

Literary Patterns in 1 Corinthians 15 by Victor Cornish (2001)

The presence of a variety of structural patterns within the text of 1 Corinthians 15 is evidence of careful authorial planning and of a literary context in which such techniques were a natural part of writing meant for oral performance. However, New Testament scholars have tended to be skeptical about many perceived literary structures. These are often considered as evidence of twenty-first century ingenuity rather than first century literary ability.

In an attempt to limit this type of subjectivity, this study seeks to establish a literary context for the Apostle Paul. The technology of first-century letter writing, the pervasive influence of an oral society on the writing of text, the argumentation of Greco-Roman rhetoric, and the profound impact of the literary style and content of the Hebrew and Greek Old Testament, were all part of Paul's background as a writer. Each area is examined with a special concern for structural features and the results are applied in the form of a structural analysis and commentary on 1 Corinthians 15. The effectiveness of this methodology is tested by its contribution to three exegetical questions: a) Paul's reference to himself as an abortion in verse 8, b) the sudden inclusion of "law" in verse 56, and c) "baptism for the dead" in verse 29.

The conclusions indicate that modern scholarship needs to develop a greater appreciation for the verbal and structural clues that are an integral part of text originally meant to be heard. These clues indicate the beginning and ending of textual units, links between units, patterns of repetition and numerous other features. Nor are these simply matter of "style". Paul's command of the technology of writing for the ear, especially as learned through the example of the scriptures of the Old Testament, was always a servant to his message