The Historical Approach to New Testament Rhetorical Criticism: A Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 15

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Abstract: The historical approach to New Testament rhetorical criticism uses ancient Greco-Roman rhetorical theory and practice to better understand the rhetoric and rhetorical context of the New Testament. Since most Bible scholars and students are unfamiliar with ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric, this article summarizes and explains Greco-Roman rhetoric in an accessible way so that non-experts can understand and apply the historical method of New Testament rhetorical criticism. It provides a rigorous step-by-step process for doing rhetorical analysis followed by a rhetorical analysis of 1 Corinthians 15 as an example of the method. This analysis displays Paul’s rhetorical prowess in 1 Corinthians 15 and demonstrates that Paul had more than a passing familiarity with Greco-Roman rhetoric. Overall, this article shows that rhetorical criticism is an indispensable and essential tool needed in the arsenal of biblical exegetes for understanding the New Testament in its original contexts.

Keywords: rhetoric; rhetorical criticism; 1 Corinthians; 1 Corinthians 15; resurrection; Paul; New Testament; classical rhetoric; Greco-Roman rhetoric

1. Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism

Rhetorical criticism means several things to several people in the field of biblical studies today. There is a wide range of approaches to this method, but the focus of this article will be upon the historical or diachronic approach to rhetorical criticism, sometimes called socio-rhetorical criticism. This historical approach to rhetorical criticism analyzes the NT using Greco-Roman rhetoric, and of the many approaches today, it is the most helpful for exegesis because it draws out the type of persuasion that was actually used during the time of the NT. This approach has a long history in the interpretation of the Bible as it dates back to many early church fathers such as Origen, the Cappadocians, John Chrysostom, and Augustine to name a few (Witherington 2015, p. 65; Classen 2000, p. 175; Black 2010, p. 169). Practitioners of this approach today are Hans Dieter Betz, Margaret M. Mitchell, George A. Kennedy, Duane F. Watson, Ben Witherington III, and Timothy J. Christian. In short, the historical methodology of rhetorical criticism is “the historical endeavor of analyzing the Bible by means of Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions...by comparing the NT texts to both ancient rhetorical theory...and ancient rhetorical practice” (Christian 2023, p. 47).

Unfortunately, many NT rhetorical critics from this historical vantage point have not been altogether unified in their methodology. Some scholars are more regimented than others in employing the method, but a methodological procedure is lacking amongst many works of NT rhetorical criticism today. Thus, the purpose of this article will be to provide a rigorous step-by-step process for interpreting and analyzing the rhetoric of the NT from the historical, Greco-Roman standpoint. This will include (1) an explanation of Greco-Roman rhetoric, (2) a procedure for employing the method of historical rhetorical criticism, and (3) then applying this method to a NT text as an example, namely, to 1 Cor 15 in particular and broadly to 1 Corinthians as a whole.
2. The Method of Rhetorical Criticism

2.1. Definition of Rhetoric

Perhaps the best way to start is to define the term rhetoric, but doing so is no simple task, since, as already stated, it means many things to many people. Broadly speaking, rhetoric is the ancient art of persuasion, public speaking, and speaking well. It is primarily an art, not a science. While there are rules and guidelines to rhetoric (like in the sciences), they are not rigid and do not require a speaker to follow them exactly. As in the arts, there is freedom, creativity, and beauty to rhetoric and making speeches and arguments. A speech, if it is to be persuasive and successful, will be shaped and formed for a specific audience. So, what is persuasive to one audience might not be so to another, and that requires some artistry. Moreover, rhetoric is an art of persuasion, which is freely convincing someone of a viewpoint or opinion. It is persuading, arguing, and making a case for a position in order to win people freely to this or that point of view based upon ethics (i.e., morals; what or who is right and wrong, good and evil), logic (i.e., reasons), and even emotions (e.g., love, compassion, fear, pity, etc.). As persuasion, rhetoric is not coercion, bending the truth, sophism, platitudes, manipulation, lying, or twisting people’s arms to attain a desired outcome. Rhetoric is a neutral tool that can be used for good or evil, and yet it is supposed to go hand-in-hand with philosophy (i.e., the love of wisdom and truth) and be found in the hands of the virtuous to be used for good.

But what exactly is Greco-Roman rhetoric? Most Bible scholars and students are unfamiliar with Greco-Roman rhetorical theory and practice. Since this is the bedrock of the methodology, it is pertinent therefore to turn now to an explanation of Greco-Roman rhetoric itself.

2.2. The Sources of Greco-Roman Rhetoric

We know about Greco-Roman rhetoric today by the extant primary sources, particularly the Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks and the speeches found in ancient Greco-Roman literature. As for the handbooks, there are five main ones that have survived to today: (1) Anaximenes of Lampsacus’ Rhetorica ad Alexandrum written around 340–338 BCE; (2) Aristotle’s Rhetorica written in the 330s BCE; (3) Cicero’s unfinished work titled De Inventione written in the 90s BCE; (4) the anonymous Rhetorica ad Herennium written in the 80s BCE; and (5) Quintilian’s Institutio Oratoria written between 91–100 CE. These handbooks were educational tools, written theory for how to persuade and speak well.

But those are not the only sources we have. There are countless speeches extant in ancient Greco-Roman literature. These speeches come in many forms. Some are actual speeches, others are speech summaries in works of historiography, while others are conversations and debates found within epic poetry and philosophical dialogues. Rhetoric is even found in ancient Greco-Roman letters. The best place to start exploring Greek speeches is the works of Demosthenes, Lysias, Isocrates, Isaeus, Thucydides, Homer, and Plato. For Roman speeches, the starting point is the works of Cicero, Julius Caesar, Augustus, Livy, Tacitus, Seneca, Virgil, Horace, and Ovid.

As we shall see, the method of historical rhetorical criticism requires one to explore both the rhetorical handbooks (theory) and actual speeches (practice). What follows here is a brief summary of the major points of Greco-Roman rhetorical theory from the rhetorical handbooks.

2.3. The Three Types of Rhetoric

According to Greco-Roman rhetorical theory, there are three types or species of rhetoric: deliberative, forensic, and epideictic. First, deliberative rhetoric in ancient Greece and Rome was for deliberating, debating, and conversing about what was advantageous or disadvantageous. The most common setting for this type of rhetoric was the democratic political assemblies. Citizens would deliberate about what course of action or decisions their city should make about any given topic or issue they were facing. For example, a common topic for deliberative debate was “Should we go to war?” Citizens would take
turns arguing their opinions, back and forth, urging their fellow citizens to see things their way. Some would argue why they should go to war (i.e., why it would be advantageous), whereas others might argue against going to war (i.e., why it would be disadvantageous). As such, then, deliberative rhetoric focused upon the future, attempting to persuade listeners to make a decision that would affect their near future (i.e., going to war or not). Thus, deliberative rhetoric either persuaded (recommended) or dissuaded (warned) one course of action over another. Overall, deliberative rhetoric was used to discover the useful and beneficial thing to do.

The second type of ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric was forensic or judicial rhetoric. It was for determining who was in the right and who was in the wrong. It was the rhetoric of the law courts, and thus was used for either accusing (“He did it!”) or defending (“He didn’t do it!”) someone of doing something in the past. It answers the question, “Who did it?” and seeks to right an injustice. Overall, forensic rhetoric was used to discover what was just and unjust.

Finally, epideictic or demonstrative rhetoric was for praise and blame. It was show or showing off rhetoric demonstrating how skilled an orator was at speaking. It was used before general audiences, but it was more specifically common for funeral eulogies, public speeches, and even the Olympics as rhetoric used to be one of the most competitive ancient Olympic sports. Epideictic rhetoric focused on either praising or blaming someone for things in the present. If praising someone, it was encomiastic and encouraged hearers to emulate such a figure. If blaming someone, it discouraged hearers from emulating that figure. Overall, epideictic rhetoric was used to discover the noble and to live into that nobility.

