

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyse Philippians 1:1-11 from a rhetorical perspective that differs from the typical approach of researchers, who tend to force ancient rhetorical categories on a letter. The analysis is done in terms of what is called a “grounded theoretical approach”. This approach is briefly summarised, followed by a systematic analysis of Paul’s basic rhetorical strategy, as well as of all the supportive rhetorical techniques, in these eleven verses. It will be argued that these verses are not to be regarded as the *exordium* of the letter, preparing the audience for the “real” arguments later on in the *probatio* (2:1-3:21). They are part of Paul’s rhetorical strategy in the letter, constructed from the text itself and aimed at persuading his fellow-Christians to persevere in proclaiming and living the gospel that they received at the founding of the church in Philippi. The conclusion is that such a text-centred approach (where the focus shifts from the formal to the functional) provides a better understanding of Paul’s rhetorical strategy in Philippians 1:1-11 than a typical rhetorical analysis, according to which this section forms part of the *exordium* of the letter.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1979 H.D. Betz published his well-known *Galatians. A commentary on Paul’s Letter to the churches in Galatia*. He argued that this letter could be studied in terms of the three classes of rhetoric identified by Aristotle, namely forensic rhetoric (which dealt with courtroom oratory), epideictic rhetoric (dealing with ceremonial oratory) and deliberative rhetoric (where the audience is advised on a future course of action). Betz regarded Galatians as an example of the ancient “apologetic letter genre” that could be analyzed as forensic rhetoric. According to Betz, the purpose of the letter was not only to persuade the Galatians to accept Paul’s point of view, but to serve as a “magical letter”, containing a conditional blessing and a curse for the readers (Betz 1979:24-25).

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Based on these premises Betz (1979:16-23) then applied the categories used in forensic defence speeches to the letter and proposed a detailed analysis of the letter within the following broad framework: *prescript* (1:1-5), *exordium* (1:6-11), *narratio* (1:12-2:14), *propositio* (2:15-21), *probatio* (3:1-4:31), *exhortatio* (5:1-6:10) and the epistolary postscript, which serves as a *conclusio* (6:11-18).

The initial reaction to the commentary of Betz was, on the whole, favourable. Even a leading classicist like George A. Kennedy took a stand on this new development in his book *New Testament interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (1984). As a result, numerous New Testament scholars, especially in the United States, started employing categories of ancient classical (Greek and Roman) rhetoric and epistolography for the exegesis of Paul's letters. However, not everyone shared the same enthusiasm and started asking advice from other classicists. One of them, the German classicist Joachim Classen, responded by questioning Betz's use of the two disciplines of epistolography and rhetoric in his analysis, and especially the aim of applying ancient rhetorical categories to Paul's letters. Was the aim to demonstrate to what extent Paul was familiar with them, or to arrive at a better understanding of his letter? If the aim was a more adequate appreciation of Paul himself, where, when and how did he become familiar with ancient rhetoric and epistolography, and did he draw on such knowledge deliberately or not? And if the aim was a more thorough understanding of the letters, should one restrict oneself to the categories of ancient rhetoric, or should one also employ new aspects that have been added since antiquity? (Classen 1993:267-268).

Anderson (1999:35-97) further contributed to the debate by pointing out that there did not exist any uniform ancient rhetorical system; that there was a difference between philosophic rhetoric (like that of Aristotle) and the kind of rhetoric practised in rhetorical schools; that rhetorical practice was more flexible than the seemingly endless distinctions and rules formulated in rhetorical schools imply, and that our knowledge of ancient rhetoric is incomplete due to the fact that many sources were lost.

As a result of these legitimate questions and concerns, New Testament scholars started analyzing Paul's letters without using ancient

rhetorical categories. Instead of forcing these categories on a letter, they began to apply modern rhetorical theories, or they analysed the arguments in a letter in terms of a text-centred approach (that is, the letter itself serves as starting-point for the analysis). Examples are the analysis of Anderson (1999) on Galatians 1-5:12, Romans 1-11 and 1 Corinthians, as well as the work of Kern (1998) on Galatians. A most recent example of such a text-centred approach is Tolmie's analysis of the same letter. He analyzed Galatians in terms of what he calls a "grounded theoretical approach", or a text-based approach (Tolmie 2000:122; see also Tolmie 2004).

The purpose of this article is to analyze Philippians 1:1-11 in terms of Tolmie's proposal for rhetorical analysis. In the first part his approach will be summarised, while the second part will deal with the analysis of Philippians 1:1-11. I hope to prove that a text-centred approach with its focus on the functional aspects of the text provides a better understanding of Paul's rhetorical strategy than a formal rhetorical analysis, according to which Philippians 1:3-11 is regarded as part of the *exordium* of the letter.

2. A TEXT-CENTRED APPROACH TO RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Since it is impossible to read or analyse a text in a totally objective way, Tolmie (2004:36-39) gives an explanation of the approach he uses in analysing the Letter to the Galatians. His purpose is not to prescribe a fixed methodology, but to reconstruct Paul's rhetorical strategy from the text itself. This can only be done once the situation that called forth the letter has been reconstructed. Thus the starting-point of any analysis is a reconstruction of the rhetorical situation. It is the broad outline of what Paul wants to achieve in the letter as a whole.

