

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF PARAENESIS¹

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The paraenetic style is that in which we give someone paraenesis . . . persuading . . . him to pursue something or to avoid something. Paraenesis . . . is divided into two parts, i.e., persuasion and dissuasion.²

In *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, David Aune identifies three basic structures found commonly in Greek letters. These basic structures are prescript, body, and conclusion.³ Aune notes that Paul modified this basic form by adding two new parts, namely, thanksgiving and exhortations or paraenesis.⁴

There is a lack of consensus about the demarcation line between formal parts because some authors have a wider view of paraenesis than others.⁵ To have a working definition of paraenesis is therefore necessary.

¹ This is the first article in a two-part series. The second article, "A Strategy for Preaching Paraenesis," will appear in *ResQ* 38/4 (1996).

² Jerome D. Quinn, "Paraenesis and the Pastoral Epistles: Lexical Observations Bearing on the Nature of the Sub-genre and Soundings in Its Role in Socialization and Liturgies," *Semeia* 50 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990) 191, quoting pseudo-Libanius (300–600 A.D.). For a detailed discussion of Libanius (the first to identify and describe paraenesis) see Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Library of Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 94–127, and Abraham Malherbe, "Ancient Epistolary Theorists," *Ohio Journal of Religious Studies* 5 (1977).

³ David Aune, *New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 162–64.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 177, 186.

⁵ David G. Bradley, "The 'Topos' as a Form in the Pauline Paraenesis," *JBL* 72 (1953) 239–46; Abraham J. Malherbe, "Paul: Hellenistic Philosopher or Christian Pastor?" *American Theological Library Association Proceedings* 39 (June 1985) 86–98; Wayne A. Meeks, "And Rose Up to Play: Midrash and Paraenesis in 1 Corinthians 10:1–22," *JSNT* 16 (1982) 64–78; Darryl W. Palmer, "Thanksgiving, Self-defence, and Exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 1–3," *Colloquium* 14 (October 1981) 23–31; Leo G. Perdue, "Paraenesis and the Epistle

Most scholars commenting on paraenesis are either building on or correcting Martin Dibelius,⁶ who notes that paraenesis is made up of disconnected sentences that cannot be interpreted as a connected discourse. Since there is a lack of coherence, there is also a lack of theological content. He states, "It would be difficult for someone to distill from them any 'theology' at all, and quite certainly the theology of Paul cannot be gathered from them."⁷ Dibelius started two lines of investigation: (1) literary analysis of formal, stylistic, and linguistic features; and (2) discovery of parallels and antecedents in Jewish and Hellenistic sources. Dibelius concluded that parenetic sections address everyday affairs, not a particular situation.⁸

Sydney Greidanus questions, "If exhortations do indeed exist in virtual isolation, the question must be raised whether one may select such an exhortation and interpret and preach it without any concern for its literary context."⁹ Greidanus himself disagrees with the definition of the first type of exhortation given by Dibelius stating that paraenesis does not exist as unrelated moral maxims.¹⁰ The following questions will be discussed in order to bring clarity to the definition of paraenesis. Does the isolated exhortation have any relationship with its immediate context? Is the context of a paraenetic section connected to the larger literary work which contains it? How does paraenesis address, if at all, the historical situation to which it was given?

Theodore C. Burgess, in "Epidictic Literature," surveys the ancient literature in detail.¹¹ In his section on *protreptikos* and *paraenetikos*, he

of James." *ZNW* 72 (1981) 242-46; Leo G. Perdue and John G. Gammie, "Paraenesis: Act and Form," *Semeia* 50 (1990) 1-271; J. Quinn, "Paraenesis and the Pastoral Epistles," *De la Tôrah au Messie: Melanges Henri Cazelles*, 495-501 (ed. J. Doré, P. Grelot, and M. Carrez. Paris: Desclée, 1981).

⁶ Martin Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, trans. M. A. Williams, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 3. On pages 19-23, Dibelius describes five characteristics of the literary form paraenesis: (1) eclectic, (2) absence of context, (3) catchword connections, (4) repetition of the same motif in different places, and (5) not related to a particular situation.

