

# Dr. David Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 14, Structural and Rhetorical Criticism Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

## **1. Abstract of Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 14, Structural and Rhetorical Criticism, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

This lecture excerpt from Dr. Mathewson's hermeneutics course examines text-centered approaches to biblical interpretation. It first discusses structuralism, a now largely outdated method focusing on uncovering a "deep structure" of meaning beneath the surface of the text, independent of authorial intent. The lecture then explores rhetorical criticism, analyzing texts for persuasive techniques and argumentative strategies, often employing models from ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric. While acknowledging the value of rhetorical criticism in understanding a text's function and persuasive aims, the lecturer cautions against imposing pre-conceived rhetorical structures onto the text, advocating instead for a careful consideration of the text's inherent formal features. The lecture concludes by noting the limitations of text-centered approaches and transitioning to the concept of reader-centered interpretations.

**2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 14 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Introductory Series → Hermeneutics).**



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### 3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts, including relevant quotes:

#### Briefing Document: Text-Centered Approaches to Biblical Interpretation

##### Introduction

This document summarizes Dr. Mathewson's lecture on text-centered approaches to biblical interpretation, focusing on structuralism and rhetorical criticism. These approaches represent a shift from historical and author-centered methods to a focus on the text itself as the primary locus of meaning. While structuralism has largely fallen out of favor, rhetorical criticism remains a significant approach, albeit one that must be used cautiously.

##### I. Structuralism

- **Core Concept:** Structuralism posits that meaning is not found on the surface of a text but rather in a *deep structure* underlying it. As Dr. Mathewson explains, "according to structuralism the most profound and important part of a communication...is not at the surface level of a text... but instead meaning is found in the deep structure that underlies the text."
- **Surface vs. Deep Structure:** *Surface structure* refers to the observable elements: words, grammar, and the text's outline.
- *Deep structure* refers to the underlying patterns and structures that give rise to the surface level. The text states, "the deep structure would be the deep underlying structure that actually gives rise to what's on the surface."
- **Authorial Intent:** Structuralism moves away from authorial intent, with meaning not necessarily being consciously created by the author, because "the deep structures that have created the surface structure... may not be available or may not be known at all by the author."
- **Deep Structures in the Human Mind:** The lecture explains, "These deep structures of meaning are inherent in human thinking itself. And in the human mind."
- **Emphasis on Oppositions:** Structuralism often identifies meaning through oppositions, such as light/darkness, good/evil.

- **Actantial Model:** One example of structuralist analysis is the actantial model, which views narratives as having six key actors: a *sender*, an *object*, a *receiver*, a *subject*, *helpers*, and *opponents*. This model is meant to identify a “universal structure of narrative” that exists below the surface of the text.
- **Daniel Patte:** A key figure in popularizing structuralism in North America. Patte believed that "a synchronic approach to the text... will uncover the various structures of the text, the linguistic structures, the narrative structure, the mythical structures that underlie...the structures of the text." He used the actantial model to analyze texts like the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman.
- **Decline of Structuralism:** Structuralism has largely run its course, due to the fact that "it seems generally to have run its course and actually it's been replaced by a movement known as post-structuralism." Key criticisms include:
  - Its complex and technical vocabulary.
  - Insights often being derived from the *surface* structure instead of uncovering a distinct *deep structure*, as the text says, "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."
  - The question of whether the surface structure should be ignored when it is the only evidence available.
  - Difficulties validating structural exegesis.

## II. Rhetorical Criticism

- **Focus on Persuasion:** Rhetorical criticism analyzes texts as means of persuasion, examining persuasive techniques and how they persuade the audience. The lecture states, "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."
- **Text-Centered, but not Exclusively:** While focusing on the text's structure, rhetorical criticism does not completely bracket the author or the historical context (the rhetorical situation).