The broad outline is then specified in more detail by a text-centred descriptive analysis of how Paul attempts to persuade his audience. As a general guideline Tolmie (2004:37) formulates what he calls "a minimum theoretical framework", which can be summarised as follows:

First the dominant rhetorical strategy in a particular section needs to be identified by answering the following two questions:

- How can one describe Paul's primary rhetorical objective in the specific section?
- How does he attempt to achieve this objective?

The dominant rhetorical strategy in each section is formulated in one sentence so as to answer both questions. For example, the dominant rhetorical strategy in Galatians 1:6-10 is: "Expressing disgust at events in the Galatian churches in order to force them to reconsider their position".

The identification of the dominant rhetorical strategy is then followed by a detailed analysis of the rhetorical strategy that Paul uses in the particular section. The principle used to demarcate a section, is a change in Paul's rhetorical strategy: every change is an indication of a new section. The rhetorical analysis itself is done in various ways, depending on what happens in a particular section. It could be done by focussing on the type of arguments he uses and why they are effective. In other sections it is better to describe the way in which he argues instead of focussing on the type of arguments used. Sometimes it is necessary to distinguish between the dominant rhetorical strategy and supportive rhetorical strategies, that is, strategies that cannot be related directly to the dominant strategy, but are important in terms of the overall argument in the letter. The point is that there is not a fixed methodology to be followed in each section, but the main characteristics of Paul's rhetorical strategy are described — depending on how that section is interpreted.

Tolmie (2004:38) also pays attention to what he calls "rhetorical techniques". These are the various ways in which Paul enhances the impact of his communication. The techniques are well-known and include the use of rhetorical questions, metaphors, the way sentences are structured, *paronomasia*, chiasm, etc. The techniques are not only identified, but their purpose is also described.

Finally, the organisation of the argument in the letter as a whole needs to be addressed. Of course, this can only be done once the analysis of the letter has been completed.

In order to understand Paul's rhetorical strategy in each section, one must first understand what he is saying to his audience. Thus, exegetical issues need to be addressed, especially when there is not

agreement on the meaning of a specific phrase or expression. The principle here is, once again, the rhetorical impact of the exegetical issue, and not the issue as such.

3. AN ANALYSIS OF PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

3.1 Introduction

Every good commentary provides a description of the probable historical situation of Paul's Letter to the Philippians (Lightfoot 1953:21-39; Müller 1964:11-12; Matter 1965:7-12; Hendriksen 1971:8-21; Silva 1988:1-10, etc.) According to Müller (1964:11), Matter (1965:11) and Hendriksen (1971:9-20) the situation that called forth the letter was the monetary gift that Paul had received from the Philippians through their emissary, Epaphroditus. The gift was a clear sign of the deep personal relationship between Paul and the church in Philippi. This relationship existed from the founding of the church up to the present, and commentators like Marshall (1987:35-69) and Brown (1997:486) regard the maintenance of this friendship as the main motivation for the letter.

In his construction of the historical situation, however, Silva (1988:21) comes to the conclusion that "the Philippians were facing great adversity, had lost their sense of Christian joy, and were tempted to abandon their struggle". The believers in Philippi were experiencing a lack of unity and many of them had lost their confidence in maintaining their Christian confession. Consequently, Paul responded by persuading the Philippians to stand fast and to persevere. (For a detailed description of the context of the letter, see Silva 1988:1-10.) The primary aim of the letter was not to attack opponents, as in the Letter to the Galatians. Only in chapter 3 did Paul condemn certain opponents, who tried to emphasize circumcision and confuse the Philippians.

I find Silva's construction of the situation in Philippi convincing. The letter must be seen as a response to the problems in Philippi — that Macedonian city to which Paul refers as constituting "the beginning of the gospel" (Phil. 4:15). Therefore he wrote the letter to

persuade his fellow-Christians to persevere in proclaiming and living the gospel that they received at the founding of the church in Philippi.

The rest of this article will be devoted to a text-centred analysis of the way in which Paul attempts to persuade his audience in Philippians 1:1-11.

3.2 Philippians 1:1-2: Using the salutation to confirm the special relationship between Paul and the Philippians

In the opening section of his letters Paul usually follows the following pattern: he employs the three traditional elements of sender, receiver and greetings, but describes the sender(s) and receiver(s) in more detail (Schnider & Stenger 1987:4-24). The greeting of a traditional letter (χαίρειν) is also changed to “grace and peace to you” and christianised (White 1984:1730-1756). Although he follows the traditional pattern, he always adapts it to the particular occasion (Tolmie 2004:40). This also happens in Philippians 1:1-2, where he extends the senders and receivers to suit his overall rhetorical strategy.