Now, while a speech or discourse has one primary type of rhetoric, it is important to note that there can be a mixture of these types at times. For example, Paul’s praise of love in 1 Cor 13 is epideictic rhetoric. However, the major thrust of 1 Corinthians itself is considered by most scholars to be deliberative, Paul deliberating with the Corinthians to see eye to eye with one another and be unified in the gospel (1 Cor 1:10). More on this later.

2.4. The Five Canons of Rhetoric

The next elements to consider are the five canons of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Invention is what the orator says and the various parts of the speech. Arrangement is the order in which the orator puts the different parts. Style is how the orator says it and the type of linguistic ornamentation and polishing of the speech. Memory is the process of the orator in memorizing the speech in preparation for delivering it. Finally, delivery is how the orator presents the speech with tone of voice and gestures. Each of these elements were vital for orators in the Greco-Roman world, but today, when analyzing written ancient speeches, only the first three— invention, arrangement, and style—are helpful in rhetorical analysis of written texts (Watson 1988, p. 13). The reason seems obvious enough, that the final two—memory and delivery—had to do with the actual performance of a speech, which is difficult to access today. While it is fascinating that ancient orators could memorize and perform their speeches without a script, some of which were many hours in length, and while it is important to remember that these speeches were actually performed before actual audiences and much went into the aesthetics and non-verbal communication as well, that does not prove overly helpful in analyzing the extant written forms of these ancient speeches, which is all we have today. Nonetheless, it is still important to note these two other canons of rhetoric, even though they do not help us much in rhetorical analysis. Thus, the focus of historical rhetorical analysis centers upon invention, arrangement, and style.

2.4.1. Invention

Invention has to do with the various parts of a speech. In a way, the orator invents or finds out what he or she wants to say or communicate. Typically, there were five parts to a speech: an introduction (exordium), a narration or statement of the facts (narratio), a
thesis statement (propositio), proofs or arguments supporting the thesis (probatio), and a conclusion (peroratio).

The introduction (exordium) introduced to the audience the topic of the speech. It was supposed to be brief, clear, and build rapport (ethos) with the audience as an ethical appeal or argument. There were two types of introductions (exordia): a direct opening (principium) where an orator stated upfront what the speech was going to be about or an indirect opening (insinuatio) where the orator merely hinted upfront at what was going to be talked about and only later in the speech would address it to avoid any undue offense because of some prejudice that the audience held.

The narration or statement of the facts (narratio) summarized the pertinent details of an issue or past action or event. Lawyers would usually narrate these facts in the case immediately after the introduction (exordium). However, a narratio was not always necessary in deliberative and epideictic rhetoric (Aristotle Rhet. 3.16.11).

The thesis statement (propositio) summarized the main point being made by the speech. It contained the overarching thrust and goal of the speech. It was what the speech was about and identified the rhetorical problem that the orator was addressing.

The proofs or arguments (probatio) supported the thesis (propositio) of the speech using reason (logos) as a logical appeal or argument. There were two ways of doing this: either confirming (confirmatio) the propositio or refuting (refutatio) objections against the propositio or the points of an opposing orator. Moreover, there were two different types of probatio: inartificial proofs and artificial proofs. Inartificial proofs were appeals to authority such as laws, previous judgments, torture, documents, oaths, witnesses, and the like (Quintilian Inst. 5.1–12). Artificial proofs, however, were arguments appealing to ethics (ethos—who is right), logic (logos—what rightly makes sense), and emotions (pathos—what feels right). An orator should use any and all of these in the probatio and make sure to begin and end with the strongest arguments ([Cicero] Rhet. Her. 3.10.18; Quintilian Inst. 7.1.10–12).

The conclusion (peroratio) ends the speech with a final emotional appeal (pathos). It also summarized the main points of the speech in a succinct way (recapitulation). In deliberative rhetoric, it would often include exhortations to decide this way or that. In forensic rhetoric, orators would often exhort the judge or jurors to make the right decision to bring justice. Sometimes in epideictic speeches, it would exhort the audience to emulate the person praised in the speech.

Now, invention can be seen on a macro-scale and micro-scale. For example, as we shall see below, the five elements of invention (exordium, narratio, propositio, probatio, peroratio) can be identified in the overall macrostructure of the whole of 1 Corinthians. Yet, on a microlevel, the whole chapter of 1 Cor 15, as a discourse within a discourse, itself contains all five elements of invention as well. So, invention can work at macro- and microlevels.

Furthermore, as an art, rhetoric can be flexible, so not every element of invention will necessarily be present in every speech or discourse. Moreover, while the above outlines the typical order of a speech, sometimes things were arranged in different ways, and that leads to the next canon of rhetoric: arrangement.

2.4.2. Arrangement

Whereas invention has to do with the various parts of a speech, arrangement has to do with the order of those various parts. In addition, whereas the orator discovers what to say through invention, arrangement helps the orator discover in what order to say it. As with invention, arrangement is also found on the macro- and microlevels. Truly, invention and arrangement go hand-in-hand. The typical order is exordium, narratio, propositio, probatio, and peroratio. However, given the situation and context, an orator might need to arrange things differently to get the point across in the most effective and persuasive way. This is called ethopoia and involved customizing the speech to the particular audience and “adapting the speech to the exact conditions under which it is to be spoken” (Murphy et al. 2014, p. 49).
A great example of this is when one should use *insinuatio*, the indirect *exordium*. *Insinuatio* was used when the audience might be offended by or prejudiced against a certain topic that the orator wished to speak about. So, instead of coming right out at the beginning of the speech and revealing to the audience what was going to be talked about and thus create undue offense and damage the orator’s *ethos*, the orator would merely hint at the beginning about that topic and only later in the speech address it head-on in a sort of final *probatio* as a *refutatio*. However, if the audience was not offended by the topic, the orator would use a *principium* type of *exordium* (a direct opening), state upfront what the speech would be about, and talk about it in the first *probatio* right away. Thus, the situation or rhetorical problem would often affect the arrangement of the speech.

To use 1 Corinthians as an example, had the Corinthians been mainly Jewish and likely open to belief in the resurrection of the dead, Paul would probably have not used *insinuatio* in 1 Cor 1:4–9 (the *exordium*) to hint at resurrection by using eschatological language and then arranged the letter to end with a discussion of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15 as a *refutatio*. Instead, if they were Jewish, Paul would probably have been able to address resurrection at the beginning of the letter. But since they were mainly Gentiles who likely did not hold to such a notion of resurrection and found it repulsive, Paul, therefore, arranged his rhetoric in such a way to be convincing to his Gentile audience. Hence, he used *insinuatio* to avoid any further undue offense and make it persuasive for his specific audience (Christian 2023).

Now concerning the three artificial proofs of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*, it was customary for these to govern the whole arrangement of the speech in this order. The *exordium* often sought to establish *ethos* and good rapport with the audience. The *probatio* often appealed to *logos* making reasonable, logical arguments. Lastly, the *peroratio* would usually make a final plea to the audience’s emotions (*pathos*). The artificial proofs, then, work on this macrolevel of arrangement as well as their microlevels discussed above on invention.

Yet, this typical order of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* sometimes changed due to the situation and matters of *ethopoëia*. Galatians is a great example of this change of the typical order. Paul already had goodwill, rapport, and *ethos* with the audience, because they were his converts. Thus, he was able to bypass establishing *ethos* at the beginning of the letter, because he already had it with them. He, therefore, jumped right into addressing head-on their desertion of the gospel at the beginning of the letter. This is an emotional appeal (*pathos*) right out of the starting gate, even though normally such appeals to *pathos* were reserved for the *peroratio* at the end.

Thus, there are exceptions to arrangement given the circumstances and situations into which the orator is speaking. Yet one element of arrangement usually stayed persistent throughout, that is, that orators must begin and end with their most convincing arguments, reserving the strongest for last ([Cicero] *Rhet. Her.* 3.10.18; Quintilian *Inst.* 7.1.10–12). This feature is quite persistent throughout most ancient speeches.

