

E. Cornelius

Prof. E. Cornelius, School of Christian Ministry and Leadership, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, South Africa.

E-mail: elma.cornelius@nwu.ac.za.

ac.za.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5420-0647>

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Paul's self-presentation and his opinion on the art of persuasion in 1 Corinthians

ABSTRACT

From Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 2:1 that he did not come to the Corinthians with eloquence/superiority of word or of wisdom, the question arises as to whether Paul was against the use of ancient rhetoric. Different references in this letter point to criticism against Paul where his authority was threatened. It was expected that Paul could easily fall into the trap of rhetorical display in his defence and presentation of himself in the letter. It becomes clear that Paul's persuasion strategies, used in 1 Corinthians to present himself, are in line with ancient rhetorical guidelines. However, even in the events of Paul's authority being jeopardised by the Corinthians, he could not be forced to exhibit his character in 1 Corinthians and fall into rhetorical display. In his presentation of himself, Paul displays a picture of dependence on God. His use of rhetoric in this letter confirms his avoidance of persuasive words of wisdom, as claimed in 1 Corinthians 2:1.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the ancient Graeco-Roman world, rhetoric – the art of persuasion – was highly valued as a skill and it played an important role in all contexts (Ferguson 1987:85-86, 89, 256). This explains why ancient rhetoric even formed part of the ancient education system. Aristotle (1947) wrote *Ars Rhetorica* as a guideline on how to communicate effectively. This begs the question: To what extent was Paul familiar with the persuasion strategies used in ancient societies



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and described in the classical handbooks on rhetoric? The vast majority of scholars agree that Paul probably did not formally study rhetoric, but that he at least “grasped the persuasive possibilities” (Forbes 2003:151; Hughes 2016:95; Porter & Dyer 2016:108).

From Paul’s statements in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that he was sent to preach – not with wisdom of word (*οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου*), in 1 Corinthians 2:1 that he did not come to the Corinthians with eloquence/superiority of word or of wisdom (*ἦλθον οὐ καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας*), and in 1 Corinthians 2:4 that his message and preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom (*ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις*¹), the questions arise as to what Paul’s opinion was on ancient rhetoric, and how it influenced his use of ancient persuasion strategies in his writings.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, exposed to the Roman culture and the Roman religion (Gill 2002:39-41), that faced challenges, due to an overemphasis on status (Gill 2002:42), “competitive individualism”, and “self-important individuals” (Garland 2003:26). Yoon (2020:59) writes that the purpose of 1 Corinthians was to expose the vanity of the wisdom of that age and to disclose the depths of the wisdom of God.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in reaction to oral reports from the household of Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11) and a letter given to him by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17; 7:1) (Gundry 2012:413). In 1 Corinthians 1:10-6:20, Paul responds to the oral reports and discusses the divisions (1 Cor. 1:10-4:21), the case of a man living with his stepmother (1 Cor. 5:1-13), lawsuits between Christians (1 Cor. 6:1-8), and immorality in general (1 Cor. 6:9-20). In 1 Corinthians 7:1-16:9, Paul replies to the questions raised in the letter. These questions concern marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-40), food (1 Cor. 8:1-11:1), order of public worship (1 Cor. 11:2-14:40), the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-58), and the collection for the church in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-9).

In what seems to be Paul’s defence of his character in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 (see Barnett 2011:8), Paul seems to offer his opinion on the art of persuasion with “I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom” (*ἦλθον οὐ καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας*) “as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God”. Louw and Nida (1988:736) translate the expression *καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας* in this particular verse with “high-sounding words or wisdom”. Barnett (2011:43) is of the opinion that this is Paul’s way to say that he preaches “simply and directly”. However, Paul rather seems to make a particular statement about ancient rhetoric. For Thiselton (2000:107), this is Paul’s statement that his “preaching is not competitive

1 According to the Nestle Aland Greek text.

rhetoric". Gardner (2018:122) views it as Paul saying that his preaching is "not powerful by worldly standards". According to Gundry (2012:417), Paul denies that he preached with the "rhetorical methods of sophistic philosophers". Forbes (2003:151) considers it Paul's way to claim that he "deliberately avoided" rhetorical style.² Garland (2003:85) prefers the metaphorical meaning of *ὑπεροχή*, namely "abundance", "superiority", or "pre-eminence". Garland's thinking makes most sense, that Paul then was against superiority of word, "pompous speech", "superior social status", "self-display", "preaching to exhibit human wisdom", and "preaching as a vehicle to exhibit the speaker's virtuosity".

According to Hanna (1983:288), Paul denied that he himself spoke in persuasive words of wisdom, while his words seem to be "full of the highest appeal to the soul of man". He is of the opinion that Paul wanted to communicate that his preaching was in contrast with the Corinthians' ideas of persuasive words of wisdom as they loved "the rhetorical flights of the artificial orators of the time". Gunderson (2009:255) mentions that Paul attacked "rhetorical sophists", who were indeed strong in word and deed, to show that weakness (the imitation of the suffering Christ) should be a symbol of superior rhetorical display. Garland (2003:52) elaborates on this weakness when he states that Paul recalled "his first preaching to them in weakness, fear and trembling", instead of "unadorned speech". Garland (2003:85) explains that, when Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 2:1 that he did not speak with the "superiority of word", he referred to rhetoric and speech that pretend social superior status – serving self-display. Paul was against preaching to exhibit human wisdom. He wanted to persuade his readers that "the way of Christianity" is the opposite of "the way of the world" (Verbrugge 2008:II, 2, c), that God "overturns the world's systems" (Fee 2014:94), including communication. While rhetorical skills in the ancient Graeco-Roman world "was a powerful way to achieve influence", Paul wanted to persuade them that God's power will bring a person closer to God (Verbrugge 2008:II, 2, c).

