

# ISSA Proceedings 2014 - Shameful Corinthians: A Pragma-Dialectical Analysis Of 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

*Abstract:* Biblical scholars have fundamental differences in defining Paul's argumentative and rhetorical goal in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. There is no convincing explanation for why the apostle brings 6:12-20 up in the letter. I conduct a pragma-dialectical analysis to account for the argumentation, rhetoric and their interplay in 6:12-20. It turns out that Paul aims at shaming the audience in order to break their resistance.

*Keywords:* 1 Corinthians, argumentation, Bible, New Testament, Paul, pragma-dialectics, rhetoric, shame, strategic maneuvering, theology.

## 1. Introduction

Biblical scholars have had significant difficulties in interpreting the argumentation in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 (Goulder 1999, p. 341; Rosner 1998, p. 336). Two frequent and general problems are brought up to motivate the upcoming analysis of the section in the letter.

The first problem deals with the goal of the section. What does Paul want to argue in the section? Two alternative standpoint options are common (Rosner 1998, p. 336):

- a. The apostle argues that the Corinthians should stop a specific behavior, that of having relations with harlots (Drake Williams III 2008, p. 20; Fee 1987, p. 250; Rosner 1998, pp. 341-342);
- b. Paul wishes to smother a broader phenomenon: sexual immorality (Conzelmann 1975, p. 108; Lambrecht 2009, p. 486; Rosner 1998, pp. 337-338). Topically speaking, the two themes are related. The question arises, which of the two notions supports the other. Does Paul employ sexual immorality to support the avoidance of harlots or vice versa?

Furthermore, why does the apostle bring up the issue in the first place? Is the control of the Corinthians' sexual morality an objective in itself for him or does Paul use it to achieve another goal?

The second problem deals with the placement of the section as a part of 1 Corinthians (Fee 1987, p. 250). Does Paul have a certain strategy in his ordering of the different argumentative sections? Or is his approach random (Murphy-O'Connor 1996, p. 253)? I will argue that he has placed the section strategically with a specific intention. In this endeavor, I will occasionally refer to the previous argumentative sections 4:18–5:13 and 6:1–11 to support my claims. My general claim is that Paul has certain long-term *dialectical* and *rhetorical aims* that he tries to achieve in the section 6:12–20 (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002, pp. 134-135).

I will conduct a pragma-dialectical analysis of 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 in order to solve the problems discussed above. After the analysis, I will draw some conclusions.

## 2. Analysis

I will apply only those tools and aspects of pragma-dialectics that I deem necessary for the purposes of this study. I will analyze the argumentative section in two main parts. The first one consists of the construction of the *analytic overview* (van Eemeren et al. 1993, pp. 60-61; van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, pp. 93-94; van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, pp. 118-122; van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002, p. 134), which, in turn, entails establishing the following steps:

1. Standpoint(s);
2. Common starting points;
3. Arguments;
4. Argumentation structure.

The analytic overview belongs to the so-called standard pragma-dialectical analysis (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992; van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004). The first three points listed above correspond with the order of the discussion stages of the ideal model for critical discussion: *confrontation stage*, *opening stage* and *argumentation stage* (van Eemeren et al. 1996, pp. 280-283; van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, pp. 57-62; van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002, pp. 132, 138-139). The fourth and last stage, the *concluding stage*, is missing in the section 6:12–20 and consequently it is left unconsidered in the analysis. After the identification of the standpoint(s), common starting points and arguments, the argumentation structure is reconstructed.

The second part consists of the analysis of the *strategic maneuvering* which is dealt with theoretically in the extended pragma-dialectical model (van Eemeren 2010). The analytic overview functions as a basis for its analysis. The strategic maneuvering will be assessed by scrutinizing the three inseparable aspects of it which are analytically distinguished from each other: the *topical potential*, *audience demand* and *presentational devices* (van Eemeren 2010, pp. 93-101, 108-113, 118-122; van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002, pp. 139-141).

## 2.1 Analytic overview

In the introduction, two alternatives were presented as possible standpoints: stopping relations with harlots and sexual immorality. To map where and how they occur in the text, in Figure 1 I have divided the section into three subsections based on the occurrences of these two topics:

*Figure 1: Section 6:12-20 divided into three parts based on the occurrences of the concepts “sexual immorality” and “harlot”*

### I.

12. All things are permitted for me, but all things are not beneficial; all things are permitted for me, but I will not allow myself to be brought under the power of any.

13. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will abolish both it and them. But the body is not for *sexual immorality* but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

14. God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.

### II.

15. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Would I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a *harlot*? Let it not be!