2.4.3. Style

If invention is what one says and arrangement is the order in which one says it, then style is how one says what one says in that order. More specifically, style had to do with the orator’s use of language. On a macrolevel, there were three types of style: grand, middle, and simple. Grand style used the highest form of language and vocabulary for elite audiences and formal occasions. Simple or plain style used colloquial language and vocabulary for everyday normal conversations. Middle style was somewhere between grand and simple. It used some formal vocabulary beyond simple conversational language, but not so much as to rise to being formal like the grand style. There were also faulty versions of these three styles: a swollen style that overdid grand style, a drifting style like middle style that vacillated between the grand and simple styles, and a meagre style that failed to meet even the basic tenants of the simple style. What is more, there were local styles, the two most common being Attic (derived from Attica or mainland Greece) and Asiatic (derived from Asia Minor). Attic style was more proper and stoic, whereas Asiatic style was more emotionally charged and over the top, and included run-on sentences,
exaggerations, and the like. In addition, there were styles that aligned with each species of rhetoric: deliberative, forensic, and epideictic (Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.12.5–6). Deliberative style was a bit less formal and less detailed than the others. Forensic style was the most detailed and highly polished. Epideictic style was the most polished and was often prepared for written composition.

On a microlevel, style was broken down into two parts: figures of diction and figures of thought. The figures of diction that an orator could use to ornament, embellish, and polish his or her language included linguistic and literary devices such as anticipation, irony, clarity, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, rhythm, epanaphora, antistrophe, interlace-ment, transplacement, antithesis, apostrophe, interrogation, question and answer, maxims, contraries, colon, comma, period, isocolon, homoeoptoton, homoeoteleuton, paronomasia, hypophora, climax, definition, transition, correction, paralipsis, disjunction, conjunction, ad-junction, reduplication, synonymy, interpretation, reciprocal change, surrender, indecision, elimination, asyndeton, apopesis, conclusion, onomatopoeia, antonomasia, pronomina-tion, metonymy, periphrasis, hyperbaton, hyperbole, synecdoche, catachresis, metaphor, allegory, and the like ([Aristotle] *Rhet. Alex.* 18–28; [Cicero] *Rhet. Her.* 4.13–34; Quintilian *Inst.* 9.1, 3). As for figures of thought, an orator could use the following: distribution, frankness, understatement, vivid description, division, accumulation, refining, dwelling on the point, comparison, exemplification, simile, portrayal, character delineation, dialogue, diatribe, personification, emphasis, conciseness, ocular demonstration, and so forth (Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.2–12; [Cicero] *Rhet. Her.* 4.35–55; Quintilian *Inst.* 9.1–2).

As with invention and arrangement, style required *ethopoeia*, that is, tailoring the style to fit the audience. If the audience was from Attica, it would not be rhetorically persuasive for the orator to use Asiatic style. Similarly, if the speech was for a court case, an orator would not want to use a simple style as the forensic setting required either grand or at the very least middle style. Each style, thus, was meant for specific situations, occasions, and audiences, and the orator needed to shape the rhetorical invention, arrangement, and style to meet the rhetorical situation and needs of the audience (Murphy et al. 2014, pp. 48–50).

2.5. A Procedural Methodology of Rhetorical Criticism

Now that we have explained Greco-Roman rhetoric, it is pertinent to turn our attention to the process and procedure of employing this method of historical rhetorical criticism to the NT. George A. Kennedy pioneered this method in the 1980s and proposed five steps to doing NT rhetorical criticism of the historic fashion, steps which this article will both follow and expand (Kennedy 1984, pp. 33–38; Watson 1988, pp. 8–28). It is pertinent to note that in following this process the rhetorical critic will consult the primary sources on Greco-Roman rhetorical theory (the handbooks) and practice (speeches) throughout this process, especially in steps three and four. Moreover, Kennedy notes that this process is circular and requires the rhetorical critic to process through it several times to refine, expand, and discover more insight into the rhetorical effect intended through these texts.

2.5.1. Step One: Determine the Boundaries of the Rhetorical Unit

First, the rhetorical critic must determine the rhetorical unit, where it begins and ends. This will involve a microanalysis of the rhetorical unit proper in determining its boundaries, but it also requires a macro rhetorical analysis of the whole work in which the rhetorical unit finds itself to ascertain its place within the larger work. Kennedy notes that a rhetorical unit must be at least 5–6 biblical verses and could be as long as several biblical chapters.

Questions to explore in this step include the following: Where does the rhetorical unit under consideration start and stop? What evidence is there for this? On a macrolevel, what is the invention, arrangement, and style of the work as a whole? How does that determine and illuminate the rhetorical unit’s boundaries and placement within the larger work? For example, is the rhetorical unit the *narratio* of the work? If so, what indicators in the text demonstrate the start and end of the *narratio* and its transition from the previous part
(perhaps the exordium) to the next part (perhaps the propositio)? What factors indicate the divisions of these various points of invention and arrangement?

2.5.2. Step Two: Discover the Rhetorical Situation and Problem

Second, the rhetorical critic must analyze the rhetorical situation, problem, or main issue being addressed by the orator to the audience. On the macrolevel of the work as a whole, these data are often found in the exordium, which regularly outlined what the speech was to be about; the narratio, which laid out the facts of the situation or case; the propositio, which was the main point and thesis being argued; and the peroratio where the orator got to the heart of the message in the speech and often summarized the main points. As such, the key areas of the larger work require some detailed attention. Sometimes there is one central rhetorical problem that the orator must address with the audience. For example, often times if prejudice was present in the case somehow, the orator would use insinuatio (the indirect exordium) to damper any undue offense while focusing the audience’s attention elsewhere throughout the speech and slowly lead into the prejudiced topic at the end of the speech.

Questions to explore in this second step include the following: What was the occasion for the orator to need to address these specific issues to this specific audience? Who were the people involved and addressed here? What events transpired to warrant such an occasion and situation? What objects were involved in the situation? What relationships factored into the situation? Where and when did these people, events, objects, and relations occur and happen? Is there one central rhetorical problem to which the orator is speaking to address or correct for this audience? If so, what is that and how does one know that? Is there prejudice involved or is it a difficult case or problem? If so, are there any signs that the orator used insinuatio, the rhetorical approach used for addressing difficult rhetorical problems in an indirect way, to address the audience’s prejudice?

2.5.3. Step Three: Determine the Species of Rhetoric

Third, the rhetorical critic must determine the type or species of rhetoric both of the whole work and of the rhetorical unit itself, whether they are deliberative, forensic, or epideictic. It must be kept in mind that sometimes the rhetorical species were mixed, so even if the larger work was deliberative, the rhetorical unit itself could be forensic or epideictic. It is in this step and the next where the rhetorical critic will explore both the Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks and speeches that employ that particular species of rhetoric found in the rhetorical unit and the work as a whole.

Questions to consider in this third step include the following: What species of rhetoric is the whole work? What species of rhetoric is the rhetorical unit? Are they deliberative, forensic, or epideictic? Is there a mixture of species between the unit and the work as a whole or are they the same species? If they are different, what is the rhetorical effect and goal of the rhetorical unit being different from the whole work? Why is it different? What evidence from the Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks and actual speeches would suggest that the rhetorical unit and the whole work are these particular rhetorical species?