- The designation of Paul and Timothy as δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Commentators like Müller (1964:26-27), Schenk (1984:77) and Silva (1988:39-40) regard the omission of ἀπόστολοι in Phil 1:1 as highly significant. Of the four epistles in which Paul does not introduce himself as ἀπόστολος, three were addressed to the churches in Macedonia: Philippians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The reason is that Paul did not find it necessary to emphasize his apostolic authority as in Galatians and Romans. In the light of their long-standing friendship and collaboration since “the beginning of the gospel”, it was not necessary to remind them of his authority.

This fact is important for modern readers, but the Philippians would not have realised this. However, the fact that Paul refers to himself and Timothy (the two founders of the church in Philippi) as δοῦλοι could not have gone unnoticed. Schenk (1984:77) points out that the term should not be understood negatively, but read in conjunction with Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ as one semantic unit. The concept is not borrowed from the social environment of the time, but it occupies the same semantic field as διάκονος in the New Testament. He

therefore suggests the translation “co-worker” (“Mitarbeiter”) instead of “slave”.

Why does Paul refer to himself and Timothy as δοῦλοι? In view of the prominence given to the subject of humility in the letter, Hawthorne (1983:3-4) and Silva (1988:40-41) agree that Paul is here exploiting the reference to lowly service, to humility. To my mind, the term is also used to identify with the audience in the sense of: we are all co-workers in the service of our Lord, Jesus Christ. (Cf. συγκοινωνούς in Phil 1:7; συνήθησαν and συνεργῶν, etc.)

- The description of the receivers as ἐπίσκοποι and διάκονοι.

This description has been interpreted by scholars like Schmithals (1971:89-90) and Schenk (1984:78-82) as evidence of a gloss added by a later redactor, and not as part of the original letter. They regard it as an ecclesiastical anachronism, since ἐπίσκοπος as church office points to a much later date than 60 CE (if the letter emanated from Rome). Older critics, who rejected the whole letter as inauthentic, used this same reference as evidence against Pauline authorship (For a discussion of this position and bibliography, see Mengel 1982:317-24).

Another suggestion is to see these titles not as offices in some technical sense, but as descriptions of activity, as church workers performing certain duties. Beyer (quoted by Silva 1988:41) rejects this interpretation, because Paul must have “in view individual members of the congregation who are unequivocally characterised by the designation ... Otherwise the addition has no meaning”. His conclusion is that ἐπίσκοποι and διάκονοι were two co-ordinated offices at the time of the letter.

Beyer is probably correct. The title ἐπίσκοπος is closely related to πρεσβύτερος and both of them occur in other pastoral letters (especially I Timothy and Titus). (Cf. Matter 1965:16, Hendriksen 1971: 48 and Silva 1988:41). If correct, the reference to ἐπίσκοποι and διάκονοι becomes rhetorically significant. Paul singles them out as those mainly responsible for the relationship between himself and the congregation (including the offering delivered by Epaphroditus). He holds those office-bearers accountable for their continued relationship.

To summarise: Paul’s dominant rhetorical strategy in Philippians 1:1-2 can be described as “using the salutation to confirm his special

relationship with the Philippians". He extends the salutation in two ways. First he describes himself and Timothy as δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, thereby emphasizing humility as a key element in their relationship and as a means of identifying with the recipients of the letter. Secondly, he adapts the salutation by singling out the two offices mainly responsible for maintaining the relationship and raising the offering brought by Epaphroditus: the ἐπίσκοποι and διάκονοι. The titles show his regard for them and pave the way for their continued relationship and the favourable receipt of the letter.

3.3 Philippians 1:3-11. Recounting his prayers to ensure their continued co-operation and total sanctification

3.3.1 Introduction

Before discussing Paul's persuasive strategy in this section, it is necessary to attend to the following two issues:

- Philippians 1:3-11 is not a prayer, but a report on Paul's prayer for the Philippians. As such it has a specific (persuasive) function in the letter. According to Schenk (1984:101) the function is "die Vertrauensbrücke zu den Empfängern zu schlagen". However, this has already been done in 1:1-2, where the special relationship between the senders and receivers has been confirmed. I want to argue that Philippians 1:3-11 has another function: Paul recounts his prayers for the Philippians to ensure their continued co-operation and total sanctification.
- Scholars who choose to apply categories from ancient rhetorical criticism to the letter, usually define this section (or part thereof) as the *exordium*. For example, Watson (1988:58-60) proposes the following division:²

2 For similar analyses, see Porter (1997:554-558). Watson is the only scholar who regards 1:3-26 as the *exordium*. Bloomquist, Witherington and Black all restrict it to 1:3-11. In his article Porter confines himself to presenting the analyses of scholars on the entire letter, compares the various proposals and remarks (quite significantly),

Epistolary Prescript: 1:1-2

Exordium: 1:3-26

Narratio/Propositio: 1:27-30

Probatio: 2:1-3:21

Digressio: 2:19-30

Peroratio: 4:1-20

Repetitio: 4:1-9

Atfectus: 4:10-20

Epistolary Postscript: 4:21-23

Philippians 1:3-11 is thus part of the *exordium* of the letter. The primary function of the *exordium* was to prepare the audience psychologically for the speaker and his case. As Lausberg (1960:180) puts it:

Ziel des Exordiums ist es, die Sympathie des Richters (oder im weitern Sinn: des Publikums) für den (parteimässig vertretenen) Reden-gegenstand zu gewinnen.

