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Assessing the Body

1 Cor 11:17–34 as Persuasion

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Abstract

The pericope of 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 has been a cornerstone in the theological understanding of the Eucharist. This study seeks to reevaluate conventional interpretations by concentrating on the primary rhetorical strategies employed within the passage, using contemporary argumentation analysis. It becomes apparent that Paul strategically utilizes the Eucharist narrative to underscore the imperative of correctly interpreting the term “body,” which he imbues with dual significance. The treatment of the members of Christ’s body in Corinth is intrinsically linked to the treatment of the Lord himself. Consequently, those who metaphorically and literally fracture his body will incur commensurate repercussions.

Keywords

Eucharist – argumentation analysis – Toulmin – rhetorical criticism

Good table manners were not known to a few Corinthian house-owners. The consequences were immense, as the history of the interpretation of 1 Cor 11:17–34 indicates.¹ This passage has served as the bedrock of the Eucharist:² it is the earliest documentation of the Last Supper and discusses practical and theological issues related to the ritual. The early church sometimes strictly limited access to Eucharist; even a bishop visiting another city was not necessarily admitted to the table.³ During the Reformation, the issue of the Eucharist separated the Lutherans and Calvinists, and even today, it marks one of the most important dividing lines between churches and denominations. Moreover, Paul's admonition to "examine oneself before eating the bread and drinking from the cup" (1 Cor 11:28) has spurred serious spiritual reflections. For example, in the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, the Orthodox Church prays to partake of the Eucharist without the risk of "judgment or condemnation" (μη εἰς κρίμα ἢ εἰς κατάκριμα), referring to 1 Cor 11:34.⁴

1 Exegetical Problems

It remains unclear whether the later uses of 1 Cor 11:17–34 are based on neutral readings of the text. Alternatively, other religious exigencies may have guided understandings of Paul's words. Academic exegesis, in turn, has directed much interest to the history behind the text, seeking to reconstruct either the earliest version of the narrative of the Eucharist⁵ or the historical situation triggering Paul's reaction.⁶ Although these questions are interesting, their answers do not suffice to support a reliable hermeneutical interpretation of the passage. Regardless of what the historical Jesus said or what the true situation at the Corinthian table was, it might be beneficial to once more focus on Paul's message and theology in the section, by using modern methodology. To this end, linguistic information and historical details are insufficient.

1 For an overview and analysis, see L. Jamir, *Exclusion and Judgment in Fellowship Meals: the Socio-historical Background of 1 Cor 11:17–34* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016).

2 From among the many options, we select the widely used term "Eucharist," except when citing other scholars or when Paul refers to "Lord's Supper" (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον, 1 Cor 11:20).

3 See W. Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries* (trans. N.E. Nagel; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966).

4 Online: <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-john-chrysostom>.

5 For example, C. Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther, Zweiter Teil* (ThHKNT VII/2; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1982) 84–90.

6 For more details, see below.

The *crux interpretum* of the passage is Paul's ambiguous expression *μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα* ("without judging the body"): should the addressees think of the difference between ordinary bread and sacramental bread, which is the body of Christ, or of the congregation as Christ's body? Another even more essential question is: "What does Paul's recitation of a liturgical tradition have to do with the Corinthian problem?"⁷ In other words, how does the Eucharist narrative (1 Cor 11:23b–25) fit into his reasoning? How does it lead to his heavy threats? Answering this question can illuminate the hermeneutical purpose of the whole passage. More generally, Paul's train of thought in the passage needs to be clarified.⁸

The task is not made easier by the apostle's peculiar approach: he relies on apparently problematic persuasive techniques.⁹ Instead of lucidly presenting clear reasons for his position, he vilifies, denigrates, and threatens his audience in various ways while emphasizing his own superiority. Scrutinizing the semantic and logical problems in the passage helps see the big picture: What is Paul doing? How does he want his audience to react? How do his aims fit into the broader context of 1 Corinthians? Is Paul instructing his audience to practice better table manners at the sacramental meal, or is the whole discussion just a step toward a wider goal? To answer these questions, a fresh, pragmatic perspective can be fruitful. This is the aim of our presentation.

2 Misguiding Rhetoric

A realistic picture of what happened at the Corinthian meals would be a good start. To this end, a minimalistic approach is more reliable than fulsome but unsupported hypotheses. The basic problem is that the only source is Paul's heavily rhetorical *narratio*, which, as a persuasive device, easily leads astray. Quintilian proposed that *narratio* was one of the most effective means of rhetorical manipulation because it yielded a seemingly neutral and reliable

7 A. Eriksson, *Traditions as Rhetorical Proof: Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians* (CB 29; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1998) 174, referring to J. Weiss, *Das Urchristentum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1910) 510.