If it is correct that Paul was against superior rhetorical display, unadorned speech, pretended social superior status, self-display, and the way of the world, the question arises as to whether Paul made use of the persuasion strategies of ancient rhetoric when presenting himself in 1 Corinthians, without displaying himself. One does not get the impression that Paul is against rhetoric as such, but rather against an unethical use of

2 Bullmore (1995:173-204) argues that Paul had "exposure to Greco-Roman culture", that he spent most of his adult life in Tarsus – a "center of Greco-Roman rhetorical and literary culture", that during his missionary journeys he became aware of the "Greco-Roman rhetorical culture", and that he was "familiar with the conventions of Greco-Roman public address".

persuasion strategies. It seems as if Paul wants to persuade his readers that his preaching is “God-display” instead of “self-display”. Schrage (1991:225) considers the focus to be more on the one preached than on the preacher.

Blomberg (1994:12) interprets Paul to state that the content of one’s preaching is more important than one’s “oratorical skill”. What Paul wants to show is that the contents of his preaching affect the form of his preaching – that the contents of preaching demand an ethical use of rhetoric, in order to communicate effectively. Gardner (2018:123) also points out that the manner and contents of Paul’s preaching were “integrally intertwined”. As the gospel was his focus, Paul deliberately chose not to showcase himself in his preaching, but only God (Garland 2003:86). That is why he preached in weakness with fear and trembling (1 Cor. 2:3). According to Garland (2003:87), Paul did not come to his readers “as one who was self-important, competitive, or proud-hearted”. His theology affected his ethical use of persuasion strategies. In 1 Corinthians 2:5, Paul states the purpose of his approach, namely “that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power”. Paul does not want the outcome of his preaching to be his audience’s amazement at what he can do or knows, but the audience’s amazement at who God is and what He can do.

When Paul mentions his opinion on rhetoric in 1 Corinthians, however, his focus is not on his own character or on rhetoric, but on the character of his preaching. His preaching is presented to focus on the gospel without exhibiting human wisdom, or self-display. Paul came to the Corinthians in weakness, fear and trembling (1 Cor. 2:3), with a demonstration of the power of the Spirit (not himself) (1 Cor. 2:4). The question is whether Paul would not even focus on himself in cases where he was criticised? When his authority was compromised, would Paul not escape the focus of his preaching for a while to defend himself?

The question is whether Paul knew ancient rhetoric, whether he knew how to use the persuasion strategies of his time – the persuasive words of wisdom being criticised in 1 Corinthians. An interpretation through the classical rhetorical method of interpretation thus seems to be an option to interpret Paul’s use of persuasion strategies. Some scholars, however, criticise the use of the classical rhetorical method of interpretation, as there is always the danger of reading the use of ancient rhetorical persuasion strategies into the text. Tolmie (2005), Genade (2007), Snyman (2009b), and Prinsloo (2022) identified the need of a text-centred analysis when interpreting Paul’s rhetoric, in order to construct the persuasive strategy of the author from the text itself.

This article attempts to determine:

- Whether Paul's authority was jeopardised by the Corinthians that could force him to exhibit his character in 1 Corinthians.
- How Paul handled criticism against him in 1 Corinthians.
- Whether Paul makes use of ancient rhetorical persuasion strategies in his self-presentation in 1 Corinthians.
- How it relates to his opinion on the use of rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 2:1 and 4.

In the interpretation of the different passages in 1 Corinthians to determine how Paul responded to criticism against him, the necessary steps of interpretation such as socio-historical background, genre and structure, word studies, and stylistic devices are taken into account.

The persuasion strategies used by Paul in 1 Corinthians to present himself are interpreted from a rhetorical point of view and scholars' rhetorical interpretations, including both text-centred analyses and classical rhetorical interpretations of the persuasion strategies, are taken into account.

2. AN INTERPRETATION OF POSSIBLE CRITICISM AGAINST PAUL IN 1 CORINTHIANS

The letter gives one the idea that Paul experienced or heard about criticism against him among the Corinthians. The question is: How did Paul respond to the criticism when rejected, judged, and opposed?

2.1 Paul rejected by some

When he responds to the problem of factions or divisions among the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21, Paul refers to divisions (*σχίσματα*) and quarrels (*ἔριδες*) caused by different groups having different heroes among their leaders. In 1 Corinthians 1:12, he mentions that one of them follows Paul, another follows Apollos, another follows Cephas, and yet another follows Christ. According to Garland (2003:51), the vast majority of scholars assume that "the church was divided into coalitions that claim allegiance to" different persons. According to Verbrugge (2008:ii, A, 1), these divisions can point to different "worshiping communities" among the Corinthians. It is clear that some Corinthians rejected Paul as leader after meeting other church leaders (Barnett 2011:10-11).