16. Or do you not know that he who joins oneself to a *harlot* is one body with her? “The two” for he says, “shall become one flesh”.

17. But he who joins oneself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

### III.

18. Flee *sexual immorality*! Whatever sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits *sexual immorality* sins against his own body.

19. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

20. For you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body!

Sexual immorality (πορνεία) occurs in subsection I in verse 13b. In general, verses 12–14 hold non-confrontational speech acts. Paul does not explicitly refer to the Corinthians besides in verse 14, in which he includes himself in the audience (ἡμεῖς ἐξεγερεῖ). The apostle does not bring up any apparent dispute in subsection I. Closest to a confrontation is the notion that sexual immorality is not for the body in verse 13b.

In subsection II, in verses 15–17, Paul confronts the recipients directly (Lambrecht 2009, p. 482). He asks them in verse 15a whether they do not know that their bodies are members of Christ. Then, he makes clear in verses 15bc that the Corinthians should not become members of a harlot. The phrases of “one body,” “one flesh” and “joins oneself” in verse 16 indicate that Paul refers to a sexual relation (Butting 2000, p. 83). Subsection II deals with why sex with harlots in particular should be avoided.

Subsection III begins with a command to flee sexual immorality in verse 18a (Byrne 1983, p. 612). Paul returns to the broader topic he brought up in verse 13b. The argumentation in verses 18–20 supports the order to flee sexual immorality.

### 2.1.1 *Standpoint(s)*

With regard to the standpoint, fleeing sexual immorality (18a) is a too abstract goal to render it as a plausible main aim. Instead, preventing sex with harlots (15bc) is a more concrete and feasible goal for Paul to attempt to achieve, when addressing a single community. It is not feasible to render avoiding prostitutes as a subordinate argument to fleeing sexual immorality. In that case, the argumentation would appear roughly as follows: “You should flee sexual immorality, since you should not have sex with harlots.” The reasoning becomes understandable when the arguments are reversed: “You should not have sex with harlots, since you should avoid sexual immorality.”

Furthermore, in the two previous argumentative sections, Paul employs the generalization of a problem to support a more concrete instance of that problem. In 4:18–5:13, he employed the general teaching to exile sinners (5:9–11) as an argument to drive out the single fornicator (5:2). In 6:1–11, he argued that lawsuits in front of unbelievers are shameful (6:5a, 6), since lawsuits in general

are shameful (6:7a). Because of this pattern, I suppose that the current section functions similarly.

### 2.1.2 *Common starting points*

In verse 12, Paul states that everything is free to him (see also 10:23). Several scholars treat this as a Corinthian slogan (Barrett 1968 p. 144; Conzelmann 1975, pp. 108-109; Dodd 1995, p. 40; Fee 1987, p. 251; Murphy-O'Connor 2009, p. 24; Rosner 1998, p. 346; Thiselton 2000, pp. 459-460). However, in my mind, the exaggerative formulation reflects Paul's own view (Dodd 1995, pp. 39, 54), since the apostle had a habit to put forward *hyperbole* (Lausberg 1998, pp. 263-264, 410-411; Thurén 2000, pp. 202-203, 212). This is not to say that the apostle does not account for a Corinthian view, too. The recipients likely considered themselves free in many respects. However, the apostle wants to appear the expert of freedom by stating that everything is permitted to him. He wishes to promote his *ethos*. Paul also wants to begin to argue from a common ground.

The phrase "foods for stomach" (and vice versa) reflects common sense that is in itself obvious. I interpret the following phrase in verse 13a about God abolishing as referring to the eschatological judgment. In the previous argumentative sections, 4:18-5:13 and 6:1-11, the apostle refers to eschatological matters (5:5 and 6:2-3). In 6:13, Paul contrasts the negative destruction in the last judgment with the positive resurrection in verse 14, which also occurs at the end of times.

A distinct *presentational device* (see, chaps. 2.2 and 2.2.3) in the current argumentative section, and in the two previous sections, is the "do you not know that" - question. Paul uses it to convey common starting points (Wuellner 1986, p. 53). The idea is that the Corinthians should have taken into account the apostle's particular teaching from a previous visit or letter (see, Hurd 1965, pp. 43-58). Consequently, verse 15a is considered a common starting point.

However, verses 16a and 19 are not common starting points, even though they hold an almost identical formulation of the rhetorical question. Instead, they are arguments, because they are supported by starting points in verses 16b and 20a (Wuellner 1986, p. 67). The word "or" in the "do you not know" -questions indicates that the Corinthians should have deduced the conclusion from the starting points that support the arguments inherent in the rhetorical questions (Lambrecht 2009, p. 483).

