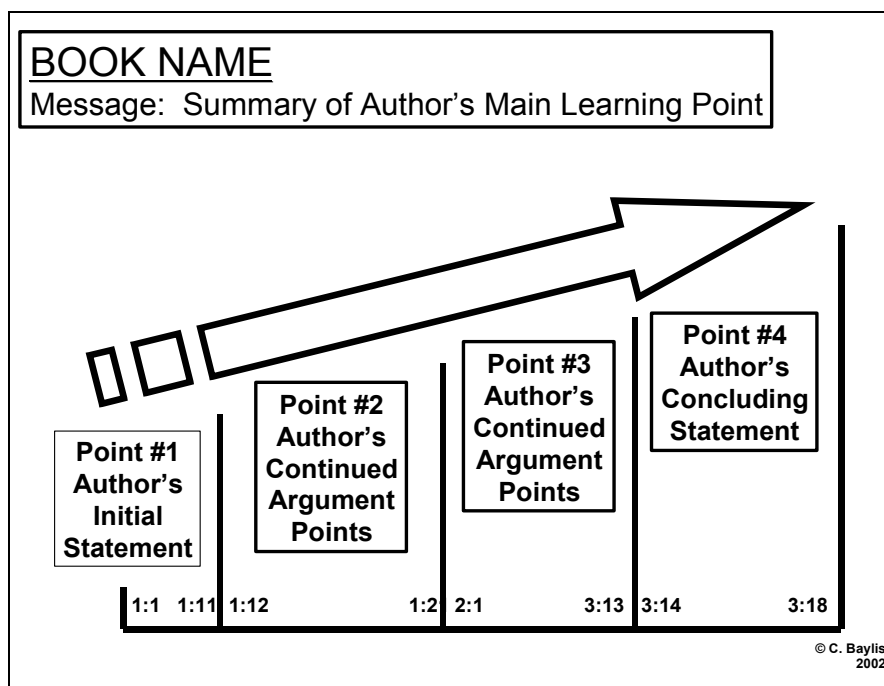# CHAPTER 5

DETERMINING THE LITERARY MESSAGE OF AN EPISTLE

PART A

THE LITERARY FLOW OF AN EPISTLE:
THE SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM

BOOK NAME
Message: Summary of Author's Main Learning Point

Point #1 Author's Initial Statement

Point #2 Author's Continued Argument Points

Point #3 Author's Continued Argument Points

Point #4 Author's Concluding Statement

1:1   1:11 1:12   1:2 2:1   3:13 3:14   3:18

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A Problem

Typically an author writes to a church or individual to correct a problem. In other words, there is some evil (negative) situation or movement that incites him to write[14]. Since the apostle (or apostolic representative) has the solution to the problem, he has the responsibility to correct the problem. So prior to the interpreter establishing the final context (argument or solution), he must establish the problem (of the epistle) that the apostle is attempting to solve. Without defining the problem precisely, the interpretive

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[14] This would be the same as the tension or the problem of narrative (story). His letter would be the same as the response to the tension. Thus, the epistle would include his philosophy or theology. The vindication would be in the Word itself which has been validated through the resurrection and will be validated in the Second Coming (when those who have embraced the philosophy will be vindicated).

solution then becomes very general and less accurate. Note the following example of proof-texting without knowing the problem and solution of the book.

For instance, when Paul says, "Be anxious for nothing," he is not telling them never to have concern for anything; as is typically stated. Paul is in prison and they fear (are anxious, or concerned) for him because some in the church are saying he is under a curse of God (while his accusers are blessed because they are prosperous). Paul then writes the epistle to tell them not to be anxious about him since they should know from the Scriptures that suffering is part of the believer's unavoidable task. Thus, they should feel joy in Paul's suffering for Christ instead of anxiety for his spiritual condition. By contrast, earlier in the epistle, Paul commends Timothy since he is anxious (concerned; same Greek word) for them. In this case, Timothy knows the Scripture and thus is rightly concerned about their spiritual condition. Thus, Paul does not mean that one should never be concerned about anything. He means that they should not be anxious about those things that God has revealed in the Scripture.

Also, the problem may not be something that is immediately present in the church, but could be a warning of a future problem that could arise.[15]. The interpreter's job is to find the narrowest of the contextual problem(s);[16] that is, the one problem that explains the whole book.

A solution

The epistle then is the solution to the problem occurring in the church or to the individual. Thus if one understands the unique problem, then he/she now will be able to see how to interpret the epistle since the context of the book must be specifically related to solving the problem.[17]. Everything in the epistle, must relate to the solution to the unique problem.[18]

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[15] 2 Peter is an example of an epistle that is written for a problem yet in the future.

[16] Note here that it is possible that there could be many contextual problems. However, the interpreter's job is to find the narrowest context possible (least ambiguous) and thus should continually seek the narrowest or least number of problems that encompasses the context. In epistolary literature of the Bible, the interpreter should hopefully find one central problem (although there may be multiple "sub" problems (e.g., 1 Corinthians).

[17] This is not determined apart from the context, but a narrowing of the context to a specific single problem and solution is important to determine so as to find the final focus of the context.

[18] If one cannot relate everything to the unique problem, then either he does not understand how this portion is a solution, or he has not determined the problem accurately.

Narrowing The Context To A Single Solution

Thus the job of the interpreter of an epistle is to find the single solution based on the single problem. The context of the book should be able to be narrowed to a single contextual solution which contains both the theology (motivation) and the resultant action required (imperative).

The Solution to the Specific Problem:
The Contextual Argument

Thus the author places his reasoning in sequential order (called the argument). Note that the sequential order of the epistle must <u>not</u> be altered. The solution <u>must</u> be able to be repeated in consecutive order as the author lays it out. To violate this order is to admit that one is not grasping the argument of the author in total. The means by which an author may move through the text has two possibilities:
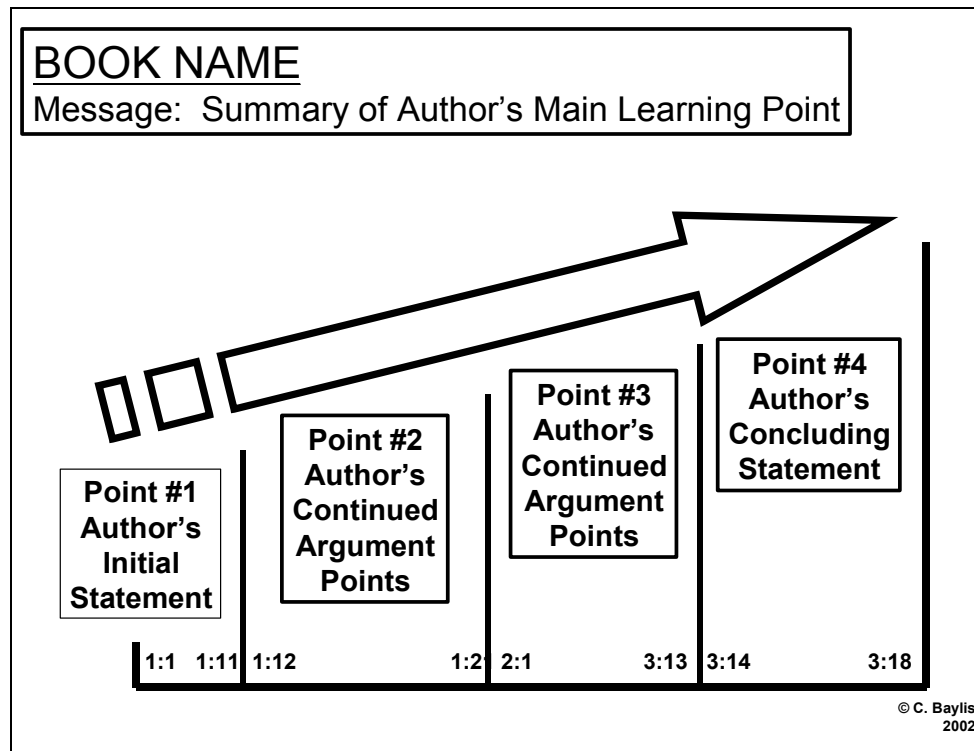
1. **Inductive** (building progressively to a specific solution): The author may move progressively, building his argument until he comes to the solution toward the end of his argument. For example he may put A, B, C, D together (which do not conclude by themselves) and then conclude with E (which is based necessarily on the earlier points), which is the solution. The single solution would then be E, built inductively from the facts presented.