8 One of the few attempts to focus on Paul's actual argumentation in this passage is offered by Eriksson, *Traditions*, 174–196.

9 For general criteria of fair argumentation and an analysis of Paul's reasoning in Galatians, see M. Hietanen, *Paul's Argumentation in Galatians* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007) 176–193. To be sure, we cannot judge Paul's persuasive technics based on modern criteria. However, certain basic conventions are universal: argumentation by threat or using *ad hominem* is hardly ever fair reasoning.

description of an incident. Audiences are less critical of such tailor-made accounts, so their opinions can be better influenced.¹⁰

More generally, although *mirror reading* remains a popular way to obtain information about the situation in Pauline congregations, this approach likely yields a biased image because the *altera pars*, the other side, has no voice.¹¹ One of the few tools to circumvent this problem is to *derhetorize* the text, or to identify its most obvious rhetorical devices and try to minimize their effect.¹² Typical expressions, which ought to be derhetorized in Paul's writings, use *hyperbole* and *vituperatio*:¹³ when he exaggerates or depicts a person with stereotypical labels, little dependable information can be expected to be found.

Against whom is Paul writing in 1 Cor 11:17–34? What have these misbehaving people done? There are two rival interpretations (if certain variations are overlooked, and some generalization applied): the classical and the new interpretations. According to the classical reading, the rich people started to eat and became drunk before the Lord's meal at the end of the service, and they possibly left no food for the poor who arrived later.¹⁴ Eventually, the rich combined an ordinary meal with the sacred one, changing the solemn, sacramental Jerusalem or Galilee tradition to a more festive Roman meal. Their main fault was to not distinguish between ordinary food and the body of Christ; moreover, they failed to wait for others.¹⁵ The modern, spatial interpretation is based on sociological studies and argues that the question was not about

10 J.D. O'Banion, "Narration and Argumentation: Quintilian on *Narratio* as the Heart of Rhetorical Thinking," *Rhetorica* 5 (1987) 325–351.

11 For criticism of mirror-reading, see, for example, G. Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985) and J. Barclay, "Mirror-reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *JSNT* 31 (1987) 76.

12 On the concept of "derhetorization," see L. Thurén, *Derhetorizing Paul: a Dynamic Perspective on Pauline Theology and the Law* (WUNT 1 124; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002) 28–29. The critic must recognize the persuasive techniques in the document and recover the goals and ideology behind them. The crucial question is, how Paul believed that his recipients would perceive his message.

13 See L.T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *JBL* 108 (1989) 419–441; A. du Toit, "Vilification as Pragmatic Device in Early Christian Epistolography," *Biblica* 75 (1994) 403–412.

14 For example, J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (tr. N. Perrin; London: SCM, 1966) 121; H.-J. Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult* (NTAbh 15; Münster: Aschendorff, 1982) 295. See further Eriksson, *Traditions*, 176 n. 8. The temporal interpretation is compatible with the fact that Sunday was a normal working day. Consequently, poorer people could not arrive until they had finished their daily work.

15 For further details, see A.C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 851–852.

timing. Instead, the rich people did not welcome others at all.¹⁶ They made the common *agape* meal their private party.¹⁷ The differences between the two groups were above all social and economic. The fault of the rich was not to recognize the whole congregation as the body of Christ.

Both understandings are based on specific semantic interpretations of the words *προλαμβάνει* (1 Cor 11:21) and *ἐκδέχασθε* (11:33): either “take first” and “wait for others” or “devour” and “welcome others.”¹⁸ While both combinations are possible, readings cannot be based only on word definitions. The plain text yields little additional information to reconstruct the situation. However, to understand Paul’s basic thought, it suffices to state that, in one way or the other, the misbehaving people did not respect others at the table, which caused “tears” or “divisions” (*σχίσματα, αἰρέσεις*)¹⁹ in the congregation. For the Corinthians themselves, the matter was about table manners, not doctrinal issues. It was Paul who made this a theological question.

In the text, Paul describes the audience with other interesting expressions, revealing his hyperbolic rhetoric. He claims that everyone (*ἕκαστος*) eats before others or in a selfish way. However, it is logically impossible for everyone to jump ahead of or exclude others. Paul further suggests that everybody has their own houses, but those who have nothing to eat hardly belong among such house owners (1 Cor 11:21–22). Both statements employ hyperbole, superficially referring to many but directed at only a few rich people who should not despise the poor. The Corinthians did not include many rich people (1 Cor 1:26), so this whole passage is targeted at only a few misbehaving members of the congregation.