It is important to consider the social-historical background for the different church leaders. Acts 18:1-4 reports how Paul taught in the synagogues in Corinth and when he left Corinth for Ephesus, other church leaders visited Corinth. Acts 18:24-28 mentions Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, who was a learned and eloquent man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, being instructed in the way of the Lord, teaching accurately, preaching in the synagogue, and working for God. Gundry (2012:416) believes that the followers of Apollos were attracted by his “learning and eloquence”. This seems possible when one reads in Acts 18 that Apollos spoke “boldly” in the synagogue (*παρρησιάζεσθαι*³ in v. 26) and “he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate” (*εὐτόνως γὰρ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις διακατηλέγγετο*⁴ in v. 28). Barnett (2011:11) opines that Apollos created a great impression in Corinth and perhaps left the Corinthians to doubt Paul’s “less-spectacular approach” – from there Paul’s arguments on rhetoric and wisdom in his preaching in 1 Corinthians 2.

Cephas was the Aramaic name of Peter, the disciple of Jesus and an apostle “who adhered to the Jewish law”. Scholars agree that Cephas’ admirers were most probably Jews (Gill 2002:46; Gundry 2012:416; Verbrugge 2008:II, A, 1). Barnett (2011:11) believes that “Peter may have created the impression that, since Paul had not been a disciple” of Jesus, he was not really an apostle. Barnett refers to Paul’s presentation of himself in 1 Corinthians where he seems to defend his apostleship (9:1-3; 15:8-11).

Gundry (2012:416) opines that those admiring Paul were probably loyal to him as he found the church in Corinth. Gundry (2012:416) views those “following Christ” to be those having an attitude of superior spirituality – or as Barnett (2011:17) calls them – the “super-spiritual ones”.

There is no indication in the letter of differences or conflict between Paul or Apollos or Cephas. The problem seems to have resided within the readers. They were quarrelling and fighting about mere people, and some criticised Paul, with the result to choose a different leader.

Between these different groups, there were divisions (*σχίσματα*) and quarrels (*ἔριδες*). It seems as if there was more than only normal conflict between these different groups. Their hanging on to different leaders caused differences of opinion with antagonism, disputes, anger, jealousy, dislike, and hostility (Louw & Nida 1988:439, 494). According to Verbrugge (2008:II, A, 1), the quarrelling and strife was a typical characteristic of a pagan society, as mentioned in Romans 1:29. It can be said that these differences must have harmed the Corinthian faith society.

3 This verb means to “speak openly” and to speak with “complete confidence” (Louw & Nida 1988:399).

4 This verb means “to defeat in a debate” (Louw & Nida 1988:439).

As many people were not in favour of Paul as their leader, Blomberg (1994:11) thinks that Paul's "authority was in jeopardy". This is in line with Barnett's (2011:11) idea that Paul addresses certain topics later in the letter in response to the criticism he received because of the eloquence of Apollos and the apostleship of Peter. Still, Garland (2003:52) rightly states that Paul is not defending himself in this letter. He does not compare himself to the other leaders or defend himself as leader. He does not "favour a particular leader over or against another" (Van der Merwe 2013:111). Paul does not exhort the readers to admire him instead of others. For Garland (2003:52), Paul's argument, in this instance, is to exhort the Corinthians to stop the "petty bickering and political infighting". Paul wants to make the readers aware of the schism and encourage them to face this problem (Van der Merwe 2013:111).

Gill (2002:47) points to the rhetorical questions Paul uses in 1:13 to confront the readers with their foolish behaviour: Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified? Were you baptised in the name of Paul? Paul definitely does not fight for his status and honour in this section, but rather for unity among the Corinthians. The criticism against him, does not persuade him to remove his focus for a moment from the gospel to his own authority.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul reaches back to the church's vision of leaders mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:12. He calls them "worldly" (1 Cor. 3:1), "infants in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1), and "mere humans" (1 Cor. 3:3), because they quarrel about leaders. Paul refers to their jealousy and quarrelling in 1 Corinthians 3:3. He does not defend himself as leader or say anything about the leadership of Apollos. He does, however, ask them: "What is Apollos? What is Paul?" (1 Cor. 3:5). Paul proceeds with an argument on leadership, stating that they are servants, each assigned a task by God (1 Cor. 3:5), having the same purpose (1 Cor. 3:8), and being co-workers in God's service (1 Cor. 3:9). He gives a final warning in 1 Corinthians 3:21 – So then, no more boasting⁵ about human leaders!

In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul explains the nature of their (Paul and other preachers such as Apollos) apostleship, and in 1 Corinthians 4:6, he mentions Apollos again without any criticism. In the letter-closing in the personal requests, Paul mentions Apollos for a last time. "Now about our brother Apollos", he reports in 1 Corinthians 16:12, "I urged him to go to you with the brothers". This is a vague statement by Paul that Apollos will come back to them when he has the opportunity. From Garland's (2003:595-596) discussion, it is clear that those among the Corinthians who

5 Watson (2003:78-81) shows how boasting or self-praise was typical in the Graeco-Roman world, and that it could be offensive and arouse envy. He points out, however, how Plutarch suggested particular techniques, in order to avoid these dangers.

admired Apollos wanted him back. It is clear from this last come-back to Apollos in 1 Corinthians 16:12 that Paul shows no opposition at all against Apollos and that he is willing to report to them about Apollos.