2.5.4. Step Four: Identify and Analyze the Canons of Rhetoric

Fourth, the rhetorical critic must analyze the rhetorical unit proper by identifying the canons of rhetoric therein, particularly invention, arrangement, and style. It is important to consider both the macro invention, arrangement, and style of the whole work and the rhetorical function of this rhetorical unit within the larger work. For example, perhaps the rhetorical unit under consideration is one of the probatio within the larger probatio section within the larger speech itself. Or perhaps the rhetorical unit being analyzed is the exordium of the whole work. Either way, such macro rhetorical factors need to be acknowledged and considered here. While some of this was done preliminarily in step one, here is where one should lay out a full rhetorical outline of the whole work to highlight where the rhetorical unit lies in relationship to the broader scope. Yet what is of most importance in this step is
to analyze the micro invention, arrangement, and style of the rhetorical unit itself. Often this simply entails a detailed analysis of the style only, especially if the rhetorical unit is shorter. However, sometimes longer rhetorical units can be broken down and outlined with the conventions of invention and arrangement. In this way, there can be a speech within a speech or macro rhetoric (invention and arrangement) inside the smaller micro rhetorical unit. Again, one must consult in this step both the Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks and speeches which employ these canons of invention, arrangement, and style to compare and contrast and confirm or deny their presence within the NT rhetorical unit under consideration.

Questions to ask for this step include the following: What canons of rhetoric are in play in the rhetorical unit and the whole work? Concerning invention, what elements of invention can be identified in the rhetorical unit and the whole work? Where is the *exordium, narratio, propositio, probatio,* and *peroratio* in the whole work and rhetorical unit? Are they all there? Are some left out, and if so, why? Where does the speech employ *ethos, logos,* and *pathos* in the rhetorical unit and whole work? Does it do so in that order? If not, why? In what ways does the invention here reflect invention as prescribed in the Greco-Roman handbooks and employed in actual speeches? In what ways might it differ, and why?

Concerning arrangement, in what order do we find the parts of invention in the rhetorical unit and whole work, and why? How does that make it persuasive? Would another order have made the rhetorical unit or whole work more persuasive? How effective and successful is this arrangement? In what ways does the arrangement here reflect arrangement as prescribed in the Greco-Roman handbooks and employed in actual speeches? In what ways might it differ, and why?

Concerning style, in what style is the rhetoric of the whole work and the rhetorical unit? Is it grand, middle, simple, swollen, drifting, or meagre? Is it a local style like Attic or Asiatic? Is it deliberative, forensic, or epideictic style? What figures of diction can be identified in the rhetorical unit? What figures of thought can be identified in the rhetorical unit? How do those elements and categorizations help one understand the meaning of the NT text? How did the author employ *ethopoeia* and tailor the style of the speech to the audience? In what ways does the style here reflect style as prescribed in the Greco-Roman handbooks and employed in actual speeches? In what ways might it differ, and why?

2.5.5. Step Five: Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Rhetorical Unit

The final step of the process of rhetorical analysis requires that the rhetorical critic evaluate whether the rhetoric employed in the rhetorical unit rose to meet the occasion of the rhetorical situation, solved the rhetorical problem, and successfully persuaded the audience. In addition, the rhetorical critic must evaluate whether the orator used standard rhetorical conventions as prescribed in the Greco-Roman handbooks and employed in the speeches.

Questions to explore in this final step include the following: Did the rhetoric get the job done? Was it persuasive to the audience? Why or why not? How or how not? Did the rhetoric in the rhetorical unit meet the rhetorical situation and audience? Did it solve the rhetorical problem? How does the rhetoric employed here reflect the rhetoric prescribed in the Greco-Roman handbooks and employed in actual speeches? In what ways did they differ, and why? How might the rhetoric here have been more effective according to Greco-Roman rhetorical theory and practice?

3. A Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 15

At this juncture, we will now turn to analyze the rhetoric of 1 Cor 15 following this methodological procedure.
3.1. Step One: Determine the Boundaries of the Rhetorical Unit of 1 Cor 15

The whole epistle of 1 Corinthians is itself the larger rhetorical unit under consideration, but since this is such a large work, it is subdivided into many sections or rhetorical units. Nearly all scholars, whether rhetorical or not, find 1 Cor 15:1–58 to be a self-contained unit (Mack 1990, pp. 56–59; Watson 1993, pp. 231–49; Saw 1995, pp. 176–272; Eriksson 1998, pp. 233–34; Witherington 1995, pp. 292–93; Mitchell 1993, pp. 175–77, 283–91; Saw 1995, pp. 1169–82; Bünker 1984, pp. 59–72; Aletti 1992, p. 396). Scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries thought this so much so that they deemed it a separate letter within 1 Corinthians among their partition theories (Weiss 1910, pp. 343–45; Lietzmann 1949, p. 76; Herig 1949, pp. 11, 132; de Boer 1994, p. 244; de Boer 1988, pp. 209–10; Peterson 2006, pp. lxxxiv, 374). The clearest indicator often pointed out is the obvious one that chapter 15 differs in subject matter (resurrection) altogether than what came before it in 1 Cor 12—14 (spiritual gifts) and what comes after it in 1 Cor 16 (the Jerusalem collection and closing comments), with 1 Cor 12:1 and 16:1 both beginning with “Now concerning” (peri de).

On a macrolevel, 1 Cor 15 is part of the larger probatio section of 1 Corinthians as a whole, often identified as beginning in 1 Cor 1:18 and ending in 1 Cor 16:12. Within that larger probatio section, 1 Cor 15:1–58 functions as a refutatio as Paul refutes two objections concerning the resurrection of the dead (15:12, 35). As such, 1 Cor 15 links with the exordium of 1 Cor 1:4–9 where Paul used insinuatio to hint at the resurrection topic, which was to be addressed later only after rapport was established (Christian 2023, pp. 182–88). Due to the Corinthians’ prejudice against (15:35) and divisions over resurrection (15:12), Paul used eschatological language in 1 Cor 1:7–8 to prepare the Corinthians in an indirect way for this discussion, which he only mentioned at the end of the letter save 1 Cor 6:14. Moreover, he shrouded all of 1 Cor 1—14 in eschatological language, which builds to 1 Cor 15 where eschatology proper is finally discussed and the theme of resurrection revealed (Christian 2023, pp. 188–93). This insinuatio and final major probatio functioning as refutatio all points to 1 Cor 15 being the climax of the letter as was often the case with speeches employing insinuatio (Christian 2023, pp. 193–200). In other words, the insinuated topic at the beginning of the letter in the exordium (1:7–8) would be brought up at the end of the letter as a refutatio to refute the prejudice, and this created a climactic effect. All in all, 1 Cor 15:1–58 is a rhetorical unit.

3.2. Step Two: Discover the Rhetorical Situation and Problem in 1 Cor 15

Regarding the rhetorical situation of 1 Corinthians as a whole, first, Paul was addressing divisions as the propositio indicates in 1 Cor 1:10: “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.” The narratio of 1 Cor 1:11–17 further reveals this as Chloe reported perhaps at least four sects among the Corinthian church: one each for Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ (1:11). Margaret M. Mitchell has pointed out that in each major section of 1 Corinthians that Paul was addressing their divisions, which had been manifested in several ways (Mitchell 1993, pp. 65–183).

Another factor to consider is that 1 Corinthians was at least Paul’s second letter to this church (1 Cor 5:9). Moreover, the Corinthians apparently sent a letter to Paul asking his advice on some issues as well (1 Cor 7:1). So, the rhetorical situation of 1 Corinthians is that Paul was addressing problems in the church—especially divisions—reported by Chloe’s people (1 Cor 1:11) and questions asked by the Corinthians in their letter to Paul (1 Cor 7:1). Paul addressed many topics in 1 Corinthians: divisions, God’s wisdom in Christ, apostleship, lawsuits, sexual immorality, Christian marriage, eating food offered to idols, proper worship, the Lord’s Supper, spiritual gifts, the resurrection, and the Jerusalem collection. Yet there were perhaps three major issues undergirding these various problems: divisions (1 Cor 1–4), a lack of love (1 Cor 13; 16:13–14), and a denial of the resurrection (1 Cor 1:7–8; 6:14; 15:1–58). The divisions and lack of love are communal and ethical problems, whereas the denial of the resurrection is more of a theological problem (Hays
I have argued elsewhere that this theological problem may be the central problem facing the Corinthians and that solving this theological problem of denying resurrection will solve their ethical and communal problems of divisions and lack of love (Christian 2023, pp. 219–21; Hays 1997, pp. 252, 277). In other words, poor theology led to poor ethics, and orthodoxy will lead them back to orthopraxy. Moreover, when there was one central rhetorical problem, orators often employed insinuatio, and that is what Paul does here in 1 Corinthians (Kennedy 1984, p. 36; Christian 2023, pp. 174–214). So, then, the main rhetorical problem of 1 Corinthians, I would argue, is found within the rhetorical situation of 1 Cor 15 itself.