Did the rich people eat and drink too much?²⁰ This could have a theological dimension if intoxication were the reason for their failure to distinguish between ordinary and sacramental bread. Paul indeed calls his antagonists drunkards (1 Cor 11:21). However, accusations of moral depravity and excessive drinking were a standard topos of *vituperatio*.²¹ Such labels generally were not intended to convey reliable information but to claim that a person was in the wrong. Indeed, in the final *peroratio* (1 Cor 11:33–34),²² in which clear, explicit

16 To be sure, both the temporal and the spatial interpretations include several variations. See Eriksson, *Traditions*, 175–176.

17 Eriksson, *Traditions*, 176; Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 850–851.

18 For a thorough discussion, see D.E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003) 540–541.

19 Wolff (*Korinther*, 79) correctly states that *σχίσματα* and *αἰρέσεις* are used here as synonyms.

20 This hypothesis fits both the classical and the modern interpretation.

21 du Toit, *Vilification*, 408. For drunkenness, see, e.g., 1 Cor 5:11; 6:10; Gal 5:21; 1 Tim 3:3.

22 Eriksson (*Traditions*, 175), too, views these verses the *peroratio* of the passage.

admonitions usually are given, Paul does not scold the misbehaving audience for alcohol abuse, tell them to distinguish between two types of meal, or even order them to not eat too much. Instead, he instructs them only to treat others well. He calls this eating their “own meal” (1 Cor 11:21: τὸ ἴδιον δεῖπνον) rather than the Lord’s meal (11:20: κυριακὸν δεῖπνον).

If these wicked individuals only violated good table manners, why does Paul threaten them with divine judgment? Surprisingly, he does not seem to provide clear theological argumentation. Instead, he plays on emotions, especially honor and shame. He not only charges (παράγγελλων) his audience with poor behavior but emphasizes it with the rhetorical device *litotes*: “I am not praising you” (1 Cor 11:17a). He later repeats this in 11:22c, enhancing the *litotes* with a rhetorical question: “Should I praise you? I am not praising you for this!” He further charges his audience with behaving “in an unworthy manner” (ἀναξίως). In contrast, Paul emphasizes his own solemn persona and closeness to the original Eucharist: “I received (11:23 ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον) from the Lord what I also passed on to you,” just as the Lord, too, took (11:23: ἔλαβεν) and passed on the bread. Moreover, Paul claims an authoritative position, as a master in command (cf. the verb διατάσσω in 11:34). In addition to calling the audience drunkards, he suggests that some are not genuine (11:19), suggests that they will be guilty (11:27: ἔνοχος), and finally, threatens them with judgment (11:29–32, 34). Resorting to such denigration, threatening, and references to his own authority does not look like reliable and lucid argumentation. Does Paul not have any solid theological grounds for his case?

3 Analyzing the Argumentation

To be sure, the passage both begins and ends with attempts at persuasive reasoning, and consequently can be scrutinized with proper argumentation analysis. However, too often the commentators’ methodology for illuminating Paul’s train of thought remains unclear. For example, Thiselton writes: “The practices which surround the sharing of the meal which (in Paul’s view) points above all to the ‘for others’ of the Lord’s death undermine the very heart of why the worshipping community celebrates the Lord’s Supper at all. ... ‘Remembering’ and ‘showing forth’ the Lord’s death is a matter of conduct and lifestyle, not simply of words and ecclesial ritual.”²³ Likewise, Lampe explains at length that the Eucharist and the proclamation of Christ’s

²³ Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 851.

death are closely connected to ethics. Christ died for both the rich and the poor, and his self-denial for the benefit of others is made present in the sacrament.²⁴ These explanations are lucid per se, but it is difficult to see how they are derived from the text. Paul never explicitly discusses lifestyle, self-denial, or most other ideas mentioned by these scholars. These examples show that even critical exegesis could benefit from proper and transparent tools for analyzing argumentation.

One of the few exceptions is a pioneering study by Anders Eriksson on the structure of the argumentation in this passage.²⁵ Since his approach is based on Aristotelian enthymematic logic, which was not originally developed for scholarly analysis, the results still leave open essential questions, particularly the crucial issue of the persuasive function of the Eucharist narrative. Thus, we follow Eriksson but apply to Paul's reasoning a more suitable model for analyzing argumentation.²⁶

One of the most widely used and most easily comprehensible method for analyzing argumentation was developed in 1958 by the British philosopher Stephen Toulmin.²⁷ According to him, any human reasoning can be broken down into certain, precisely defined functional elements. In brief, the speaker puts forward a specific opinion (*Claim*), which must be supported by specific information already accepted by the audience (*Data*). The connection between the opinion and the information is ensured by a general rule (*Warrant*), supported by general information (*Backing*). The characterizations of these elements are crucial; if not followed precisely, an analysis will not function.

