

# Desire spiritual gifts that edify: A text-generated persuasion of 1 Corinthians 14:1–40

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Paul's first epistle to the Corinthian church details the various problems it faced, with the primary issue in 1 Corinthians 14 being the use of spiritual gifts. Churches today are not free from similar issues, making Paul's letter particularly relevant, especially regarding spiritual gifts. This article interprets 1 Corinthians 14:1–40, focusing on Paul's persuasion of the Corinthians towards proper use of spiritual gifts. The interpretation employs a text-centred rhetorical approach called 'text-generated persuasion-interpretation' (TGPI), which avoids imposing a predefined rhetorical model, whether ancient or contemporary. Following Tolmie and Snyman's framework, the study identifies the dominant rhetorical strategy in each pericope and examines how Paul uses rhetorical techniques to enhance his communication's effectiveness. The article highlights Paul's rhetorical objectives in 1 Corinthians 14:1–40 and how he achieves them. Specifically, it addresses two key questions: (1) How can the author's primary rhetorical objective be described? (2) How does the author achieve this objective? The conclusion asserts that Paul's rhetorical strategies in 1 Corinthians 14 effectively guide churches towards proper use of spiritual gifts, making his teachings relevant to contemporary church issues.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** Reading 1 Corinthians through rhetorical criticism is common, although there is no consensus on approach. This article, allowing the text to speak for itself, aims to enhance understanding of Pauline rhetoric, its application to modern church practices, and New Testament scholarship. Using the TGPI method, it integrates classical rhetorical criticism and socio-historical aspects to offer a fresh perspective on the chapter, making Paul's teachings more relevant to contemporary audiences.

**Keywords:** text-generated persuasion-interpretation (TGPI); rhetorical analysis; Corinthian church; spiritual-gifts; edification.

## Introduction

Chapter 14 of the first book of Corinthians builds upon the foundational guidance provided in 1 Corinthians 12 regarding the utilisation of spiritual gifts within the Corinthian church. In 1 Corinthians 12:7, Paul explicitly states, 'a manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good' [ἐκάστῳ δὲ δίδεται ἡ φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον]. This establishes the premise for his detailed discourse in 1 Corinthians 14, where he primarily concentrates on the spiritual gifts of prophecy and tongues, emphasising their role in benefiting the ecclesiastical community (1 Cor 14:5). Moreover, Paul's exposition in 1 Corinthians 13 underscores the essential disposition required in exercising these gifts: love. He asserts that love is the supreme guiding principle, without which the practice of spiritual gifts is futile. Louw and Nida (eds. 1996:688) describe practising spiritual gifts in love as an extraordinary degree of excellence, highlighting its unparalleled significance. This introduction aims to contextualise Paul's teachings on spiritual gifts, linking the theological principles in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 with the practical instructions in 1 Corinthians 14. By doing so, it establishes a clear framework for understanding the proper utilisation of spiritual gifts, governed by the biblical standard of love.

In 1 Corinthians 14, the discourse on using spiritual gifts begins with a caveat. Grounded in the guidance of love, not regulation (Talbert 2002:109), Paul exhorts the Corinthians to 'pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy' [διώκετε τὴν ἀγάπην and ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε, 1 Cor 14:1]. On the one hand, Fee (2014:722) considers 1 Corinthians 14:1–40 as corrective, particularly concerning the utilisation of the gift of tongues. On the other hand, Witherington (1995:360) asserts that we should not interpret the correction as implying that spiritual gifts inherently created disorder in the Corinthian church. Rather, it was the conduct of practitioners who did not adhere to the guidance of love – namely, seeking

to edify the church in the utilisation of spiritual gifts – that engendered disorder and division within the church.

The same holds true today: if spiritual gifts are exercised within the church, there is a potential for disorder and division to arise because of misguided motives, specifically a lack of love's guidance. The detailed issues highlighted in the Corinthian correspondence illuminate challenges that contemporary churches may still encounter regarding the utilisation of spiritual gifts (Dutch 2005:1). Therefore, this article proposes to advance a novel methodological approach for interpreting and applying Paul's guidance on the utilisation of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 14:1–40. Although cognisant of the debates on whether the miraculous spiritual gifts continue today or have ceased, the scope of this article does not permit dialogue with scholars on this issue. The focus of this article is on how the proposed methodology, which has never been employed to interpret 1 Corinthians 14:1–40 before, may be applied to interpret it. Consequently, it provides the flexibility for contemporary readers of this text from diverse persuasions to draw conclusive applications for their context. Moreover, this methodology aims to advance our understanding and persuade the church to exercise spiritual gifts in a manner that edifies through love.