1. **Two Approaches: Analyzing Rhetorical Techniques:** This approach focuses on style, figures of speech, argumentation, and the rhetorical function of different text units.
2. **Applying Ancient Rhetorical Speech Patterns:** This method analyzes biblical texts (especially letters) in light of Greco-Roman rhetorical speech structures, utilizing handbooks such as those by Aristotle.
  - **Steps in the First Approach:** Identify the rhetorical unit.
    - Analyze the rhetorical function of the unit in context.
    - Examine the rhetorical setting.
    - Analyze the teaching style, proof, and argumentation.
  - **Greco-Roman Rhetorical Speech Structure:** A full-blown rhetorical speech includes:
    - *Exordium*: The introduction that states the cause.
    - *Narratio*: An account of the facts and background of the case.
    - *Propositio*: The agreed-upon main point or thesis.
    - *Probatio*: The proofs and arguments for the *propositio*. These proofs often include appeals to *pathos* (emotion) and *logos* (logic).
    - *Refutatio*: Refutation of opponent's arguments.
    - *Paroratio*: A summary and final appeal.
  - **Types of Rhetorical Speeches:**
    - *Judicial*: Argues the rightness or wrongness of a past action.
    - *Deliberative*: Persuades or dissuades from a future course of action.
    - *Epidictic*: Uses praise or blame to affirm a present point of view or values.
  - **Key Figures:**
    - **George Kennedy:** Advocated the application of Greco-Roman rhetoric to New Testament texts.
    - **Ben Witherington:** Popularized rhetorical approaches through his "social rhetorical commentaries" on various New Testament books, which applied those Greco-Roman frameworks wholesale to the biblical texts.
    - **Hans Dieter Betz:** Argued that Galatians was a judicial piece of rhetoric.

- **Application to Galatians:** Betz analyzed Galatians as a judicial piece of rhetoric. He identified chapter 1:6-11 as the *exordium*, chapter 1:12-2:14 as the *narratio*, chapter 2:15-21 as the *propositio*, chapters 3-4 as the *probatio*, and chapters 5-6 as the *paranasis*.
- Others, like Witherington, have analyzed Galatians as deliberative rhetoric.
- Different scholars often disagree about where to divide the text according to these rhetorical structures.
- **Evaluation of Rhetorical Criticism: Values:** Sheds light on the function of different sections of text.
- Highlights argumentation and persuasion, emphasizing that New Testament texts are not merely theological treatises but attempts to persuade readers.
- Focuses on the entire text rather than partitioning it.
- **Limitations:** Danger of forcing a rhetorical construct onto the text; when forced, there may be other better interpretations that are ignored because they do not fit a rhetorical framework.
- Ignores the formal indications of literary genre, instead applying Greco-Roman rhetorical frameworks.
- There are no formal indicators in the text that actually show that a section is an *exordium* or a *probatio*. The distinctions are often made based on what *seems* analogous, not based on clear markings in the text itself.
- It may not be possible that first century letters and rhetorical speeches could be combined.
- **Conclusion:** Rhetorical criticism should be used cautiously; it is problematic to wholesale apply rhetorical frameworks to biblical texts and ignore formal indicators of the text. The text indicates, "we should avoid the wholesale application of entire speech patterns to biblical texts, particularly New Testament letters."

### III. Transition to Reader-Centered Approaches

- Text-centered approaches, while valuable, do not definitively yield any objective meaning, leading to a shift to reader-centered approaches. The text states, "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."

- Post-structuralism has largely supplanted structuralism, focusing on readers and the meaning they create. The lecture indicates, "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."

## **Conclusion**

This lecture provides a useful overview of the progression from historical to text-centered methods of biblical interpretation. While structuralism has waned, rhetorical criticism remains important but must be used with care. The limitations of these approaches lead to an examination of reader-centered theories in the following lecture.

## 4. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 14, Structural and Rhetorical Criticism

### Study Guide: Structural and Rhetorical Criticism

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the main difference between surface structure and deep structure in structuralism?
2. According to structuralism, where is the most profound meaning of a text found?
3. What are the six components of the actantial model often used in structural analysis?
4. Who is Daniel Pote and what role did he play in the history of structuralism?
5. What is the main goal of rhetorical criticism?
6. What are the two main approaches to rhetorical criticism in New Testament studies?
7. What are the six components of a full-blown rhetorical speech as described in ancient handbooks?
8. Name the three main types of rhetorical speeches and describe their focus.
9. Who is Hans Dieter Betz and how did he contribute to rhetorical criticism?
10. What are two main strengths and two main limitations of rhetorical criticism, according to the lecture?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. Surface structure refers to the text's literal wording, grammar, and organization, while deep structure refers to the underlying, often unconscious, structures that give rise to the surface level of the text. Structuralism seeks to uncover the deep structure.
2. According to structuralism, the most profound meaning of a text is not found on the surface level, but in the deep, underlying structures that exist within human thinking and shape the surface presentation. These structures are often viewed as universal.