Paul does not defend himself and he does not criticise the other leaders. He does, however, communicate that the fights and quarrels about different leaders are not necessary and this remains his focus in this section. The threat to his authority, the quarrels and strife did not influence him at all to focus on himself in his preaching.

2.2 Paul being judged

In 1 Corinthians, Paul mentions himself being judged, by using different forms of the verb *ἀνακρίνω*. In both 1 Corinthians 4:3 and 9:3, it seems as if this is about a judicial enquiry, interrogation, and investigation in court (Louw & Nida 1988:553). In 1 Corinthians 4 Paul mentions people's judgement of him and he declares "I care very little if I am *judged* by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even *judge* myself" (ἐμοὶ δὲ εἰς ἐλάχιστόν ἐστιν, ἵνα ὑφ' ὑμῶν ἀνακριθῶ ἢ ὑπὸ ἀνθρωπίνης ἡμέρας· ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἑμαυτὸν ἀνακρίνω· (1 Cor. 4:3). Paul cares very little if people might interrogate him about his apostleship. Verbrugge (2008) explains that Paul wraps up his discussion of church unity in the context of church leaders in 1 Corinthians 4:1-7. Paul describes his leadership role as a servant (*ὑπηρέτας*) and slave (*οἰκονόμος*) in 1 Corinthians 4:1. Thiselton (2000:341) is of the opinion that, when Paul states "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court" in 1 Corinthians 4:3, it is not a sign of Paul's "thick-skinned" attitude towards the opinions of others. According to Thiselton, Paul wants to communicate through this that public opinion is not a reliable guide. According to Garland (2003:120), the argument is that the only judgement that counts comes from God. In 1 Corinthians 4:3, Paul does not seem to defend himself. It seems more like a simple statement to communicate to the Corinthians that God will be the one to judge him as servant.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul refers once again to people's judgement of him when he defends himself for declining payment. "This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me (Ἡ ἐμὴ ἀπολογία τοῖς ἐμὲ ἀνακρίνουσίν ἐστιν αὕτη (1 Cor. 9:3). Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 9:1 "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle?" Garland (2003:319-320) seems right to interpret the rhetorical questions in 1 Corinthians 9:1 not to communicate anger or defensiveness, but to simply introduce the issue at discussion. Paul defends his right to earn material support and argues that every labourer has the right to earn profit (Garland 2003:210).

2.3 Paul being opposed

In the personal requests in 1 Corinthians 16:5-18, in his discussion of the status of Apollos, Timothy, and Stephanas, Paul once again refers to the many who oppose him – “there are many who oppose me” (ἀντικείμενοι πολλοί. [1 Cor. 16:9]). In Paul's travel itinerary in 1 Corinthians 16:5-9, he promises to come to the Corinthians and expresses his wish to at least spend some time with them (1 Cor. 16:7). In 1 Corinthians 16:8-9, he then informs them that he will stay on in Ephesus until Pentecost, where there was resistance against him. However, the resistance against him did not cause Paul to leave Ephesus. This simple reference to the opposition in Ephesus shows that nothing will hinder Paul in his evangelisation. He is dedicated and does not run from opposition. Although some people criticised Paul in Ephesus, he does not mention any further details and does not defend himself.

2.4 Summary

The only instance where Paul seems to defend himself in 1 Corinthians is in 9:1-18, where he defends his right to earn material support, by asking different rhetorical questions. In general, it seems as if Paul refrains from defending himself openly in this letter in cases of criticism against him. Why does Paul not fight for his authority? Why does he not openly correct people's thinking about him?

According to Aristotle (*Ars Rhetorica* II. 1, 1378a6-20), the credibility of the speaker contributes to the effectiveness of persuasion and *ethos* is persuasion through the character of the speaker. Does this mean that, contrary to what ancient orators would have done, Paul did not make use of the persuasion strategy of *ethos* at all in 1 Corinthians?

It can be mentioned at this stage that Paul did not allow any threat to his authority among the Corinthians to distract his attention to focus on himself instead of his work as apostle among the Corinthians. This does not mean, however, that Paul did not present himself at all in his letter.

The next section focuses on Paul's self-presentation in 1 Corinthians from a rhetorical point of view. The question is: Does Paul really avoid self-display as in his opinion on rhetoric in 1 Corinthians?

3. RHETORICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE PERSUASION STRATEGIES USED BY PAUL IN HIS SELF-PRESENTATION IN 1 CORINTHIANS

Paul presents himself in 1 Corinthians as an apostle (1:1; 2:10-16; 3:10; 4:8-16; 9:1-18; 15:8-11); as one being thankful to God (1:4-7a); as one caring about the readers (1:4-7a); as one who preaches with the focus on God (2:1-5); as having the mind of Christ (2:16b); as servant of God (3:5; 4:1); as being weak (4:10); as prioritising the gospel (9:12-18), and as slave to all (9:19-23).

These instances of self-presentation in 1 Corinthians are interpreted rhetorically, by focusing on the rhetorical context, the overall rhetorical strategy, and the use of ancient persuasion strategies.