## Methodological consideration

Many scholars interpret this passage using the grammatical-historical critical method of exegesis, exploring the historical context behind the text that produced 1 Corinthians to understand how it was perceived in its original cultural and social milieu. Their consensus is that understanding these factors of an ancient text like 1 Corinthians may bring us closer to the same understanding and application that the author and original audience had (Bartholomew 2015; Fee 2014; Kaiser & Silva 2007; Thomas 2002; Zuck 1991). A related methodological approach is the socio-historical method, whose proponents assert that the degree of certainty in understanding an ancient text cannot be attained without comprehending the socio-historical context of a letter (Virkler & Ayayo 2007:80–81). Esler (1994:22) emphasises that New Testament texts must be interpreted as products of their distinct cultural contexts, which are significantly different from our own. To prevent ethnocentric and anachronistic misinterpretations, it is crucial to consider these contextual differences when analysing ancient texts. A thorough understanding of local customs and socio-historical conditions not only enhances our comprehension of the Pauline corpus but also enables a more precise interpretation of these texts (Esler 1994:22).

Conversely, other scholars contend that the text alone suffices to provide us with the information necessary to comprehend the occasion that gave rise to the text. Snyman (2016:2) asserts that the matter of understanding what the author seeks to persuade the audience about is solely embedded in the text. Hence, the rhetorical situation is to be preferred over the socio-historical or grammatical-historical approach to discerning the text's intent. The 'entextualised' situation that occasioned the writing of the text presents us with the complex of people,

the events the author delineates, and the actual exigence created by the author (Bitzer 1986:1–4; Kennedy 1984:5; Snyman 2016:2). The author, as gleaned from the text, provides us with sufficient material to interpret the authorial intent and any external factor adds no value to understanding the text.

This approach is particularly crucial for conducting a rhetorical exegesis of the text. According to Genade (2007:55), the rhetorical interpretation proposed herein confines the exegete to what can be discerned within the text itself, based on the presupposition that 'every discourse owes its existence to a particular situation that necessitated its creation'. If that situation is not evident in the text, it is not incorporated into the rhetorical interpretation. This rhetorical approach is distinctive in that comprehending the rhetoric employed by the author to persuade his audience is essential for grasping the meaning and application of ancient texts. Some scholars contend that this can only be achieved through the lens of ancient rhetoric (Collins 2016; Cornelius 1998; Mitchell 1991; Schüssler-Fiorenza 1987; Witherington 1995). However, Porter and Deyer (2016:157) remain unconvinced that Paul adhered strictly to ancient rhetorical conventions. Similarly, this article posits that while Paul was proficient in rhetoric, he adapted it to ensure his works could be comprehended by the common layperson and not solely through the lens of rhetoric. Although the previously mentioned scholars provide interpretations based on their respective methodologies, they often consider the components of other methodologies without giving them sufficient detailed attention.

For instance, in works employing the historical-grammatical method, attempts are made to identify the rhetoric in 1 Corinthians, but often without a comprehensive analysis of how the rhetorical techniques and stylistic devices function to enhance the author's message. In rhetorical treatises, sometimes the comprehensive historical context behind the text that occasioned its writing is not provided or is only minimally addressed. The historical context and the rhetorical situation are treated in a manner that may give the impression that they do not complement each other.

## Methodology utilised in this article

In contrast to the previously mentioned approaches that analyse 1 Corinthians 14:1–40 by imposing ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric on the text, Tolmie (2005) developed a different rhetorical approach for interpreting Pauline letters. This methodological approach, known as a 'text-centred' approach, aims to analyse the rhetoric of the text by comprehensively describing only the means that the author uses within the text to persuade his readers to adopt his point of view. Notably, Snyman (2009a, 2009b), Van der Merwe (2013), and Prinsloo (2023) have utilised Tolmie's methodology to analyse some Pauline texts, yet without making any improvements to Tolmie's 2005 minimal theoretical framework.