⁷ Dibelius, *James*, 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 145. E.g., he states, "To attribute all of the sins enumerated in the vice lists to particular churches would be a mistake."

⁹ Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 326.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 326-27.

¹¹ Theodore C. Burgess, "Epidictic Literature," *The University of Chicago Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

notes the overlapping nature of terms. The technical distinctions do have nuances of meaning yet at times are fully interchangeable in their use by many ancients.¹² Paraenesis is one category in the larger *protreptikos logos* genre.¹³ Paraenesis is defined as a series of precepts which will serve as a guide for conduct under fixed conditions.¹⁴

David Aune defines this larger genre form, *protreptikos logos*, as exhortations to take a particular way of life as one's own and instructions on how to live.¹⁵ *Protreptic* belongs to the rhetoric of the assembly which tries to shape the future decisions or actions of the audience.¹⁶ He quotes Epictetus as being one of the earliest to define this genre:¹⁷

But isn't there such a thing as the right style for exhortation? . . . Why yes, who denies that? Just as there is the style for refutation . . . , and the style for instruction. . . . Who, then, has ever mentioned a fourth style along with these, the style of display. . . ? Why, what is style for exhortation [*ho protreptikos*]? The ability to show to the individual, as well as to the crowd, the warring inconsistency in which they are floundering about, and how they are paying attention to anything rather than what they truly want. For they want the things that conduce to happiness, but they are looking for them in the wrong places. . . . There is nothing more effective in the style for exhortation than when the speaker makes clear to his audience that he has need of them.

He, then, who can show to each man the contradictions which cause him to err, and can clearly bring home to him how he is not doing what he wishes, and is doing what he

1902) 89–248. He outlines the prehistory of paraenesis in philosophy and rhetoric on pages 226–28.

¹² *Ibid.*, 229 n.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 232 n. He gives as a definition of *protreptikos logos*: an exhortation to some general course in philosophy, rhetoric, virtue. It gives a comprehensive view setting forth the advantages and removing the objections to a course of action or attitude.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 230 n.

¹⁵ David E. Aune, "Romans as a *Logos Protreptikos* in the Context of Ancient Religious and Philosophical Propaganda," 91–124, in Martin Hengel & Ulrich Heckel, *Paulus und das antike Judentum* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991) 93.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 94

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 94–95. Quoting Epictetus 3.23.33–35 and 2.26.4–5.

does not wish, is strong in argument, and at the same time effective both in encouragement [*protreptikos*] and refutation [*elegktikos*]. For as soon as anyone shows a man this, he will of his own accord abandon what he is doing.

Abraham Malherbe, after analyzing literary and nonliterary features of paraenesis found in the writings of the Hellenistic Moralists, defines these historical uses of paraenesis as a style of exhortation used to influence conduct rather than teach something new. Paraenesis sought to modify the conduct of the audience.¹⁸ Malherbe identified the following features of paraenesis: (1) paraenesis tends to consist primarily of material that is traditional and unoriginal; (2) paraenesis involves the general applicability of the precepts presented; (3) paraenesis is often addressed to one who knows or has heard it before; (4) paraenesis often employs examples of people who possess the virtue which is being advocated; and (5) paraenesis assumes a close personal relationship between author and recipient of the letter, which would set the tone and justify the advice.¹⁹

James McDonald defines paraenesis as follows:

Paraenesis . . . tends to brevity and to a simple succession of imperatival units. Moreover, it is concerned with intimate, personal counsel on moral and spiritual issues, with down-to-earth practical advice as part of the education of the recipient. According to Aristotle [*Rhetoric* 2:21] it was the kind of teaching appropriately given only by the more elderly teacher, on matters of which he has some experience. Its dominate characteristic is its adherence to the popular, gnomic wisdom, passed on from generation to generation and frequently embodied in ancient poetry and other traditions.²⁰

There are three types of paraenesis: (1) lists of vices and virtues, (2) a prolonged exhortation or extended homily on a particular topic (e.g.,

¹⁸ Abraham J. Malherbe, "Paul: Hellenistic Philosopher or Christian Pastor? *American Theological Library Association Proceedings* 39 (June 1985) 92-93.