Any argumentation begins with a common point of departure. In 1 Corinthians, the behavior of some addressees is at stake. Even if Paul's denigrating references are exaggerated, something in the Corinthians' behavior at the table clearly irritates him. At the end of persuasive passage (*peroratio*), one should express the issue in a straightforward manner. Indeed, 1 Cor 11:33 suggests that the Corinthians have excluded others in one way or another. Thus,

24 P. Lampe, "Das Korinthische Herrenmahl im Schnittpunkt hellenistisch-römischen Mahlpraxis und paulinischer Theologia Crucis (1 Kor 11:17–34)," *ZNW* 82 (2009) 206–213.

25 Eriksson, *Traditions*, 174–196.

26 For the field of argumentation analysis and its numerous options, see F.H. van Eemeren et al., *Handbook of Argumentation Theory* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014).

27 S.E. Toulmin et al., *An Introduction to Reasoning* (2nd ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1984) 29–77; L. Thurén, *Parables Unplugged—Reading the Lukan Parables in Their Rhetorical Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014) 30–32.

we present a preliminary structure of the reasoning in 11:21–22. After Figure 1, the audience is assumed to have accepted its *Claim*, so that it can be reused as the *Data*¹ of Figure 2.

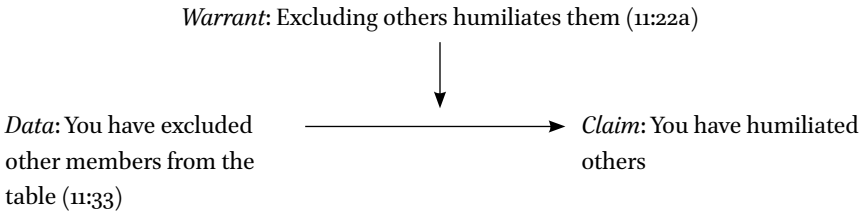


FIGURE 1 The reasoning in 1 Cor 11:21–22

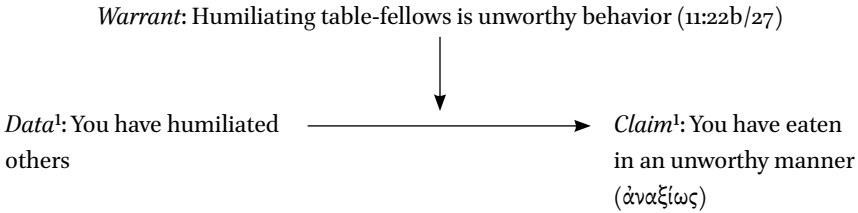


FIGURE 2 The reasoning in 1 Cor 11:21–22

The *Claim*¹ is reused as a point of departure (*Data*²) for the final reasoning in 11:27–34, which is intended to persuade the addressees to eat together with their brethren. In this reasoning, eating in an unworthy manner (ἀναξίως) is related to eating “without judging correctly (μὴ διακρίνων) the body.” What this obscure expression refers to is studied later; here, it suffices to say that such behavior is presented as preventable. In a simplified form, Paul’s reasoning in the last verses of the passage can be described as follows.²⁸

28 Eriksson’s elegant enthymeme comes close to this figure: improper behavior at the Lord’s Supper leads to judgment. Coming together so that some are left hungry is improper behavior. Thus, to avoid judgment, do not gather so that some are left hungry, but welcome one another (Eriksson, *Traditions*, 193).

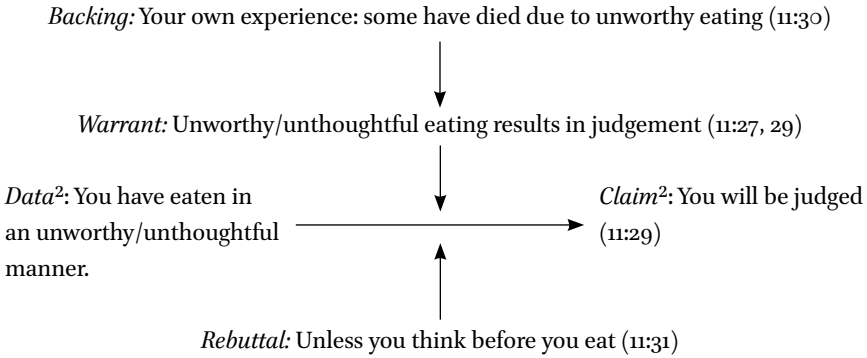


FIGURE 3 The reasoning in 1 Cor 11:27–31

The addressees probably want to avoid judgment, so they are expected to accept this *Rebuttal*²⁹ as the accepted *Data*³ for the further reasoning.

