

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Lecture 14, Structural and Rhetorical Criticism

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All right, the main topic we've been discussing in relationship to hermeneutics and biblical interpretation has been text-centered approaches. We looked at how hermeneutics, hermeneutical theory and methods of interpretation moved from more historically oriented approaches that focused on the history behind the text, the author's intention, the sources and forms that gave rise to the text or the author utilized in the text and focused on an author's intention as the main determinant of meaning in author-centered approaches. Given some of the questions raised by such an approach, historically and logically, the focus shifted to literary approaches or text-centered approaches.

And so we looked a little bit at literary criticism, formalism and also looked at narrative criticism specifically and what that is and what that does and how that might be useful in interpreting biblical text. I want to continue looking at two more, briefly, two more text-centered approaches to interpretation, ones that do not, at least one of them does not ask questions of or focus on the author but finds meaning solely in the text. Another one does often give account to the author and the historical readers and background but still focuses on the text, not sources and forms behind the text but focuses on the text and its workings and its persuasive techniques and things like that, which is known as rhetorical criticism.

So we'll talk about these two final text-centered approaches and I've included rhetorical criticism in a text-centered approach and ask what they are and what they do and how they might be helpful or not for biblical interpretation and interpreting the text of the Old and New Testament. The first text-centered approach that I want to look at is known as structuralism and I don't want to spend a lot of time discussing

it for reasons that we'll see, but structuralism seems generally to have run its course and actually it's been replaced by a movement known as post-structuralism that we'll talk about in the next session and it's given way to other methods. Structuralism in some respects is difficult to define, especially when you start reading about it.

It appears to be more of a philosophy or an approach to a text than it appears to be a specific method or collection of principles. And structuralism again was a movement or an approach that ranged far beyond biblical texts and even written texts. It was utilized in the humanities and psychology, sociology, etc.

But it did have its day in biblical studies and actually developed quite early, beginning in some movements back in the 1920s, but again also eventually made its way into biblical studies. According to structuralism, what it is, according to structuralism the most profound and important part of a communication, and for our purposes the communication is the text and more specifically the text of the Old and New Testament, the most important and profound part of communication is not at the surface level of a text. So when one reads a text, the most important part of it and the most significant part of meaning and understanding is not in the surface structure of the text, not what lies on the surface of the page, but instead meaning is found in the deep structure that underlies the text.

So those two terms of surface structure and the deep structure are often important for structuralism. And simply what that means is the surface structure again would be what I find on the surface of the text, the words, the grammatical constructions, what we'd often call the outline of the text, how the text is structured and put together. But the deep structure would be the deep underlying structure that actually gives rise to what's on the surface.

And in fact what structuralism does then is tries to penetrate behind the surface structure, what one finds in the text, to recover the deep structures, the deeper meanings that have given rise to that. A deep structure that even the author was probably not aware of. And so structuralism again has moved away from author's intention.

The primary goal of interpretation is not to uncover the author's intended meaning because the deep structures that have created the surface structure, the deep structures that have determined what the author has written may not be available or may not be known at all by the author. These deep structures of meaning are inherent in human thinking itself. And in the human mind.

And so generates the surface structures of what again we often associate with the wording, the grammar, how the text is put together and arranged its outline. And again so the goal is to map the deep structures that lie right behind the surface structure of the text. And what structuralism does, it often works with oppositions.

For example, between light and darkness or good or evil, etc. etc. One example of structuralism, and then we'll look at just briefly at one individual who's championed at least in North America and especially in biblical studies, has championed structuralism and then briefly look at where it has gone and by way of evaluation.

One example is structuralism, at least some who have worked with structuralism and applied it to the biblical text, have often used a model called an actantial model. That is, it looks at narrative particularly in terms of the primary actives, the primary structure that seems to be a universal structure of narrative that gives rise to all the different narratives and the different surface structures. For example, this actantial model consists of six different actors within the narrative.

And again, we're not talking, although it doesn't always work out this way, I don't think, but at least for those that would advocate this model, they're not so much talking about again what one sees on the surface in the order of the narrative, but the underlying structure. This actantial model consisted of six parts or six actants within the narrative. Number one, there was a sender.

The first element was there's a sender in the narrative who functions to communicate an object to a receiver. So you have the sender who is trying to communicate an object to a receiver. And then he does so, the sender communicates that object to a receiver through a subject.