2. **Deductive** (building separately to a general solution): He may make several points, each one of them stands on its own as part of the solution. For example A refutes the problem as well as B as well as C. Taken all together there are three reasons that his argument is valid. One must then summarize deductively a single solution from the three separate facts.

The Process (The Observation Exercise Followed By The Synthesis)

The whole of the epistle can be analyzed objectively by finding determining the problem of the epistle and then following the literary structure to determine the argument (solution). Once the problem is determined and stated concisely then the argument (the sequential steps of his reasoning[19]) is used to explain the solution. Frequently this is displayed on a synthetic chart.

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[19] This is similar to an outline, but it is <u>not</u> an outline. It is a sequential ordering of the author's reasoning. An outline is usually topical and does not show an argument.

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│  ┌───────────────────────────────────────────┐      │
│  │ BOOK NAME                                  │      │
│  │ Message: Summary of Author's Main Learning Point │
│  └───────────────────────────────────────────┘      │
│                                                      │
│        Point #1   Point #2   Point #3   Point #4     │
│        Author's   Author's   Author's   Author's     │
│        Initial    Continued  Continued  Concluding   │
│        Statement  Argument   Argument   Statement    │
│                   Points     Points                  │
│     1:1 1:11 1:12      1:2 2:1    3:13 3:14    3:18   │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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BOOK NAME
Message: Summary of Author's Main Learning Point

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The Synthetic Chart

Example: Philippians

Problem of the Book of Philippians
(determined from the Observation exercise):

Based on a prosperity theology (Prosperity indicates spirituality), certain Jewish false teachers have stated that Paul is under a curse since he is in prison under Gentile rule and all who follow him are liable to cursing as well and thus the church should follow the false teachers.

Solution to the problem:
Paul's answer (as if from his speech)

1. To say that being in prison shows one is not delivered (blessed) by God is wrong since:

   a. Many have come to Christ due to Paul's imprisonment, even the Roman guards.
   b. Many preach more boldly due to Paul's imprisonment.
   c. Deliverance is not determined by physical means but by ones conformance to the word of God.
      • Thus prison is the exact place that God would have Paul.

- Thus, the best thing for Paul is not just prison, but to die for Paul would be with Jesus.

   d. The doctrine of suffering must be included in ones belief in Jesus as it is correct behavior that one suffer for the gospel for the benefit of others.

2. The theology of suffering for God is exemplified by Jesus.

   a. Though He was equal with God, He gave it up to become a man and suffer on the cross for the sake of others with the result that He became the greatest of all.
   b. Thus Paul suffers for the sake of the Philippians to serve Christ.
   c. Timothy is coming to the Philippians and is the only one who serves Christ by suffering for the Philippians.
   d. Ephaphroditus suffered on the Philippians behalf to bring the gift to Paul.

3. The theology of the Jewish false teachers who seek success and call it obedience are wrong.

   a. They think that if they are Jewish and keep the Law (so to speak) that they will reap rewards and be elevated.
   b. By contrast, Paul, who was elevated among the Jews due to his birth and keeping the Law, gave it all up to suffer for the gospel in anticipation of the resurrection into the Kingdom.
   c.` They, through their beliefs, are dead, since they serve the physical, not Godly.
   d. The believing Philippians and Paul, suffer, waiting for their Deliverer to deliver them into the Kingdom

4. The application of this for the Philippian church is as follows:

   a. Euodia and Syntyche need to follow Paul's doctrine and join those who have united under him apart from the false teachers.
   b. The sacrificial gift was appropriate for an apostle of the gospel and will be to the Philippians credit.
   c. God can provide all the Philippians needs, as He did Paul's.
   d. Greet and care for those who follow Paul's gospel of sacrificial service.

Solution: Paul exhibits the sacrificial behavior of the gospel demonstrated in Christ and the Philippians should suffer for the sake of others in the gospel.

PART B

DETERMINING THE PROBLEM AND SOLUTION

In order to determine the argument of a literary unit (e.g., a book) the interpreter must be sensitive to how the author uses a literary style to communicate his message. A narrative (story) will have different characteristics than an epistle (letter) or poetry. If a more general "one size fits all" tool is used, then one can only determine a more general solution. To use the same basic tools on each one will ignore the author's specific selection of a unique style to communicate his message and thus one can never see the specific color with which the author has painted his literary canvas.

Simple Contextual Discovery

The reader of any type of literature is supposed to begin at the beginning of the book and read to the end automatically interpreting based on what he has just read. The difficulty with this simple time-proven method is the Biblical reader's mind is frequently too theologically tainted by preconceptions of what the book should say. He thus reads a verse at a time, or a chapter, or simply assigns meanings to verses based on what he has always known of them or what some commentator has said. Thus the typical Biblical reader interprets based on his already determined systematic theology and thus the literary movement is ignored. Thus original reading of the author's intent becomes difficult.

In addition, instead of placing himself under the historical information held in the literary flow of the book, the reader frequently assumes the situation of the epistle is similar to the situation of his own church in 21st century westernized society.

For instance, in Matthew 7:20, the text states that "you shall know them by their fruits." Most interpreters do not consider the literary structure of the story of Matthew when considering the interpretation and automatically import the statement of Jesus to be a comment on their own situation. Thus, assuming the Sermon was delivered into their own church, the interpreter feels that Jesus is separating his audience and not the literary, historical group. Since the audience of the reader is a typical evangelical church, then he assumes that Jesus is separating true Christians from false professors. Since all in the church may profess to be Christians, then the separating part, the fruits, must be works. Thus true believers will be separated on the basis of works.