However, Genade (2015) proposed refinements to the methodology, commencing with renaming it 'text-generated

persuasion-analysis' (TGPA). He also formalised the guideline steps for interpreting a text. In 2023, Kukuni suggested further enhancements, including another name change. Instead of Tolmie's minimal theoretical framework or Genade's TGPA, Kukuni (2024:1) advocates for the term 'text-generated persuasive-interpretation' (TGPI). In addition, contrary to the methodology's predecessors, Cornelius and Kukuni (2024:1–9) integrate socio-historical aspects and practical applications of the text to address contemporary issues. Darko (2020:2–3) asserts that the success of any academic study lies in its impact and applicability for non-academics, who may not always engage with scholarly dialogues.

Besides these changes and additions to enhance the methodology, the steps of applying the methodology in the interpretation phase of the text are identical to the original authors' steps of rhetorical interpretation; thus, Tolmie's (2005) steps will be followed in interpreting 1 Corinthians 14:1–40, which include:

- The dominant rhetorical strategy of a section is identified as the first step.
- A detailed interpretation of the author's rhetorical strategy follows.
- The identification of existing supportive rhetorical strategies.
- Identification and interpretation of the rhetorical techniques.
- If the letter has been analysed as a whole, then what follows is the organisation of the argument in the letter.

### The socio-historical context of 1 Corinthians

By the time of the composition of 1 Corinthians, Corinth was referred to as Roman-Corinth. It was a fortified cosmopolitan centre characterised by flourishing religious pluralism, thriving commerce, education, and a strong pursuit of social status and individual rights (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:43). The city was bustling with eminent itinerant orators whom people paid to listen to, reflecting the community's aspiration for elevated social positions. Strategically situated near the north-south route leading to the port of Lachaeum in Greece, this Roman colony had a demographically diverse population, comprising both affluent and impoverished Jews and Greeks (Carson & Moo 2008:419; Elwell & Yarbrough 2013:270).

Determining the precise date of the composition of 1 Corinthians is an exceedingly challenging task. However, Paul's interactions with the church provide historical data that can help ascertain the date of this epistle. One indication is Paul's reference to being in Ephesus in 1 Corinthians 16:8. According to Gundry (2012:413), this suggests that Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote 1 Corinthians. Based on this, Köstenberger, Kellum and Quarles (2016) date the epistle to approximately 53–54 AD.

Regarding authorship, there is a broad scholarly consensus that Paul wrote the epistle. Barnett (2012:109) suggests that

this consensus stems from Paul's extensive engagement with the Corinthian church – more than with any other church in the New Testament. This extensive interaction remains largely unchallenged. Witherington (1995:51), along with Carson and Moo (2008:419), concurs that this evidence of Pauline authorship allows interpreters to engage comprehensively with the content of the letter.

Fee (2014:63) analyses the Corinthians' notorious veneration for leaders, asserting that they associated their social status with the elevated status of the leaders they revered. This explains why some Corinthians venerated Apollos, Cephas, or even Christ himself, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:12 (Collins 2016:16). Apollos, revered for his eloquence, knowledge of the scriptures, and perceived strength compared to Paul, stood out as a hero. Reflecting on this, Paul writes, 'For they say, his letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is weak and his speech contemptible' [ὅτι Αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ μὲν, φησὶν, βαρεῖαι καὶ ἰσχυραὶ, ἡ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενῆς καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος 2 Cor 10:10].

### Rhetorical situation that occasioned the writing of 1 Corinthians

Traditionally, there are two texts that stand out as widely being regarded in scholarship as hinting to the textual situation that occasioned the writing of 1 Corinthians. Scholars such as Kennedy (1984:87), Pogoloff (1992:273–274), Schüssler-Fiorenze (1987:395):

- The first instance is 1 Corinthians 1:11, where Paul states, 'For I have been informed concerning you, my brothers, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you' [ἔδηλώθη γάρ μοι περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί μου, ὑπὸ τῶν Χλόης ὅτι ἔριδες ἐν ὑμῖν εἰσιν]. Here, Paul explicitly mentions that Chloe's people informed him about the pervasive 'quarrels' [ἔριδες], which BDAG (2000:346) defines as 'engagement in rivalry, especially with reference to positions taken in a matter'. It is important to notice that quarrels are symptomatic of a far greater problem. Louw and Nida (eds. 1996:494) suggest that this strife may result from other forms of conflict, which are frequently expressed verbally.
- The second instance is 1 Corinthians 7:1, where Paul states, 'Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman' [περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε, καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἅπτεσθαι]. Here, Paul unequivocally acknowledges receipt of a letter from the Corinthians. It is a matter of scholarly conjecture to attempt to decipher what the Corinthians wrote to Paul, and it is speculative to assert that the topics of marriage and sexuality in 1 Corinthians 7 are Paul's response to issues of marriage and sexuality raised by the Corinthians. Various scholars, including Witherington (1995:170), Biatoma (2010:27), and Snyman (2009a:2), infer from this text that whenever the formula 'now concerning' [περὶ δὲ] appears, it signals Paul's address of the written communication from the Corinthians. The subsequent texts where this formula appears are 1 Corinthians 7:25,