And that subject is helped by certain helpers, which would be the fifth category, and opposed by certain opponents, which is your sixth and final category. So you have those six actants in this, what is known as an actantial model, where you have a sender trying to communicate an object to a receiver. And he does so through a subject who is aided by helpers and who is opposed by opponents.

And the goal then is to look at narrative and how it follows a structure and to see this underlying structure behind the stories and narratives. For example, and this has been applied to Old Testament texts and New Testament texts as well, it's been applied to the parables, we'll see an example of that later, and smaller narrative units like the parables, smaller stories, but also entire narratives. One intriguing example, at least in my field of interest, the book of Revelation is that Revelation has often been subject to this actantial model, trying to look at the primary actants, the primary structure behind the narrative.

For example, the sender of Revelation, according to one analysis, the sender of Revelation is God himself. The object that he's trying to communicate is salvation or

judgment. The receivers of that object, the recipients or the receivers, would be the church, the seven churches that are addressed, or the entire world.

The subject through which the sender tries to communicate this object, that is salvation or judgment, the subject is Jesus Christ, who is helped by the angels, by angelic beings in the text, and who is opposed by a number of opponents, especially Satan in chapter 12, etc. Sometimes that model of those six actants is applied to individual chapters, at other times the entire book of Revelation is analyzed according to that model. And again, my intention is not necessarily to evaluate that, although it could help to expose who the primary characters are and what role they play in narrative.

But just to give you an example of how biblical texts are sometimes analyzed according to structuralism, or looking at the deep structures of the text. Now, as we'll see a little bit later on, one of the difficulties with the method is, is at times, those that claim to be analyzing the deep structures seem to actually be analyzing what is on the surface. But we'll return to that.

I want to talk very briefly about one of the primary figures behind structuralism in biblical studies, an individual named Daniel Pote, P-A-T-T-E. And most know him as the one who has made structuralism popular, or had made structuralism popular among North American scholars in biblical studies, as well as elsewhere. Daniel Pote was influenced by a movement called French structuralism, and he produced a number of publications in book form and article form from the mid-1970s on, where he demonstrated the value of his structural approach to biblical interpretation, taught at Vanderbilt University in the United States for years, and again popularized among scholars structuralism as an approach to understanding the biblical text.

And again, what he did is, Potte suggested that a synchronic approach to the text, that is looking at the text as it stands, as it is, will uncover the various structures of the text, the linguistic structures, the narrative structure, the mythical structures that underlie the primary, the text itself, that underlie the structures of the text. These underlying structures, these linguistic and mythic and narrative structures under the text are complex and not necessarily known to the author, according to Potte. But these underlying structures are what determine the meaning of the text, not the author's intent.

So again, when I'm reading a biblical text, the goal is to be able to map and uncover the underlying structures that gave rise to what I see in the surface that may or may not have been in the author's mind at all. So once again, according to Potte, the author's intention is not significant when it comes to interpreting a biblical text, because you're dealing with the structures that the author may not have been aware of. So for example, Potte frequently analyzed narrative structures in much of his writing and also in his commentaries on biblical text.

He analyzed narrative according to the actants or that actential model that we just talked about, where you have a sender who sends, communicates an object to a receiver through a subject. The subject is helped by helpers and opposed by opponents. So for example, he analyzed the Good Samaritan according to this model.

And again, my purpose in providing this is not to suggest agreement with it, but to demonstrate how one parable could be analyzed according to the structure. So in the parable of the Good Samaritan, that story of a traveler who is on the road to Jericho, gets jumped and attacked by thieves or robbers, is beaten. The priest and Levite come by and do nothing.

Then a Samaritan comes by and helps him, tries to restore him to his health. Potte said in that parable, the receiver of the action was the traveler, the person who was on the road. The object that the receiver is communicating is his health.

The subject is the Samaritan. And the helper is the provision that is made for the traveler. And then the opponents would be the robbers, the ones that beat him up.

So one could ask the question, well, what's the implication of such an analysis? But at this point, I just want to demonstrate how he used that model to understand one parable. Or when it comes to Jesus and the Samaritan woman, Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4, Potte analyzed according to oppositions within the text. That's another important part of, often of structural analysis and Daniel Potte's analysis, to uncover the deep structure in terms of the oppositions that are in the text.

