

# A STRATEGY FOR PREACHING PARAENESIS

TIM SENSING

Burlington, NC

The "New Hermeneutic"<sup>1</sup> provides interesting possibilities for preaching paraenesis. The traditional (rational) homiletic of the past falters. "Point-making," "situational" sermons, and "conversational" sermons miss the power of the original "language event." To reduce the paraenesis to a single "point" turns it into a static propositional truth, frustrating its intentional force. Although first impressions may lead one to surmise that propositional preaching will be well suited for preaching paraenesis, it altogether fails by ignoring theological, literary, and historical contexts.

The language event is first a historic event that cannot be stripped of its context. The historical form is not accidental and neither is the setting coincidental. "What is meant" and "how it functions" must be the first step before "what it means." Exegesis comes before hermeneutics and certainly homiletics. Without this, the language event becomes only a

---

<sup>1</sup> A simple definition of the New Hermeneutic is thus: The interpreter enters into dialogue with the text in order to be subjectively confronted by language and events from a different historical context. The interpreter seeks the original "language event" so that it can be translated to today with the same impact. When the language from a biblical context touches one's life in a meaningful way, it becomes truth for that person. A detailed explanation can be found in Anthony C. Thiselton, "A New Hermeneutic," *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) 308-33. William Thompson, *Preaching Biblically* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981) 66: "One of the most valuable insights of the 'new hermeneutic' is its emphasis on the text as 'language event.' . . . The concerns of Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs, seminal thinkers in the 'new hermeneutics' school of thought, lift the principle of language to that of prime importance of understanding the Scriptures. Both the presuppositions and the elaborations of the 'new hermeneutics' view of language raise serious questions about its conclusions, but it has provoked biblical interpreters into a useful study of the role of language." Robert Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* (New York: Harper, 1966) 20-77, summarizes the works of Fuchs, Ebeling, and language event.

creation of the exegete. Also, without the historical background the interpreter will only yield theological utterances or moral demands that may or may not be equal to the original meaning or intent. The modern setting will often interfere and prejudice interpretation by clouding the original meaning of the text.

The avoidance of the historical context opens the doors for a host of interpretations. The historical setting places boundaries and gives direction for crossing that cultural bridge. Edgar Krentz summarizes the historical-critical method and maintains it is the best alternative for interpreters.<sup>2</sup> “Historical criticism respects the historical gap and uses a method to determine as precisely as possible the significance of the words for the people then.”<sup>3</sup> Next, he places this interpretation into our history so that the impact of the message is made relevant.<sup>4</sup> He introduces this field of study by stating:

The fundamental rule of biblical exegesis is that the interpreter must be obedient to the text itself; that is, he or she must allow the texts to determine their interpretation. . . . History and exegesis are by no means the same: history tries to reconstruct the past while exegesis attempts to unfold the meaning of texts.<sup>5</sup>

The language of the 20th century has changed. The biblical allusions (points of reference) no longer reach by themselves to today. Although the passages have been passed down, the language event has not. The pulpit must find a way to repeat the same language event. The paraenesis should once again challenge so decision will occur. This is the task of exposition. Historically, how did the language event affect the original hearers? What were the points of reference that touched their lives? Christian preaching seeks to imitate that event in the lives of present-day believers. When the

---

<sup>2</sup> Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 61, 87–88. See pp. 63–67 for the fruits of the historical-critical method. He recognizes that this method is not the only valid way to read a book. To answer the historical-critical question does not exhaust every possibility or question. Meaning can be found in a variety of ways. Meaning always comes in the context of a community’s own history of interpretation. Since these documents are seen as Christian Scripture, there is value in recognizing a text’s past and present ongoing life as a living Word to the community.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, v–vi.

Word of God comes alive, the change of existence is possible. The listener moves from unbelief to faith. In paraenetic preaching the socialization function will be accomplished.