1 Corinthians 8:1, 1 Corinthians 8:4, 1 Corinthians 12:1, 1 Corinthians 16:1 and 1 Corinthians 16:12.

Consequently, according to Snyman (2009b:132), in these sections Paul responds to a series of inquiries the Corinthians posed to him. Furthermore, there was a lack of consensus among them on these issues, which caused them to quarrel and be divided. Paul thus resolves contentious issues and guides the Corinthians towards the correct practice concerning marriage and sexuality (1 Cor 5–7), meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8:1–11:1), worship (1 Cor 11:12–14:40), the resurrection (1 Cor 15:12–37) and the collection for the saints (1 Cor 16:1–4).

However, it is worth noting that not all scholars concur that the formula ‘now concerning’ [περὶ δὲ] invariably signals Paul’s response to what the Corinthians wrote to him about, except in the case of 1 Corinthians 7:1, where the matters the Corinthians wrote are explicitly mentioned. Furthermore, even if it may be posited that the Corinthians wrote to Paul on these issues, it is challenging to infer from the supposed responses what the Corinthians inquired about or communicated to him. This fundamentally questions whether Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthians is directed by their inquiries or whether Paul autonomously addressed topics he deemed necessary, irrespective of their correspondence. In 1 Corinthians 5:1 serves as an exemplar of how Paul refers to information he acquired through what appears to have been public knowledge of a scandalous, incestuous case in the Corinthian church.

Collins (2016:16) contends that it is a moot point whether Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthians constitutes a response to their inquiries. Collins (2016) suggests that it is plausible that the time Paul spent with Chloe’s people (1 Cor 1:11), Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:17) provided him with the opportunity to gather information about the welfare of the Corinthian church. Consequently, his letter is informed by what he deemed essential to address based on the extensive information he personally obtained. This understanding opens the possibility of reading 1 Corinthians as addressing multifaceted issues as Paul perceived them, rather than viewing it as confined to the differences the Corinthians had among themselves. Fee (2014:6) asserts that if one were to read 1 Corinthians through the lens of the conflict among the Corinthians themselves that they wrote to Paul about, then it implies that Paul considerably misread, misunderstood and misjudged their letter, because he addresses some theological questions that do not point to the divisions among the Corinthians and appears to challenge those who questioned his apostolic authority in 1 Corinthians 9 and 14:37.

The final point that necessitated the composition of 1 Corinthians to comment briefly on is the scholarly disagreements regarding the phrase ‘now concerning’ [περὶ δὲ]. As previously mentioned, some scholars assert that this formula addresses questions that the Corinthians wrote to Paul. However, scholars such as Mihaila (2009:191) and Ciampa

and Rosner (2010:160) dispute whether this formula indicates that Paul is addressing questions posed by the Corinthians or whether he is responding to points raised in the letter they purportedly wrote to him. Perhaps the most persuasive and compelling argument that aligns with Mihaila (2009) and Ciampa and Rosner (2010) is presented by Mitchell (1989:229, 233–234), who demonstrates that, in the context of ancient Greek literature and epistolary composition, *περὶ δὲ* is merely a transitional marker to introduce a new topic. Therefore, Paul used it in that sense and not to signal that he is replying to the Corinthians’ letter.