So for example, he found in the parable of the Good Samaritan, opposition between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, opposition between Jesus' identity versus lack of knowledge of who Jesus was, opposition between spiritual water and literal water. And again, the point is the meaning of this narrative of this text is found in the deep structure that lies behind the text, not in the author's intention. Now, one thing to be said that we'll return to in making a final statement about this method is structuralism, as I've already indicated, seems to have run its course.

You don't find very much anymore, as I see it, at least you don't find too much work done on biblical text from a structuralist perspective, maybe once in a while. But again, it's basically given way to the approach that we'll look at in the next session, and that is post-structuralism. So, several observations about this method.

First of all, we have moved beyond structuralism then. We, again, you don't hear much about it. Even Daniel Potte has moved away from structuralism into more sociological approaches or cultural approaches to interpreting the text.

Second, one of the difficulties that some have highlighted with structuralism is the complex nature of the vocabulary and the technical nature of the vocabulary used to describe it. The one often has to master a vocabulary, the highly technical vocabulary to understand and utilize the method. Third, one observation I've already hinted at is that often the insights that structuralism purportedly gives are more based on the surface structure of the text and not so much on the deep structure.

So there's the question of what's the relationship between the two. And at times, some of the insights from structuralism appears to be not much different from insights that one could gather from simply analyzing the surface structure itself. So it's often not much different from literary criticism at times.

Number four, should we ignore the surface structure of the text for an underlying deep structure? Again, what is the purpose then of the surface structure? Should that be ignored, since that's all we have? That's the only evidence that we have of any type of deep structure. Certainly the surface structure itself shouldn't be ignored. And a fifth one is how do we validate a structural exegesis when all we have is the text itself? So for some of these reasons and others, structuralism is no longer really a major player in hermeneutics.

And again, you don't hear a whole lot about it. You don't see a lot written on it, although it still has some influence. And it was an important method and played an important role historically.

So I have touched upon it. But I will leave it at that, because it's basically an approach that has sort of run its course and given way to other hermeneutical theories and approaches to interpreting the biblical text. So having said that, I want to move on to the last text-centered approach that I will consider, and that is rhetorical criticism.

As I've already mentioned, this is not exclusively a text-centered approach in that it does not necessarily bracket the author or what is often called the rhetorical situation. That is what sometimes some of us might say the historical background that occasioned the biblical text. So those items are often still of interest to rhetorical critics.

But again, since it focuses on the text as a whole, since it focuses on the structure and the working of the text, I have placed it here. And by the way, given what we've just talked about, from now on when I talk about structure, I'll be referring to the surface structure of the text. I won't be using it in the technical way that structuralism used it of the underlying deep structure.

But when I talk about structure, I'll be talking about how, using it to talk about how the text is put together, the surface structure of the text. So because rhetorical criticism then focuses on the text as a whole, the structure of the text, I've placed it in the category of text-centered approaches. Though again, one could quibble about that.

The primary feature of rhetorical criticism seems to me to be to analyze text in terms of text as a means of persuasion. It analyzes the text from the standpoint of its persuasive techniques and its ability to persuade the audience. The classic expressions of at least ancient rhetoric go back to Aristotle and other ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians and how they conceived of rhetoric.

And they have left us with many writings that at least expose us to their theories of rhetoric and how that was done. And many have mined those works for the value that they have for trying to come to grips with the persuasive aspects of the rhetorical dimensions of biblical texts as well. So in light of rhetorical criticism, then biblical texts are analyzed rhetorically or how they are structured and put together in order to persuade and how they contain persuasive argumentation.

And again, rhetorical criticism has played a significant role in both Old and New Testament interpretation. And we'll see, especially in the New Testament, there are a couple of figures that are particularly associated with analyzing New Testament documents from almost exclusively a rhetorical approach. There's actually two approaches, especially in New Testament studies, there have been two approaches to rhetorical criticism.

First of all, one could simply study the rhetorical techniques of a document, focusing on things like style, or figures of speech, or rhetorical argumentation, and looking at rhetorical units or again rhetorical style or how argumentation works in the text. One common method or model applied to both the Old and New Testaments would include these steps. Number one, identifying the rhetorical unit, that is simply identifying a unit of the text by isolating the beginning and the end of the unit.