In the primary presidential election of 2008, Mr. Mitt Romney, a Mormon, quoted that verse with that interpretation to show that he was the same as Evangelical believers, since his fruits, his "labor", showed he was a true child of God. The practical failure of this interpretation thus becomes obvious. For even though Mr. Romney has been married to the same woman, goes regularly to his religion's services, opposes legalized abortion and same sex marriage, he is

clearly not a child of God since the Mormon doctrine is a doctrine of works and a denial of the Jesus of the Scriptures. Thus, Jesus cannot be saying that one can tell a child of God by their "works," else many unbelievers would qualify including the Pharisees of the chapter previous (6:1-18).

In the argument of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), Jesus is dealing with a different group than the contemporary evangelical church of the 21st century. In Matthew there are two types of contrasting characters; those who would follow God and those who would oppose God. Since all would say they follow God, He reveals how one might identity of those who are on each side. The characters that He is exposing are the Pharisees, whose works look good ("wolves in sheep's clothing; also see 6:1-18), the trait identified with "fruits" is one's confession of Jesus Christ as the means of their forgiveness and imputed righteousness, which the Pharisees do not do (they confess their works). This is played out in chapter 12, where the Pharisees _verbally_ reject Jesus, and accuse Him of being from Satan. In 12:33-36, Jesus mentions again the fruit and clearly states that it is the words, words of identification with Him as the Christ; words that the Pharisees do not have. Thus, knowing true "children of God" is available by listening to one's confession. He either justifies himself by works[20] or by imputation and thus the identity is made.

Being aware of this danger forces the exegete to submit himself to the objective tools of literary analysis, that is, how an author communicates his message.

Literary Sensitivity

When one reads a contemporary story written into a situation within which he is familiar, he reads contextually and interprets automatically, based on years of reading a particular kind of literature and understanding how the author communicates his meaning. However, when reading historical literature the reader is quite displaced from the situation and must submit himself to objective tools of analysis to keep from automatically assuming himself and his culture into the text.

For instance, in narrative literature (story) a reader should **_never_** assume the author addresses him directly. In the classic tale "Cinderella," one would not assume that the author means for the fairy godmother's speech to Cinderella to be applied to the reader. Yet when interpreting story in the Bible, the reader frequently assumes that Jesus is talking to him when He addresses the disciples.

Examples of statements in narrative literature to disciples: Which ones apply?

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[20] The justification by works of James 2:14ff. is regarding sanctification (cf. James 2:1) and will not be covered here.

- **John 14:26** "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.
- **John 14:31** Arise, let us go from here.

If one listens to the pulpits of America (assuming they are teaching Bible), they would likely say 14:26 is to all believers while 14:31 is not. But the answer very simply is "neither!" In narrative literature these imperatives are directly addressed to the apostles and while the last one obviously cannot be duplicated by the reader (one would not know where to go from or to), the former one is also addressed to apostles. Without some additional literary information the reader has no basis on which to choose the former, as well as the latter, for himself. This should be readily apparent in the first one since the present day reader could never remember what Jesus said to him since he wasn't there. One can only determine application when all the parts of the story are determined, particularly the philosophy of the story (or the moral or the message).

Epistolary literature also has its unique traits with which the author uses to communicate. Yet again they are frequently ignored as the reader takes the author to be speaking directly to his situation, his contemporary church, when in fact the situation and problem may be far different than his.

Examples of statements in epistolary literature to the historical church: Which ones apply?

- **Hebrews 13:17** Obey your leaders, and submit *to them*
- **Hebrews 13:18** Pray for us
- **Hebrews 13:23** Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released

The exhortation again is that the reader must be prepared to follow the literary tools of the author so that he might determine the message without undue influence from his own perspective. While the first one seems to apply, the second and last ones are obviously historically applied and cannot be directly applied to the reader (he cannot pray for the author, nor take notice of Timothy's release). The first one also cannot be directly applied, although it seems like it, because the leaders he references are not the leaders of the present day church, but the historical church to whom he wrote.[21]

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[21] Note that this may turn out to be applicable when all one's work is finished on the epistle. But one cannot just assume all imperatives are for the present day reader as is being shown.

Finding the characteristics of the epistle (categorization).

The author is writing into a historical situation, but it is a present situation to him. In order to determine the historical interpretation, the reader must determine the specifics of the historical reader's situation into which the author writes.

Characters (centered around the historical reader)

Note that the characters mentioned within an epistle are unique. The historical reader mentioned is different than the present day reader since the historical situation is unique from the readers of today. The writer is also different since he is inspired by God to write. In addition, if the writer is an apostle, then many things that the apostle requires for himself cannot be assumed by the present day reader without error.[22] Thus, the reader must determine the uniqueness of the characters so as to differentiate them from himself.

> **Note**: The actual identity of characters is <u>not</u> the most important thing in the epistle (literary speaking). In fact, frequently the characters are muted and it is difficult to determine exactly who they are as far as an idenity. For instance, not much can be said regarding the characters of Ephesians, e.g., what is the reader like? About all one can say of the reader is that generally they are predominantly Gentile. Or, what can be said about the anonymous author of Hebrews? However, note that an epistle does have characters, even though they may be somewhat unidentified. What is important to note about characters is whatever the author tells the reader, particularly their theological identity, and then how they are affecting the readership with that theology.

Imperatives (Instructions to Act):
The most important literary part of an epistle.

When an author writes an epistle he wants to bring about a change in the reader. If he accomplishes that change, he is successful. If he does not effect a change then he has failed. So the epistolary style is chosen because its central part is found in imperatives. In other words when the reader is done reading the epistle he knows what the author wants him to do; <u>act on the imperatives and heed his warnings</u>.

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[22] For instance in 2 Corinthians the apostle is being rejected by his readership, the church at Corinth. However, one cannot compare their own rejection to that of Paul, as rejection of him is a rejection of the gospel, since he is identified in a similar way to a prophet.

By contrast, narrative literature has <u>no imperatives</u> for the historical reader. In fact, the reader is not even alluded to in a story.[23] So, this makes the interpretation of epistolary literature much easier than narrative. <u>If the reader wants the historical application (to the historical church) of the epistle, he simply needs to list the imperatives. This is precisely what the author wants the reader to do.</u>

Philosophy (Theology):
The reason the reader should follow his imperatives.

If a reader has only imperatives he/she may or may choose not to do them. For instance, if a pastor told a church member simply to give him money (an imperative) the member might not do it. Why not? It is simply because the member can see no benefit in giving the pastor money. The pastor has not given the member a reason that will benefit him. Since the member is left to determine his own reasoning, and since he cannot find any that justifies giving the pastor money, he refuses. He might reason to himself that the pastor wants it to buy a sports car or support a gambling habit.

But then the pastor tells him the reason he should give him money. If he gives him money the pastor will use it to hospitalize another member's sick mother and this would be an opportunity for members to display the love of God.

Now that the member has some proper reasoning, he is motivated to give the pastor money. But without the reasoning, the member sees no benefit and the imperatives become words with no motivation.