If the brief socio-historical context and rhetorical situation of 1 Corinthians outlined above are deemed acceptable, then insights may be extrapolated from them to elucidate the principal rhetorical objective of 1 Corinthians 14:1–40. The primary rhetorical aim of 1 Corinthians 14:1–40 is derived from a socio-historical context indicating that the Corinthian church was situated in Roman-Corinth, a city renowned for its cosmopolitan status, with its inhabitants idealising their identity as Corinthians. Nevertheless, Paul addresses them in 1 Corinthians 1:2 as a distinct ‘church of God which is at Corinth’ [ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ οὗση ἐν Κορίνθῳ]. Beset by quarrels [ἔριδες] and numerous issues highlighted in the rhetorical situation, Paul endeavours to persuade the Corinthians towards the appropriate utilisation of spiritual gifts within the church.

## The dominant rhetorical strategy

To exhort the Corinthians towards the proper utilisation of spiritual gifts within the church, Paul commences 1 Corinthians 14 by extending the discourse on the exercise of spiritual gifts in love, which he elaborated upon in 1 Corinthians 13. In verse 1, he employs the imperative phrases ‘pursue love’ [διώκετε τὴν ἀγάπην], ‘yet earnestly desire spiritual gifts’ [ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά], and ‘but especially that you may prophesy’ [μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεῦητε]. Verse 2 begins with the conjunction ‘because’ [γὰρ], establishing a connection with the preceding verse while providing a rationale for the imperatives in verse 1. The reasons Paul provides are sustained throughout the chapter. Consequently, the predominant rhetorical strategy of 1 Corinthians 14 can be summarised as: ‘Urging the Corinthians towards the appropriate use of spiritual gifts within the church’. To achieve this objective, Paul employs the following supportive strategies:

- Urging the Corinthians to seek intelligible gifts that edify: 1 Corinthians 14:1–19.
- Urging the Corinthians to think maturely about the gifts that edify: 1 Corinthians 14:20–25.
- Urging the Corinthians to conduct their worship orderly: 1 Corinthians 14:26–40.

## Urging the Corinthians to seek intelligible gifts that edify: 1 Corinthians 14:1–19

In 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers to earnestly seek the gifts that edify [διώκετε τὴν ἀγάπην,

ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε 1 Cor 14:1]. Porter (1993:330) interprets the present imperative verb ‘earnestly desire’ [διώκετε] as elucidated in 1 Corinthians 14:5. In 1 Corinthians 14:5, Paul underscores ‘especially that you may prophesy’ [μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε]. The rationale for this emphasis on prophecy is revealed in 1 Corinthians 14:12, which highlights the purpose of prophecy, namely ‘the strengthening of the church [τὴν οἰκοδομὴν τῆς ἐκκλησίας], which is the overarching purpose of all spiritual gifts. Paul maintains the imperatival force of seeking to use the gift of prophecy with the verb ‘seek’ [ζητεῖτε], coupled with the ‘so that’ [ἵνα] clause, which confines it to a singular purpose: ‘for the edification of the church’.

There is a rhetorical progression from the plural imperative address in verse 1, seemingly inviting the church to collectively seek love and prophesying, to the singular focus on the one who prophesies, being cognisant of the burden of exhortation and encouragement that supersedes the gifting one possesses or desires to possess. If the gifting does not fulfil the purpose for which it was bestowed, then it is rendered meaningless. Horsley (2011:182) elucidates that the intrinsic value of gifts lies in their capacity to edify. Vine, White and Unger (1996:194) define the noun ‘to edify’ [οἰκοδομὴν] as denoting the act of building. Louw and Nida (1996:677) define οἰκοδομὴν as ‘to increase the potential of someone or something, with an emphasis on the process involved’. Paul employs it figuratively to refer to the edification of the body towards spiritual maturity. Thus, the individual who utilises spiritual gifts should employ them solely for their intended purpose, namely, to build up or enhance the potential of the members of the church in worship. According to Hays (2011:236), Paul is not preoccupied with the hierarchy of spiritual gifts or the individuals who possess them, as some within the Corinthian community were. Spiritual gifts serve to equalise all members of the church, transcending socio-economic barriers, gender, class, patronage and other distinctions.