Second, then, is asking the question of the rhetorical function, how does this unit function in its broader context? But third, analyzing also the rhetorical setting, that is the situation that this unit is addressing and how it is functioning, what it is trying to do. And then finally, analyzing the teaching style of that unit and things like proof and argumentation. So in that regard, rhetorical criticism has been utilized rather broadly to look at certain sections as far as their rhetorical techniques, their function, their means of argumentation, etc.

And again, you can find numerous examples of that in both the Old and the New Testament. However, a second, especially in New Testament studies, a second approach to rhetorical criticism has really caught on, and that is to analyze New Testament texts, whether large sections of texts, especially speeches, or more particularly, to analyze epistolary literature, the letters and epistles by Paul and the other New Testament writers, to analyze them according to ancient rhetorical speeches and ancient rhetorical speech patterns. Usually ancient patterns that are discussed and outlined in some of the ancient rhetorical handbooks, such as Aristotle and written by Aristotle and others, and then to take those categories and to take those rhetorical speech forms and patterns and analyze the New Testament documents in light of that.

Two prominent individuals that have done the most, at least among evangelical scholars especially, but even outside of Christian evangelical scholarship, first of all was an individual named George Kennedy, who did much work in in classical Greco-Roman literature and was the first to, one of the first to advocate and make popular the application of Greco-Roman rhetoric to New Testament texts and analyze texts such as the Sermon on the Mount and other documents according to Greco-Roman rhetoric. Probably the influential scholar to popularize among New Testament scholars, to popularize rhetorical approaches to the New Testament documents, where you would again, you would take not just analyzing the figures of speech and persuasive means of text, some of the things that we've often associated with rhetorical criticism, but taking entire rhetorical speeches from the Greco-Roman rhetorical text handbooks and applying them wholesale to biblical text is Ben Witherington. And Ben Witherington has written commentaries on virtually every New Testament document and most of them, the majority of them, are labeled something such as a social rhetorical commentary, a social rhetorical commentary on Romans, a social rhetorical commentary on Galatians, a social rhetorical commentary on Philippians, etc., etc.

So he's produced, and a couple others have as well, he's been influential in contributing to the series of social rhetorical commentaries that analyze biblical text in light of ancient conventions of rhetoric. According to those who analyze speeches, or either speeches especially, for example, in Acts, you find the speeches of Acts or even the speeches of Jesus, such as the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospels, you find them analyzed often according to rhetorical techniques, but we said the epistles, Paul's letters in particular, have seemed to provide a lot of fruitful material for applying rhetorical criticism. In doing so, a full-blown rhetorical speech, according to first century and earlier conventions of Greco-Roman speech patterns, might contain most or all of the following.

Number one, a rhetorical speech would include what is known as an exhortium. An exhortium simply states the cause, it's kind of the introduction, it states the cause, it states the issue, and it tries to gain the empathy of the audience, and tries to get the audience to be sympathetic with the person arguing his case. The second is what is known as the narratio, which is basically a narrative of, or an account of the facts, or of the background and facts of the case.

Third is what is known as the propositio, which is basically what is agreed upon, or the main point that is going to be argued, or kind of the main thesis that the author will argue for. Followed by number four, probatio. The probatio is the proofs and the arguments that the author appeals to, and the proofs are often of two types.

In the probatio, the probatio is often a longer section that again includes all the arguments for the proofs for the propositio, or what the person is trying to argue for. There's often two types of proofs. One could often appeal to a pathos or emotion, or one could appeal to logos, that is kind of logical argumentation.

So you'll see in the probatio those two types of argumentation or proofs. Fifth is what is called the refutatio, and this is a section that refutes the opponent's arguments. And then finally, what is known as a paroratio, p-e-r-o-r-a-t-i-o, a paroratio, which simply summarizes the argument, kind of the final appeal on the part of the speaker.

So those six parts, the exordium, narratio, propositio, probatio, refutatio, paroratio, you'll find those discussed in most New Testament introductions to rhetorical criticism, or most approaches within New Testament scholarship to rhetorical criticism. And again, most or all of those could be found in the document. And New Testament documents are often, again, analyzed then according to these types of categories.

Another important feature of rhetorical criticism is, that seems to be revealed from ancient rhetorical handbooks, is that there are three types of historical speeches, of rhetorical speeches. And again, you can find these three discussed in virtually any treatment of rhetorical criticism in the New Testament. First of all, a rhetorical speech could be classified as judicial.