In line with Lausberg, Watson (1988:62) highlights three main functions of the *exordium*: “to obtain audience attention, receptivity and goodwill”. Goodwill is also obtained “by concentrating upon the facts of the case and the persons involved, including the rhetor, the audience and the opposition”. The major drawback in describing Philippians 1:3-11 as *exordium* (or part thereof), and limiting its function to obtaining goodwill, is the fact that it leads to a degradation of the argumentative value of this part of the letter. As Tolmie (2004:53) points out in his analysis of Galatians, the *exordium* and *narratio* cannot merely be regarded as “preparatory” for the “real” arguments in the *probatio*. He distinguished between the theological content of Paul’s arguments and their persuasive value. Even if the arguments at the beginning of a letter may appear less “theological” in nature, it does not imply that they should be viewed inferior or less persuasive than the ones used later on in the *probatio*. On the contrary: it may be that Paul prefers to use his best arguments first!

that the wide diversity among those who treat the entire letter throws into serious question any claim that ancient rhetorical analysis can arrive at an objective estimation of the structure (1997:555).

Thus I shall not classify Philippians 1:3-11 as part of an *exordium*, but rather point out the various phases in Paul's argument as he recounts his prayers for the Philippians. The phases are verses 3-5, 6-8 and 9-11. Verses 9-11 pose no problem: it represents his prayer for the total sanctification of the Philippians. The division between verses 5 and 6 is more difficult. As will become clear, it does not depend on linguistic considerations, but on a shift in Paul's rhetorical strategy.

3.3.2 Philippians 1:3-5: Thanking the Philippians for their co-operation up to now.

Paul recounts his thanksgiving by constructing a complicated sentence: ³Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ μνεΐα ὑμῶν ⁴πάντοτε ἐν πάσῃ δεΐσει μου ὑπὲρ πάντων ὑμῶν, μετὰ χαρᾶς τὴν δέησιν ποιούμενος, ⁵ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης ἡμέρας ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν ...

There are various syntactical combinations possible. The main verb εὐχαριστῶ could be linked to the prepositional phrase ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ μνεΐα ὑμῶν in verse 3, but not to ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν in verse 5 (literally: "I thank ... in all remembrance of you"). Another possibility is to link εὐχαριστῶ with both prepositional phrases in verses 3 and 5 (literally: "I thank my God every time I remember you ... because of your fellowship in the gospel"). To mention one more possibility: μετὰ χαρᾶς could be construed with what precedes in verse 4 ("always in every prayer of mine on behalf of you all I make my prayer with joy"), or with what follows ("it is with joy that I make my prayer because of your participation in the gospel").

The main question is whether verse 5 ("because of your participation") provides the reason for Paul's thanksgiving in verse 3, or for his joy in verse 4. Earlier commentators and translators (Greijsdanus 1962:160-161; Matter 1965:17-18; Hendriksen 1971:51-51; Die Bibel nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers; the 1933/1953 Afrikaans translation, etc.) prefer the first option, according to which verse 5 provides the reason for Paul's thanksgiving in verse 3. Verse 4 is then regarded as a parenthesis. More recently, however, commentators and translators prefer to regard verse 5 as the reason for Paul's joy in verse 4, and not for his thanksgiving in verse 3 (Louw & Nida 1977:11;

Schenk 1984:128; Silva 1988:43-44; Groot Nieuws Bijbel; 1996; the 1983 Afrikaans translation; New International Version 1978; Contemporary English Version 1996, etc.).

Which interpretation is to be preferred? Silva (1988:44) is probably correct in pointing out that the sentence — although complicated — does not create a semantic problem, due to the repetition of words and clauses. He (1988:49) prefers the second option, because the article τὴν in μετὰ χαρᾶς τὴν δέησιν ποιούμενος would seem to refer to the previously mentioned δεήσει in verse 4 and this factor suggests that μετὰ χαρᾶς begins a new clause and is emphatic.

From a rhetorical perspective two questions come to the fore: Why is the syntax of Philippians 1:3-5 so complicated? And what is the purpose thereof? As to the syntax, Silva (1984:44-45) points out that the thanksgivings in Colossians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon — though somewhat ambiguous — are not nearly as complicated as the one in Philippians 1:3-5. The reason is the intensity of Paul's emotion here, which accounts for the repetition of πᾶς (in πάσῃ — used twice — πάντοτε and πάντων) and, I would add, of δεήσει. Silva also attributes the forcefulness of subsequent expressions (“from the first day”; “being persuaded”) to Paul's emotional state.