3.1 Paul called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God (1 Cor. 1:1)

In the letter-opening, Paul identifies himself as the author of the letter. What he deems important to share with his readers about himself right from the start is that he writes as an apostle who is called (*κλητὸς ἀπόστολος*⁶) by the will of God (*διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ*). McNamara (2008:81) also points to how Paul identifies himself in the letter-opening to “set the stage for the rest of the epistle”. As the letter-opening serves to introduce the readers to the author, Paul adds this description to his name, making use of the persuasion strategy of ethos to persuade the readers of his authority and trustworthiness. According to Aristotle (*Ars Rhetorica* I:ii, 4), ethos is the most effective means of proof. It is a strategy to remove all prejudices against the author and to render him worthy of confidence, showing the readers that he is informed, an expert, qualified, intelligent, reliable, and trustworthy (Campbell 1982:134-135).

Snyman (2009a:2) offers his interpretation of the salutation in 1 Corinthians from a text-centred rhetorical perspective. In “emphasizing the divine origin of his apostleship” in 1 Corinthians 1:1, the “dominant strategy” is “adapting the salutation” (in this verse the naming of the author) to “emphasize his divine calling”. Snyman (2009a:3) refers to Tolmie (2005:31) who indicates that Paul adapts the traditional patterns to the particular occasion of the letter to strengthen the overall rhetorical strategy. Garland’s (2003:40) opinion corresponds to this: “Paul’s Christological convictions” lead him to modify the standard greeting by

6 An *ἀπόστολος* is, according to Louw & Nida (1988:542), a person who is “commissioned by Jesus Christ for a particular task or role”.

introducing himself not as an ordinary person but as God's representative. According to Snyman (2009a:2), the broad picture of the letter shows that Paul attempts to persuade the Corinthians to accept his authority as apostle and the truth of his message, and to be obedient to his instructions on how to live a new life in Christ. This is why Snyman (2009a:3) regards Paul's description of himself in the salutation as "emphasiz[ing] that his apostleship is completely dependent on God". Snyman (2009a:3) identifies this type of argument as "an argument based on divine authorisation".

Paul introduces himself to the readers, through the strategy of ethos, as one who can be trusted, as he comes to them because of God – being called by God, being an apostle by the will of God (1 Cor. 1:1). He makes it very clear that he has no authority in himself. He approaches the readers as a "spokesman of God" (Cornelius 1998:68). On the one hand, this creates a humble picture of Paul as one who is dependent on God. On the other hand, this creates a picture of one being powerful because of God. However, the strategy of pathos is used simultaneously to affect the emotions of the readers, in order to persuade them to trust Paul and to respond to his letter in a positive way (Aristotle *Ars Rhetorica* I:ii, 5).

Paul's repetition of the themes of apostleship and authority from God in 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 3:10; 9:1-18, and 15:9-10 proves that he wanted to emphasise his reliance on God. In 1 Corinthians 2:12-13, he claims to speak in words taught by the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 3:10, Paul acknowledges that he works for God "by God's grace". Paul persuades his readers of his rights as an apostle in 1 Corinthians 9:1-18 and, in 15:9-10, he makes it clear that, although he does not deserve to be called an apostle, it is by God's grace that he works as an apostle.

Paul thus does apply ancient rhetorical skills for the sake of effective persuasion. What is characteristic of his creation of his ethos, however, is that he only presents himself in terms of God without any self-display. Instead of boasting about wealth or a good reputation, honour, virtue, or bodily excellencies, Paul talks about being an apostle through the grace of God while not deserving it. Paul is not an apostle out of own choice or because he was selected by human authorities, but because he was captured by God's call (Garland 2003:41). McNamara (2008:81) notes that Paul makes it clear that his identity is shaped by his relationship to Jesus Christ. Through this, Paul presents his own value system of rather pleasing God than to be honoured by people. In all of this, he proclaims God as a powerful, graceful, loving, caring, and present God.

Paul quotes Jeremiah 9:23 in 1 Corinthians 1:31: “let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord”. Watson (2003:77-78) sums it up, stating that boasting should not be “anthropocentric”, but “theocentric”. This is what Paul does in 1 Corinthians – he boasts about God’s acts in his life, confessing God.

3.2 Paul being thankful to God (1 Cor. 1:4-7a)

The thanksgiving is typically part of the letter-openings of most of the Pauline letters. In 1 Corinthians, Paul gives thanks to God for the readers for grace given to them (1 Cor. 1:4), for being enriched (1 Cor. 1:5), and for their spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 1:7).

Snyman (2009a:4-5) interprets the thanksgiving from a text-centred approach and identifies the rhetorical strategy in this section as “thanking God for the Corinthians and their gifts” (Snyman 2009a:5). He shows how this strategy is served, by using arguments “based on divine involvement” in 1 Corinthians 1:4-6. The readers are persuaded of God’s involvement in their lives when Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 1:4 to God’s grace given to them in Christ, in 1:5 to their enrichment in him, and in 1:6 to Christ being among them and God confirming the author’s testimony about them. Snyman (2009a:5) indicates that the fact that God confirms Paul’s testimony serves as a guarantee to the truth of Paul’s gospel.