How can the modern preacher create the same awareness of a direct and personal message? Although imitating the logic and form of the paraenetic text may be helpful, there is great latitude to the homiletical craft that gives ample opportunity to seek a dynamic equivalent. Sometimes other sermonic forms or logical approaches may speak to a particular congregation more effectively without reshaping the message. The pulpit needs to keep the function of paraenesis as it contributes to the ongoing argument of the text in mind so the effect is not lost in translation.<sup>6</sup> A dynamic equivalent of the language event is needed to bridge the cultural barrier so the original dynamic is felt by the modern audience. Therefore, aim, theme, and relevance of the original text should influence aim, theme, and relevance of the sermon.

The text speaks with authority because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The church confesses its faith that these are its Scriptures for life and doctrine. Today the preacher can only witness to that authority. Properly understood, paraenesis will be as demanding, threatening, rebuking, encouraging, and promising today as it was then.

When considering paraenesis, pathos, ethos, and logos are all involved in the original language event. As noted above, paraenesis is written by one who has relationship with the audience already and knows the situation to which he writes. The content of the paraenetic section is bound to the message the audience has already received and accepted. The exhortation is for the purpose of reinforcing identity or bringing about a transformation in conduct due to a preexisting transformation in existence. The audience is faced with resolving specific moral problems and conflicts that arise from coming out of the world and entering into new social structures. The reality of their new life is addressed specifically in paraenesis that insists on concrete ways in which the gospel impinges on their new existence while still "in the flesh."<sup>7</sup>

Exegesis of the text will enable the preacher to place the sermon in its proper historical, literary, and theological context, thus establishing logos. The preacher will also need to know the congregation and the occasion of the present message to establish pathos. Some of the possible

---

<sup>6</sup> David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 185–192 warns against the use of the term "translation" when moving from Scripture to theology.

<sup>7</sup> Victor Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968) 92.

occasions noted above dealt with the entrance or anticipation of entrance into a new stage of life, role, or group. When the connection is made between the congregation and the message, ethos will derive. Ethos will be maintained when the preacher gives the sermon with confidence and authority.

Paul's authority is based on his understanding of apostolic authority. This authority should not overemphasize the commanding nature of paraenesis, neither should paraenesis be reduced to "recommendations and good advice."<sup>8</sup> Since the gospel contains both demand and mercy, Paul gave binding directives for moral life for both the individual and the community. He used the authority of the gospel for his authority. The same authority that enabled him to preach initially, enabled him to correct, admonish, encourage, and command.<sup>9</sup> Out of Paul's concern that the community be grounded in the indicative of the gospel, he did not primarily issue decrees, but rather argued with deep theological passion. He sought to convince these communities of the fundamental implications of the gospel so that they could participate in the decision to conform their will to God's.<sup>10</sup>

Foremost, a paraenetic sermon will be rooted in the theology of the text. Whether one starts with a text or the life situation, the immediate occasion must be woven into the theology of the text. Although the preacher does not want to dull the unique theology of a particular pericope or letter, the context of the canon must also be considered. The paraenetic passages are always bound to a larger framework often discussed as the "indicative" of the gospel.

The indicative of Scripture always implies an imperative. It is part of the essential nature of the gospel. Doctrine is not taught for its sake alone so that it may be known; it is taught in order that it may be actualized in practice. The imperative has a dialectical relation to the indicative in Paul because it actualizes what the indicative makes possible.<sup>11</sup> The relationship of the indicative and the imperative must be

<sup>8</sup> Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 117.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 117–18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* Lohfink goes on to say (p. 119) that *paraklesis* is directive instruction, but by Pauline usage it is also appeal, encouragement, admonition, consolation, invitation, and even request.

<sup>11</sup> J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 276. See also Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard DeWitt (Grand Rapids, MI:

understood in terms of the Christ event. The old age is gone, yet still continues. The new age is here, but not fully. In the present, Christians are free from the old age with its powers yet still live in the world. "Therefore, now we stand with both gift and demand of the gospel."<sup>12</sup>

Rudolf Bultmann connects the power of experiencing a new reality by expounding upon the integral relationship of the indicative and imperative in Scripture. The power of the gospel and the Christ event must be a continual event in one's life. The Christian must maintain a continual response to the Word of God proclaimed in Christ.<sup>13</sup> The indicative gives expression to the new self-understanding of the believer. Since this existence includes the will, the imperative reminds the believer that there is freedom from sin, provided there is also renewal in obedience to the command of God.<sup>14</sup> For Paul, this freedom from sin is rooted in baptism. The old self was crucified with Christ through baptism. The sinful self was rendered powerless. Enslavement to sin is no longer possible.<sup>15</sup> Bultmann asks, "How can 'you shall not sin' be reconciled with the indicative 'you