The purpose of this report on his thanksgiving is to convey Paul's appreciation and joy to the Philippians for their co-operation in proclaiming the gospel. Schenk (1984:95-96) distinguishes between the proclamation of the gospel (“Evangeliumsverkündiging”) and the work in the congregation (“Gemeindefarbeit”) and regards κοινωνία here as “Evangeliumsverkündiging” (as κοινωνία ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον clearly indicates). The Philippians became missionaries, in the same sense as Paul is a missionary, and the purpose of Phil. 1:3-5 is to inform them about his high regard for their work in proclaiming the gospel. κοινωνία includes, but is not limited to, the financial contributions of the Philippians. It is “an association involving close mutual relations and involvement” εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον (Louw & Nida 1988: 446); a sympathetic participation in (amongst others) “my bonds and the defence and confirmation of the gospel” (verse 7).

The participation had been there “from the first day until now” (ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης ἡμέρας ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν). This verse stresses perseverance

in spite of all obstacles. Their efforts in proclaiming the gospel for the past (approximately) ten years have not gone unnoticed and have not ceased up to now.

Lastly, Paul uses the following rhetorical techniques in this section:

- *Paranomasia* with πᾶς and δεήσις in verse 4 underscores the intensity of his emotions. Writing to close friends, Paul is free to express his personal feelings.
- The repetition of πάντων ὑμῶν/πάντας ὑμᾶς in verses 4, 7 and 8 of Philippians 1 emphasizes the corporate nature of the Christian community in Philippi and serves to remind them of the danger of divisions (Loh & Nida 1977:11). That it is necessary to do so, is clear from the rhetorical situation of the letter.
- Silva (1988:45) contributes the forceful expression in verse 5 “from the first day until now” to Paul’s emotional state. The expression could also serve to exaggerate the time that the Philippians were involved in proclaiming the gospel, thereby accentuating their perseverance.

3.3.3 Philippians 1:6-8: Trusting that their co-operation will continue

This section could be regarded as distinct from Philippians 1:3-5, due to the strategic shift from εὐχαριστῶ (“I thank”) in verse 3 to πεποιθῶς (“trusting”) in verse 6, as well as the shift from human activity (“*your* fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now”) to divine activity (“*He who* began a good work in you will carry it on toward completion”).

The following issues are important from a rhetorical perspective:

- In verse 6a Paul is expressing his confidence that the Philippians will continue with their co-operation: πεποιθῶς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ... (For the function of such an expression of confidence, see Tolmie 2004:168.) The expression is extremely powerful, since it creates a sense of obligation among the Philippians to do what he wants them to do. The major source of his confidence is the fact that God will complete the work He has begun (verse 6b). This is a subtle reminder that the work they are engaged in, is of divine

origin and that, by continuing with it, they are doing what God wants them to do.

- Paul does not mention God's name explicitly, but only writes "He who began a good work in you" (ὁ ἐναρξάμενος ἐν ὑμῖν ἔργον ἀγαθόν). From the context ("I thank my God" in verse 3), however, the referent is clear. By not mentioning God's name, He, as the One who began the good work and will complete it, is emphasized (Loh & Nida 1977:12).
- The next issue is important in the light of the rhetorical situation of the letter. It concerns the relation between (what Hendriksen 1971:54 calls) "human perseverance" and "divine preservation". Paul is assured that the Philippians will continue with their participation in the gospel till the very end, because God is involved. Commentators (Müller 1964:33-34; Hendriksen 1971:54-56; Silva 1988:50-52, etc.) agree that this section deals with a point that is fundamental to the epistle as a whole, namely the close relation between human responsibility and divine grace. Both the Philippians and God are engaged in their *κοινωνία εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον* actually, their participation in the gospel was really God's work, and He will not fail in bringing it to conclusion — no matter how severe their problems might be.

By sharing this assurance with the Philippians, Paul is trying to persuade them to continue their co-operation in proclaiming the gospel. The case is not lost, because God is involved from beginning to end (*ἄχρι ἡμέρας Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ*, verse 6). Schenk (1984: 100) argues convincingly that the unit ("syntagma") *ἡμέρα Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ* refers to the day of completion (*ἐπιτελεῖν*), and not to the day of judgement. If correct, the function of the unit is to persuade the Philippians to persevere in proclaiming the gospel, since God Himself will bring their work to a successful finish at the day of Christ, which is a day to look forward to, not a day of judgement.

The type of argument used here, is an argument based on divine support. Since God will bring their work to completion on that joyful day when Christ returns, the Philippians are indeed able to persevere in proclaiming the gospel to the very end. This notion

that God is involved also forms the basis of a rhetorical technique like the oath in verse 8.