Rhetorically, what Paul advocates is synonymous with the way of love that edifies (1 Cor 8:1). To enhance his persuasion, Paul transitions to another spiritual gift not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:1. He includes ‘tongues’ [γλώσσαις] yet appears to suggest that prophecy is more beneficial for the church than tongues. Regarding tongues, Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14:5, ‘but I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy. And greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues’ [θέλω δὲ πάντας ὑμᾶς λαλεῖν γλώσσαις, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε: μεῖζων δὲ ὁ προφητεύων ἢ ὁ λαλῶν γλώσσαις]. Yet, in a surprising rhetorical shift, Paul contends that prophecy and tongues are equal when tongues are interpreted. This argument hinges on the phrase ‘unless’ [εἰ μὴ] in 1 Corinthians 14:5 or ‘unless’ [εἰ μὴ] in 1 Corinthians 14:6. The emphasis lies in the fact that prophecy is greater, and the one who prophesies is greater, unless there is interpretation for the church’s edification. Paul underscores the importance of edification that both prophecy and tongues provide. The significance lies in the intelligibility of both and their role in edification.

## Conclusive argument: 1 Corinthians 14:6–19

Kukuni (2023:33–36) categorises 1 Corinthians 14:6–19 into two clusters that encapsulate the point already articulated in the first five verses of 1 Corinthians 14. He contends that Paul reiterates his rhetorical intent that the Corinthians should seek to edify the church with their gifts, given their zeal for spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:12). In a surprising rhetorical shift, Paul asserts that prophecy and the one who prophesies are greater, yet he adds that even the speaker of tongues achieves the same purpose as the gift of prophecy. Mitchell (1991:280) emphasises that Paul advocates for liturgical language that is intelligible and can be comprehended by anyone in the ecclesia who requires edification. Paul then uses himself as an example in 1 Corinthians 14:11, illustrating how unprofitable he would be if he spoke in a language that no one in the ecclesia understood. It would be lifeless, meaning non-edifying, akin to the musical instruments he referenced in 1 Corinthians 14:7–8 if they were played without producing beautiful, distinguishable music. Because of the exigency of edification, McDougall (2003:194–195) argues that edification should never cease and must be conducted in love for the benefit of others, as love does not seek its own (1 Cor 13:5).

## Urging the Corinthians to think maturely about the gifts that edify: 1 Corinthians 14:20–25

Kukuni (2023:36) identifies this section as a natural progression from the previous one, where Paul indirectly urged the Corinthians to mature and ensure that their speech, whether in tongues or prophecy, is intelligible. In this segment of 1 Corinthians, Paul refers to 1 Corinthians 13:11, which discusses the transition from childhood to maturity. In 1 Corinthians 14:20, Paul states, ‘Brothers, do not be children in your thinking; rather in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature’ [Ἀδελφοί, μὴ παιδία γίνεσθε ταῖς φρεσίν, ἀλλὰ τῇ κακίᾳ νηπιάζετε, ταῖς δὲ φρεσίν τέλειοι γίνεσθε]. The reference to ‘childishness’ [νήπιος] (1 Cor 14:20) and ‘self-centredness’ [οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ] (1 Cor 13:5) pertains to the immature manner in which the Corinthians utilised spiritual gifts.

Thiselton (2000:1119) convincingly demonstrates that the reference to childishness in 1 Corinthians 14:20 explicitly pertains to the childishness mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:11, as ‘childishness’ and ‘thinking’ are similarly paired in these two verses within the same context. Paul does not imply that the use of spiritual gifts in question is inherently childish. Rather, he argues that if spiritual gifts are utilised for self-serving purposes, they fail to fulfil their intended purpose of edifying the church. An individual who insists on exercising spiritual gifts for personal benefit exhibits concerning signs of immaturity and lovelessness, as love is ‘not self-seeking’ [οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ]. The persuasion Paul offers is a call for cognitive transformation and an exhortation for those exercising spiritual gifts to adopt an outward-looking perspective.

In calling them to be mature, demonstrating the ineffectiveness of infant talk, Paul uses what Tolmie (2004:108) calls 'argument based on authority on scripture'. Tolmie (2004:108) elucidates that this type of argument, 'argument based on the authority of scripture' is used by Paul to employ arguments grounded in scriptural authority to reinforce his point and to establish a connection with the audience, who share a reverence for scripture. This scriptural authority is typically interwoven within Paul's arguments.

### Urging the Corinthians to conduct their worship orderly: 1 Corinthians 14:26–40

This concluding section of Paul's argument is marked by a conclusion marker, 'what is the outcome then, brothers?' [τί οὖν ἐστὶν, ἀδελφοί;]. This is followed by Paul's final instructions, emphasising that orderly worship is essential to ensuring that spiritual gifts fulfil their purpose of edifying the church. After all, there is no gift of the Holy Spirit that is not intended for edification. In 1 Corinthians 14:26, Paul states, 'let all things be done for edification' [πάντα πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν γινέσθω]. When the church is assembled, members bring a variety of gifts, all of which have the sole purpose of edification, in alignment with the persuasive strategy of 1 Corinthians 14.

