

ABSTRACT

A detailed examination of the relation between 1 Corinthians 8:6 and its textual context is significant both for historical Christology and for exegesis of the epistle. The textual context is identified as a multi-genre argumentative discourse in which Paul seeks to persuade the “wise” and “strong” in the Christian community in Corinth to defer to the sensibilities of those they regard as ignorant and weak in faith in relation to foods that have been offered to idols. At the same time he must defend himself against critics of this policy who use his refusal of financial support from them as grounds to question his apostolic status. The central topos used by Paul is the authoritative example of Christ, which Paul claims to exemplify in his practice of renouncing the full use of his own rights.

The analysis of the relation between the verse and its context takes place in three stages. The first (chs.2 - 6) uses an examination of the argumentative genres present both in the epistle as a whole and in 1 Cor.8-10 as an analytical tool to identify the complex pattern of argumentation surrounding the verse. The dominant genre in this discourse is shown to be deliberative rhetoric, with judicial rhetoric, appeal to Jewish scripture, and appeal to the established proclamation of Christ also appearing as inclusions within the discourse.

The second stage of analysis (chs.7-8) examines the grammatical structures governing 1 Cor.8:6, both in its internal structure and in its relation to the textual context. Three conclusions are drawn: that the placement of this verse indicates that it is most likely to function as a deliberative *prothesis* indicating the fundamental rhetorical grounds on which the author will argue his case throughout the ensuing discourse; that it is grammatically structured to play an integral part in that discourse; and that its semantic structures indicate that it is intended to assert something about the relation between benefits received from God through Christ and obligations owed to God through Christ.

The third stage (chs.9-10) considers the most likely significance of this benefits-and-obligations schema within the social context of the discourse and concludes that two related Greco-Roman social structures, patronage and family, determine the semantic field within which the author intends the audience to interpret this verse, in order that it may achieve the communicative function indicated for it by its textual context.

We may conclude that the discourse function of 1 Cor.8:6 as a deliberative *prothesis*, and its semantic context within the epistle, indicate an interpretation in which the key concepts are drawn from the social context which the discourse addresses. We thereby preclude interpretations in which this verse is essentially a cosmological statement or a deliberate reformulation of a traditional credal formulation drawn from scripture.