---

Eerdmans, 1975) 254–55, 258–65; Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 9–13; J. S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ* (London: Hodden & Stoughton, 1935) 199; and Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, trans. F. V. Filson (London: SCM, 1951) 224. Dodd, *Gospel*, 3–5, 9–13, 66–67, would opt for the virtual irrelation of the indicative to the imperative.

<sup>12</sup> Allen Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984) 104.

<sup>13</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958) 76. Bultmann's work is crucial in understanding the indicative and the imperative as the basic structure of Pauline ethics. Some may want to stress the indicative over the imperative or vice versa, but his balanced presentation is the best course. A comprehensive review of the literature on the indicative and imperative is found in William D. Dennison's article "Indicative and Imperative: The Basic Structure of Pauline Ethics," *Calvin Theological Journal* 14 (April 1979) 55–78; and Michael Parsons, "Being Precedes Act: Indicative and Imperative in Paul's Writing" *EvQ* (April 1988) 99–127. His argument for a middle road between Bultmann and Dodd in understanding the relationship of the indicative and the imperative is summarized simply by his title "Being Precedes Act." See also Georg Strecker, "Indicative and Imperative according to Paul," *AusBR* 35 (1987) 60–72; Richard E. Howard, "Some Modern Interpretations of the Pauline Indicative and Imperative," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 11 (1976) 38–48; and Joel Marcus, "Let God Arise and End the Reign of Sin: A Contribution to the Study of Pauline Paraenesis" *Bib* 69 (1988) 386–95.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

are freed from sin?"<sup>16</sup> He finds the answer in the inner connection between the indicative and the imperative.<sup>17</sup>

This relationship is also found in the teachings of Jesus.<sup>18</sup> Jesus proclaimed the will of God, God's demand, the demand for the good. He demanded that all be obedient to God. He protested against the delusion that one's duty to God can be fulfilled by obeying certain external commandments.<sup>19</sup> For Jesus, the demand of God's liberating salvation is found in the reality of the reign of God.<sup>20</sup> All of Jesus' ethical instructions, too, must be interpreted against the indicative of the reign of God.<sup>21</sup>

Since the preacher cannot proclaim the imperative in isolation from indicative, literary interpretive methods are needed to establish the connection between the two. One preached without the other results in either legalism or libertinism. Allen Verhey comments:

The indicative mood has an important priority and finality in the proclamation of the gospel, but the imperative is by no means merely an addendum to the indicative or even exactly an inference drawn from the indicative. Participation in Christ's cross and resurrection (the important priority of the indicative) and anticipation of the new age of God's unchallenged sovereignty (the important finality of the indicative) are constituted here and now by obedience to God's will (the imperative).<sup>22</sup>

E. P. Sanders reveals that for Paul, "participatory language of being 'in the body of Christ' or being 'in Christ' are the themes Paul appeals to most often in paraenesis and polemic."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> McDonald, *Kerygma*, 72–87, reviews the use of paraenesis in the OT, John the Baptist, and Jesus. He states, "The early Christians inherited a tradition of paraenesis from Jesus."

<sup>19</sup> Bultmann, *Jesus*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Lohfink, *Jesus*, 59. See also James G. Williams, "Paraenesis, Ethics, and Excess: Matthew's Rhetoric in the Sermon on the Mount," *Semeia* 50 (1990) 163–88.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Verhey, *Great Reversal*, 104–5.