By directly giving thanks to God, Paul indirectly praises the readers, and presents himself as one caring about the well-being of the readers (Cornelius 1998:79; Verbrugge 2008:1B), and one continuously praying when he says “I thank God continuously for you” (*Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν*). Garland (2003:47) refers to Paul’s “regular habit of giving thanks”. This testifies to Paul having a relationship with God, knowing and caring about the readers.⁷ Through the persuasion strategy of ethos, Paul creates a particular positive picture of his character and his relationship with God and the readers. At the same time, Paul makes use of the strategy of pathos in his attempt to affect the emotions of the readers to trust him for knowing God and caring about them. The strategy of pathos also surfaces in Paul’s attempt to move the readers to trust in God, as God is already involved actively in their lives.

As the thanksgiving forms part of the letter-opening, it makes sense to use persuasion strategies to persuade the readers to trust the author, even before the commencement of the letter-body. Through the thanksgiving, Paul persuades the readers that he cares about their well-being and this guarantees a positive response to the remainder of the letter. Paul’s

7 Vorster (1990:115) is of the opinion that, in a case like this, the intention is not thanksgiving, but to express that what is important to the readers is also an interest of the speaker or author.

rhetorical strategy can thus be defined as “reporting his continuous thanksgiving about God’s care for the readers in the letter-opening”, in order to ensure goodwill from the readers even before he addresses the main arguments in the letter. Paul seems to know how to use the ancient persuasion strategies. Verbrugge (2008:1B) refers to his “good rhetorical style”. It is, however, significant that Paul limits himself in self-display. What he discloses about his own character is meant to serve the message about God.

3.3 Paul’s preaching focuses on God (1 Cor. 2:1-5)

In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Paul presents the character of his preaching: “I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God”. As argued in section 1 above, Paul claims that his preaching is free from an unethical use of persuasion strategies, free from superior rhetorical display or self-display. Paul wants to persuade his readers that his preaching only showcases God, that the content of his preaching is more important than his oratorical skill.

Snyman (2008:213) formulates the rhetorical strategy used in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 as “using the contrast between divine and human wisdom to explain Paul’s preaching”. He refers to the “shift in expectancy” in this contrast, as Paul draws the attention to the work of the Spirit (Snyman 2008:214). In this line of thinking, Paul shows that his power is not in himself but in the work of the Spirit, that his preaching “does not originate in man, but in God” (Snyman 2008:212).

This is an example of the strategy of ethos, as Paul establishes a positive picture of himself as preacher. As preacher, Paul is affected by the God he proclaims, in such a way that he aims to exhibit God’s power instead of human power. In 1 Corinthians 2:2, Paul states that his focus was on Christ and his crucifixion alone. Paul is a humble preacher, displaying God instead of himself in his preaching. Instead of displaying his own power, he rather displays the power of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:4). Ciampa and Rosner (2010:112) note that Paul does not want to project his own image, but rather the image of Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 2:5, Paul makes it clear that he wants the readers’ faith to rest on God’s power and not on human wisdom. This has the potential to affect the readers emotionally, being persuaded that Paul has the right attitude as a preacher dependent on God’s power (Verbrugge 2008:II, A, 2, d). This is called pathos and has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of Paul’s preaching.

With regard to the use of the persuasion strategy of *logos*, Paul makes use of opposites to make his point. While ancient people regarded rhetoric to be a powerful show of human wisdom, Paul states the opposite. Instead of coming to them with superior rhetorical display, he comes in weakness, fear, and trembling (1 Cor. 2:3). He indirectly says about God that all power belongs to God. Paul does know how to use ancient rhetorical persuasion strategies. The difference is that, as apostle of Christ, he keeps his focus on God.

3.4 Having the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16b)

In 1 Cor. 2:6-16, Paul explains that God's wisdom is revealed by the Spirit. As apostles, he says, they proclaim a message of wisdom (1 Cor. 2:6) and this message of wisdom is revealed by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10). They do not proclaim in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13). Having the Spirit of God is, therefore, important. Van der Merwe (2013:118) discusses the relationship between the "wisdom of God", the "spiritual man", and the "mind" of Christ".

Paul distinguishes between two groups – the believers and the unbelievers. The believers proclaim the message of God's wisdom, whereas the unbelievers cling on to the wisdom of this world. The difference for the believers lies in their guidance by the Spirit while having the mind of Christ. Having the mind of Christ is to understand, reason, think, and make decisions like Christ (Louw & Nida 1988:324-325). According to Willis (1989:118), this results in "sobriety, watchfulness, faith, hope and life", and having an outlook on life "shaped by an awareness of Christ". Willis (1989:121) explains that having the mind of Christ involves an "ethical outlook", manifesting in "attitudes" and "conduct". Van der Merwe (2013:118, 126) offers the same opinion, namely that it is about obedience, being "in harmony with God's mind", desiring to "God's will", and to "reflect God's glory".

In 1 Corinthians 2:16, Paul concludes this section by quoting from Isaiah 40:13: "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" It is obvious that no one can teach God. Paul states: "but we have the mind of Christ" (*ἡμεῖς δὲ νοῦν Χριστοῦ ἔχομεν*). According to Verbrugge (2008:II, A, 2, d) Paul implies that, although no one can teach God anything, they can still have the mind of Christ through their relationship with Christ and the Spirit. Being spiritual guarantees having the mind of Christ (Garland 2003:99).