¹⁹ Ibid. See also Abraham Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation, A Greco-Roman Source Book*, Library of Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 124-25.

²⁰ James I. H. McDonald, *Kerygma and Didache: The Articulation and Structure of the Earliest Christian Message* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 70.

the household code), and (3) a cluster of unrelated moral maxims strung together like beads on a string. This repeats Dibelius's thesis that there is little to hold exhortations together except their similarity in form, or perhaps a catchword carried over from one to another (e.g., a proverbial ethical saying found in the *topoi*).²¹ This essay addresses this third category.

The recognition that isolated moral maxims are found in the *topoi* brings the dimension of literary unity to these exhortations. This is the first step to correct the use of a qualifier such as "isolated" or "unrelated." David G. Bradley defines *topoi* as brief and pithy admonitions on a variety of subjects. They are self-contained units of teaching with only a loose, if any, connection with the immediate context.²² He goes on to say, "The distinctive characteristic is that it [a *topos*] is composed of more than one sentence dealing with the same subject."²³ Unity is found in the common subject matter. This unity is often strengthened by the use of a recurring word which binds the other elements together."²⁴ Or as William Doty states, "The *topoi* are miniature essays of stereotyped good advice."²⁵

Terrence Mullins expands Bradley's thesis by identifying a recognizable form. The *topos* form contains the following elements: (1) an injunction urging that a certain course of behavior be followed or avoided, (2) a reason for the injunction, and (3) a discussion of the logical or practical consequences of the behavior. He then adds two optional

²¹ Calvin J. Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 34–35. He offers Rom 12:9–13 as an example of this third type noting it has thirteen different injunctions discussing twelve different topics. Roetzel, page 36, will qualify this definition noting that Paul does knit together the body of the letter with paraenesis for specific relevance for a particular church. See also Roy Yates, "The Christian Way of Life: The Paraenetic Material in Colossians 3:1–4:6," *EvQ* 63 (July 1991) 242.

²² David G. Bradley, "The *Topos* as a Form in the Pauline Paraenesis," *JBL* 72 (1953) 240. Bradley argues that the paraenetic items Paul discusses are only connected loosely with their context. His treatment is inadequate and is in need of supplementation.

²³ McDonald, *Kerygma*, 70, states, "A minimal *topos* may consist only of a sentence or so, devoted to one subject and including an imperatival or gnomic sentiment. For a greater discussion of this type of rhetorical form see Aristotle's discussion of maxims in *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (trans. George A. Kennedy; New York: Oxford, 1991) 2:21.

²⁴ Bradley, "Topos," 243.

²⁵ William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 39.

elements: (4) An analogous situation to the one dealt with in the *topos*, and (5) a refutation of a contrary way of thinking or acting.²⁶

McDonald's definition is helpful:

The word *topos* is used in rhetoric to denote a common-place—the proper subject of dialectical and rhetorical syllogisms—which may deal with such questions as justice or politics and may be of various, identifiable types. In relation to paraenesis, it denotes a particular topic of moral concern.²⁷

McDonald also sees the cohesion of a topical unit by observing the common repetition of the sentiment of the first line. He lists the following features: imperatives, causal extensions, similes, conditional clauses, and questions.²⁸ The limitations of *topoi* are their generality. The advantages exceed the disadvantages, for *topoi* appeal directly to the audience with practical advice in a clear and concise manner without equivocation. They assume authority. They assume unity of thought and action. They stimulate the mind into active thought. Therefore, *topos* is a flexible unit of paraenesis capable of addressing various subjects on matters of practical living.²⁹ Consequently, isolated maxims do exhibit a relationship with the immediate context in a coherent and unified way. Each isolated maxim functions to contribute to the whole purpose of the *topoi*.

There are also both a larger literary context and a historical context for each exhortation.³⁰ Hans Dieter Betz states, "Paraenetic sayings ordinarily address themselves to a specific (though perhaps fictional) audience, or at least appear in the form of a command."³¹ Betz, while still

²⁶ Terrence Mullins, "Topos as a New Testament Form," *JBL* 99 (December 1980) 542. Vernon K. Robbins, in "A Socio-Rhetorical Response: Contexts of Interaction and Forms of Exhortation," *Semeia* 50 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990) 261–71, introduces a taxonomy concerned with topics and persuasive figures.