- In verse 7 Paul continues by commending the Philippians once again for their participation and support, whatever the circumstances. He says: “even as it is *right for me to think this*” (καθὼς ἐστὶν δίκαιον ἐμοὶ τοῦτο φρονεῖν). The meaning of δίκαιος is “pertaining to being proper or right in the sense of being fully justified” (Louw & Nida 1988:627). Paul is fully justified in thinking that the Philippians will complete the work, because God is involved. But: the Philippians will also persevere to the end because their lives have already provided the necessary evidence and thus justify Paul’s confidence: they have all been his “partakers of grace” (συγκοινωνοὺς μου τῆς χάριτος, verse 7). What does this mean? After discussing possibilities such as a reference to the Philippians’ gift or divine grace in general, Silva (1988:53-54) argues for a reference to Paul’s apostolic ministry. His reasons are that

- Paul often uses χάρις with reference to his ministry (Rom. 1:5; 12:3; 15:15; I Cor. 3:10; Gal. 2:9);
- it is this ministry that verse 7 describes as “in my bonds and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel”;
- a general reference to divine grace does not do justice to the parallel expression in verse 5, which also refers to Paul’s gospel ministry;
- commentators have strangely ignored the parallel in I Cor. 9:23: “And I do all things on account of the gospel (εὐαγγελίου), that I may become a partaker (συγκοινωνός) of it”.

Silva’s argumentation assumes a close connection between κοινωνία (verse 5) and συγκοινωνός (verse 7), as well as between εὐαγγελίου (verse 5) and χάρις (verse 7). Such connections are valid, because the terms are semantically related and occur within the same context. Therefore, the expression “partakers of grace” does not refer to divine grace in general, but to the Philippians’ support of his gospel ministry in the past. This support provides concrete evidence for his assurance that they will persevere in proclaiming the gospel to the very end.

The argument used here is an argument from past achievement. This type of argument is highly effective, because the Philippians are well aware of their participation in Paul's apostolic ministry up to now. By using this argument, Paul is trying to persuade them to continue their co-operation and support in future.

- The section is concluded by emotional remarks in which the mutual affection between Paul and the Philippians once more surfaces. Already in verse 7 Paul wrote: (It is right for me to have such confidence), διὰ τὸ ἔχειν με ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμᾶς. How should this clause be understood? There are two options: "because I have you in my heart" or "because you have me in your heart". Commentators and translators usually choose the first option, because the accusative closest to the infinitive is normally regarded as the subject (preferred by Müller 1964: 34; Hendriksen 1971:56; the *Good News Bible*, New Afrikaans Translation, etc.). Schenk (1984: 128) prefers the second option and takes ὑμᾶς as the subject: "weil Ihr alle so sehr an mich denkt." One of his arguments is that δία introduces a reason for the preceding clause and με can thus not be the subject of the clause: the reason becomes obscure ("nicht einsichtig") and the whole statement tautological if one interprets it as: I have such confidence, because I have you in my heart (Schenk 1984:104).

Silva (1988:50, 56-57) allows for both options. Although the rendering "I have you in my heart" is supported by most commentators (including a Greek speaker like Chrysostom) and by the linguistic rule that the accusative closest to the infinitive is normally regarded as the subject (here με), he admits that the second option "You have me in your heart" yields a smoother connection with what precedes: the Philippians' love for Paul provides a reason (δία) for his confidence. He thus translates: "And indeed it is right that I should feel this way about all of you — for I hold you dear in my heart [*or*, because you hold me dear in your heart]" (Silva 1984:50).

It is difficult to take a decision. Perhaps Silva is correct by allowing for both interpretations. In any case, this strong expression emphasizes the mutual affection between Paul and the Philippians

— an affection that is explicit from the context and rhetorically significant: it's one of the main factors underlying the continued co-operation of the Philippians in proclaiming the gospel.

Verse 8 once more reveals the depth of Paul's feelings for the Philippians: "God is my witness how I long for you all with the intense love of Christ Jesus" (μάρτυς γάρ μου ὁ θεὸς ὡς ἐπιποθῶ πάντας ὑμᾶς ἐν σπλάγχνοις Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ). By expressing his affection in a compassionate way (see rhetorical techniques below) Paul is confirming their relationship. This relationship is the direct result of their continued co-operation in the gospel. To discontinue this co-operation, is to harm the relationship between them.

Lastly, it is important to draw attention to a few rhetorical techniques that Paul employs in this section. All these techniques are aimed at strengthening the relationship between himself and the Philippians. They are appeals to emotional issues such as affection and friendship, which form the basis of their past and continued co-operation.

- The position of πεποιθώς at the beginning of verse 6 emphasizes Paul's trust or confidence.
- διὰ τὸ ἔχειν με ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμᾶς in verse 7 is an expression indicating the deep feelings of the participants towards each other. Uncertainty about the interpretation of the phrase also retards the reading/hearing process, thereby accentuating its content.
- In verse 8 Paul expresses his desire to be with the Philippians. The expression in itself strengthens the relationship between them and could be regarded as a highly effective technique (Tolmie 2004:223). This relationship is essential for their continued co-operation in the work of the gospel.
- To emphasize the trustworthiness of his desire, Paul uses a solemn oath at the beginning of verse 8: μάρτυς γάρ μου ὁ θεός ("God is my witness"). An oath is a powerful rhetorical device (Tolmie 2004:69) and by using it here Paul underscores the earnestness of his desire to be with them. He calls to God as the One who can testify to the truthfulness of his feelings (Loh & Nida 1977:15).
- The term σπλάγχνα (verse 8), which literally means "entrails", is used by way of metonymy to indicate the spiritual center of

one's emotions (Hendriksen 1971: 58; Schenk 1984:109). It is usually translated with "love" or "compassion". According to Louw & Nida (1988:295), the unit *σπλάγχνα Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ* is ambiguous. It could mean: "the compassion which Christ Jesus Himself has for you, or: for me". On the other hand, it may also characterize the kind of love that Paul has for the Philippians, in the sense of: "How I long for all of you, even with the kind of love Christ Jesus has for you". This kind of love adds depth to an already emotional passage.

