

# THE RHETORICAL STRUCTURE OF 2 TIMOTHY

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These notes were originally written as a letter on 2 Timothy in preparation for a preaching workshop on 2 Timothy.

It is probably easiest to start with a short glossary of rhetorical terms used in the **arrangement** part of ancient rhetorical method (the term for finding arrangement or structure is *dispositio*). If you want to explore a few of the ancient sources on this, see [Cicero] *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (especially book 1), Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (especially book 3), Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (especially books 4-5), and Cicero's *De Inventione* (especially book 1). Unless otherwise cited, the structure and definitions come from [Cicero] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, which sets out the typical structure (or arrangement) for discourse as:

1. *exordium* (including *prooimion* and *epodos*)
2. *narratio*  
    [*propositio*]
3. *partitio*
4. *confirmatio*
5. *refutatio*  
    [*peroratio*]
6. *conclusio*

Note: Quintilian adds to this general structure a *propositio* after the *narratio*. The *peroratio* is generally viewed as interchangeable with the *conclusio* (see notes below).

## Glossary

*dispositio*: this refers to how an orator would arrange his speech and in English is usually called arrangement – it is one of a few different aspects of rhetoric (which include the genre of rhetoric, topics to be discussed, style)

*exordium*: this is a kind of introduction – usually it does not include the main arguments, but rather ‘prepares’ the listener for the arguments to come – as such, it makes use of ‘*ethos*’ and will frequently include a defense of the speaker’s authority (cf. Paul’s general practice of referring to himself as ‘Apostle’ in the opening line of his letters) [RaH 1.4.6-1.7.11]

*narratio*: this is a narrative statement of facts that explains the nature of the argument – generally it is used to establish common ground or commonly understood facts/conditions [RaH 1.8.11-1.9.16]

*propositio*: this is a concise statement or summary of the coming arguments (see Quintilian 4.4)

*partitio*: this is a kind of summary point that brings to a close what is agreed upon and sets out what is contested (hence Quintilian says it is blended with *propositio*) – it usually includes a kind of outline (and may even include a statement about how many points will follow...[Cicero] is adamant that it is not more than three) [RaH 1.10.17]

*confirmatio*: this is the main body of the discourse, usually consisting of arguments (or proofs) and corroborating statements – it is characterized by an appeal to ‘logos’ [RaH 1.10.18ff, cf. Quintilian 5.1-12]

*refutatio*: this generally consists of counterarguments to expected points of contention with one’s opponents (importantly, [Cicero] seems to blend this with *confirmation*, as do other ancient rhetoricians) [RaH 1.10.18ff, cf. Quintilian 5.13]

*peroratio*: this is a conclusion of the discourse, including a summary of the arguments and employing ‘*pathos*’ – as such, it will generally be linguistically close to the *propositio* [see *De Inventione* 1.52-56] – possibly important here is the fact that [Cicero] and Cicero do not use the word ‘*peroratio*’ but uses conclusion (*conclusio* or *conclusionem*), possibly suggesting a distinction between a *peroratio* (summary of the argument) and the conclusion (which may be wider in scope and more general, possibly including practical concerns and/or seemingly unrelated statements meant to stir up the crowd...something like when Cato the Elder ends every speech with ‘and Carthage must be destroyed’...something like if you were to end every sermon with ‘and may the White Sox win!’) – Cicero divides the conclusion into three parts, which may also help explain the distinction in vocabulary – either way, the *peroratio* and *conclusio* will include a shift in language and tone from the *confirmatio*

*conclusio*: this is full the conclusion of the discourse (see note on *peroratio* for additional notes)

*ethos*: this an appeal to one’s character or authority, generally trying to show how one is knowledgeable and/or benevolent [Aristotle 1.2.4, 2.1, 2.12-17]

*logos*: this is an appeal to reason, rational argumentation, or logic [Aristotle 1.2.6, 2.18-26]

*pathos*: this is an appeal to the emotions of one’s listeners [Aristotle 1.2.5, 2.1.8, 2.2-11]

## 2 TIMOTHY

I do not know of any commentaries that have done a rhetorical analysis of 2 Timothy in the style of H.D. Betz (i.e., the *Hermeneia* volume on the Pastorals predates Betz on Galatians). Ben Witherington has done a socio-rhetorical analysis that, based on looking at his table of contents, agrees in part with what is proposed here. The major differences are on the parameters of the *propositio* (these parameters are drawn from parallel language with the *peroratio*) and the number and content of the arguments. He also does not seem to distinguish between the proof and corroborative statements in the *confirmatio* (nor does he appear to use the term *confirmatio*). In general, it is worth noting that these notes do not interact with his text on 2 Timothy at all. So, he may have good reasons for his structure.