<sup>23</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 256. See also Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 91. Furnish goes on to describe this on pp. 107 and 110 as the impossibility of separating the "didache" and "kerygma" in Paul's terminology. They

The fundamental feature of Pauline paraenesis is that it is governed by God's act of salvation in Christ. It explains the implications and consequences of faith in Christ.<sup>24</sup> "It elucidates the imperative implied in the indicative of God's action in Christ. It describes the way followed by those who truly know Jesus Christ as Lord."<sup>25</sup> McDonald lists the motifs that most influence paraenesis: (1) baptism ("putting on Christ," "rising and dying with Christ," and participation with Christ); (2) eschatology (summed up in the love of Christ and his parousia); and (3) the new life in Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Our righteousness will not be dependent upon our accomplishments. Our righteousness depends solely on God's grace.<sup>27</sup> Faith is our response to grace in obedience. The Pauline concept of grace is inclusive of the Pauline concept of obedience. Obedience, moral and ethical acts, does not bring righteousness; rather, these acts are the expression of our radical call.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, exhortations are more than a list of 'dos' and 'don'ts.' The demand in Scripture is the embodiment of the gospel in God's people. The church is therefore confronted by the gospel with relevant moral choices about life and relationships.<sup>29</sup> Commands call forth the presence of the Lord in his church. These exhortations provide a vivid description of what it means to live in Christ and to have Christ living in his people.<sup>30</sup>

---

have an overlapping function. Therefore, the theological affirmations of Paul carry within themselves the moral imperative.

<sup>24</sup> McDonald, *Keryma*, 87.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 88–89. McDonald expounds further on pages 90–100, describing different types and forms of paraenesis that operated in the early Christian teaching. He identifies traditional paraenetic topics, situational paraenetic topics, and ecclesiastical paraenetic topics. Many of these topics overlap.

<sup>27</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, denies the twin theses that first century Judaism was legalistic and that its soteriology was simply a matter of merits and demerits. Judaism recognized the gracious act of God in the gift of the covenant. Judaism saw human obedience as a matter of accepting the responsibilities of the covenant and not earning entry into the covenant. Obedience will maintain one's position but not earn that position. Therefore, Sanders concludes that ethics for Paul is not so much a response to justification as it is because of the believer's participation with Christ. See also, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983).

<sup>28</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Paul and His Theology: A Brief Sketch* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989) 99.

<sup>29</sup> Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 75.

<sup>30</sup> Greidanus, *Modern Preacher* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 332.

Therefore, Pauline paraenesis must be interpreted in light of Pauline theology, for it is within this context that paraenesis functions.

Paul Scherer<sup>31</sup> understood well this connection between theology and ethics, between the indicative and the imperative, between the gift of the gospel and the demand of the gospel. Scherer began with the "offense" of the gospel. There is no gospel at all without understanding first this offense. The preacher must find that which offends.<sup>32</sup> The gospel cannot be distilled either by "whittling down the imperatives" due to the "thoroughly radical transactions. . . . The demand of the gospel cannot be separated from the comfort."<sup>33</sup> The gospel challenges and summons the Christian to "ceaseless participation in God's creative and redeeming act."<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the gospel comes to us both as "conflict" and "demand."<sup>35</sup> Scherer states:

The gospel comes to us not just as history, but as conflict. Another, that it comes to us not alone as succor, but as the succor which is inseparable from demand, and in such a way that the demand itself is the succor. And still another, that therefore it comes to us not primarily as solace, an invitation to patient reliance upon God—faith is more than that!—but primarily as challenge, the summons to ceaseless participation in God's creative and redeeming act, as he shares with us his own dangerous life, moving day in and day out toward the accomplishment in us and through us of his eternal purpose.<sup>36</sup>

Scherer opposes many popular forms of preaching paraenesis. He notes that there are no substitutes for the disturbing gospel of a redeeming God.<sup>37</sup> This would include morals or moralizing, exhortations, pastoral counseling en masse, positive thinking, pop psychology, emotionalism, or self-help theology.