Hinting at the necessity for modest regulation, Paul, in verses 27 and 28, stipulates that two or three speakers in tongues are permitted to speak, each taking turns, supplemented by interpretation. James (2004:13) observes that in verse 29, two or three prophets are permitted to speak, supplemented by an evaluation of what is prophesied: 'And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgement' [προφητῶν δὲ δύο ἢ τρεῖς λαλεῖτωσαν, καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι διακρινέτωσαν]. It is not apparent whether 'the others' [οἱ ἄλλοι] refers to the entire assembly, because Paul earlier hinted at others not being mature enough. Therefore, 'others' could mean other prophets, and because only two or three will be speaking, order will be maintained. Thiselton (2000:1140–1141) indicates that in context, the entire assembly is invited to 'evaluate carefully' [διακρινέτωσαν], yet it should be those who, in 1 Corinthians 12:10, have the gift of discernment. Collins (2016:519) interprets 'others' as inclusive of everyone in the church indiscriminately. Louw and Wolvaardt (2015, 1 Cor 14:30a) interpret 'another who is seated' [ἄλλο καθήμενον] as referring to one of the two prophets who will not be speaking while the other speaks. For Keener (2005:117), however, the key persuasive drive by Paul is to ensure that prophesying is conducted in an orderly manner that encourages others to learn and be edified, as the ultimate goal is edification.

There should be no contention or discrimination in the church regarding the exercise of spiritual gifts. The section from verses 33b–35 is contentious among scholars. Resane (2024:3–5) perceives it as chauvinistic, patriarchal, marginalising women, culturally bound to first-century issues, and self-contradictory in the light of 1 Corinthians 11:5. Thiselton (2000:1161) and Witherington (1995:259) interpret this section as curtailing both men and women

who were tempted to usurp authority over Paul, reject his apostolic authority, and establish their own authoritative rules not based on church order, thereby causing confusion.

Kukuni (2023:42) argues that regardless of the exegete's perspective, Paul's primary concern is the paramount importance of orderly, love-filled worship. What Paul is establishing is an authoritative guideline – the love-guided worship in the Corinthian church, as in all the churches of the saints [ὡς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῶν ἁγίων] (1 Cor 14:33b). There must be orderly worship. 'Therefore, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner' [ὥστε, ἀδελφοί μου, ζηλοῦτε τὸ προφητεῦν, καὶ τὸ λαλεῖν μὴ κωλύετε γλώσσας· πάντα δὲ εὐσχημόνως καὶ κατὰ τάξιν γινέσθω] (1 Cor 14:39–40).

### Text-centred rhetorical stylistic devices used

Emanating from the text and allowing it to speak for itself to reveal its own rhetoric, the rhetorical stylistic devices that Paul used to persuade the Corinthians to desire spiritual gifts that edify emerge are discussed next.

#### Pathos

In 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul employs a different imperative verb, 'pursue' [διώκετε], for love, which notably has strong overtones, compared to the imperative verb 'desire' [ζηλοῦτε] for spiritual gifts. This may be Paul, in addressing the preceding chapters, which were critical, urging the Corinthians to consider which would be more appropriate to adhere to: the strong, emotionless 'pursue' [διώκετε] or the more suitable 'earnestly desire' [ζηλοῦτε] that conveys strong feelings of attachment and affection. It is as if he is prompting the Corinthians to undergo a cognitive shift and interchange the two verbs, committing to [ζηλοῦτε], which encompasses emotional experiences. The Corinthians will earnestly and zealously seek spiritual gifts, but love will be the driving force behind their exercise of these gifts.

*Pathos*, therefore, is a rhetorical technique that transitions the language from being pejorative and carrying judicial undertones to evoking calm within the audience. Lanham (1991:111) recounts how Quintilian remarked that the cautious writer possesses the skill of distinguishing between violent and calm emotions. In the context of 1 Corinthians 14, Paul writes to influence the emotions of the Corinthians, stirring their heartfelt desires so that they may introspectively assess whether their practice of spiritual gifts genuinely prioritises the edification of others.