In verse 16b, Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, which belongs to the presumably authoritative religious writings to him and to the recipients (Drake Williams III 2008, p. 20; Heil 2005, pp. 103-105, 122). Consequently, I render the quote as a common starting point. In verse 20a, the apostle alludes to the sacrifice of Christ (see also 7:23) (Lambrecht 2009, p. 484). God has bought the Corinthians, and believers in general, to himself with Christ's blood (Conzelmann 1975, p. 113; Goulder 1999, p. 347; Fee 1987, p. 265). This is a fundamental event that establishes the faith of the recipients and belongs to the common starting points.

### 2.1.3 Arguments

The rest of the text consists of arguments (verses 13b, 16a, 17-19 and 20b). There is no concluding stage, unless one considers verse 20b as belonging to it. I render 20b as a positive repetition to flee sexual immorality which occurs in verse 18a (Fee 1987, p. 265; Lambrecht 2009, pp. 484-485). To be able to glorify God in the body, one needs to flee sexual immorality. The phrases are immediately connected and should be considered as a single argument.

As stated above, the "or do you not know" -questions in verses 16a and 19 are considered as arguments, since they are supported by common starting points.

To sum up, Figure 2 portrays the stages of the ideal model as they appear in section 6:12-20. The text between the two symbols '[S]' indicates the sole standpoint. It does not occur until the midway of the section. The symbols '[O]' and '[A]' similarly indicate the opening and argumentation stages, respectively. Most of the opening stage appears in the first half of the section. The argumentation stage is prominent in the last half of the text. This ordering of the text indicates that Paul approaches the argumentative situation indirectly, making use of *insinuatio* (Kennedy 1999, pp. 103-104; Lausberg 1998, pp. 121, 124, 132-133, 684). The reason for this is assessed in the analysis of strategic maneuvering (chap. 2.2).

#### *Figure 2: Stages of the ideal model in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20*

12. [O] All things are permitted for me, but all things are not beneficial; all things are permitted for me, but I will not allow myself to be brought under the power of any.

13. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will abolish both it and them. [O] [A] But the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. [A]

14. [O] God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.
15. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? [O] [S] Would I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Let it not be! [S]
16. [A] Or do you not know that he who joins oneself to a harlot is one body with her? [A] [O] "The two" for he says, "shall become one flesh". [O]
17. [A] But he who joins oneself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.
18. Flee sexual immorality! Whatever sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.
19. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? [A]
20. [O] For you were bought with a price. [O] [A] Therefore glorify God in your body! [A]

#### 2.1.4 *Argumentation structure*

The argumentation structure, in Figure 3, is constructed based on the assessment of the standpoint, common starting points and arguments (chaps. 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3) and the division of the text displayed in Figure 1. The three subsections frame three argumentative wholes (see, Lambrecht 2009, p. 480).

In subsection II, the first line of defense for the standpoint occurs. The argumentation deals with why sex with harlots specifically is dangerous. Subsections I and III argue why the more general phenomenon, sexual immorality, should be avoided. The reasons for fleeing sexual immorality constitute the second line of defense.

#### *Figure 3: Argumentation structure of 1 Corinthians 6:12-20*

- 1 You should not have sex with harlots (15bc)
  - 1.1a You should not become one with a harlot (15b)
    - 1.1a.1a You are one with Christ (15a)
      - (1.1a.1b) [You cannot be one both with a harlot and with Christ (15-17)]
    - 1.1b Having sex with a harlot makes you one with her (16a)
      - 1.1b.1 Gen: "The two shall become one flesh" (16b)
  - 1.2a Sexual immorality should be fled (18a)
    - (1.2a.1) [Sexual immorality is not like acceptable urges such as eating (13)]
      - (1.2a.1.1a) [How food affects the stomach *will not matter* in the end (13a)]
        - 1.2a.1.1a.1 God will *abolish* both (13a)

(1.2a.1.1b) [How sexual immorality affects the body *will matter* in the end (13b)]

1.2a.1.1b.1 Your bodies will be *resurrected* (14)

1.2a.1.1b.1.1 The Lord's body was resurrected (14)

(1.2a.2) [Sexual immorality is a sin against the Holy Spirit (19)]

1.2a.2.1a Sexual immorality is a sin against the body (18b)

1.2a.2.1b The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (19)

1.2a.2.1b.1 God owns you (20a)

(1.2b) [Having sex with harlots is a case of sexual immorality]

The arguments beginning with 1.1 (subsection II) represent the spiritual danger that sex with harlots specifically causes. Curiously, the argument 1.1a.1b is left implicit. This argument is crucial because it indicates why unity with a harlot is dangerous in view of the unity with Christ: they are mutually exclusive (see, Fee 1987, pp. 251, 257 and Lambrecht 2009, p. 483). Members of the congregation should not be mixed with representatives of sexual immorality. On a more general level, the point is that the holy and the unholy should not be mixed with each other.