²⁷ McDonald, *Kerygma*, 70.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ John C. Brunt, "More on the *Topos* as a New Testament Form," *JBL* 104 (September 1985) 499–500. Brunt argues against appealing to the *topos* form to show that advice is not directed to a specific situation. The better alternative is to examine each text's context in order to determine if the *topos* is situational. See Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 255–56.

³¹ Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 3.

maintaining that paraenesis applies to a single audience and a single set of circumstances, goes on to doubt the possibility of reconstructing one single frame into which all the paraenetic sayings will fit.³² Betz's qualification of finding the historical context brings a needed caution in the reconstructing of social backgrounds from limited information; however, recent sociological studies have brought promising results that have contributed to some convincing reconstructions of historical settings.³³

Paul's situational paraenesis is designed to help believers to work out individually and corporately what the "law of Christ" is for them in the midst of their struggles to live out the implications of their faith. Even though Paul wants these communities to acquire moral insight, he also points them towards relevant traditions and teachings. If all else fails, Paul will finally rely upon his own apostolic relationship and authority rooted in Jesus Christ.³⁴

The most comprehensive description and classification of paraenesis has been published by Leo G. Perdue and John G. Gammie.³⁵ Perdue's article deals primarily with function.³⁶ Paraenesis either "orders" (obedience is the motivation of most actions in order to preserve the existing social order) or "conflicts" (seeking to change social order so a new social

³² *Ibid.*, 11.

³³ Recent sociological study of Paul has renewed interest in the historical context to which Paul wrote. These studies sharpen our awareness of the social dimensions of Paul's work that increases our understanding of the nature and function of roles in his letters. By investigating the relationship of Paul's symbolic world, greater insight is gained in understanding Paul's relationship with his addressees. See especially W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1983); B. Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Norman Peterson, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); and Robin Scroggs, "The Sociological Interpretation of the New Testament. The Present State of Research," *NTS* 26 (1980) 164–79.

³⁴ McDonald, *Kerygma*, 93.

³⁵ Leo G. Perdue and John G. Gammie, "Paraenesis: Act and Form," *Semeia* 50 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990).

³⁶ Leo G. Perdue, "The Social Character of Paraenesis and Paraenetic Literature," *Semeia* 50 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990) 5–40. Perdue illustrates his methodology in "Paraenesis and the Epistle of James," *ZNW* 72 (1981) 242–6.

order will emerge).³⁷ Within the variety of forms found in paraenesis, the overriding purpose is to provide guidance for the moral life of the community.³⁸ This is done either by preserving/confirming the social order or by converting/subverting the old social order in favor of a new one. The community is exhorted on the basis of duty and self-interest to follow and conform to social expectations within that community. Immoral behavior will only produce chaos and become a threat to both communal and individual life.³⁹ Perdue notes that paraenesis often addresses the point of entrance or anticipation of entrance into a new stage of life, role, or group. Moral exhortations are often repeated to remind recipients of expected behavior and reconfirm the validity of the guidance given when one formerly enters into the new stage of life, role, or group.⁴⁰

John G. Gammie divides paraenesis into sub-genres.⁴¹ Gammie sees previous attempts to define paraenesis as “too neat.” He contends paraenesis is more inclusive and covers broader categories due to pluralistic audiences.⁴² He defines paraenesis as “a form of address which not only commends, but actually enumerates precepts or maxims which pertain to moral aspiration and the regulation of human conduct.”⁴³ He identifies the following formal characteristics: (1) a collection of precepts, maxims, (2) the validity of these maxims commended by using exhortations frequently accompanied by motive clauses, (3) admonitions, and (4) *encomia* (praises) of righteous persons. All of these characteristics are in the context of a personal relationship of author and audience.⁴⁴

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5. It all depends upon who is in power or who is oppressed.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 19. He details the social functions of paraenesis on pages 23–26. These are protrepsis (for purposes of conversion), paraenesis (for purposes of confirmation), socialization, legitimatization, and conflict.