Therefore, in an epistle there are two foundational parts; <u>imperatives</u> and <u>theology</u>. The imperatives tell the reader what to do, and the theology tells him why God wants him to do it, that is, the benefit it will be to him. So the interpreter first looks for the imperatives and then searches for the theology that will impel the reader to perform.

Note this clearly. The imperatives must be tied directly to the theology. If one finds they have a theology that is not directly tied to imperatives then it is out of context. All theology is given to motivate the reader to do the imperatives.

<u>Summary</u>

The combination of characters, the theology and the imperatives are all related. For instance

<u>The antagonist</u> (left side of chart)
- Influences the reader

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[23] The unique exception to this is Luke and John. Luke introduces the reader in 1:1 and discusses his purpose for Theophilus, while John mentions the reader with a plural "you" in 20:31 where he also lists the purpose that "you might believe . . ."

- based on <u>evil theology</u>
- to do <u>evil actions.</u>

<u>The author</u> (right side of chart)
- Writes to influence the reader
- based on <u>good theology</u>
- to do <u>good (Godly) actions</u>

EPISTOLARY ANALYSIS

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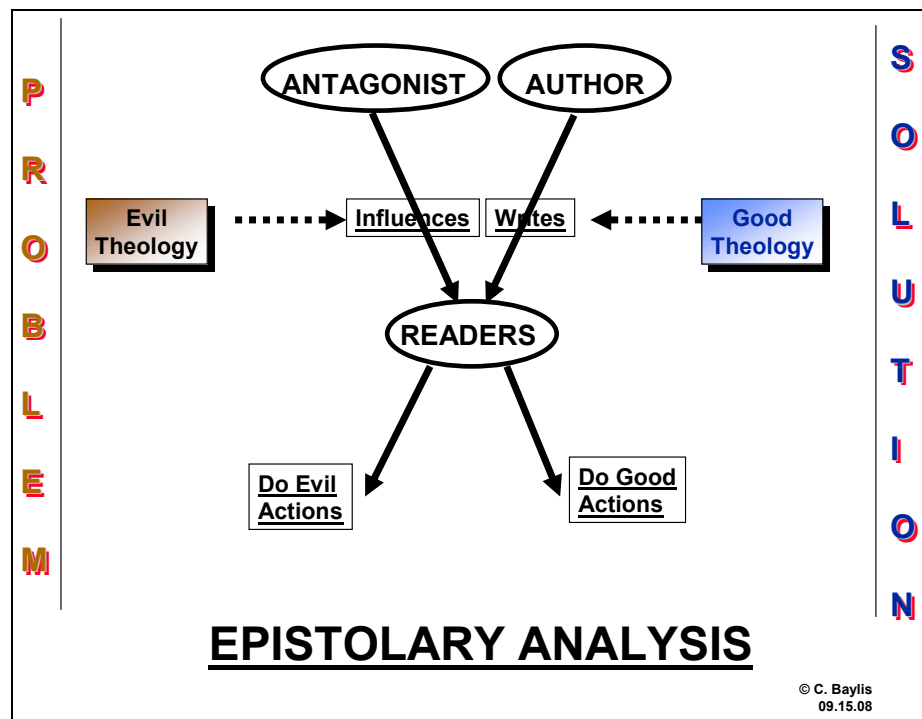
As one can see, the problem of the epistle is listed on the left side of the chart (evil theology driving evil actions) and the author's solution is on the right side of the chart (good theology driving good actions). Thus, this visualization and objective categorizing of the words of the epistle helps the reader to sort out what is going on. In addition, this helps the reader to reject his interpretations that do not fit on this chart since this chart is the problem and solution of the epistle[24]. To have something that does not fit, very simply, indicates that it is out of the context of the epistle. Since the epistle is a

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[24] At this point it must be emphasized that the chart is determined by the words of the epistle by the interpreter and is not forced on the epistle. Thus, the interpreter gains information and places it in its appropriate place and determines from that the problem and solution.

problem solving solution, to have something apart from that indicates that the reader has come up with something not germane to the purpose of the epistle and is likely wrong.[25]

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[25] The student may ask here if it is possible that there could be something not germane to the argument. The answer is that it is possible, but very unlikely. And if it was possible, the interpreter would have no way of knowing that since it would be given apart from the oontext. Since the context is the only way the interpreter has of validating his reasoning, he would be left to wondering of what the author was speaking.

PART C

OBJECTIVELY DETERMINING THE MEANING AND APPLICATION

EPISTOLARY ANALYSIS
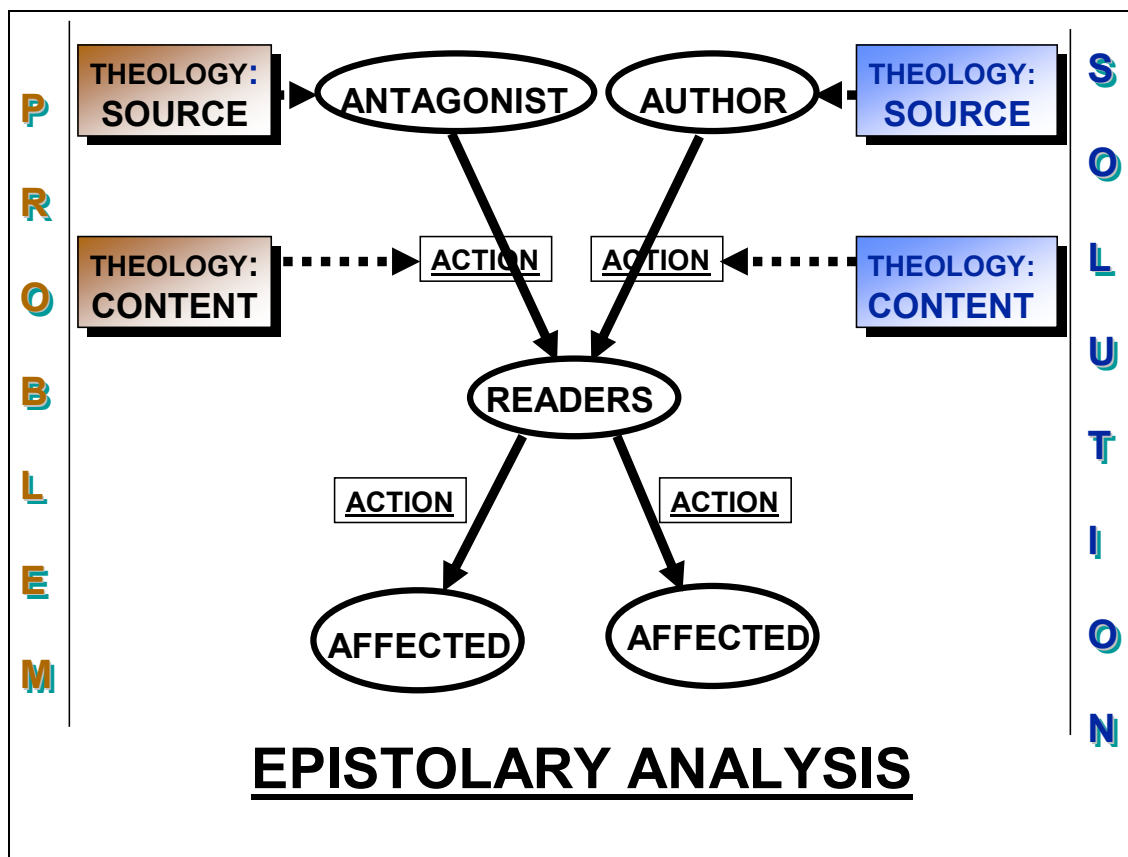
Epistolary Categories:

The Epistle must be objectively broken down into the author's categories. This is not an interpretive process requiring a judgment by the reader. These are very specific categories revealed in the text and able to be precisely determined. These will go into two areas; physical and philosophical (theological).