3.3.4 Philippians 1:9-11: Praying for their total sanctification

Philippians 1:9-11 represents another shift in Paul's strategy, namely to report on the content of his prayer. He prays for the complete sanctification of the Philippians. It is a direct response to the rhetorical situation of the letter: to persuade the Philippians to persevere in living the gospel.

He reports that he prays "that their love may abound more and more in knowledge and total discernment" (*καὶ τοῦτο προσεύχομαι, ἵνα ἡ ἀγάπη ὑμῶν ἔτι μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον περισσεύῃ ἐν ἐπιγνώσει καὶ πάσῃ αἰσθήσει*, verse 9). The fact that *ἀγάπη* does not have an object, means that the term is used in a comprehensive sense (Loh & Nida 1977:16; Schenk 1984:110). And Paul is not praying that the Philippians should love one another; he is praying that the love (which they already have) should "abound more and more", that it should keep on growing (present tense). It is also important to note that the subject is not "love", but "you". The unit *ἡ ἀγάπη ὑμῶν*, as well as *ὑμᾶς* in verse 10, clearly indicate this: "Ihr — hinsichtlich eurer Agape Hingabe — mögt wachsen" (Schenk 1984:117).

Their love should abound "in knowledge and total discernment". The way in which Paul entwines knowledge with love means — according to Silva (1988:59) — that love is cultivated by knowledge and, may I add, "a complete capacity for understanding" (see Loh & Nida 1977:384 on *αἰσθήσις*). Love is not mindless. It finds expression in knowledge and understanding. The combination of *ἐπιγνώσις* ("knowledge") and *αἰσθήσις* ("understanding") is thus not just a

stylistic device: Paul uses αἰσθήσις to specify the practical outworkings of knowledge (Silva 1988:59).

Three other expressions in verses 10-11 emphasize the moral perfection for which Paul prays: εἰλικρινεῖς (“sincere”), ἀπόσκοποι (“blameless”) and πεπληρωμένοι καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης (“filled with the fruit of righteousness”). The first two expressions are clearly ethical. As to the third one, Silva (1988:60-61) argues for yet another ethical interpretation, in which case the genitive (δικαιοσύνης) is to be viewed as epexegetical: “the fruit that consists in right conduct”. The other possibility is to interpret δικαιοσύνη in a forensic sense, in which case the genitive is to be understood as subjective: “fruit that result from our justified state”. Tolmie (2000:216) agrees with Silva in view of

- the use of κάρπος δικαιοσύνης in the rest of the Bible, and
- the immediate context in which it is used here, which suggests an ethical interpretation.

Rhetorically significant is the remark that the κάρπος δικαιοσύνης comes “through Jesus Christ” (τὸν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, verse 11). Vincent (1961:14) draws attention to the defining force of τὸν and remarks: “Righteousness without Christ cannot be fruitful (Jn. 15:5, 8, 16).” It is Christ who secured for the believer a new state, so that by virtue of this new state he or she can produce fruit. The remark τὸν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ serves to persuade the Philippians to persevere in living the gospel, since Christ is the One who enables them to produce the καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης. It is yet another example of an argument based on divine support.

Equally significant is the expression εἰς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ at the end of verse 10. As in verse 6, the “day of Christ” is not the day of judgement, but of completion (see ἐπιτελεῖν in verse 6): the partial sanctification which they now have must be brought to completion “at the day of Christ”. This is in line with the emphasis that Paul places on progression (“abound more and more” verse 9), as well as with the persuasive function of the parallel expression in verse 6. The focus is on the partial character of their sanctification and its completion on that joyful day when Christ returns.

The ultimate goal of all that is mentioned in the prayer should be “to the glory and praise of God” (εἰς δόξαν καὶ ἔπαινον θεοῦ,

verse 11). Underlying both “glory” and “praise” is a causative relation, an implied agent: it is people who must give these things to God (Loh & Nida 1977:18-19).