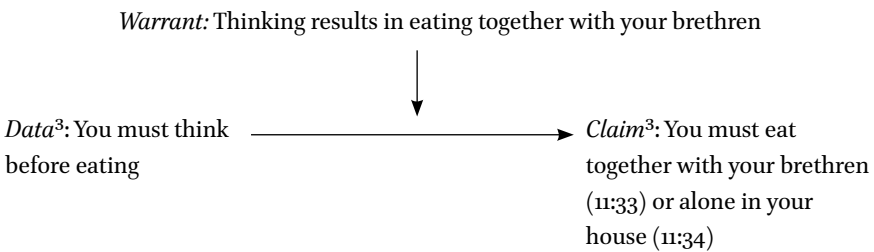


FIGURE 4 The reasoning in 1 Cor 11:31–34

Paul's reasoning, however, presents a major problem. How can the audience be sure that the essential *Warrant* in Figure 2 (*Unworthy/unthoughtful eating results in judgment*) is valid? The *Backing* referring to dead members of the congregation is not very compelling. They might have died for many other reasons than bad table manners.

Indeed, even if eating before others or excluding them in any other way is not nice behavior, and even if this can be characterized as unworthy behavior in a sacramental situation, it still appears to be only a minor point compared to the many major theological issues discussed in Paul's epistles. How

29 A *Rebuttal* displays another valid view of the situation (see Toulmin, *Introduction*, 81–101).

can such a minor point make one “guilty of the Lord’s body and blood” (11:27), bring judgment (11:29) resulting in weakness and death, and finally, lead to judgment with the rest of the world (11:32)?

Paul’s main proof for his thesis is the re-telling of the Eucharist narrative in 1 Cor 11:23b–26. Here, the emphasis is on the bread and body; wine is not explicitly identified with the Lord’s blood. The logical particle γάρ connects this narrative to the proclamation of the Lord’s death (11:26), which, in turn, is connected by the logical particle ὥστε³⁰ to Paul’s thesis about the association of poor behavior and disgrace to the “body and blood of the Lord” (11:27). The Eucharist narrative, therefore, serves as the crucial *Backing*, intended to support the general rule or *Warrant* that “unworthy eating results in judgment” (11:27).

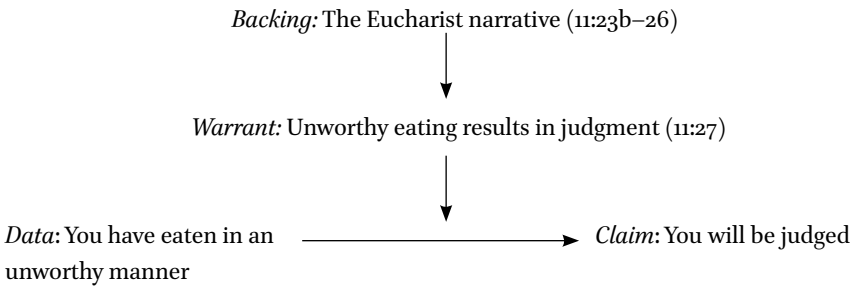


FIGURE 5 The reasoning in 1 Cor 11:21–32

The relationship between the *Backing* and the *Warrant*, however, remains unclear. How and why does unworthily eating the Lord’s body and drinking his cup, or its result—the unworthy proclamation of his death—make one “responsible for his body and blood” and moreover lead to judgment?

Eriksson suggests an answer based on Aristotelian syllogisms:

Major premise The tradition prescribes behavior at the Lord’s Supper
(underlying enthymeme)

30 For more details, see L. Thurén, *Argument and Theology in 1 Peter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995) 70–71.

Minor premise You do not follow the tradition
 (*first refutative enthymeme*)
Conclusion Thus, there can be no Lord's Supper.³¹

Unfortunately, the major premise is derived incorrectly from the text: the tradition in the Eucharist narrative given by Paul mentions nothing about table manners. Its connection to the reasoning, therefore, remains unclear. Eriksson concludes that according to the tradition transmitted by Paul, the Corinthians' meal "should function as a ritual of solidarity. Their failure to show this unity in practice is the basis for the ensuing argumentation concerning judgment."³² Indeed, Paul's reasoning would be clear and lucid—if he said so. Since this is not the case, we have to continue the analysis.

4 Judging the Body

So far, we have decoded the "unworthy eating" as the rich congregation members' habit of excluding and humiliating the poor in some way. For Paul, this seemingly social misbehavior becomes theological because it somehow violates the body of Christ. The correct solution is not to accept or wait for others but to "judge" or "assess correctly the body" (1 Cor 11:29: διακρίνειν τὸ σῶμα). This verb can be interpreted in several ways. The basic etymological meaning is "to separate one from another," while "distinguish," "judge," "assess," or even "interpret" are also good options.³³ The meaning depends on the context.