Observable Physical Categories

There are physical people and physical activities that occur in any church. These are historically identifiable by observation of the text.[26] There are certain

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[26] There are two things to note here. First of all, the categories are derived *from* the text and are not forced into the text. The second, which comes from the first, is that not all categories may occur in every epistle. That must be determined from the text alone.

people/activities that, if possible[27], should be identified in each epistle in order to solve the problem. These are the following:

Characters

These characters are those in the historical church or related to it in the historical situation.[28]

Antagonist(s): These are the people who are acting to affect the reader(s) for evil. They contradict the author.

Author: This is the writer of the letter. He is acting to contradict the antagonist and affect the readers for good.

Reader(s): These are the person(s) whom the antagonists are acting to affect for evil. The author is seeking to convince these person(s) the antagonists are wrong. These will always be the ones addressed by imperatives or the pronoun 'you'.

Affected: These are the people who will be affected if the readers do what the antagonists want them to do. These same people will be affected for good if the readers listen to the author. These could include the antagonist(s), brothers in the church, outsiders, the reader(s) themselves, or the author.

Physical Actions

There are physical activities going on ***between*** characters. The antagonist and the author are acting toward the reader, while the reader will do some resultant activity which will affect someone. The author, as well, is acting toward the reader encouraging him to act in some physical way that will affect someone.

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[27] Note that all categories may not occur in the epistle, and thus may not be used.

[28] One must be careful here to use only the characters that directly and historically affect the reader. For instance, there may be some mention of characters that are used for illustrative purposes and are not included on the direct historical analysis (e.g., Jannes and Jambres in 1 Timothy). Note that there are some characters who are not necessarily physical who do enter into, are affect those in the physical realm and may be included on the chart in some related form (but not as any of the above four; e.g., Satan, demons, angels).
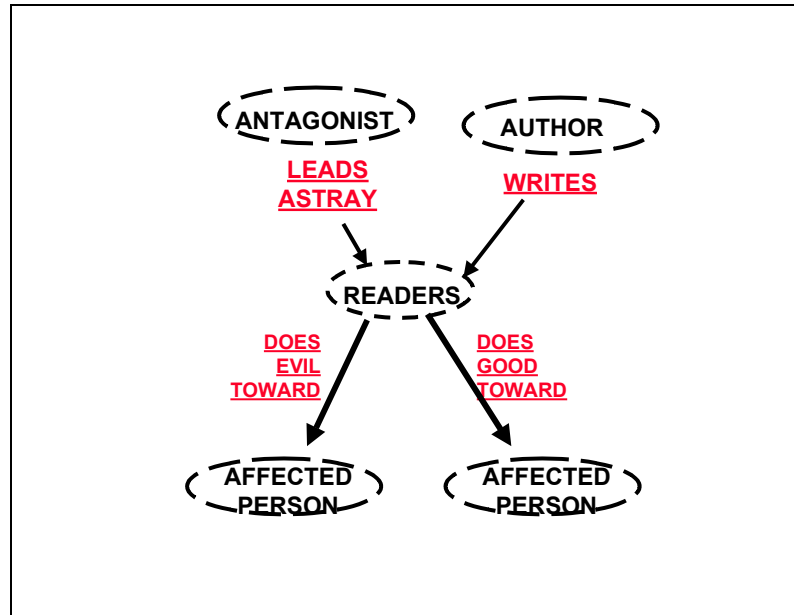
Evil Actions (the Problem)

The antagonist will act (usually in some deceptive way) toward the reader to get him to do some evil towards himself or others. In the Book of 1 Timothy, this will be the false teachers deceiving Timothy into pursuing the pleasures (e.g., riches) of the world as opposed to following the apostolic gospel of Paul and the resultant suffering.
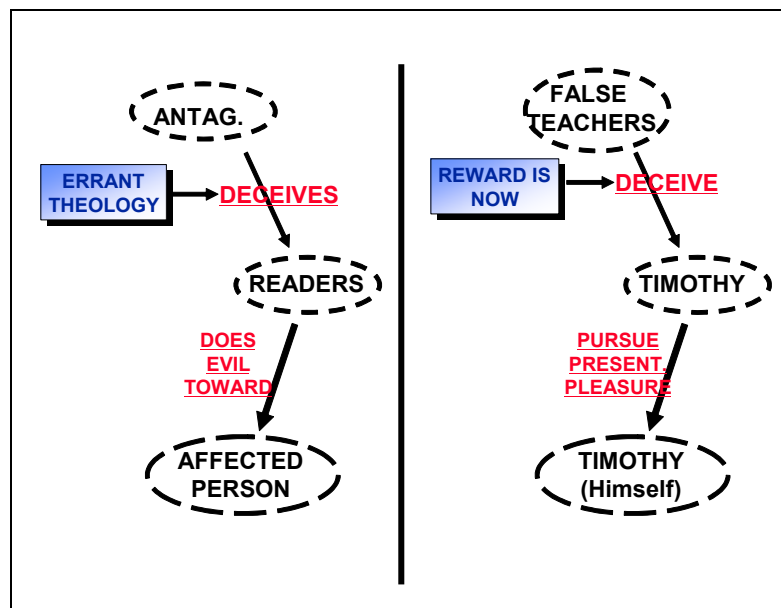
Antagonists' *physical action toward* **Readers:**

The antagonists are ***doing something*** to influence the readers. This could[29] result in causing the readers to consider evil.

>   Examples: ***luring*** into immorality *(Jude)*
>   ***persecuting*** physically *(Hebrews)*

Readers' *physical action toward* **Affected (a result of the Antagonist action)**

The readers ***are doing*** (have done, will do) something evil if they are convinced by the antagonist's actions/theology. This activity could affect various people including themselves, antagonists, brothers, outsiders and/or the author. ***Note: All the warnings will be in this category.*** Warnings are negative imperatives (e.g., Don't do something). The author is using these warnings to keep them from doing negative behavior inspired by the antagonist.