⁴¹ John G. Gammie, “Paraenetic Literature: Toward the Morphology of a Secondary Genre,” *Semeia* 50 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990) 41–81.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 55. On pages 58–61, Gammie gives several definitions. The following definitions relate specifically to this paper. Exhortation: an invitation, an encouragement, a command, a directive to follow a given course of action or adopt a given attitude. Admonition: a warning against a given course of action or attitude. Precept: a sentence in the indicative which instructs and contains an implied or obvious directive for conduct.

One of the most detailed classifications of paraenesis has been done by Walter Wilson.⁴⁵ He identifies the paraenesis materials as containing “gnomic sayings” coming from the “sapiential” tradition.⁴⁶ Every culture practiced the coining, use, and preservation of wisdom sayings.⁴⁷ Wilson’s proposal connects this earlier literary form with Paul, who also employed common rhetorical categories not only to express his theology but also to accomplish pragmatic aims in service to the Christian community.

Maxims would be contextualized in five common ways: They may be (1) personalized, (2) supported by reasons or epilogues, (3) supplemented with examples or illustrations, (4) employed as evidence or proof, and (5) placed at the beginning or conclusion of a distinct section of text.⁴⁸ These maxims become invaluable as tools of oratory. They are vivid, memorable, and convincing. What is more important, they help to clarify the moral purpose of a speech and the moral character of the speaker.⁴⁹

Three gnomic formal distinctions are identified by Wilson as gnomic poetry, gnomic anthologies, and wisdom instructions.⁵⁰ These different distinctions contain the following similarities: (1) they draw on the same pool of ideas and topics; (2) they are set in a didactic and ethical setting; (3) they draw on preexisting sapiential material with which the readers are familiar; (4) these maxims figure as basic components in the composition of each; and (5) there is a logical and literary structure that is often based upon a distinct theme woven throughout the section.⁵¹

Each of the gnomic categories follows a formal structure. First, there is a programmatic statement which expresses the ethical objectives of the entire passage. It is in the form of direct address and challenge. It

⁴⁵ Walter T. Wilson, *Love without Pretense: Romans 12.9–21 and Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Literature*, WUNT 2. Reihe 46 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3. These wisdom sayings are useful for making practical decisions about day-to-day life. They functioned as a means of preserving the insight of other cultures and previous generations.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 41. Many letters that are non-sapiential genre may often take advantage of gnomic forms since they are of use in achieving their broader objectives, 51.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 52. See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 2.21. Aristotle notes that maxims are persuasive because they appeal to the emotions of the audience insofar as they are pleased to hear their own views expressed in such general terms.

⁵⁰ Wilson, “Love,” 88.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

is followed by a descriptive section which depicts some model of ethical behavior related to the programmatic statement. Finally, a prescriptive statement concludes the section which contains the moral exhortations.⁵²

The descriptive paraenesis does not stand in isolation of its literary context. Within a larger literary context, paraenesis contributes to the overall argument and aim of the author. Wilson connects paraenesis with his discussion of maxims by noting how paraenesis employs wisdom sayings. Paraenesis does not introduce a significant quantity of new information or call upon the audience to pursue a different or unaccustomed way of life but contains familiar material that is presented in such a way as to serve the author's special aim.⁵³ Much of paraenesis follows the formal distinctions of gnomic sayings. He states:

Once the readers have been engaged in evaluating and internalizing this model of behavior, the author is in a position to resume the direct address, teaching, exhorting, and encouraging them. Wisdom admonitions predominate, though wisdom sentences, examples, promises, and so forth may also be key elements, in the third, or prescriptive, section. This segment is normally the longest and most varied, and it exhibits the clearest gnomic features and didactic intentions. Here the author identifies certain concrete ethical strategies and specific patterns of behavior that derive from the general plan that had been announced in the programmatic statement and illustrated in the descriptive model. The prescriptive section affords the author an opportunity to articulate some of the fundamental presuppositions, principles, and motivations of the ethical program being presented, and to appeal for the audience to accept these as the basis of their future ethical decision-making. The various precepts and admonitions of the section reveal the ethical perspective and moral ideals that the author desires for the audience, but they accomplish this not so much through the exhaustive treatment of a particular topic or theme but by suggesting a number of different actions and attitudes that typify the author's ethical program.⁵⁴