The Christian religion is not a life-adjustment technique, which assumes that both the questions and answers are to be found in the situation itself. It is not a situation-overcoming

<sup>31</sup> Paul Scherer, *The Word God Sent* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

technique, which assumes that the questions posed by the situation are resolved in the answers provided by the Christian faith. It is not a correlating-technique, which assumes that for any given situation, with the questions it puts, the primary significance of the faith consists in its answering quality. Christianity is not a technique at all. The situation becomes for faith the occasion for both question and answer—the questions which are God’s questions, and the answers which lie in the indicatives of his gospel and in the imperatives of his will for our lives. On other terms can it be profoundly understood that Christianity is intended to create situations which were not there before.<sup>38</sup>

Flexibility is the key when imitating the form of the text. Commanding alone, independent of the indicative of Scripture, will abuse the language event and will tend toward legalism. Indicative alone will also violate the nature of the radical gospel. One legalistic sermon is too much, and a steady diet of such will lead to shallow and unhealthy congregations. There is not enough paraenesis in the world to make one good enough or to make one holy. Holiness is rooted in the mercies of God, the indicative of the gospel. Only the grace of God can preserve such preaching from shattering the gospel itself. Although the immediate pericope might seem to be absent of theological content, the wider context will always reveal the power of the Christ event.

The following three examples demonstrate the possibility of locating the connection between theology and paraenesis. Philippians 4:4–9 is a favorite paraenetic section filled with preaching treasures. The text contains five imperatives, namely, *rejoice*, *do not be anxious*, *present*, *think*, and *put*. Each of these exhortations has provided rich soil for numerous sermons. The text is controlled by the indicative of verse 5, “The Lord is near.” The modifying phrases of each imperative also are rooted in God. The pericope concludes with “And the God of peace will be with you,” bringing closure to the paragraph. The themes of each of these imperatives do not originate in this pericope. Each will have an antecedent earlier in the letter. Although these themes find an imperitival expression here, they are rooted in earlier indicative sections.<sup>39</sup> The

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>39</sup> E.g., Imperatives such as *consider*, *have this mind*, or *think* occur in various forms about fifteen times in the letter. Chapter 2 clearly roots the thinking of the Philippians in their own experience of being “united with Christ” and

theology is the tie that binds this pericope together and therefore influences the theme of the sermon.

The paraenetic section in Ephesians is well documented. Although often overemphasized,<sup>40</sup> the indicative of Ephesians seems clearly separated from the imperative. Only one imperative verb is found in chapters 1–3, namely, 2:11 (*mnemoneuete*). Of the over forty imperatives in the rest of the letter, one example is in 18, “Be filled with the Spirit” (*plerousthe*). Although some are tempted to rummage in the book of Acts for what it means to “be filled with the Spirit,” the immediate context must be kept in view. Such consideration will prevent early exodus to Acts. A grammatical analysis of the text reveals that this imperative is modified by five participles that describe what it means to be filled with the Spirit: “speaking,” “singing,” “making,” “giving,” and “submitting.”<sup>41</sup> This small section is part of a whole paraenetic section that must be viewed as a whole modified by the theme “walk a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Eph 4:1). The theme of “walking” is repeated seven times in the letter, five of which are in the paraenesis just prior to this imperative. It is inseparable from the “calling” proclaimed in the indicative of the earlier chapters.

Finally, an example from the vice list in 2 Cor 12:20–21 reveals the connection between the paraenesis of Paul and his earlier situational concerns. This vice list deals with divisive behavior (bickering, pettiness, arrogance, etc.), antisocial acts (anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, etc.), and sexual immorality. These behaviors characterize Corinthian behavior mentioned elsewhere. The historical context in this case connects what otherwise would be seemingly isolated exhortations.

The preacher must know the purpose of using paraenesis. First, how is the author using paraenesis in this text? Furthermore, how do I intend to use paraenesis in this sermon for these people? Is the sermon designed to bring about social order by encouraging a continuation of behaviors and attitudes already accepted by the community? Or is this sermon designed

---

imitating the example of Christ, who “did not consider” himself more highly than he ought. Chapter 3 gives the example of Paul considering his relationship with Christ of paramount importance compared to all else. “All of us who are mature should take such a view of things” (3:15).

<sup>40</sup> Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 68–69, notes that paraenesis is interwoven into the total context of the letters. Paraenesis is expressed in a variety of ways throughout each letter. Therefore, Pauline letters should not be neatly divided into doctrinal and ethical sections.

<sup>41</sup> The final participle also functions as a verb for the next section.

to bring about a rejection of behaviors or attitudes that need casting aside by the community? The overriding purpose is to provide guidance for the moral life of the community.