>   Examples: ***Self:***   ***Fornicate*** (Jude)
>   ***Church:***   ***Create doubt*** *(Heb.)*

Good Actions: (The Solution)

This will be the author acting toward (usually writing to convince) the reader and the reader responding in some good action toward another. In 1 Timothy Paul is writing Timothy to endure suffering for the gospel and others for the sake of his own reward at the Second Coming of Christ.

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[29] The word here "could" actually could have occurred (past), be occurring (present) or might occur (future).
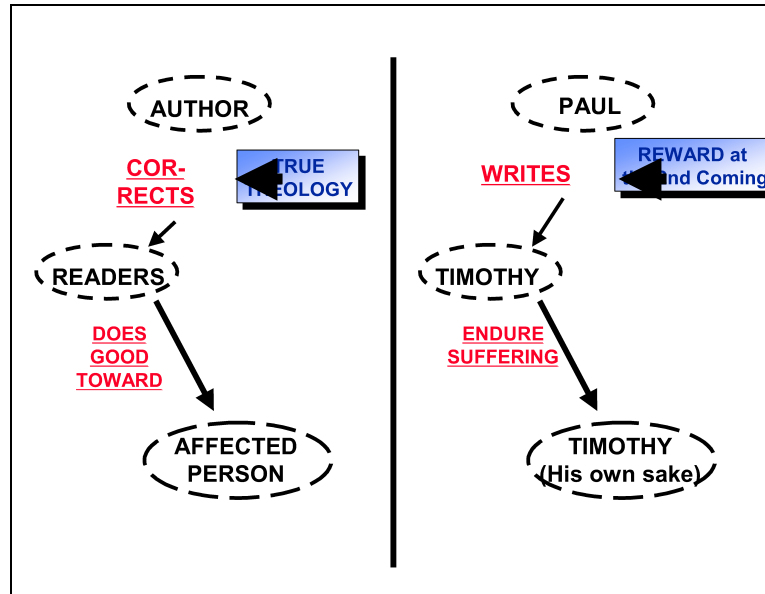
Author's *physical action toward* Readers:

The author ***is doing*** something. These are ***physical activities*** which he is doing.   This is causing the readers to consider good. Normally the activity is to write them, but also includes the reason for writing such as encouraging, reminding, rebuking them.

Examples: ***writing to remind*** of apostolic doctrine *(Jude.)*
writing to explain *(Heb.)*

Reader's *physical action toward* Affected:

The readers ***are doing*** (have done, will do) something good if the author is able to affect them for good. This activity may affect various people including, antagonists, brothers, themselves, outsiders and/or the author. ***(Note: All the imperatives in the book will normally go into this category).***

Examples: ***Self:***   ***Live pure*** *(Jude)*
Church: ***Encourage*** *(Heb.)*

Theological Categories

All the physical activities of the reader will be justified by *theology*. Thus it is necessary to determine the theological categories. There will be a theology of the antagonist, a false teaching as well as an opposite theology of the author.

Problem Theology

The antagonist (if identified) will be promoting a false theology, a philosophy to which he adheres.

Theology: *Source* of the problem theology

One always has a *source* for their theological information. Normally the antagonists use some form of natural observation of the physical realm or a humanistic (self-serving) interpretation of the Old Testament. They reject apostolic revelation and/or proper Old Testament contextual interpretation.

THEOLOGY: SOURCE		Dreams, Instincts, Natural Lusts

Examples: *Natural observation, i.e., dreams, instincts, lusts* (Jude)
Errant (Self-serving) View of Old Testament (Heb.)

Theology*: Content* of their proposed truth (the philosophy itself)

From the source the antagonist derives his theological *doctrines*. These *doctrines* are the ones that he passes to the readers that he feels will justify the resulting evil activities. These *doctrines* will be repeated in some fashion throughout the book but will *always* be focused in one central doctrine.

THEOLOGY: SOURCE		Dreams, Lusts, Visions

THEOLOGY: CONTENT		Natural Desires Are Right

Illustration: *Natural desires are right* (Jude)
Israel is only means of blessing (Heb.)

Solution Theology

The author now proposes a solution based on his correct, true theology

Theology: Source

One always has a **source** for his theological information. Normally the author uses **apostolic** revelation (which often is his own) and/or proper **Old Testament** contextual interpretation. This may be assumed (i.e., he assumes an acceptance of it and does not try to justify his source), or there may be a defense for it. In the case of an apostolic writing there will almost always be a defense of apostleship as part of the theology.

THEOLOGY: SOURCE		Apostles, Old Testament

Examples: *Apostolic Reference / Old Testament* (Jude)
Apostolic (Reference) /Old Testament (Heb.)

Theology: Content

From the source the author gains his theological doctrines. These are the ones which will justify all the activities taking place. These doctrines will be repeated in some fashion throughout the book but will **always** will be centered in one central doctrine.

THEOLOGY: SOURCE		Apostles, Old Testament

THEOLOGY:
CONTENT

2nd Coming to judge
those following lusts,
Escape through
Atonement

Examples: ***Surety of 2nd Coming to judge ungodly*** *(Jude)*
              Jesus is means of blessing to Israel *(Heb.)*

Notes:

1. All persons/activities may not be present (or named specifically) in the letter.
2. There may be more than one person in each category.
3. The chart is determined from the epistle itself. Thus the categories may be applied only as they are the author's categories from the evidence of the text. Character categories may be added as directed by the categories and relationships that come from the epistle.
4. The theology needs to be as specific as possible until there is a clear and precise contrast between the antagonist and the author. For instance, often the antagonist and the author will share much of their theology, but will differ on specific points. This then will be the thrust of the epistle. Thus if the theology is not specific enough, the motivation for the imperatives will be too general. For instance, in Galatians the antagonists and Paul share the means of salvation (through Christ) but differ on sanctification (through the Law or through Christ). The theology must be specific enough to motivate the reader to do the specific imperatives based on clearly contrasting theology.
5. The temptation to use other Biblical books to supplement the analysis of the text must be resisted, as the literary study of a book is a complete unit without additional input, unless the author utilizes the knowledge of other texts by reference (such as the Old Testament). Remember when most epistles were delivered to churches they were the only New Testament books that they had (although the Old Testament could be assumed to be known or available.). Assuming other inputs such as information contemporary with the author is always subject to one's view of history and one's understanding of historical contemporary information and thus low on the validation scale. However, it is important to note that there is a theology that can be derived from the books place in the Biblical story (e.g., post-resurrection impact as the indwelling Spirit, the new life, etc.). Although one must again be careful to use the author's allusions to those concepts.
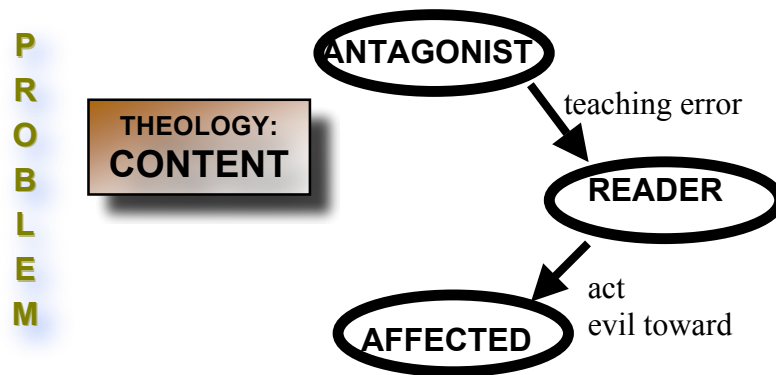
PART D

SUMMARIZING THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION (GOAL)

The Problem

Once having identified the items of part #2 within the letter itself, the **problem** becomes clearly identifiable. The problem is simply the theological and physical activities which the *antagonists* are doing to the *reader* who is in turn doing things to the *affected.*

The Problem: This is the combination of the antagonist(s) teaching his errant theology to the reader, who in turn will embrace that theology and perform certain sinful acts as a result.