3. The six components of the actantial model are: a sender, an object, a receiver, a subject, helpers, and opponents. These represent the key roles and relationships within a narrative structure.
4. Daniel Pote was a scholar who popularized structuralism in North American biblical studies, influenced by French structuralism and writing extensively on the subject. He emphasized uncovering the underlying linguistic and mythic structures.
5. The main goal of rhetorical criticism is to analyze a text in terms of its persuasive techniques and its ability to influence its audience. This involves examining how the text is structured and composed to achieve its persuasive purpose.
6. The two main approaches to rhetorical criticism in New Testament studies are, firstly, studying the rhetorical techniques (style, figures of speech, argumentation) and, secondly, analyzing New Testament texts according to ancient Greco-Roman rhetorical speech patterns.
7. The six components of a full-blown rhetorical speech are: the exordium (introduction), narratio (background), propositio (thesis), probatio (proof), refutatio (refutation of opponents), and peroratio (summary and final appeal).
8. The three types of rhetorical speeches are: judicial rhetoric, which argues about the rightness or wrongness of a past action; deliberative rhetoric, which argues for or against a future course of action; and epideictic rhetoric, which uses praise or blame to affirm a set of values or point of view in the present.
9. Hans Dieter Betz is known for his commentary on Galatians in which he argued the letter was primarily a judicial piece of rhetoric, applying ancient rhetorical principles to analyze its structure and purpose.
10. Two strengths of rhetorical criticism are that it can illuminate the function of different sections of text and help see the persuasive intent of the text. Two limitations are the danger of forcing a construct on a text and ignoring formal indications within the text itself.



## Essay Questions

**Instructions:** Answer each question in a well-organized essay, making sure to cite relevant points from the source material.

1. Compare and contrast structuralism and rhetorical criticism as text-centered approaches to biblical interpretation. What are their shared assumptions, and where do they differ in their methodologies and goals?
2. Critically evaluate the actantial model as applied to biblical narrative. What strengths and weaknesses does this model present, and how effective is it in uncovering a text's meaning?
3. How has the application of Greco-Roman rhetorical speech patterns influenced the interpretation of New Testament epistles? What are the benefits and drawbacks of this approach, and how does it affect our understanding of the text's literary features?
4. Discuss the challenges associated with the search for "deep structures" in structuralism. Are these structures discoverable, and how do they relate to the surface structure of the text?
5. To what extent does rhetorical criticism prioritize or diminish the author's intention? How does the lecture's understanding of authorial intent affect the analysis and interpretation of biblical texts?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Actantial Model:** A structuralist model that analyzes narrative based on six key roles: sender, object, receiver, subject, helper, and opponent.
- **Deep Structure:** In structuralism, the underlying, often unconscious structures that generate the surface structure of a text.
- **Deliberative Rhetoric:** A type of rhetorical speech that seeks to persuade an audience for or against a future course of action.
- **Epidictic Rhetoric:** A type of rhetorical speech that uses praise or blame to affirm values or points of view in the present.
- **Exordium:** The introduction to a rhetorical speech, intended to gain the audience's sympathy.

- **Formalism:** A literary approach that emphasizes the study of literary forms and structures independent of historical context or authorial intent.
- **Hermeneutics:** The theory and practice of interpretation, particularly of texts.
- **Judicial Rhetoric:** A type of rhetorical speech that argues about the rightness or wrongness of a past action.
- **Narratio:** The background information or narrative of the facts in a rhetorical speech.
- **Paroratio:** The conclusion of a rhetorical speech, which summarizes the argument and makes a final appeal.
- **Post-Structuralism:** A movement that critiques structuralism, often emphasizing the instability of meaning and the role of the reader in interpretation.
- **Probatio:** The section of a rhetorical speech that presents the proofs and arguments in support of the main thesis.
- **Propositio:** The main thesis or point of agreement in a rhetorical speech.
- **Refutatio:** The section of a rhetorical speech that addresses and refutes opposing arguments.
- **Rhetorical Criticism:** A method of literary analysis that focuses on the persuasive techniques and effects of a text.
- **Rhetorical Situation:** The historical and social context that gave rise to a text, including the speaker/author, audience, and purpose.
- **Structuralism:** A text-centered approach to interpretation that focuses on the underlying structures of language and narrative.
- **Surface Structure:** The literal wording, grammar, and organization of a text.