That is, a judicial rhetorical speech would argue for the rightness or wrongness of a past action. And as the name implies, the setting for this type of rhetorical speech was naturally the courtroom. So a judicial type of rhetorical speech would argue for that a past act was either right or wrong.

A second type of rhetorical speech is what is known as deliberative rhetoric. What deliberative rhetoric did is argue for, or try to persuade, or dissuade the audience from a future course of action. So judicial rhetoric focused on a past act, whether it was right or wrong.

A deliberative rhetorical speech is either persuaded or dissuaded the audience from taking part in or participating in a future course of action. So presumably a course of action that was desirable, the speaker was trying to persuade them to engage in that, or a course of action that was undesirable, the author then would dissuade them from following that course. And then finally, the third type of rhetorical speech was known as Epidictic, E-P-I-D-E-I-C-T-I-C.

And again, you can find these names in titles in most, just about any treatment that deals with the rhetorical criticism of the New Testament. Epidictic rhetoric was basically the use of praise or blame to affirm a point of view, or to affirm a set of values in the present. And so either praising or blaming, using the techniques of praise or blame, whether directed towards a person, or again a belief or set of values in the present.

So those three types of rhetoric, again judicial rhetoric, a past act, a judgment of the rightness or wrongness of the past act, deliberative rhetoric, focusing on persuading or dissuading the audience about the correctness or incorrectness of a future course of action, and then Epidictic rhetoric, affirming something in the present. Now, the starting point, or one of the most significant landmarks, I guess is the way to put it, one of the most significant landmarks for rhetorical criticism entry into New Testament studies was an individual named Hans Dieter Betz, who wrote an article, or wrote an article too, but wrote a commentary, a significant commentary in a series called the Hermeneia commentary series, and in it he argued that Galatians was an apologetic or judicial piece of rhetoric. And so he was one of the first in New Testament studies to analyze a New Testament letter according to the techniques of rhetorical speeches.

And what he did is he took those six features of a full-blown rhetorical speech, exhortium, narration, propositio, probation, etc., and also starting with those three

types of rhetoric, he concluded that the book of Galatians functioned primarily as an apologetic or judicial piece of rhetoric. That is, convincing readers of the rightness or wrongness of a past act. And so, for example, again, you can pick up his commentary and see a more detailed treatment of what he does, but for example, he saw chapter 1, 6 through 11 of Galatians as the exhortium, the part that sort of establishes the cause.

It's meant to gain a sympathetic hearing from the readers. Then chapter 1, 12 through chapter 2, verse 14, he labeled as the narration. And this is that section in Galatians, halfway through chapter 1 into chapter 2, you find Paul discussing his life before Judaism and his interaction with the Jerusalem apostles, and particularly with Peter at Antioch.

So Betz labeled that as the narration, giving the background and the facts of the case. Chapter 2, verse 15 through 21 then was the propositio. This was the main thesis.

This is the what was agreed upon, the main thesis that would be argued for in the rest of the book. Number four, the probatio then, Betz identified with chapter 3, verse 1 through the end of 4. So chapter 3 and 4 were basically a long series of proofs or arguments that Betz saw Paul using to establish his case. And then finally, he labeled chapter 5 through 6, he labeled as paranasis, that is, exertational material, which really doesn't fit with that sort of a rhetorical speech pattern.

But he saw the last two chapters as paranasis or exertational commanding type of material. Now, many actually reacted to Betz and suggested that Galatians isn't really an apologetic. I mean, you look at the last two chapters, and Paul is certainly persuading his readers to obey, to obedience.

And when you read Galatians, he's trying to dissuade them from taking the course of action that the Judaizers are perpetrating, and persuade them to live out life in the spirit. So for that reason, most more recently, those who have analyzed Galatians, for example, from a rhetorical perspective, have analyzed it as a piece of deliberative rhetoric. And even some have combined it to suggest that it has features of apologetic and deliberative rhetoric as both.

For example, Ben Witherington, in his commentary on Galatians, argues that Galatians is a piece of deliberative rhetoric. And he also analyzes it according to those same categories as of exhortum and *near ratio*. Though it's interesting when you compare Betz and Witherington, and even others who have analyzed Galatians, sometimes they differ significantly as to where they divide the text, or what sections belong to the *propositio*, or what section belongs to this or that.