Lastly, Paul uses the following rhetorical techniques in this section (Phil. 1: 9-11):

- Silva (1988:58) already drew attention to the stylistic crescendo in this prayer report. In verse 9 Paul prays that their love may abound “more and more” (ἔτι μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον). In the subsequent clauses he sets three goals before his readers: “so that you may test the things that matter” (verse 10) → “in order that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (verse 10) → “to the glory and praise of God” (verse 11). The focus is on the last element of such a crescendo: the ultimate goal of their growing in love is to the glory and praise of God.
- The metaphor *κάρπος* in verse 11 is used to focus on the unity of all deeds acceptable to God. The expression *κάρπος δικαιοσύνης* is a positive statement, which differs from *εἰλικρινεῖς* (“not having anything bad about you”) and *ἀπρόσκοποι* (“without having done anything for which you could be blamed”) with their negative undertones (Loh & Nida 1977:17).

To summarise Paul’s argument in Philippians 1:3-11: The dominant rhetorical strategy of the section can be described as “Recounting his prayers to ensure the continued co-operation and total sanctification of the Philippians”. He begins the section by thanking them for their co-operation up to now (Phil. 1:3-5). The complicated sentence structure in verses 3-5 could be attributed to the intensity of Paul’s emotion. The expression *κοινωνία εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον* serves to identify the Philippians as missionaries in the same sense as he is a missionary. Their participation in proclaiming the gospel has been there “from the first day until now”. This forceful expression is another indication of Paul’s emotional state. It could also serve to exaggerate the time that the Philippians had been proclaiming the gospel, thereby accentuating their perseverance. Supportive rhetorical techniques include the *paronomasia* in 1:4, emphasizing the intensity of Paul’s emotions, and the repetition of *πάντων ὑμῶν/πάντας ὑμᾶς* in Philippians

1:4, 7 and 8, which stresses the corporate nature of the Christian community in Philippi and reminds them of the danger of divisions.

In Philippians 1:6-8 Paul expresses his trust that the co-operation will continue. The major source of his confidence is the fact that God will complete his work (verse 6). In this way the Philippians are reminded that their work is of divine origin: to continue with it is to do what God wants them to do. God's involvement, as well as the assurance that He will bring it to completion "on the day of Christ", should persuade the Philippians to persevere in proclaiming the gospel. The type of argument used here, could be described as an argument based on divine support. Paul's confidence is also justified by the fact that the Philippians had been "partakers of grace" (verse 7): their lives had provided evidence of their co-operation and perseverance. This is an argument based on past achievement. Supportive rhetorical techniques used to strengthen the relationship between Paul and the Philippians, include the position of *πεποιθώς* at the beginning of verse 6; expressing his desire to be with them and appealing to God to testify as to the truthfulness of this desire (verse 8); and the use of expressions indicating intense emotions: "I have you/you have me in your heart" (verse 7) and *σπλάγχνα*, used by way of metonymy for intense, deeply-felt love (verse 8).

In verses 9-11 Paul is praying that the Philippians, with regard to the love that they already have, should grow. This love is cultivated by knowledge and the capacity to understand. The argument here is related to the rhetorical situation of the letter, especially the problem of unity. This problem should be addressed with the knowledge and understanding, that cultivate love. Paul informs the Philippians that he is also praying for their moral perfection. No one has yet arrived at his or her spiritual destination. Thus, the Philippians should persevere and not abandon the struggle. The partial sanctification that they now have should be brought to completion "at the day of Christ" (verse 10). With a view to this joyful day the Philippians should persevere in living the gospel, in producing the fruit of right conduct (*κάρπος δικαιοσύνης*) that comes through Jesus Christ. Since Christ is the One who enables them to produce this fruit, it is another example of an argument based on divine support. Supportive rhetorical

techniques are the stylistic crescendo in verses 9-11 and the metaphorical use of κάρπος in verse 11.

4. CONCLUSION

Philippians 1: 1-11 is not preparatory for the arguments in the letter, but already an integral part of Paul's argumentation. The dominant rhetorical strategy in Philippians 1: 1-2 can be described as "using the salutation to confirm his special relationship with the Philippians". The dominant strategy in the next section (Phil. 1: 3-11) is to recount his prayers in order to persuade them to continue their co-operation and progress towards total sanctification. Philippians 1: 3-11 could be divided into three parts, demarcated by shifts in the argument: Philippians 1: 3-5 (Thanking them for their co-operation up to now); Philippians 1: 6-8 (Trusting that their co-operation will continue); and Philippians 1: 9-11 (Praying for their total sanctification).

The two dominant rhetorical strategies are both in response to the rhetorical situation, as outlined in the introduction to the analysis (3.1 above). In analysing these strategies, the focus was on supportive rhetorical strategies, on exegetical issues that could have a rhetorical impact, and on the types of arguments used. Arguments based on divine support and past achievement have been identified, while Paul uses various rhetorical techniques to enhance the impact of his communication. Most important among these are emotional techniques, aimed at strengthening the relationship between himself and the Philippians. These arguments, supportive rhetorical strategies and techniques were all used in an attempt to persuade his fellow-Christians to persevere in proclaiming and living the gospel.

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Keywords

Rhetorical criticism

Functional approach

Phil. 1:1-11

Pauliniese literatuur

Trefwoorde

Retoriese analise

Funksionele benadering

Fil. 1:1-11

Pauline literature