Regarding that situation, some of the Corinthians were denying the future resurrection of the body, and Paul refuted this denial in this chapter. This resurrection denial, in fact, was a further case of divisions as only “some” denied it, whereas some assumedly maintained it (15:12). Paul called out the deniers on their illogical conclusions, for they apparently maintained that Christ rose from the dead but denied the future resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:12–19). This was most likely due to their cultural values, as most Gentiles did not believe in resurrection (Christian 2023, pp. 177–82; Witherington and Myers 2022, p. 62; Keener 2005, p. 122; Anderson 2006, pp. 99, 114; Wright 2003, pp. 32–38). What is more, even some Jews did not believe in resurrection, particularly the Sadducees. So, then, belief in resurrection was quite a divisive topic in the ancient Greco-Roman world. It makes sense, then, why Paul saved a discussion of resurrection for the end of the letter, because it was probably the most divisive topic he had to address and there was lots of prejudice against it. So, he delayed addressing resurrection, so that he could address all the other issues (1 Cor 1–14) before taking on the most difficult topic they were facing. For such a difficult rhetorical problem as this, Paul therefore used the rhetorical approach for a difficult problem, namely, insinuatio (Christian 2023).

3.3. Step Three: Determine the Species of Rhetoric in 1 Cor 15

The majority of scholarship agrees that 1 Corinthians is deliberative rhetoric (Christian 2023, p. 174; Mitchell 1993, pp. 20–64; Kennedy 1984, p. 87; Witherington 1995, p. 46; Watson 1993, p. 232; Malcolm 2013, p. 269; Wegener 2004, p. 442). Only a minor few have suggested that it is forensic, though many have noted that 1 Cor 13 is a digressive epideictic praise of love (Fee 2014, p. 6; Litfin 2015, pp. 141, 169, 172–73, 194, 198). Likewise, most scholars view 1 Cor 15 as deliberative rhetoric, with a few deeming it forensic. The reason why some identify chapter 15 as forensic is because the refutational force of this chapter (refutatio). This polemical or combative attack on their denial of resurrection has thus been misinterpreted by some as forensic. Yet, the overall goal is deliberative, that the Corinthians change their future course of action, believe in and be united in belief in the gospel of resurrection, and have one mind and thought on the matter (1:10; 15:1–11). The Corinthians were not on track, and they needed to get on track according to Paul. Paul, thus, was deliberating with them in 1 Cor 15, trying to convince them to believe in resurrection and dissuade them from denying it. That is the realm of deliberative rhetoric, not forensic.

3.4. Step Four: Identify and Analyze the Canons of Rhetoric in 1 Cor 15

As for the canons of rhetoric in 1 Cor 15, it is difficult to separate invention and arrangement, but I have done so below to show their distinction. Also, due to space constraints, I will only highlight key stylistic conventions in 1 Cor 15, though much more could be said about the style in all 58 verses.

3.4.1. Invention

Concerning invention, rhetorical scholars have identified it in 1 Corinthians and in 1 Cor 15. While there is a general consensus on the different parts, there is no unity. Here is my outline of invention in 1 Corinthians, though others have suggested minor distinctions (Witherington 1995, p. 76; Mitchell 1993, pp. 184–86).
The exordium can be identified specifically as both a principium and insinuatio, for parts of it are direct and parts are indirect. Furthermore, it functions as a divisio because it divides out most of the topics that Paul will address in the letter: speech (1:5; chapters 1–4), knowledge (1:5; chapters 8–10), spiritual gifts (1:7; chapters 12–14), and eschatology (1:7–8; chapter 15). In addition, the larger probatio section can be divided into multiple arguments as such, though again others have minor differences (Witherington 1995, p. 76; Mitchell 1993, pp. 184–86).

As for ethos, logos, and pathos, 1 Corinthians begins with building ethos, especially in the exordium (1:4–9). There Paul almost flatters them with the phrase, “you have been enriched in every way” (1:5). Moreover, the proposicio and narratio in 1:10–17 are not combative, but matter of fact. The mention of Chloe, Apollos, Cephas, Crispus, Gaius, and Stephanas is somewhat of a name dropping to build the trust and rapport needed for the Corinthians to listen to his arguments in the probatio. The probatio section (1:18–16:12) certainly is heavy with logos as this is where Paul argues his points with the Corinthians and makes his appeal for concord among factionalisms. Finally, the peroratio and closing epistolary sections in 16:13–24 exude pathos. There is an appeal to love (16:14), a recollection of the first Christian converts in Achaia (16:15), warm greetings from Aquila and Priscilla (16:19), an autograph from Paul (16:21), a prayer for the return of Christ (16:22), and Paul’s love sent to them (16:24). This all follows the standard arrangement for ethos at the beginning of the speech, logos in the middle, and pathos near the end.

Now regarding 1 Cor 15, it is Probatio 7 above and is the rhetorical unit under consideration here. It functions as a refutatio linking to the insinuatio in 1 Cor 1:4–9 (exordium) and it is the climax of the whole probatio section (Christian 2023, pp. 10–46, 176–214). As a self-contained rhetorical unit, 1 Cor 15:1–58 is often deemed as a speech within a speech replete with its own exordium, narratio, proposicio, probatio, and peroratio—micro invention and arrangement if you will. Many scholars have outlined chapter 15 with Greco-Roman invention, and below is a chart (Table 1) showing their differences and similarities (Mack 1990, pp. 56–57; Watson 1993, pp. 235–49; Saw 1995, pp. 223–26; Witherington 1995, p. 292; Eriksson 1998, pp. 248–51; Wegener 2004, p. 449).

All agree that 1 Cor 15:1–2 constitutes the exordium and that 1 Cor 15:58 is either a peroratio or exhortatio. Another element that nearly all share is that there is some sort of refutatio happening in 1 Cor 15. Given the variety of opinions, it is difficult to ascertain the exact rhetorical outline of the chapter. The sections and subdivisions of the chapter are clear, but identifying the parts of invention has proven more difficult for rhetorical scholars. Here is my understanding of the invention in 1 Cor 15:

• Exordium (15:1–2)
• Narratio (15:3–11)
• Proposicio 1 (15:12)
• Refutatio 1 (15:13–19)
• Confirmatio 1a (15:20–28)
• Confirmatio 1b (15:29–34)
• Propositio 2 (15:35)
• Refutatio 2 (15:36–44a)
• Confirmatio 2a (15:44b–49)
• Confirmatio 2b (15:50–57)
• Peroratio (15:58)

Table 1. Scholarly Rhetorical Analyses of 1 Corinthians 15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verses</th>
<th>Mack</th>
<th>Watson</th>
<th>Saw</th>
<th>Witherington</th>
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<td>3–11</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Narratio vv. 3–20</td>
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<td>13–19</td>
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<td>20–28</td>
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<td>29–34</td>
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<td>35–44a</td>
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<td>44b–49</td>
<td>Confirmatio</td>
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<td>50–57</td>
<td>Conclusion vv. 51–58</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Confirmatio</td>
<td>Peroratio</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>Peroratio</td>
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<td>Peroratio/Exhortation</td>
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The exordium (15:1–2) is an insinuatio, for had it been a direct principium it would likely have begun with “Now concerning” (peri de) like 1 Cor 12:1 and 16:1 to indicate a change in subject matter. However, Paul, in fact, purposefully did not want to signal in a direct way that he was changing subjects to resurrection in 1 Cor 15:1. Instead, he starts by talking about the gospel as an indirect way to ease into discussing not only the resurrection of Jesus, but the future resurrection, which some of the Corinthians specifically denied. The narratio (15:3–11) narrates the situation as to how Paul received and passed on the gospel of Christ dying, rising, and appearing to the apostles. This sets the stage for the propositio in 15:12 stated as an interrogation: “But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” What follows is a refutatio (15:13–19) refuting the illogical conclusion that some have made that the dead are not raised yet they believe that Christ was raised. Paul refutes that claim by showing that if Christ was raised, then resurrection indeed happens because it happened to Christ. Next, 15:20–28 functions as a confirmatio confirming the thesis that Christ has been raised from the dead and all that comes with that. A second confirmatio occurs right after that in 15:29–34 where Paul explores the further implications of denying the resurrection, that life and ministry would be meaningless, and confirms that those things are not meaningless because Christ was indeed resurrected.