## 5. FAQs on Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 14, Structural and Rhetorical Criticism, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions: Structural and Rhetorical Criticism

- **What is structuralism and how does it differ from other approaches to biblical interpretation?**
- Structuralism is a text-centered approach that focuses on uncovering the *deep structures* that underlie the *surface structure* of a text. Instead of focusing on the author's intent, it seeks to identify universal patterns of thought and meaning embedded within the text. This is a departure from author-centered approaches, as structuralists believe that the deep structures, which generate the surface text, are not necessarily known by the author. Meaning, therefore, is not what the author intended, but what the deep structures reveal.
- **What are "deep structures" and "surface structures" according to structuralism?**
- In structuralism, the *surface structure* refers to the readily apparent aspects of a text: the words, grammar, sentence constructions, and overall outline of the text as it appears on the page. The *deep structure*, conversely, represents the underlying, often subconscious, patterns and oppositions that give rise to the surface. These deep structures are thought to be inherent in human thought and mind, and they are what structuralism aims to uncover to find deeper meaning in the text.
- **Can you explain the "actantial model" used in structuralism?**
- The actantial model, often used by structuralists, analyzes narratives by focusing on six primary "actants" or roles: a *sender* who communicates an *object* to a *receiver* through a *subject*. This subject is aided by *helpers* and hindered by *opponents*. For example, in the Book of Revelation, God is seen as the sender, salvation or judgment is the object, the church is the receiver, Jesus Christ is the subject, angels are the helpers, and Satan is the opponent. This model attempts to demonstrate an underlying, universal structure common across diverse narratives.

- **Why did structuralism decline as a dominant method in biblical studies?**
- Structuralism declined due to several factors. Its complex and technical vocabulary makes it hard to access and use. Also, many of its insights often overlapped with those obtained from surface-level literary criticism and failed to reveal a *deep* structure. Furthermore, questions arose about the legitimacy of ignoring surface structure for the underlying deep structure, as all the evidence for this deep structure comes from the text itself. Finally, there was the issue of validating a structural exegesis without clear methods to do so. These limitations contributed to its displacement by other methods, particularly post-structuralism.
- **What is rhetorical criticism, and how is it different from structuralism?**
- Rhetorical criticism is a text-centered approach that examines a text's persuasive techniques, structure, and ability to persuade its audience. Unlike structuralism, rhetorical criticism can take into account the historical background that gave rise to the text. It analyzes the text as a means of persuasion, looking at elements like style, argumentation, and figures of speech to understand how the text seeks to influence readers. While both are text centered, rhetorical criticism attends to the author's rhetorical aims and the way the text is intentionally structured to persuade the audience, while structuralism moves past author intention to find meaning.
- **What are the main components of a rhetorical speech as identified in classical rhetoric?**
- Classical rhetoric, as taught by figures like Aristotle, outlined a typical structure for a speech that included: *exordium* (an introduction stating the issue and seeking the audience's empathy), *narratio* (an account of the facts), *propositio* (the main point or thesis to be argued), *probatio* (the proofs and arguments supporting the thesis, often using emotional or logical appeals), *refutatio* (refuting opposing arguments), and *peroratio* (a final summary and appeal). These elements are used in rhetorical criticism to analyze how a text is constructed to persuade.

- **What are the three types of rhetorical speeches used in classical rhetoric, and how might they apply to biblical texts?**
- Classical rhetoric identifies three types of speeches: judicial, deliberative, and epideictic. *Judicial* rhetoric argues for the rightness or wrongness of a past action. *Deliberative* rhetoric tries to persuade or dissuade the audience from a future action. *Epideictic* rhetoric uses praise or blame to affirm present beliefs and values. The Letter to the Galatians, for instance, has been interpreted as a judicial piece by some, or as a piece of deliberative rhetoric by others, based on whether the goal is seen as establishing a past action or persuading the audience to change a current action.
- **What are some of the strengths and limitations of rhetorical criticism?**
- Rhetorical criticism can illuminate the function of different parts of a biblical text by showing how they function in relation to rhetorical structures, highlight argumentation and persuasion, and treat the text as a whole instead of dividing it into parts. Limitations include the risk of forcing a rhetorical model on a text, the possibility of neglecting formal, grammatical clues in favor of fitting the text into rhetorical speech categories, and the questionable practice of mixing rhetorical and epistolary genres, as well as the interpretive risks that come with these forced fits.