Paul here plays with the semantic options, which we translate with one option only throughout the passage: one gains judgment (κρίμα) without judging (διακρίνων) the body (1 Cor 11:29); if we will judge (διεκρίνομεν) ourselves, we will not be judged (11:31: ἐκρινόμεθα); and God judges us (κρινόμενοι), so we will not be judged (11:32: κατακριθῶμεν). Apparently, this is not the best

31 Eriksson (*Traditions*, 184) presents several versions of the same reasoning, with major premises such as "the Lord's Supper tradition prescribes behavior at the Lord's Supper" (181) and "the one who follows the tradition deserves praise" (182).

32 Eriksson, *Traditions*, 196.

33 LSJ s.v. διακρίνω. Moreover, διακρίνειν can refer to questioning or doubting. For further details, see Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 892.

possible translation. Instead, the denotation of the word varies among cases. In particular, διακρίνειν “the body” and διακρίνειν “ourselves” refer to correct assessment based on examination (11:28: δοκιμαζέτω) without necessarily referring to two particular options; the wordplay governs the word choice.

It is more difficult to actually follow Paul’s instruction and make a correct assessment of the word “body” (σῶμα). Does he refer to the sacramental body of the Lord, as the old interpretation holds, or to the ecclesiological body of the Lord, as posited by the new interpretation? Unlike in the case of the verb διακρίνειν, dictionaries and analyses of the word’s general semantic field are of little use. Instead, the ambivalence must be interpreted from the perspective of the implied audience: how did Paul assume that his recipients would understand the expression while hearing its context?

In the context, Paul gives his audience two signals. Immediately before the passage, he discusses eating food offered to idols (1 Cor 10) and tells the audience to understand (1 Cor 10:15: κρίνατε) what he says. Eating food offered to idols connects people with idols, while eating bread at the Eucharist makes them one body with Christ (10:16–21).

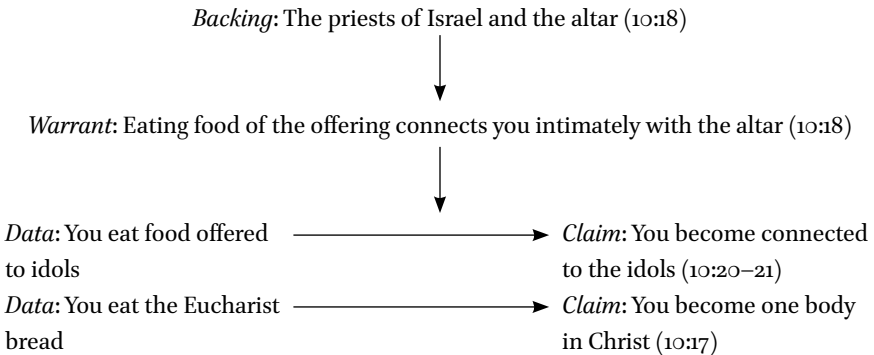


FIGURE 6 The reasoning in 1 Cor 10:16–21

Bread thus has a double figurative meaning. In addition to denoting food, it both refers to communion with the body of Christ (10:16b: κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) and makes them one body (10:17: ἐν σώμα οἱ πολλοί ἐσμεν).

Accordingly, by this point in the epistle, the addressees should understand that the word “body” (σῶμα) also has a double figurative meaning: it describes both the body of Christ and the congregation as his body. Paul

guides his audience to keep in mind this ambivalence because he later more explicitly expresses both meanings: in 1 Cor 11:24, Jesus calls the bread his body, while in 12:12–30 Paul develops the idea of the congregation as the body of Christ.³⁴

Paul typically played with various semantic fields. Perhaps most famously, he employs several meanings of the word νόμος (e.g., Rom 3:31).³⁵ This technique has caused the interpreters much trouble, yet any attempt to homogenize his semantics would spoil his reasoning. In the middle of this word play while discussing the Eucharist, Paul bluntly mentions τὸ σῶμα and tells the audience to assess it correctly (1 Cor 11:29). The audience then has no choice but to think about the two meanings and their interconnection of which they have just heard. Picking one meaning and disregarding the other would be unnatural for anyone who has just read or heard 1 Cor 10. The correct assessment of the “body” (1 Cor 11:29) is to realize that the bread eaten, the sacramental body of the Lord, and the congregation as the body of the Lord are nearly identical. The bread eaten gives κοινωνία with both bodies, which are essentially one. To neglect either results in judgment or damnation. How and why this actually happens, however, is not explained in 1 Cor 11:29.