P
R
O   THEOLOGY: ANTAGONIST
B   **CONTENT**   ↘ teaching error
L   READER
E   ↘ act
M   AFFECTED   evil toward

The Solution (Goal)

Once having identified the items of part #2 within the letter itself, the **solution** becomes clearly identifiable. The solution is simply the theological and physical activities which the *author* is doing to the *reader* who is in turn doing things to the *affected.*

The Solution: This is the combination of the author teaching his theology to the reader, who in turn will embrace that theology and perform certain good (Godly) acts as a result.

AUTHOR

↙ writes   THEOLOGY:
                         CONTENT

S
O
L
U
T

do good toward
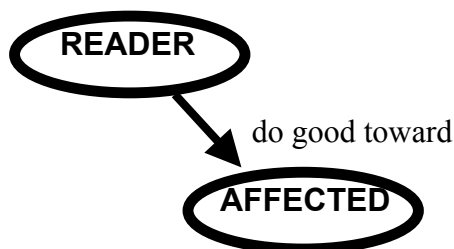
The Application (Historical & Present Day)

The physical action (activity) which the reader is to accomplish with regard to the affected is the physical *application*. Virtually every activity which the author urges the reader to do will fall under this category. In other words, in breaking up the book, one should list the ***"imperatives" or "instructions"*** under this category. This will be the "historical application."

Historical application is the same as the Physical Activity between the Reader and Affected in the solution.

Present day application is the same as the historical application, except brought up to date (i.e., change names, dates to present names and dates). The reason that this is so easy in epistolary literature is that the present day reader shares the same theological basis (being in the church age as a member of the church) that the historical reader did. However, note that some things cannot be duplicated since they have passed historically not to appear again. Thus, "pray for Paul" cannot be duplicated in the same way as historically. But praying for the spread of Paul's gospel and for those who take the apostolic message would be a modern update to what specifically cannot recur (apostolic presence).

Specific Implementation is methodology by which the audience of the present day speaker may accomplish the *present day application.* It is important to note that this methodology is normally not to be construed as God's word as it may vary from age to age from culture to culture and from person to person.[30] It is not to be established by the

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[30] In the things discussed by the interpreter it is only here that things may become non-normative. And thus, this is not God's word, but is a wise perception by the interpreter. This is where the wisdom of wise men can contribute the most to one's actions (apart from guarding the proper textual interpretation). For instance, one may wonder whether to attend seminary to study the Bible or to study through a workbook. There is no textual validation preferring one choice over another, and thus an elder's wisdom is important to evaluate one's gifts, desires, history, etc. in aiding the determination of a proper specific implementation.

speaker as 'thus saith the Lord', since it is reader perceived as a *possible* means by which the application (which is God's word since it was established by the text) may be accomplished.

Examples of this would be:

Historical Application: The church at Thessalonica should support Paul's gospel so that they might minister faithfully against pagan opposition.

Present day application: A church should continue to faithfully preach and teach the scriptures against pagan opposition.

Specific implementation: Establish a Bible Study on Tuesday night, optional for members, but required for Bible Teachers[31] so that the church will be able to enlarge its capacity to teach and preach the apostolic gospel.

Note: When constructing a sermon from a letter, the theological message (theology) of the present-day speaker should be the same as the historical message (theology) which the historical author wanted the reader to perceive. The speaker's audience should be urged to believe in the same theological principle, and take the same or similar physical action (based on adaptation to the current church situation in light of the common theology. When this is completed, the expositor should determine some very specific examples of actions which the audience should take to put into action the theologically based application.
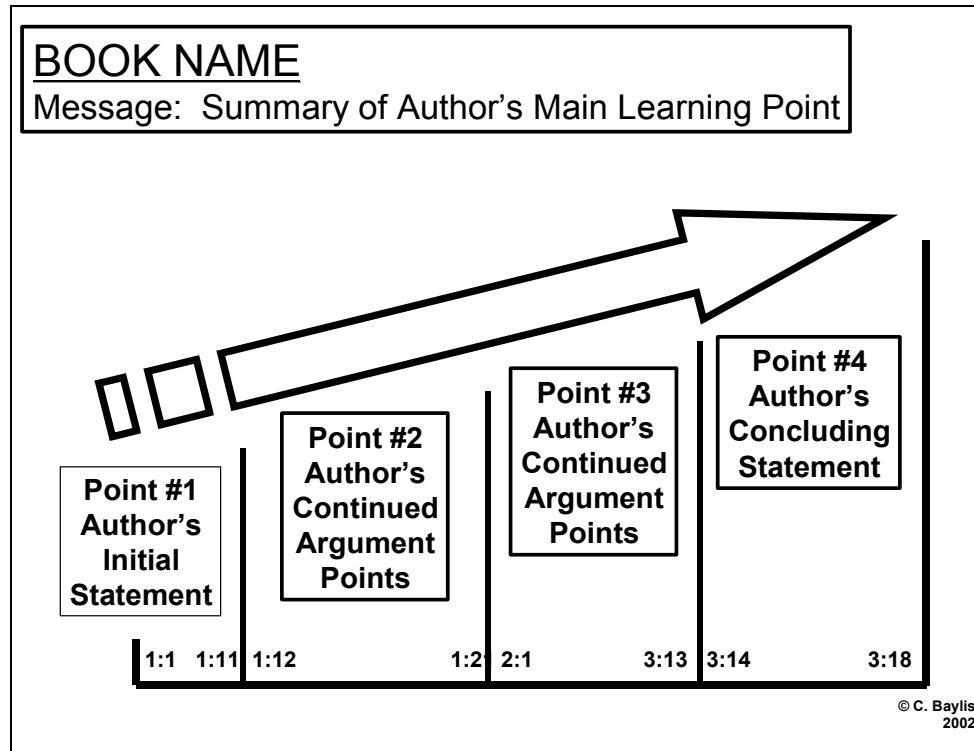
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[31] Note that the example used here may implement the gospel well in some situations. At other times it might be an extravagant use of money, or Tuesday Night might conflict with multiple schedules. Thus, the methodology is not the word of God. The reader must determine, prayerfully, based on many wise inputs that he is seeking to implement the Biblical application. Thus, building programs, group sizes, teaching methods, song books versus overhead projectors, should never be taken as the word of God, but are imperfect methodologies used by imperfect people to carry forth the perfect word of God. However, note also that there are times when the Bible *does* indicate methodology (i.e., The Lord's Supper, Baptism), and these imperatives are not subject to cultural adaptation.