The second main part of chapter 15 begins in 1 Cor 15:35 with another propositio of sorts. It addresses some common Gentile objections to belief in resurrection. Thus, 1 Cor 15:36–44a constitutes a refutatio of these objections. Then, 1 Cor 15:44b–49 shifts to a confirmatio arguing for the resurrection body being a spiritual body. Like before, a second confirmatio follows in 1 Cor 15:50–57, clarifying further that the resurrection body is a kind that is immortal and imperishable and not mere flesh and blood. The chapter concludes in 15:58 with a peroratio containing exhortations, which function as an exhortatio. As for ethos, logos, and pathos in 1 Cor 15, the exordium (15:1–2) and narratio (15:3–11) build ethos with the Corinthians. He reminds them of “the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you” (15:1–2). This anchors the whole
rest of the discussion in chapter 15, because “this is what we preach, and this is what you believed” (15:11). The Corinthians received and believed Paul’s preaching of the gospel, which included the resurrection (15:4). This recalls that their faith came from Paul, and that they should also receive his word in what follows in chapter 15 because he is trustworthy. The probatio, refutatio, and confirmatio sections of 15:12–49 exude logos and logical argumentation. This makes sense as Paul was refuting their denial and faulty thinking concerning resurrection. This high level of logical debate is probably why many rhetorical scholars deem chapter 15 to be a tour de force (Eriksson 1998, p. 232; Witherington and Myers 2022, p. 111). As for pathos, the final confirmatio and peroratio in 15:50–58 elicit emotions of hope, wonder, and praise. It ends with a doxology of praise in 1 Cor 15:57 and exhortation not to give up doing the Lord’s work in 1 Cor 15:58. This is Paul’s final rallying of the troops to excite them into belief in resurrection. This all follows the standard arrangement for ethos at the beginning, logos in the middle, and pathos at the end.

3.4.2. Arrangement

Now concerning arrangement, the order of 1 Corinthians as a whole mostly followed the prescribed order for a speech. The one place where Paul deviated from the handbooks on this is when he placed the propositio (1:10) before the narratio (1:11–17), whereas the handbooks suggest the order of exordium, narratio, and propositio. The reason for this is probably because 1 Corinthians is deliberative rhetoric. Deliberative was more flexible with the narratio and did not always need a narratio.39 Forensic rhetoric, however, was stricter with the order of exordium, narratio, and propositio. Also, at the end of Paul’s narratio, he speaks of “the cross of Christ” (1:17), and that theme ties into the first probatio in 1 Cor 1:18 where Paul says, “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishings.” Had Paul placed the propositio after the narratio between 1 Cor 1:17 and 1 Cor 1:18, there would be an unnecessary interruption of thought and theme. Thus, Paul flexed the order so he could flow right into his proofs (probatio) after the narratio.

The handbooks also instruct orators to start and end with one’s strongest arguments, and Paul certainly does that. The probatio section (1:18—16:12) begins and ends with Paul’s strongest arguments, 1 Cor 1:18—4:21 where Paul addresses the divisions and 1 Cor 15:1–58 where Paul addresses the most divisive issue—belief in resurrection. In fact, 1 Cor 15 is his strongest argument—a tour de force—and the climax of the letter as already mentioned (Christian 2023, pp. 10–46, 212–14).40 As for the arrangement of 1 Cor 15, while the sections are easy to decipher (15:1–2, 3–11, 12–19, 20–28, 29–34, 35–44a, 44b–49, 50–57, 58), it has been difficult for rhetorical critics to identify the exact invention associated with these sections. That makes the arrangement difficult as well. Yet, the chapter does follow the standard arrangement of exordium (15:1–2), narratio (15:3–11), propositio (15:12), probatio (15:13–57)—whether refutatio or confirmatio with a secondary propositio of sorts in 15:35—and peroratio (15:58); that much is clear. I suggest that there are two parts of the argumentation (15:12–34; 35–57) and that each part mirrors the other with this order: propositio (15:12; 35), refutatio (15:13–19; 36–44a), confirmatio a (15:20–28; 44b–49), confirmatio b (15:29–34; 50–57).

3.4.3. Style

Now concerning the macro style of 1 Corinthians generally and 1 Cor 15 specifically, both are probably best regarded as the middle style. They are certainly not grand style, though they are a bit higher level than simple style. Moreover, there is no indication of the faulty styles of swollen, drifting, or meagre here. As for a local style, they probably reflect more of an Attic style, and this is not surprising given that Corinth was the capital of Attica or Achaia. They are certainly not Asiatic style with long run-on sentences and overly heightened pathos. Since both are deliberative rhetoric, they have a deliberative style which employs many examples (e.g., 1 Cor 10:6; 11:1; 15:9–11, 29–34). In these ways, Paul tailors his macro style to fit his setting and audience (ethopoeia).
Now concerning the micro style of 1 Cor 15, Paul used many figures of diction and thought.\(^{41}\) As for the figures of diction, he used anticipation (15:35), interrogation (15:12), asyndeton (15:17, 19, 26, 32, 34, 39, 41–44, 47), parenthesis (15:10b), antithesis (15:39–44a), ellipsis (15:23–24, 27, 32, 39–42, 44–48, 55–57), maxims (15:32–33), contraries (15:50–55), hendiadys (15:52–55), irony (15:32b), interpretation (15:45–49), hyperbole (15:9), analogy (15:36–44a), synecdoche (15:29), and many more. As for figures of thought, Paul used rhetorical questions (15:12, 29–30, 32, 35), dialogue (15:35), diatribe (15:35), emphasis (15:8–9, 12, 18, 26, 36), *exclamatio* (15:36, 51), simile (15:8, 22, 38, 48–49), division (15:38–41), personification (15:35), understatement (15:12), and many more.

3.5. Step Five: Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Rhetorical Unit of 1 Cor 15

When considering Paul’s rhetorical effectiveness in 1 Cor 15, he certainly used the correct approach of employing *insinuatio* in the exordium and delaying addressing the most divisive topic of resurrection, the topic with the most prejudice against it, until the end. Moreover, it has a climactic affect in finally addressing the theological issue behind the ethical issues. It is possible that Paul solved the issue of resurrection denial, since he does not correct them anymore on the matter in 2 Corinthians.\(^ {42}\) However, he has not solved all of the Corinthians’ problems at large, for there are still many issues seen in 2 Corinthians and even much later in 1 Clement.