But the point is, Galatians provided a kind of fruitful field for the application of rhetorical approaches to the New Testament epistles. But other New Testament letters, as I've already said, have also been subject to rhetorical criticism. For example, and many of these have been, Ben Witherington has contributed commentaries on, but others have as well.

The Book of Romans, the Book of Ephesians has been analyzed according to Greco-Roman rhetoric, the Book of Philippians has by a number of scholars, the Book of Jude, and others have been subject to rhetorical analysis with probably with various, various successes. So, what should we say about rhetorical criticism, then, by way of evaluation? First of all, when it comes to rhetorical criticism, the value is rhetorical criticism does two things, I think. Number one, it can shed light on the function of different sections of a speech or a letter or a prophetic text, for example.

When certain texts or certain sections of text function similarly to sections of a rhetorical speech, this full-blown rhetorical type of analysis of biblical text can shed light on the function of various sections, when there seems to actually be an analogy and there seems to be a fit in the way that they work. However, a second one is that rhetorical criticism also focuses our attention more on argumentation and persuasion. It's a reminder that Galatians is not primarily a theological document or theological tractate.

It's not primarily Paul's intention to communicate theological data or theological truth, though it does that, though it is a profound theological document, but it's theology in the service of persuading the readers to adopt a certain course of action. So, rhetorical criticism can help us see the documents according to their true intention, as persuading readers to adopt a certain point of view, persuading readers to pursue a certain course of action, rather than simply seeing them as containers of theological truth or a support for a theological system. Again, although they are deeply theological, they are theology in the service of Paul's pastoral intent to persuade the reader.

So, it kind of captures the pastoral intent and function of New Testament letters. A third value, obviously, is rhetorical criticisms focus on the whole entire text and focusing on the text as a whole, rather than partitioning it up into different sources and forms. Rhetorical criticism helps us focus on the entire text and how it functions and how it works.

Though, in my opinion, there are still a number of limitations to a rhetorical approach. First of all, one of the dangers is forcing a construct on the text, whether it is more modern rhetorical approaches or even taking the ancient rhetorical speeches and now forcing it on a literary text. We'll return to that one again.

But, for example, my impression often is reading through Ben Witherington's commentaries and other rhetorical approaches, of all the value of that approach and some of the helpful insight, sometimes what you'll find is when it comes to trying to deal with a problematic text or verse, they'll often survey a number of interpretations, but then opt for an interpretation that I think has less support, but it would seem to fit the type of rhetoric, whether this is an exhortium or a probatio or a propositio. Based on what we know about those categories, they'll often choose an interpretation that best fits. So Witherington will say something like, Paul deals with this issue because this wasn't a common issue to deal with in deliberative rhetoric or something like that, whereas there might be a more suitable explanation for why Paul dealt with this issue.

Or this text means this because this is what it would have done in a rhetorical speech, epideictic speech, whereas there might be a more suitable explanation and interpretation of that text. So it assumes a rhetorical speech form and then it often interprets the data in light of that, sometimes in ways that at least some examples I've seen could be explained more clearly and in a better way by a different means. Second, sort of related to that, is rhetorical criticism, and again I'm talking mainly about the second method that is applying entire rhetorical speech patterns to large sections of biblical text, whether it's a speech or again entire epistles, for example.

To me, rhetorical speech patterns seem to ignore the clear formal indications in the text itself of the literary genre. That is, in my opinion, interpretation of a text and identification of the text must start with the formal criteria of the text itself. And one of the difficulties I think with rhetorical criticism is that there are no formal controls or formal indicators as far as where's the exhortium and how do I know this is deliberative, how do I know that this is epideictic, where are the formal indicators that show here's the exhortium, now I've moved on to the probatio or the paratio or the narratio.

Most of the judgments simply, I think, come out of possible analogies and similar functions between the sections. But there seem to be a lack of clear, in my opinion, clear formal indicators that would demonstrate that you have an exhortium and then a narratio and a propositio and a probatio, etc., etc. Instead, as I read New Testament letters particularly and even the book of Galatians, the main formal indicators, the only formal that is grammatical and the different formula that one finds in a letter, the only indicators are that Paul is writing a first century letter, something that resembles a first century letter or first century epistle.