PART E

THE SYNTHETIC CHART SHOWING THE ARGUMENT

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BOOK NAME
Message:  Summary of Author's Main Learning Point
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Point #1
Author's
Initial
Statement

Point #2
Author's
Continued
Argument
Points

Point #3
Author's
Continued
Argument
Points

Point #4
Author's
Concluding
Statement

1:1   1:11 1:12   1:2 2:1   3:13 3:14   3:18

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The Argument (synthesis)

In Epistolary Literature, as with most other literature, the author has a point to make with his writing. This point is his reasoning to the reader, or what is called 'an argument' or 'message'. The point is developed through an arrangement of his sub-points. These sub-points not only contain individual reasoning, but are arranged so as to come to a conclusion at the end of the piece.

The Arrangement of the Argument

This movement may be charted on what is known as a 'synthetic chart'. This is the contextual argument of the book showing the separate points of the author's message, arranged in order from introduction (initial statement) to a conclusion (concluding statement). Frequently in epistolary literature, the introductory point is a greeting which contains an overview of the reasoning he is about to make. The conclusion is frequently a closing greeting which usually includes some concluding applications for the reader.

The Goal of the Argument

The goal of any author's piece is to implement a change in the activity of the reader. Thus at the conclusion of the reading the reader should take some action. The action required by the author is the same as the imperatives given within the text. *Thus the application of Epistolary Literature is identical to the imperatives.*

The Necessity of Understanding Argument for Correct Interpretation

It is very important to understand that the synthesis (or argument) is an understanding of the author's contextual work and is what the reader needs to understand to do proper interpretation. Without this understanding (not only of content but of order) the reader will read individual statements without benefit of context and will necessarily incur a certain amount of error.

PART F

DETERMINING APPLICATION FROM THE HISTORICAL EPISTLE

All the Biblical Epistles are historical letters written to historical people. On the face of it, like a personal letter written to a church or person today, there would be no applicability except for the addressed. Yet, historically, the letters written were circulated and became applicable generally to other churches. Yet, it is clear that not all is to be applied in the same way. Paul's imperative to Titus to come to him at Nicopolis cannot be transferred to anyone. Yet Paul's imperative to Titus to teach seems to be more broadly applicable. The difficulty with perceiving the correct applicability so as not to violate the intent of the author and preserve God's word is apparent. The previous applications seem correct because the seem correct. In other words, the typical interpreter would aver that he knows inherently what is applicable and what is not. But there is no such thing as inherent as it is derived from knowledge gained from experience and other areas. But it is not derived from the text and this is the problem.
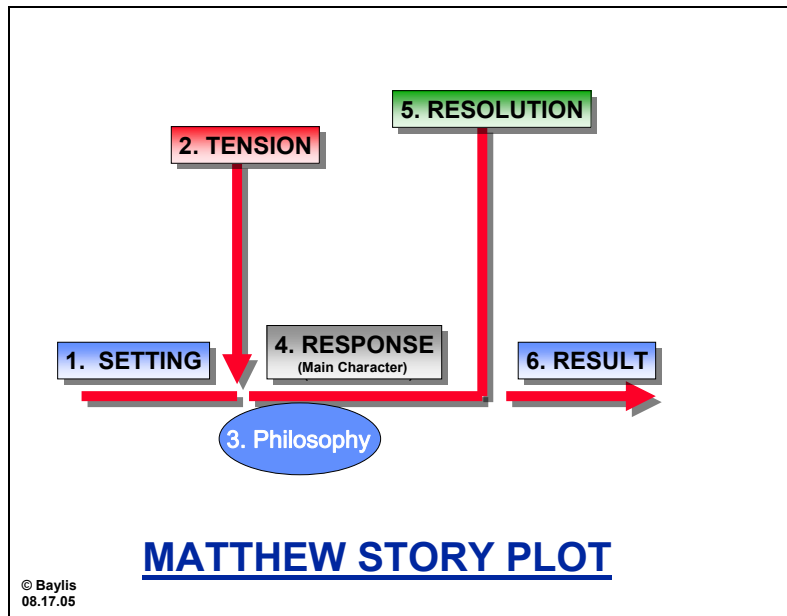
Titus was told to

- choose elders
- teach the older women to teach the younger women
- to come to Nicopolis

The question is, which ones of the above are applicable to those in the church today?

The Epistle as a Story

In story there is typically a setting, philosophy, tension, response to the tension, validation and results.

MATTHEW STORY PLOT

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Setting: The situation and the main characters (protagonist and antagonist) introduced.
Tension: The problem which upsets the protagonist and the setting
Philosophy: The reasoning basis of the protagonist to deal with the problem in order to achieve success (eliminate the problem).
Response: The action that the protagonist takes to eliminate the problem based on his philosophy.
Validation: The event or pronouncement by the author that determines that the protagonist has successfully eliminated the tension and is victorious.
Results: The denouement, or the tying up of everything, as a result of the success of the protagonist.

The epistle is a true representation of a historical story. The author will give the reader some of the elements of this story, but not necessarily all of the elements. But all epistles will give the reader a survey of the problem that has occurred in the church or to the person to whom the letter is addressed. The letter then is primarily the philosophy (theology) in order to get the church or person to respond to the tension correctly. The validation and results are yet in the future; that is the Second Coming of Christ to establish the Kingdom is the final validation of the theology and the results are the Kingdom enjoyment itself. Thus the reader of the epistle will act based on the theology of the Apostle (or writer).

Just as in story, the philosophy is the part of the story that transcends the historical events. In other words, the contemporary reader cannot duplicate the events of the epistle (or story). He can only surmise the philosophy and utilize that in his own case, in his own day. This is the point of novels, movies, etc. While the reader/watcher cannot duplicate the situation, he can derive a philosophy that allows the protagonist to be victorious and adapt that philosophy for himself.

Thus, in an epistle it is not the imperatives that the contemporary reader should adopt, which is typically the case. In other words, most imperatives are typically brought to bear for the reader except those which he inherently rejects as not applicable. But the point is that no imperatives should be adapted as none of them can be duplicated since they are all historical. In other words, "husbands love your wives" is definitively for Ephesian husbands and no one else. It is no different than Paul's request in the same letter to pray on his behalf. The reader has no right to apply them to himself, since he is looking over the shoulder of the Ephesians and reading their mail.

So, one must adapt the related philosophy/theology of the author since that is the commonality between the historical reader and the contemporary reader since that is the foundation of what the author wanted to communicate. Then, having made that concrete determination the interpreter may measure the historical imperatives (e.g., "husbands love your (Ephesian) wives"), and modify them for the contemporary situation based on the common theology ("as Christ loved the church" as a picture of one's marriage theologically).