What does Paul say about his own character in this section? He declares that he has the mind of Christ, due to his relationship with God, being guided by the Spirit. Paul persuades his readers of his faith and of his proclamation of God's wisdom. This is *ethos*, affecting the emotions

of the readers (pathos) to trust him as their preacher and author and to live through the Spirit, in order to have the mind of Christ. It is important to note that this is another example of Paul establishing his character in relation to God.

3.5 Servant of God (1 Cor. 3:5; 4:1)

In 1 Corinthians 3:5, Paul mentions that he and Apollos, as church leaders, are “servants” (διάκονοι) and, in 1 Corinthians 4:1, he specifically claims that they, as apostles, are “servants of Christ” (ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ). Louw and Nida (1987:460) define both the διάκονος and ὑπηρέτης as helpers who render services – servants who are voluntarily serving God (Verbrugge 2008:II, A, 3, a). Barnett (2011:53) explains that the servant served on behalf of his master, “in his name and under his authority”. In 1 Corinthians 3:5b, Paul makes it clear that God has assigned each servant a task and, in 3:6, he explains that his particular task was to plant as a founder of the church, although he acknowledges that the different ministries are equal and “complementary under God” (Garland 2003:106). However, in this whole discussion, Paul focuses on God and the servants’ dependence on God (Garland 2003:106). In 1 Corinthians 3:7, Paul makes it clear that he and Apollos, as founder and developer, are not important, as God is the One who makes things grow.

In Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:1 to regard them as servants of Christ (ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ), he adds another characteristic to being a servant of God. He states that, as servants, they are “stewards of the mysteries of God” (οἰκονόμους μυστηρίων θεοῦ). An οἰκονόμος is a person who has “authority and responsibility for something” (Louw & Nida 1988:477) and, as servants of God, these church leaders have the responsibility and authority from God to distribute the mysteries of God to others (Garland 2003:118). McNamara (2008:123) points out that being stewards of God was a position of great responsibility and honour.

Like all apostles, Paul serves God, while God trusts him enough to entrust him with his “mysteries”. Paul presents, about himself, his relationship with God and his calling to serve the church. This is an example of the persuasion strategy of ethos. Paul’s establishment of his ministry in these verses also serves as pathos, as it has the potential to affect the emotions of the readers to realise that it is not Paul at work, in this instance, but actually God at work in Paul. Paul wants to persuade the readers that all leaders are equal as an appeal for unity.

3.6 Paul being weak (1 Cor. 4:10)

When Paul discusses his preaching in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, he mentions himself preaching in weakness (*ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ*). In 1 Corinthians 1:25, he mentions God's weakness (*τὸ ἀσθενές τοῦ θεοῦ*) and, in 1 Corinthians 1:27, he states that God chose the weak (*τὰ ἀσθενῆ*). In 1 Corinthians 4:10, Paul describes himself with the apostles as being weak (*ἡμεῖς ἀσθενεῖς*) and, in 1 Corinthians 9:22, he acknowledges that he became weak for the sake of the weak, in order to win the weak (*ἐγενόμην τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν ἀσθενής, ἵνα τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς κερδήσω*). According to Louw and Nida (1988:678), *ἀσθενεία* is a state of incapacity, limitation, and weakness. It can also refer to an illness or disability (Louw & Nida 1988:270). That is the reason why Fee (2014:98) considers Paul's weakness to be a physical illness. The weakness can also be understood psychologically (Louw & Nida 1988:318), meaning that Paul could have referred to himself preaching without confidence. This makes sense when one reads about Paul's preaching in weakness with fear and trembling (*ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ* [1 Cor. 2:3]).

Garland (2003:87) summarises the different opinions among scholars on the cause for Paul's fear and trembling, but Pogoloff's (1992:131) idea that it refers to the "opposite of the strength and boldness" of a skilled orator makes most sense. In order to rebuke the readers for clinging on to wisdom, power, and honour, Paul emphasises the contrast when he mentions, in 1 Corinthians 4:10, that we are fools but you are wise, we are weak but you are strong, you are honoured but we are dishonoured. These contrasting words give an idea of the words of high status, probably used by the readers – wise, strong, and honour (Gill 2002:66) and Paul seems to be sarcastic in these statements (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:182). Ciampa and Rosner (2010:183) call it Paul's "shock tactics".

McNamara (2008:143) points out the irony in these verses as Paul seems to engage in self-shaming, while he is actually shaming the readers. The rhetorical strategy then is to motivate the Corinthians to reconsider their thinking and behaviour, in order to act as people following Jesus instead of people "elevating themselves to the place of ruling" (McNamara 2008:144). The indirect command to the Corinthians, is to "match their conduct with their confession" (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:183).