The arguments beginning with 1.2 build a bridge between the specific issue of having sex with harlots and the broader phenomenon of sexual immorality (Goulder 1999, p. 345). The implicit argument 1.2b indicates this connection. Two lines of defense, beginning with 1.2a.1 and 1.2a.2, support the notion that sexual immorality should be fled. These correspond with subsections I and III.

In verses 13–14 (subsection I; arguments beginning with 1.2a.1), Paul manufactures a counter-argument to a view that he implicitly attributes to the Corinthians (see, Fee 1987, p. 253). He compares sexual immorality to acceptable human urges. Eating is used as an example of an acceptable urge. Eating is alluded to by foods and stomach. The point of verse 13a is the following: how food affects the stomach, which is a part of the body, *does not matter* in the end. This is because God will abolish them. Sexual immorality, however, affects the body in a way that *matters* in the end. The body is important because it is meant for resurrection and not for destruction (Conzelmann 1975, p. 111; Lambrecht 2009, pp. 481-482). Paul suggests that the unholy sexual immorality harms the holy resurrection body while acceptable urges do not. Thus, sexual immorality differs from other urges.



From the above reasoning, the alleged Corinthian position may be deduced. The Corinthians may have considered sex with harlots as harmless as, for instance, eating. Paul argues that their view is incorrect. However, the analyst has to be careful in making these assumptions regarding the recipients' stance. The apostle may attribute a false position to the audience in order to make his own case more persuasive. In this case, Paul would commit the fallacy of the *straw man* (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, p. 126; van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 181; van Eemeren & Grootendorst & Snoeck Henkemans 2002, p. 177).

In subsection III, Paul argues that sexual immorality should be fled because it is spiritually dangerous. In verse 18b, the apostle states that sexual immorality is a sin against the body and in verse 19 that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. From these two notions, the implicit argument 1.2a.2 can be deduced: sexual immorality is a sin against the Holy Spirit. Again, Paul tries to prevent the mixing of the holy and the unholy.

In verse 20a, the apostle suggests that God has bought the Corinthians. In other words, they are his slaves and not free. This runs contrary to Paul's initial position in verse 12: everything is free. During the course of the argumentation the apostle attempts to change the recipients' attitude regarding them being free to its opposite. Already in verses 12-13, Paul qualifies his radical statements (Lambrecht 2009, p. 480). The Corinthians should act according to the will of their master and not according to their alleged freedom. This tactic of Paul functions as an example of his strategic maneuvering which is scrutinized further.

## 2.2 *Strategic maneuvering*

In the analysis of strategic maneuvering, its three inseparable aspects, which can be distinguished analytically, are assessed: topical potential, audience demand and presentational devices (van Eemeren 2010, pp. 93-101, 108-113, 118-122; van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002, pp. 139-141). The analysis concentrates on finding answers to the questions brought up in the introduction. Consequently, some otherwise interesting issues are left unaddressed.

### 2.2.1 *Topical potential*

Paul chooses to defend a standpoint which holds that the Corinthians should not have sex with harlots. The topic of the standpoint is substantially strong, because it can be regarded as a sexual misconduct. The apostle explicates this connection in the argumentation stage by implicitly suggesting that having sex with harlots is

a case of sexual immorality (1.2b). Paul uses the topic to shame the audience (Goulder 1999, p. 342; see, Moxnes 1993, pp. 22-24).

Connecting the specific issue, sex with harlots, to a broader topic, sexual immorality, provides Paul a pool of new arguments. In addition, sexual immorality makes the specific issue explicitly a sin and thus more easily condemnable. Moreover, from a linguistic point of view the topics, sex with harlots (πόρνη) and sexual immorality (πορνεία), are easy to connect.

The specific phenomenon described in the standpoint has significant topical potential also because the phenomenon is concrete. The Corinthians, according to Paul, are guilty of a physical sin which also has spiritual implications. It is difficult for the audience to deny the accusation or to interpret their behavior as something else. The concreteness leaves little room for defense: either they are guilty or not.

In the opening and argumentation stages, Paul mentions the three persons of the godhead: God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. That the Corinthians' behavior affects the three persons emphasizes the spiritual danger of having sex with harlots and, perhaps more importantly, the Corinthians' failure. They have failed to glorify God (20b), to take into account that their bodies are members of Christ (15a), and that they have sinned against the Holy Spirit (18b-19).