#### Ethos and argument based on own character

The other mode of persuasion that Paul employs in 1 Corinthians 14 is ethos, which Lanham (1991:115) describes as the unimpeachable character of the speaker. This is utilised by the speaker to demonstrate that, instead

of boasting, they exhibited imitable humility that the audience cannot refute. Collins (2016:491) comments on Paul using the technique of *ethos* in 1 Corinthians 14:6 to illustrate to the Corinthians that he never exploited them, but rather became a model for them on how to use spiritual gifts, how not to regard it as prestigious when one possesses a gift, and how, from 1 Corinthians 14:7–33a, spiritual gifts are bestowed according to the will of God for the edification of the community of the people of God, and not the individual. Hence, the concept of listening to one another is emphasised (Collins 2016:491).

## Synonymia

As a rhetorical technique, *synonymia* occurs when the author amplifies their communication to ensure it is retained by the recipients (Lanham 1991:38, 183). It is not merely a literary stylistic device; the author is being emphatic, ensuring that hearers will always remember their communication when they hear the synonyms used together. In 1 Corinthians 14:3, Paul employs two virtual synonyms, stating ‘the one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and encouragement’ [ὁ δὲ προφητεύων ἀνθρώποις λαλεῖ οἰκοδομῆν καὶ παράκλησιν καὶ παραμυθίαν]. The two words ‘exhortation’ and ‘encouragement’ both begin with *παρα*, which sounds similar, and are not cognates in meaning (eds. Louw & Nida 1996:305). Collins (2016:491) extends the synonym by linking them to the only other word that begins with the Greek letter *π* in 1 Corinthians 14:3, concluding that when the passage is read aloud, the *π* sound of ‘prophesying’ [προφητεύων], ‘exhortation’ [παράκλησιν], and ‘encouragement’ [παραμυθίαν] will link them together, most importantly for the edification of the church. Besides *synonymia*, Paul also employs the technique of *rhythm*, which makes the reading of 1 Corinthians 14:3 aesthetically pleasing and memorable. The rhythm engages emotional connection and contributes to the retention of what is read. In this way, Paul adeptly utilises the Greek language to craft persuasion that is both beautiful and memorable (eds. Culler & Glasser 2019:21–11; Kukuni (2023:42).

## Antithesis

In 1 Corinthians 14:2, Paul employs *antithesis* to state, ‘for one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries’ [ὁ γὰρ λαλῶν γλῶσση οὐκ ἀνθρώποις λαλεῖ ἄλλὰ θεῷ, οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἀκούει, πνεύματι δὲ λαλεῖ μυστήρια]. He is juxtaposing ideas that appear to convey the same meaning but are paradoxical.

## Repetition

Paul sought to emphasise that the utilisation of the spiritual gifts of prophecy and tongues occurs through speaking. Regarding the exercise of speaking, Paul employs the participle verb ‘speaking’ [λαλῶ] twenty-four times in 1 Corinthians 14, which Collins (2016:492) describes as the involvement of ongoing intelligible communication for the benefit of others. Therefore, the prophet or tongue speaker should be cognisant of this demanding task, ensuring

that what they speak originates from God, is edifying, and that they possess the maturity to handle the responsibilities that accompany it.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article is to present a rhetorical methodology for interpreting Paul’s letter to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 14:1–40, utilising a novel rhetorical approach termed ‘text-generated persuasion-interpretation’. This methodology posits that Paul’s rhetoric can be derived from the text itself, without reliance on ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric, while still acknowledging its significance.

By interpreting the text through this rhetorical model, Paul’s predominant rhetorical objective in 1 Corinthians 14:1–40 is identified: ‘urging the Corinthians towards the appropriate use of spiritual gifts within the church’. This dominant rhetorical strategy is elucidated by demonstrating how Paul sought to achieve it through three supportive strategies: (1) ‘urging the Corinthians to seek intelligible gifts that edify (1 Cor 14:1–19)’; (2) ‘urging the Corinthians to think maturely about the gifts that edify (1 Cor 14:20–25); and (3) ‘urging the Corinthians to conduct their worship in an orderly manner’ (1 Cor 14:26–40).

By heeding Paul’s dominant rhetorical objective, the use of spiritual gifts will be exercised in love, thereby edifying the church.

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## Data availability

This was a qualitative study, and the author, T.J.K., confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within this research article.

## Disclaimer

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