Paul presents himself as being weak – "stripped of self-reliance" (Van der Merwe 2013:123). In 1 Corinthians 4:11-12, he explains the weakness he and other missionaries experience as apostles, being hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, beaten, homeless, and hard-working. Paul presents his shameful circumstances of suffering and disgrace instead of glory. This has the potential of the persuasion strategy of pathos to affect the readers'

emotions not only to feel sorry for them, but also to shame them for what they cling on to while others suffer. The *ethos* Paul presents of himself and other missionaries features in 1 Corinthians 4:12, namely that, in spite of these circumstances, they endure it, answer kindly, and bless. In 4:16, he urges the readers to imitate his behaviour and it is clear that, although Paul states in 1 Corinthians 4:14 that he does not write this to shame them, he is actually aiming at shaming them and moving them emotionally to adapt their conduct. Paul presents his weaknesses rather than his strengths and cannot be blamed for self-displaying.

3.7 Main priority is the gospel (1 Cor. 9:12-18)

In his discussion of the rights of apostles, Paul defends the right of apostles to food and drink (1 Cor. 9:1-18). However, in 1 Corinthians 9:12, he states: “[W]e did not use this right”. Instead of using the right to food and drink, Paul claims that they “put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ” (ἀλλὰ πάντα στέγομεν ἵνα μή τινα ἐγκοπὴν δῶμεν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ). Paul's main priority is the gospel of Christ and he presents himself as one who not only preaches the gospel, but whose life “reflects gospel priorities” (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:410). This is his use of the persuasion strategy of *ethos*, and at the same time he gets an opportunity to affect the readers emotionally to respond with trusting him as their leader and preacher.

Paul decided to give up his right as apostle to receive material support from the Corinthians, in order not to hinder the progress of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:12). The rhetorical strategy in this passage seems to be Paul's attempt to persuade the readers of his commitment to the gospel by explaining his refusal for support. Paul presents himself in a humble way as one who willingly proclaims the gospel with no expectations from people. His focus is on God and the gospel.

3.8 Slave to all (1 Cor. 9:19-23)

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul is still presenting the gospel as his priority when he uses the metaphor of the slave to present himself. In 1 Corinthians 9:19, he states that he willingly enslaved himself to everyone (Ἐλεύθερος γὰρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων πᾶσιν ἑμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα) with the purpose to win as many as possible (ἵνα τοὺς πλείονας κερδήσω). Paul is a free man and does not belong to any patron “that might wish to own him” (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:422). However, he is willing to submit himself as a slave out of free will. The purpose of his enslavement is for the sake of salvation of as many as possible (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:422).

In verses 20-22, he explains how he became a slave to everyone by adapting his missionary strategies according to his target audiences. Ciampa and Rosner (2010:430) refer to Paul's willingness to give up his right to live according to his own culture and context. In verse 22, he states the purpose of his becoming all things to all people, "so that I might save some" (*ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω*), and, in verse 23, he mentions that his willingness to be a slave is with the purpose to "share in its blessings" (*ἵνα συγκοινωνὸς αὐτοῦ γένωμαι*). Paul adapts his missionary strategies not to please the people, but to please God.

Why would Paul humble himself in this way? In 1 Corinthians 9:23, he explains that he is a slave to everyone "for the sake of the gospel" (*διὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον 9:23*). Paul presents himself as one whose character and behaviour are determined by the gospel – powerless for the sake of the gospel. Paul's rhetorical strategy, in this section of the letter, is the strategy of ethos to persuade his readers of his commitment to the gospel by even enslaving him to people. The power of his ministry is not in him being strong and mighty, but in serving a powerful God. Using the strategy of pathos, Paul persuades his readers of his commitment to God and to the believers, in order to receive trust.

4. CONCLUSION

In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul denies that his ministry among the Corinthians was with persuasive words of wisdom. Different references in this letter point to criticism against Paul where his authority was threatened, and the expectation was that Paul could easily fall into the trap of rhetorical display and self-display in his defence and presentation of himself in the letter, in order to defend his authority.

It is clear that Paul's persuasion strategies, used in 1 Corinthians to present himself, are in line with ancient rhetorical guidelines. Paul does not refuse human conventions for good communication, as suggested by Gardner (2018:126). However, even in the events of the Corinthians the Corinthians jeopardising Paul's authority, he could not be forced to exhibit his character in 1 Corinthians and fall into rhetorical display. In his presentation of himself, Paul focuses on himself in relation to God. He presents a humble picture of himself as a servant of God, always having the gospel as his focus point.

McNamara (2008:93) observes that the letter-greeting and the thanksgiving serve to define the roles of the "main characters in the Corinthian congregation". In his opinion, Jesus is presented as the main character, while the Corinthians are the clients of Jesus who have been

blessed with gifts, while Paul is the apostle of Jesus. Paul then presents different characteristics of himself in this letter, all in relation to God – he is an apostle by the will of God, thankful to God, caring about the readers, focusing on God in his preaching, prioritising the gospel, having the mind of Christ, being weak, a servant of God, and a slave to all. Paul's presentation of himself creates a picture of humility and dependence on God. Becker (2020) shows how humility as virtue was, in fact, the foundation of the ethic Paul introduced to churches. Paul's presentation of his ethos in 1 Corinthians is that he is not only a voice of the values he preaches, but that he displays those values. In his self-presentation, he does not display himself, but God, who is the content of his preaching.

Paul's use of rhetoric in his letter confirms his avoidance of persuasive words of wisdom as claimed in 1 Corinthians 2:1, understood to be superior rhetorical display, self-display, unadorned speech, pretended social superior status, and the way of the world.

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