The text and the sermon must be addressing analogous situations. In the letters of Paul that will usually mean a pastoral concern. In paraenesis that will usually involve a socialization function. If the selected text does not address the local concern, then another text can be chosen or another life situation addressed. The sermon must maintain the same function as the text was originally intended. Confidence in making connections between then and now can be developed by remembering that the church is a continuation of God's activity among his people. Also, the letters of Paul speak with immediacy to many of the same concerns that affect the church today. The task of the preacher is to maintain relevant and concrete applications so that people's lives can be affected by the truth in the text.

The paraenetic sermon may take various forms. The logic of the text may dictate the logic of the sermon or the preacher may adapt the arrangement of materials to meet specific needs. However, each sermon should contain the following elements:<sup>42</sup> (1) Use of traditional material and familiar maxims that are generally applicable, clear, vivid, memorable and that directly address the congregational situation. Authority will arise naturally by use of these features. Much of the power of the original language event will be carried by these sayings.<sup>43</sup> (2) A theme that unites the section in a coherent whole. Often in paraenetic sections of the N T, the theme of the text can serve as the theme of the sermon. (3) Examples of the actions or attitudes that are to be commended or rejected. (4) Motivational clause rooted in both eschatology and christology. (5) Explanations of the maxims. (6) A repeating of the maxim to form an inclusio. These elements taken as a whole will have an explicit connection to the kerygma.

Paraeneses are not an exhaustive list or cataloguing of Christian moral responsibilities. They serve primarily as representative lists that address the immediate context. In reality, there is no limit to the gospel's demands. There is neither a limit to the good by one transformed by the gospel nor the evil that is possible by one who is not.<sup>44</sup> The preacher may

---

<sup>42</sup> Although some elements are not found in every passage and are optional in their employment in the sermon, the preacher will want to be aware of why they are omitted.

<sup>43</sup> One possible source for maxims today is found in the hymnal. Much of this literature speaks not only with authority but also to the heart.

<sup>44</sup> Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 75. He notes Gal 5:19 and Rom 1:32 that indicate the lists are endless. Furnish goes on to describe the vice lists, stating on

add to a paraenetic section another exhortation from Scripture that may be appropriate for this particular setting. However, caution needs to be exercised so that neither the delicate balance between indicative and imperative nor the literary structure is disturbed in such a way that the language event is robbed of its power.

Two possible extremes are prevalent in pulpits. First, many exhortations are isolated from their original contexts and preached as topical admonitions. If the paraenetic section contains seven separate admonitions, the preacher might preach seven separate sermons. Furthermore, the preacher may be tempted to preach each admonition in the same sermon, like unrelated pearls on a string. This sermon would resemble a rapid-fire propositional machine gun. "Line 'em up! Shoot 'em dead!" Instead, the balance between the "didache" and "kerygma" needs to be maintained. The sermon must have a theological unity based upon God's saving work in Jesus Christ.

In summary, the paraenetic sermon must begin with theological, literary, and historical exegesis so that the original language event can be properly understood. The primary theological intent of a letter must control how one looks at individual passages within the letter. This exegetical step should bring coherence and power to the message. The preacher needs to be sympathetic to original theological intent for the community of faith then so that faithful correspondence between then and now will be maintained. Otherwise, the preacher may need to be doing something else besides preaching. Second, the preacher will explore analogous situations that are present in the local community of faith. It is from the community that the preacher rises to proclaim the message to the community. Although the text may address several competing needs, there is always another Sunday to preach another sermon. Therefore, a single theme or focus should be chosen from the text for each sermon as it addresses a single issue. Finally, the preacher will construct a sermon that will imitate the function of that original language event. For this sermon to be called a paraenetic sermon, it will contain the elements described above.<sup>45</sup>

---

p. 76 that of the six vice lists, there are forty-two terms of which thirty-nine are distinct. None of the terms appear in all six lists. Twenty-five appear only once. And on p. 86, he notes twenty terms used for virtues, sixteen of which are distinct.

<sup>45</sup> For detailed descriptions on preaching epistles see, Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 323–36; and Long, *Preaching Literary Forms*, 107–26.



#### Copyright and Use:

**As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.**

**No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.**

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

#### About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.