⁵² *Ibid.*, 92–94.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

He lists eight basic formal and structural characteristics found in prescriptive sections: (1) the section opens with a “protreptic maxim”; (2) a series of coordinated statements specify the implications and consequences (often ethical) of the maxim; (3) a central statement states a goal or motivation of the ethical program; (4) this statement will be followed by a number of concrete injunctions, motivations, examples and the like; (5) the number of imperative statements will decrease as the section progresses while indicative statements will increase; (6) the author will often employ common literary and poetic devices; (7) the author will regularly quote, modify, or allude to certain traditional sources reminding the audience of a shared cultural tradition; and (8) the section will often conclude with another maxim forming an inclusio.⁵⁵

Paul’s theology also influenced his exhortations. His use of rhetorical devices was modified and molded to fit his specific agenda. Douglas Alan Low and Hieronymus Cruz have both contributed to the exploration of the theological motivations for Paul’s exhortations.⁵⁶ These authors explore fundamental motivations that reflect the church’s perception of reality. These motivations can be attached to individual paraenesis or found in larger hortatory pericopes. They are designed as deliberative rhetoric to encourage and persuade the audience to accept the behavioral and attitudinal advice about future decisions. Ethos, pathos, and logos all function together to motivate the audience.⁵⁷ Although paraenesis is “traditional, reflecting conventional wisdom generally approved by society,” self-evident, and available to any philosopher to use, Paul puts it in a Christian context based upon the nature of the gospel.⁵⁸ Paraenesis, therefore, calls for a proper understanding of the Christian tradition and faith and not merely Pauline demand.⁵⁹ In other words, based on the knowledge of the message that led them to embrace Paul’s message

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁶ Douglas Alan Low, *Apocalyptic Motivation in Pauline Paraenesis* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1988) and Hieronymus Cruz, *Christological Motives and Motivated Actions in Pauline Paraenesis*, *European University Studies* 23 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990).

⁵⁷ Low, *Apocalyptic*, 2–3. See also Aune, *Literary Environment*, 198–200. Low will omit Rom 12:9–21 saying it “contains not a single additional phrase to encourage the believers to accept and practice these pastoral admonitions.”

⁵⁸ Low, *Apocalyptic*, 6–7. See also Aune, *Literary Environment*, 191.

⁵⁹ Low, *Apocalyptic*, 6–7.

originally and its meaning in the Christian community, Paul exhorts them with reminders and appeals to act in the present.⁶⁰

Cruz summarizes the theological teachings that provide the motivation for Pauline ethical exhortations. He states:

The Christians are urged to do certain things or to keep off from others because of Christ i.e. because of his words, examples, second coming, especially because of his passion, death, and resurrection in which we have participated through baptism and thereby becoming 'new men' we are intimately united with him as members of his body, possessing the Spirit. Thus Christ is the real power behind Pauline exhortations.⁶¹

Paul forcefully moves his readers to action by use of Christian imperatives which flow smoothly from the Christological indicatives of the Christ event.⁶²

Only a few exegetes have taken advantage of recent studies concerning paraenesis. The following limited survey is intended only to hint at the possibilities that are available by understanding paraenesis in its literary and historical environment.⁶³ Abraham Malherbe set the standard in recent understandings of paraenetic literature as applied to NT literature.⁶⁴ Malherbe begins by reviewing the nature of paraenesis found in the "Hellenistic Moralists," demonstrating clearly that Paul's letters exhibit the same literary characteristics.⁶⁵ He notes the affectionate relationship and pastoral concern Paul has for this church. It is only after he praises them for their response to the gospel and reminds them of his example in light of that gospel that he gives advice on matters of conduct

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶¹ Cruz, *Christological Motives*, 30–31. This concept is crucial in my interpretation of Rom 12:9–21.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 427, 434, 436. Although Cruz recognizes other theological and practical motives, he convincingly argues that, for Paul, these cannot be separated from God's action done through Christ.

⁶³ These articles were chosen because they demonstrated connecting the paraenesis of a NT epistle to the historical context, literary context, or theological context.