Paul’s point of departure (*Data*) is that his audience, with their poor table manners, has caused division in the congregation (1 Cor 11:18) and humiliated some members (11:22). Now, the essential message of the Eucharist narrative (11:23–25) is to emphasize that the bread eaten is the body of the Lord. From the previous chapter, the audience knows that the congregation, too, is the body of the Lord. They, therefore, have torn apart or humiliated not only their fellow congregation members but also the Lord himself. A plain structure regarding the table manners at the Eucharist describes the process of judgment against Paul’s audience.

34 The section 12:12–30 expresses the unity of the members: there should be no disharmony because all members suffer when one suffers.

35 Paul uses νόμος to refer to both Mosaic law and the story in Genesis (Rom 3:31). For a discussion, see Thurén, *Derhetorizing*, 107.

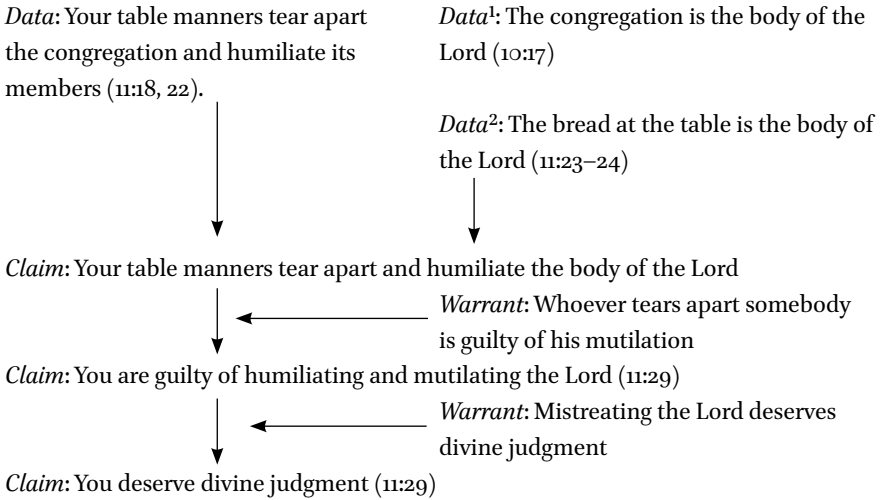


FIGURE 7 Judgment according to 1 Cor 11:18–29

Rhetoric is commonly divided into three dimensions: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. This simple reasoning explains the *theological* dimension of the crisis, as it explicates the rhetorical *logos* dimension of the passage. The logical role of the Eucharist narrative is to remind the audience that the bread eaten at the Eucharist is the body of the Lord, referring not only to the members of the congregation but also to the Lord himself. Thus, how congregation members treat each other when eating the bread/body/the Lord pertains directly to him.

Although this word play is evident in the text, Paul does not present a lucid structure of reasoning. Perhaps this is due to his attempt to simultaneously use the Eucharist narrative for other purposes. A solemn narrative, it enhances the *pathos* of Paul’s presentation, emphasizes his role as the mediator of the narrative (1 Cor 11:23), and enhances his *ethos* (while, in contrast, references to the audience’s unworthiness [11:27] and drunkenness [11:21] diminish their *ethos*). One explanation of the somewhat awkward presentation of the Eucharist narrative is that Paul “presupposes a certain theological concept about the Lord’s Supper that he does not develop.”³⁶ Alternatively, the problem at the table has taken him by surprise, and he is not fully prepared to

36 P. Lampe, “The Eucharist: Identifying with Christ on the Cross,” *Interpretation* 48 (1994) 36; T. Engberg-Pedersen, “Proclaiming the Lord’s Death: 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 and the

address the situation.³⁷ This speculation is supported by his heavy use of *ethos* and *pathos* with the weak ad hoc reference to the sick and dead (11:30), which is an additional element unconnected to the main reasoning.

5 The Big Picture?

The primary exigency behind 1 Cor 11:18–34 is the poor manners at the sacramental meal by a few rich members of the Corinthian congregation. This has caused unwanted social differentiation based on the members' economic status and, moreover, has humiliated the poor majority. Paul meets this exigency by humiliating the rich: they are put to shame and threatened with God's judgment. In doing so, Paul continues the earlier thrust of the epistle (1 Cor 6:5: "I say this to your shame"). A major goal of the first part of the epistle is to identify at least some problems in the audience and enlarge them as much as possible to reestablish his own authority. For example, Paul finds among the ethically impeccable Corinthians one single morally questionable man (1 Cor 5:1) and makes him into a major issue.³⁸ This passage 11:18–34 also serves this goal well: a social problem caused by a few people has major theological implications. In Paul's own words, "a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough" (1 Cor 5:6). This rhetorical technique, by which the speaker overinterprets the recipients' perception of their current situation, can be called *radicalized reality*.³⁹ In many cases, the Corinthians' poor behavior reflects their disrespect for other members of the congregation.⁴⁰

Forms of Paul's Theological Argument," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers* (ed. E.H. Lovering Jr.; Atlanta: Scholars, 1991) 113.