#### 2.2.2 Audience demand

Regarding audience demand, Paul approaches the case indirectly. In verses 12-14, he puts forward mostly starting points. Paul does not put forward the standpoint until midway the section and it is formulated as a rhetorical question. The apostle also refers literally to himself. Why does he choose the *insinuatio*-approach? Characteristically this approach is chosen, when the case is considered difficult for the arguer (Lausberg 1998, p. 121).

A plausible reason for Paul to opt for *insinuatio* is that he contributed to the problems in the congregation with his preaching prior to 1 Corinthians (Rosner 1994, p. 125; Thurén 2009). Consequently, Paul does not accuse the recipients directly of wrong behavior but criticizes, instead, their lack of drawing the correct conclusions from his previous teachings (verse 15a). In addition, in 5:9-11 the apostle corrects the interpretation of his earlier letter (Hurd 1965, pp. 149-150). Moreover, in 11:2 Paul thanks the audience for taking his message literally. When these features are combined with the apostle's generally hyperbolic

presentation, such as that regarding libertinism in 6:12, radical misinterpretations appear plausible.

Paul addresses the whole congregation even though it is not feasible to render all the recipients guilty of sexual misconduct. However, by accusing the whole community the accusation becomes potentially stronger, since the congregation has to share the blame and the shame that follows. Paul wants to claim an authoritative position over the audience and a shared responsibility of the transgression by them helps in this aim.

### *2.2.3 Presentational devices*

Regarding the presentational devices, the hyperbolic formulation in verse 12 reflects Paul's own rhetorical position more than that of the Corinthians (Dodd 1995, pp. 39, 54). In order to correct his earlier teaching on libertinism without losing his ethos, the apostle chooses to begin from a position that the audience allegedly accepts. Towards the end of the section, he has changed his stance on freedom almost completely (verses 19-20). The Corinthians are not free but instead God's slaves. Consequently, they should follow his commands which Paul, as their spiritual father, puts forward. Instead of losing authority, he may have felt it necessary to exaggerate his position to portray himself as the expert of freedom.

Besides establishing common starting points, the "do you not know" -questions are designed to shame the audience (see, Wuellner 1986, pp. 61-62, 72). The Corinthians have failed to take into consideration the apostle's teachings. Paul suggests that they have not realized what consequences the quote from Genesis 2:24 and the notion of them being bought with a price entail. Instead, they have gotten mixed up with unholiness in having relations with harlots. Paul use of the rhetorical questions to shame the audience corresponds with their function and intent in the previous sections 4:18-5:13 and 6:1-11 (Wuellner 1986, pp. 61-62).

### *3. Conclusion*

In the introduction, it was asked, what function section 6:12-20 has as part of 1 Corinthians. Is it placed randomly or strategically as a part of the letter? Is there an underlying train of thought that connects it to the other argumentative sections, especially 4:18-5:13 and 6:1-11?

Regarding the dialectical aim, Paul wants to keep the holy and the unholy

separate. He wishes to prevent the Corinthians from uniting with harlots and consequently being part of sexual immorality. This goal corresponds with the aim of sections 4:18–5:13 and 6:1–11. In the former, Paul argues that the recipients should exile the unholy fornicator from their holy congregation. In the latter, the apostle forbids the community of saints to have their lawsuits in front of the unrighteous judges.

Regarding the rhetorical goal, Paul wants to shame the Corinthians by accusing them of sexual immorality. The apostle chooses the topic of sexual misconduct purposefully to inflict the negative feeling. Prolific presentational devices in this attempt are the “do you not know” – questions, which appear also in sections 4:18–5:13 and 6:1–11. In addition, in 4:18–5:13, he brings up the Corinthians’ failure to exile the fornicator as means to shame them. In 6:1–11, the apostle explicitly states that he argues to shame them in verse 5. The recipients going to law before unbelievers is shameful, because, for instance, they are allegedly worthy and able to resolve the issues themselves.

Paul approaches the case indirectly, by way of *insinuatio*. Verses 12–14 consists mainly of common starting points and the standpoint in verses 15bc is formulated as a rhetorical question, which refers to the apostle himself. He cannot blame the Corinthians directly, since he has contributed to the issue at hand with his earlier preaching.

Paul’s overall goal in shaming the audience is to diminish their boasting, for which he blames them in chapters 4 and 5. According to the apostle, the Corinthians think that they do not require his leadership anymore (4:8, 15, 18–19). Paul wants to revive his authority and argue that they still need him, since there are several severe, even shameful, problems in the congregation.

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