Most rhetorical scholars consider 1 Cor 15 to be Paul at his rhetorical best. He generally followed rhetorical theory and practice here, and his rhetoric rose to meet the occasion and the audience where they were at. As Eriksson and Witherington put it, 1 Cor 15 is a rhetorical *tour de force* (Eriksson 1998, p. 232; Witherington and Myers 2022, p. 111). It met the rhetorical problem of solving their theological issues, perhaps even some of their communal and ethical issues as well for a time. As we see from 2 Corinthians, it seems that the Corinthians did become united in some way after all, namely, united against Paul and his apostolic ministry. But this might not be the effect of 1 Corinthians so much as events that transpired between these writings (i.e., the painful visit mentioned in 2 Cor 2:1). All in all, Paul displays his rhetorical prowess in 1 Cor 15 and demonstrates that he is perhaps more educated in Greco-Roman rhetoric than many Pauline scholars today want to give him credit for.\(^ {43}\)

4. Conclusions

Rhetorical criticism is a helpful and indispensable tool for interpreting the NT. It can be used to analyze practically any book in the NT in some way: the speeches in the Gospels, the speeches and letters in Acts, the Pauline and General Epistles, the sermons like Hebrews and 1 John, and the seven letters in Rev 2—3. Some scholars have objected to the use of rhetorical criticism for letters and writing and instead demand the use of epistolary criticism only. I have dealt with that issue at length elsewhere and will not repeat that here, but it is crucial to clarify that rhetorical criticism should go hand-in-hand with epistolary criticism, because the NT letters are rhetorical letters and contain features of rhetoric and letters (Christian 2023, pp. 50–80). In addition, the historical approach to rhetorical criticism should be the foundation for one to explore the other avenues of modern approaches to NT rhetoric. After this historical process is completed, scholars are encouraged to press further into modern issues of rhetoric, but only in that order. Unfortunately, there is not much overlap today between camps. As for literary criticism, rhetorical criticism is quite similar to it. Both focus on the final form of the text and try to understand the work as a whole while also pointing out important stylistic, structural, and linguistic features. In that same vein, there is also an overlap between rhetorical criticism and inductive Bible study (IBS). Often times observations of major structural relationships in IBS coincide with the canons of rhetoric and the logical argumentation therein, yet IBS uses more modern terms whereas rhetorical criticism uses the ancient terms and concepts to describe essentially the same phenomena. I suggest, as most NT rhetorical scholars do, that rhetorical criticism is one of the many approaches that interpreters of the NT must consider when doing exegesis.
of the NT. Rhetoric is a crucial piece to the historical and literary contexts of the NT, and it was something that Paul and the other NT writers used and were very familiar with during their time. Ben Witherington III writes, “One ignores Greco-Roman rhetoric at one’s peril if one wants to understand the NT. It is not enough to have a nodding acquaintance with minor rhetorical devices and how they work” (Witherington 2015, p. 87). Rhetorical analysis, therefore, helps exegetes draw out the original meaning of the NT and see the original intentions of the NT authors—how they were trying to persuade the recipients of the NT—and gain a better perspective on the social, theological, and pastoral issues and situations in these early Christian communities.14

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Notes
1 This is not to be confused with Vernon Robbins’ socio-rhetorical interpretation, which employs a tapestry of ancient and modern rhetorical approaches (Robbins 1996). This article is also not focused on New Rhetoric. For the other various modern approaches to rhetorical criticism, see (Martin 2014).
2 Betz only considered the rhetorical handbooks. Mitchell considered both the rhetorical handbooks and actual speeches, but she over-emphasized Greek speeches over Roman ones. See my comments about this (Christian 2023, pp. 80–85). Kennedy set the precedent for a rigorous method and Watson, his student, followed (Kennedy 1984, pp. 3–38; Watson 1988).
3 My methodology builds upon Kennedy’s and Watson’s approach (Kennedy 1984; Watson 1988).
4 For a more detailed look at my definitions of these terms, see my own work (Christian 2023, pp. 47–50).
5 In ancient Greece and Rome, philosophers and rhetoricians debated about the nature of rhetoric. Philosophers accused rhetoricians of relativism and sophism, which in general meant that orators would say whatever they could to win the argument regardless of whether it was true. For discussion on this historic debate, see (Murphy et al. 2014, pp. 25–59; Kennedy 1994, pp. 30–43; Plato, Gorgias (Plato 2004); Plato, Phaedrus (Plato 2005); Williams 2009, pp. 51–221).
6 Another helpful handbook is Demetrius’ On Style (Demetrius 1960) written perhaps in the second century BCE, but its focus is solely on style.
7 For examples of elementary rudiments in rhetoric during and after the NT period, see the Progymnasmata (Kennedy 2003; Parsons and Martin 2018).
8 This is a heated debate among NT rhetorical scholars today. I have argued at length to settle the matter and show that rhetoric was indeed for letters and writing as much as for speeches and speaking (Christian 2023, pp. 50–80).
9 Some other primary sources on Greco-Roman rhetoric that rhetorical scholars sometimes consult to compare to the NT, which are either during (later) or beyond the NT period, are Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ Ars Rhetorica, Pseudo-Longius’ On the Sublime, and orators from the Second Sophistic movement. Use caution when consulting such works to avoid anachronism, since many of these are beyond the NT period. Methodologically, it is best to consult sources before or concurrent with the NT text under consideration.
10 For a reference, here are the major places where the rhetorical handbooks describe deliberative rhetoric: [Aristotle] Rhet. Alex. ([Aristotle] 1936) 1–2; 6.1; 29–34; Aristotle Rhet. (Aristotle 1982) 1.4–8; 2.1; 2.18; 3.12; Cicero Inv. (Cicero 1968) 1.5–6; 2.52–58; [Cicero] Rhet. Her. (Cicero 1989) 1.2; 3.2–5; Quintilian Inst. (Quintilian 1960) 3.4; 3.8. Also, here are a few select deliberative speeches: Isocrates, Nic. (Isocrates 1928); Isocrates, Paneg. (Isocrates 1928); Isocrates, Phil. (Isocrates 1928); Isocrates, De pace (Isocrates 1929); Demosthenes 1–3 Philip. (Demosthenes 1939); Thucydides P.W. (Thucydides 1956) 1.37–43; 6.16–18; 8.53; Cicero, Agr. (Cicero 1935); Cicero, Cat. 4 (Cicero 1996); Cicero, Dom. (Cicero 1993); Cicero, Har. Resp. (Cicero 1993).
11 For a reference, here are the major places where the rhetorical handbooks describe forensic rhetoric: [Aristotle] Rhet. Alex. 4; 6.3; 36; Aristotle Rhet. 1.10–15; 2.1; 2.18; 3.12; Cicero Inv. 1.5–6; 2.4–51; [Cicero] Rhet. Her. 1.2; 1.3–2.31; Quintilian Inst. 3.4; 3.9. Also, here are a few select forensic speeches: Lysias 1, 12, 21, 25 (Lysias 1930); Isocrates, Soph. (Isocrates 1929); Isocrates, Antid. (Isocrates 1929); Demosthenes, Cor. (Demosthenes 1939); Thucydides, P.W. 3.51–68; Cicero, Quinct. (Cicero 1984); Cicero, Rosc. Aner. (Cicero 1984); Cicero, Rosc. con. (Cicero 1984); Cicero, Verr. (Cicero 1928, 1935); Cicero, Cat. 1 (Cicero 1996); Cicero, Muc. (Cicero 1996); Cicero, Sull. (Cicero 1996); Cicero, Flac. (Cicero 1996); Cicero, Arch. (Cicero 1993); Cicero, Plane (Cicero 1993).
12 For a reference, here are the major places where the rhetorical handbooks describe epideictic rhetoric: [Aristotle] Rhet. Alex. 3: 6; 35; Aristotle Rhet. 1.9; 2.1; 2.18; 3.12; Cicero Inv. 1.5–6; 2.59; [Cicero] Rhet. Her. 1.2; 3.6–8; Quintilian Inst. 3.4; 3.7. Also, here are a few select epideictic speeches: Lysias 2, 33; Isocrates, Evag. (Isocrates 1928); Isocrates, Hel. enc. (Isocrates 1929); Cicero, Cat. 2–3 (Cicero 1996); Cicero, Red. ser. (Cicero 1993); Cicero, Red. pop.