⁶⁴ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); "Exhortation in First Thessalonians," *NovT* 25 (1983) 238–56; and "'Gentle as a Nurse': The Cynic Background to I Thess ii," *NovT* 12 (1970) 203–17.

⁶⁵ Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians*, 70–80.

related to their particular circumstances.⁶⁶ Paul's paraenesis in 1 Thessalonians is rooted in God's action and their eschatological future.⁶⁷ Malherbe has demonstrated that Paul has written a letter that not only imitates the familiar form of a paraenetic letter, but has addressed the church as though he is present. The letter functioned, then, as a sermon serving his pastoral purpose.⁶⁸

Leo Perdue applied Malherbe's methods to the Epistle of James.⁶⁹ He was especially interested in exploring the question of the social setting in which the paraenesis originated.⁷⁰ This task is complicated due to the fact that James is silent about such a setting. Therefore, Perdue argued from the evidence of other paraenetic literature that is explicit about social setting.⁷¹ He concludes from the literature:

The social settings are varied. . . . However, the unifying factor is the instructional situation involving an experienced teacher and an immature novice who either is in the process of initiation into a group, is being elevated to a new status, or has recently achieved group membership or a new status.⁷²

In other words, the primary function of paraenesis is socialization.⁷³ Perdue concludes his article by making some suggestions as to how the social settings and social functions of paraenesis within the context of both the Hellenistic Moralists and Jewish Wisdom Literature may be applied to James.

Jerome D. Quinn builds upon Perdue's article and makes the following observations concerning the Pastoral Epistles:

Paraenesis is particularly appropriate for the public recommendations and charges that accompany entrance into the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 74, 76.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 78. The paraenesis of 1 Thess deals primarily with relationships. Paul is now absent. He is unable to continue his pastoral work among them. This letter serves to overcome the distance and meet pressing deficiencies in their faith while providing the means for greater social stability. Finally, the Thessalonians are exhorted to continue the work of Paul and be responsible for their own faith.

⁶⁹ Perdue, "Paraenesis and the Epistle of James," 241–56.

⁷⁰ Contra Dibelius.

⁷¹ Perdue, "Paraenesis," 247. Much of this material is discussed above and functioned as a precursor to his later article.

⁷² Ibid., 250.

⁷³ Ibid., 251.

community as such (the primary socialization) or entry into special social roles within the community (secondary socialization). . . . The process of socialization aims at palpable change in the individual as he or she crosses the threshold into a new mode of existence. This change becomes evident in the conduct and then the character of the person whose life is being 're-created' by entering this group or assuming a new role within it. Paraeneses, positive and negative, are among the means used to urge this transformation, particularly of conduct. It is given, not to be argued with, but to be acted upon. . . . The justification or legitimization of the new world of order into which the neophyte is being inducted is particularly important when the old order still advertises attractive alternatives. [That is why paraenesis often appeals to authority and ethos.] . . . Finally, paraenesis aims at reinforcing a sense of identity with a group and sense of separation from those who do not believe or do not conduct themselves as the group does. Paraenetic exhortation sketches in black and white, with clear lines between those inside and those outside. Thus the hearer is forewarned and forearmed for conflict. In a Christian setting, paraenesis looks to the parousia with its definitive revelation of who is 'in' and who is 'out' of the new world.⁷⁴

He concludes that the Pastoral Epistles exhibit these characteristics.

Yates identifies the antecedents of the ethical lists, household codes, and paraenesis in Colossians.⁷⁵ More important for Yates, though, is the theological setting in which this material is found in Colossians. Paul did not add this material as an "appendix" to the main argument of the epistle. The theology of dying and rising with Christ has implications for the Christian who has participated with Christ. Christ's death and resurrection become reality for the Christian life in the ethics of everyday living.

In summary, paraenesis has often been defined as isolated moral maxims unrelated to either its literary or historical context. At first glance, NT paraenesis seems to fall into this paradigm. However, recent studies have clearly demonstrated that both historical and literary contexts are essential when interpreting Pauline paraenesis. Finally, Pauline paraenesis is intricately connected to Pauline theology.

⁷⁴ Quinn, "Paraenesis," 195–97.

⁷⁵ Yates, "Christian Way of Life," 241–51.



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