Again, I don't think I want to go as far and say Paul was not influenced by Greco-Roman's rhetorical speech patterns. I don't want to say that he was unaware of that, although that is a debate that impinges on this. To what extent was Paul's upbringing and education, to what extent would that have included instruction and practice in Greco-Roman rhetoric? That's an ongoing debate and has influences this, but still, when one looks at the New Testament letters, it appears that the only formal clues that one finds is that Paul is writing a first century letter.

That includes the typical epistolary opening. We'll return to this when we get to genre criticism in a subsequent session, but when one looks at Galatians, for example, what one finds is typical epistolary conventions, and this is true throughout all Paul's letters. They'll have a typical way of opening an epistle, Paul, the Apostle Jesus Christ to someone, greetings, and then usually moving on to a thanksgiving, though that is lacking in Galatians and again sometimes those who analyze it from the standpoint of rhetorical criticism say that it's because this is a deliberative speech, because of rhetorical conventions, the thanksgiving is missing.

There's probably other reasons why the thanksgiving is missing here, but again, other than that, you find very typical formula of a first century epistle. For example, when

you read, let me read just a section of, let me just read a section of chapter 4 of Galatians, and the reason I'm going to do this is this is an example of where those that analyze the text according to rhetorical techniques often, I think, run roughshod over and ignore the clear formal indicators. For example, chapter 4 of Galatians is usually seen to just be part of Paul's probatio, that is, it's just his proof, his argumentation, but what is interesting is a starting of verse 8. Formally, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods, but now that you know God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you not wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years.

I fear for you that somehow I have wasted my efforts in you. I plead with you, brothers, become like me. You have done me no wrong.

As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. I'll stop right there, but the one thing that is interesting about this section that is not necessarily revealed in reading an English translation is that it includes a couple of significant formulas that suggest Paul has a slight shift here and begins a new unit to a request section of the letter. So this is not a probatio, a series of proofs, this is now a request section, and he actually piles up three or so typical epistolary type formulas that you would have found in first century letters to indicate that something different is taking place.

This is kind of a new section or new focus in the letter or something like that, but my point is to simply analyze this chapter four as a probatio, a series of proofs in a rhetorical speech, overlooks a number of important formal features that suggest that Paul is primarily following the format of first century letter. And again, I'm convinced that the primary clues that should guide us in reading should be formal ones, what the text indicates that it's doing. And if rhetorical criticism helps us understand that,

well and good, but to force a rhetorical speech pattern on a text and ignore the clear formal features seems to me to be problematic.

A third and related to that is the question of whether letters in rhetorical speeches could ever be mixed. Even if Paul did have an education and was aware of these rhetorical speech patterns, which he may have been, some scholars have still questioned whether rhetorical speech patterns and epistles and letters were ever mixed. So because of that, my conclusion is I think we should use rhetorical criticism cautiously.

And more importantly, I think we should avoid the wholesale application of entire speech patterns to biblical texts, particularly New Testament letters. Rhetorical criticism, again, can be helpful in helping us the persuasive techniques, focusing on the argumentation and some of the techniques Paul may have used. Sometimes rhetorical analysis using entire speeches can help us see the function of text and how they're working.

But at the same time, I think we need to be cautious of taking entire rhetorical speeches and forcing them on biblical texts and analyzing the text primarily in conjunction with those rhetorical speech patterns. So that brings us to the end of text-centered approaches to interpretation and approaches that focus on the text as the primary locus of meaning. The text is that which determines meaning, whether literary approaches or narrative criticism, structuralism that we said has sort of run its course, and rhetorical criticism, which without bracketing the author or historical background, still focuses on the text and the text as a whole.

One of the difficulties was with text-centered approaches is that text-centered approaches still seemed to not yield any objective meaning in the text. And so text-centered approaches soon gave way historically and logically to the third facet of the

communication model, and that is readers. Reader-centered approaches, that is, looking at meaning in front of the text and finding the locus of meaning in the reader, soon became prominent.

And today, structuralism has basically given way to what is known as post-structuralism, which includes a variety of approaches, including and focusing on reader-centered approaches, the fact that it's readers who make sense of text. So in the next session, we'll shift our focus then and look at, particularly at reader-centered approaches, also move on to talk a little bit about deconstructionism and a couple of other approaches that kind of fall under methods that focus on the reader and meaning residing in the reader rather than the text or the author.