13 For ways in which memory and delivery can apply to NT rhetorical criticism, see (Olbricht 1997).

14 There is of course some value, for the NT was, in fact, written to be orally performed with the voice and aurally received by the ear. It was written to be heard, not seen, in an ancient oral culture. So, delivery and memory were actually quite important aspects, though it is difficult to ascertain such aspects today.

15 For a reference, here are the major places where the rhetorical handbooks describe invention: [Aristotle] Rhet. Alex. 29–37; Aristotle Rhet. 3.13–19; Cicero Inv. 1.15–56; 2.4–59; [Cicero] Rhet. Her. 1.3–3.8; Quintilian Inst. 4.1–6.5.

16 For a reference, here are the major places where the rhetorical handbooks describe exordium: [Aristotle] Rhet. Alex. 29; 31; 35.1–4; 36.2–16; 37.2–3; 38.3–5; Aristotle Rhet. 3.14–15; Cicero Inv. 1.15–18; [Cicero] Rhet. Her. 1.4–7; Quintilian Inst. 4.1.

17 For a reference, here are the major places where the rhetorical handbooks describe narration: [Aristotle] Rhet. Alex. 30.1–11; 31.1–3; 38.6–7; Aristotle Rhet. 3.16; Cicero Inv. 1.19–21; [Cicero] Rhet. Her. 1.8–9; Quintilian Inst. 4.2.

18 For a reference, here are the major places where the rhetorical handbooks describe propositio: Cicero Inv. 1.22–23; [Cicero] Rhet. Her. 1.10; Quintilian Inst. 4.4–5.

19 For a reference, here are the major places where the rhetorical handbooks describe probatio/confirmatio: [Aristotle] Rhet. Alex. 32; 36.17–18; 38.8–9; Aristotle Rhet. 3.17–18; Cicero Inv. 1.24–41; 2.4–59; [Cicero] Rhet. Her. 1.10–2.29; Quintilian Inst. 5.1–12. For a reference, here are the major places where the rhetorical handbooks describe refutatio: [Aristotle] Rhet. Alex. 33–34; 36.19–44; Cicero Inv. 1.42–51; 2.4–59; [Cicero] Rhet. Her. 1.10–2.29; Quintilian Inst. 5.13.

20 On a macrolevel, it was customary for these three artificial proofs (ethos, logos, and pathos) to govern the whole arrangement of the speech as well and in this order. The exordium often sought out ethos with the audience, the probatio often appealed to logos making reasonable, logical arguments, and the peroratio would usually make a final plea to the audience’s emotions (pathos). So, artificial proofs work on the micro- and macrolevels (Witherington and Myers 2022, p. 6).

21 For a reference, here are the major places where the rhetorical handbooks describe peroratio: [Aristotle] Rhet. Alex. 22.7; 36.29, 46–51; 38.10; Aristotle Rhet. 3.19; Cicero Inv. 1.52–56; [Cicero] Rhet. Her. 2.30–31; Quintilian Inst. 6.1–4.

22 For a reference, here are the major places where the rhetorical handbooks describe arrangement: [Aristotle] Rhet. Alex. 29–37; Aristotle Rhet. 3.13–19; [Cicero] Rhet. Her. 3.9–10; Quintilian Inst. 7.1–10.


24 In Galatians, for example, the situation is desperate. Thus, concerning his arrangement, Paul leaves out the standard parts of an exordium or letter opening: “there is no thanksgiving section, no greetings to particular persons, no health wish, no mention of present or future travel plans” (Witherington and Myers 2022, p. 105). Given the dire situation, he jumps right in to thumping them on the head: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel” (1:6). Paul arranges things based upon the needs.

25 Most scholars maintain that Paul begins and ends with his strongest arguments in 1 Corinthians, namely, the argument about divisions in 1 Cor 1–4 and the argument about the resurrection in 1 Cor 15. For a detailed review of the scholarly literature on 1 Cor 15 as the strongest argument and climax of the letter, see (Christian 2023, pp. 10–46).

26 For a reference, here are the major places where the rhetorical handbooks discuss ethos: [Aristotle] Rhet. Alex. 18–28; Aristotle Rhet. 3.2–12; [Cicero] Rhet. Her. 4.8–55; Quintilian Inst. 1.5; 8.1–11.1.

27 Kennedy compares a rhetorical unit to a pericope in literary criticism (Kennedy 1984, p. 33).

28 This is comparable to discovering the literary contexts in literary criticism and standard exegetes.

29 For the classic work on the rhetorical situation, see (Bitzer 1968).

30 Kennedy and Watson both suggest considering classic theory here, but due to its complexity, they do not recommend that students and scholars unfamiliar with the Greco-Roman primary sources on rhetoric attempt to do this sort of analysis and should stick solely with analyzing the species of rhetoric (Kennedy 1984, p. 36; Watson 1988, pp. 9–13).

31 Oddly, Mitchell thinks that the probatio ends in 15:57 and that 15:58 is the peroratio of the whole letter (Mitchell 1993, pp. 283–91). This is not the majority view, and both Witherington and Watson challenge Mitchell on this point (Witherington 1995, pp. 291–92; Watson 1993, p. 232).

32 Some suggest that these sects are only hypothetical, though I think otherwise. For a detailed discussion of the sects and slogans in Corinth, see (Thiselton 2000, pp. 123–33).

33 The themes of eschatology (resurrection) and love appear in the peroratio of 16:13–14: “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.” The first imperative grégorite is often associated with the end time (Garland 2003, pp. 765–66; Hays 1997, p. 288).

34 The major deliberative goal that Paul wants the Corinthians to do is to “agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Cor 1:10). This gets expressed in many ways as he...
addresses the issues of divisions (chs. 1–4), immorality and lawsuits (chs. 5–6), Christian marriage (chs. 7), eating food offered to idols (chs. 8–10), proper worship and the Lord’s Supper (chs. 11), spiritual gifts (chs. 12–14), and the resurrection (chs. 15). In all of these, he is trying to persuade them to change their course of action and go in a different direction in the future on these issues. This is how 1 Corinthians functions as deliberative rhetoric.

Insawn Saw provides a history of interpretation on what species of rhetoric 1 Corinthians is (Saw 1995, pp. 31–63). For 1 Cor 13 being epideictic, see (Witherington 1995, pp. 264–73; Christian 2023, p. 174).


The two interrogations of 1 Cor 15:12 and 15:35, which are followed by rebuttals, constitute the refutation or polemics, though I much prefer to call it refutation, not so much combative or polemical as some do.

The handbooks only allow for one type, whereas actual speeches—especially Cicero—often combine these (Christian 2023, pp. 147–49, 171).

Aristotle Rhet. 3.16.11: “In deliberative oratory narrative is very rare, because no one can narrate things to come; but if there is narrative, it will be of things past, in order that, being reminded of them, the hearers may take better counsel about the future.”

As for 1 Cor 16:1–12, this is seen as falling action by many. For all intents and purposes, 1 Cor 15 is the last major argument of the probatio. Mitchell thinks this so much that she does not include 1 Cor 16 within the probatio but part of the letter closing or epilogue (Mitchell 1993, pp. 291–95).

For more details on stylistic analysis of 1 Cor 15, see (Mack 1990; Watson 1993; Saw 1995; Witherington 1995; Eriksson 1998; Wegener 2004). In 2 Cor 4–5, he speaks of resurrection now as if it is a shared belief instead of a disputed point or issue of conflict and division: “because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence” (2 Cor 4:14).

Eriksson also draws a similar conclusion: “Paul argues like a skilled rhetorician. Certain features in his argumentation indicates that his rhetoric is not just a product of a natural talent. . .The rhetorically most advanced section of the letter is 1 Cor 15. . .This historical conclusion from the rhetorical analysis adds corroborative evidence to an emerging consensus that Paul had some rhetorical training” (Eriksson 1998, p. 303).

For other helpful examples of rhetorical criticism, see (Watson 1998; Mihaila 2009; Heil 2005; Collins 1999). For a detailed bibliography with many scholarly examples of the method, see (Watson 2006).

References