37 Unlike, for example, the question of the Law of Moses, Paul cannot present a well-prepared theological answer or compelling reasoning (cf. Thurén, *Derhetorizing*, 180–183).

38 For more details, see N. Lahti, *The Maneuvering Paul: A Pragma-Dialectical Analysis of Paul's Argumentation in First Corinthians 4:18–7:40* (PhD diss.; University of Eastern Finland, 2017).

39 The concept is developed by J. Pappinen (*Functions of Satan in Early Christianity*, PhD diss., University of Eastern Finland, 2017), based on H. Ulland, *Die Vision als Radikalisierung der Wirklichkeit in der Apokalypse des Johannes* (Tübingen: Francke, 1997).

40 In addition to the question of the Eucharist, cases that involve disrespect are, for example, eating food offered to idols (1 Cor 8 and 10) and speaking in tongues (1 Cor 12 and 14). As a general antidote, Paul recommends "love," or respect for one's neighbor, in a hyperbolic manner. See L. Thurén, "By Means of Hyperbole' (1 Cor 12:31b)," in *Paul and Pathos* (SBL Symposium Series 16; ed. T.H. Olbricht and J. Sumney; Atlanta 2001) 97–113.

However, even in 1 Cor 11, Paul also attempts to sketch a theological response. Through referring to the Eucharist narrative, he suggests that violating any member of the body of the Lord, especially at the meal where his body is consumed, violates the Lord himself and deserves punishment. For the misbehaving Corinthians, the proper reaction to Paul's message is to examine themselves and to recognize the two natures of the "body" as represented by the sacramental bread: it refers to both the Lord and the members of his congregation. Moreover, they should return to their previous obedience to the apostle.

According to our earlier hypothesis based on a rhetorical analysis of the Corinthian correspondence, Paul's difficulties in giving reasonable and clear answers to most of the Corinthians' problems are due to their specific nature: they can be explained as caused by Paul and his hyperbolic teaching. Occam's razor makes any hypotheses about external influences superfluous. Moreover, the problems reflect the Corinthians' lack of knowledge of Jewish customs due to the small presence of Jews in the city. For example, no good Jew would have bad table manners at a ceremonial meal or have eaten food offered to idols, although Jews know that such gods do not exist.⁴¹

In sum, the essential exegetical problems—the meaning of the word "body" and the function of the Eucharist narrative—can be solved by studying Paul's argumentation in its context, even if some less important questions, such as what precisely had happened at the Corinthians' gatherings and whether the social separation was based on timing, remain unclear. The Eucharist narrative does not display a Christian lifestyle, a tradition of proper behavior at the table, as often suggested. Although the method used here is just one of the possible ways for clarifying Paul's train of thought, and the results may not be entirely new, we have attempted to make the analysis as transparent as possible.

Instead, Paul uses the Eucharist narrative to emphasize why it is crucial to make the right assessment regarding the "body": the word has a double meaning. What happens to the members of Christ's body in Corinth also happens to the Lord himself. Those tearing apart his body in both senses will be punished accordingly. The common explanations that Paul refers to the distinction between ordinary and sacramental food or exhorts the audience to general spiritual self-examination have support in neither the text nor its

41 L. Thurén, "The Corinthian Heresies Revisited—A Rhetorical Perspective to the Historical Situation," in *Saint Paul and Corinth—1950 Years since the Writing of the Epistles to the Corinthians* (ed. S. Papadopoulos et al.; vol. 2; Athens: Psychogios Publications 2009) 777–878.

context. Not only are these explanations superfluous, but they also require a sudden change in subject.

The Corinthian individuals who—perhaps due to thoughtlessness—violated basic table manners scarcely realized the effect of their behavior. The reception history of Paul's attempt to address the situation indicates that his rhetoric may not have been entirely successful. Whereas Paul aimed at eradicating any social separation during the Eucharist, his words were used to support separation among the churches. Currently, the Eucharist is among the most important dividing lines among denominations. Consequently, Christians may have become guilty of the very misbehavior against which Paul so strenuously warned.⁴² Paying heed to proper exegetical analysis can perhaps contribute to finding a way out of the ecumenical separation.

42 In addition, these issues may have caused spiritual anxiety over the Eucharist among some later Christian groups.