closer attention to the rhetorical strategy of the argument in 1 Cor 15 helps us understand how this biblical treatise continues to instill in us the assurance of a bodily resurrection.