### BEGINNING AND END OF 2 TIMOTHY

1:1-2	epistolary prescript ( <i>exordium</i> )
1:3-5	thanksgiving prayer ( <i>narratio</i> )
4:9-18	travel instructions ( <i>conclusio</i> )

4:19-22          benediction (*conclusio*)

Notes: These are normal epistolary forms and fairly standard across the Pauline corpus. The variations across the Pauline corpus generally include a clue as to the circumstances or melodic line of the book (e.g., the lack of thanksgiving in Galatians—in this case, the inclusion of “*the promise of life*” is suggestive). If we treat the body of the letter in terms of the most basic rhetorical structure, then the epistolary prescript, thanksgiving prayer, travel instructions, and benediction are Pauline additions to the form. It is conceivable, however, that the first two function in the role of an *exordium* and a *narratio* in rhetorical discourse, as the rest of the letter follows standard rhetorical structure. This is not necessary for the rest of the structure to hold.

The final two (travel and benediction) are also fairly standard for contemporary epistolary forms. In other words, Paul tailors the language of these parts to suit its overall purposes. And again, they may function rhetorically as a *conclusio*. Again, classifying the travel instructions and benediction this way is strictly not necessary for the rhetorical structure of the body to hold.

#### MAIN BODY OF 2 TIMOTHY

Here is my proposed rhetorical structure. Please note: the letter is structured around the imperatives as exhortations with corroborating text (foundational, Paul as model) generally following (with exceptions).

1:1-2	<i>Exordium</i>
1:3-5	<i>Narratio</i>
1:6-12	<i>Propositio</i>
1:13-3:17	<i>Confirmatio</i> (possibly including elements of <i>refutatio</i> )

Verse	Argument	Text	Imperative
<b>Proof 1</b>			
1:13	P1.1	Hold to the pattern of sound teaching...	present
1:14	P1.2	Guard the good deposit...	aorist
1:15-18C		...corroboration for P1.1-2	

Notes: Allegiance is to the Word...live by it, protect it (like a soldier does, hence ‘guard language)... type (pattern = type/example, cf. 1 Tim 1:16)

<b>Proof 2</b>			
2:1	P2.1	Be strong in grace...	pres/aor
2:2	P2.2	Entrust to faithful men...	aorist
2:3	P2.3	Share in suffering...	aorist
2:4-6	C	...corroboration for P2.3	
2:7	P2.4	Think over what I have said...	present

Notes: (Hard) Life in service of the Gospel - like joining the military...there is a way it works...v.1 is purely transitional, v.2 anticipates 2:14-19, notice that the primary image is the soldier (which really starts with the 'enlist reinforcements' idea in verse 2) and is heightened by the renewed exhortation to "share in suffering" in verse 3 - these images reappear in 4:5-8

**Proof 3**

2:8	P3.1	Remember Jesus Christ (death/resurrection)	present
2:9-13	C	...corroboration for P3.1	

Notes: The gospel is the foundation for both the suffering and the endurance...note the reference to themes of "life" and "death"

**Proof 4**

2:14	P4.1	Remind them of this...(referring to above)	present
2:15	P4.2	Do your best to present yourself...	aorist
2:16	P4.3	Avoid profane chatter...	present
2:17-19	C	...corroboration for P4.3	

Notes: Why this task is worth pursuing...you serve a greater one (Jesus) and you serve the elect...motivation, notice increase in themes of 'truth' and 'Word-centricity' which are maintained in remaining passages

**Proof 5**

2:20-21	C	...corroboration for P5.1-2	
2:22	P5.1	Flee youthful passions...	present
2:22	P5.2	Pursue righteousness...	present
2:23	P5.3	Refuse controversies...	present
2:24-26	C	...corroboration for P5.3	
3:1	P5.4	Know this...	present
3:2-4	C	...corroboration for P5.4	
3:5	P5.5	Avoid them!	present
3:6-9	C	...corroboration for P5.5	

Notes: Be careful when you are doing it...there is a right way and a wrong of going about this task (don't get sidetracked by controversies)...notice the opening (governing) metaphor is a house and the first complaint against the hopeless opponents is 'creeping into households' (notice also the two uses of 'captive' holding the passage together), primary issue is how Timothy (as good vessel) relates to false teachers who might repent (vessels to be cleaned) and false teachers who will continue to lead people astray (vessels which will never be cleaned), so three vessels

**Proof 6**

3:10-13	C	...corroboration for P6.1	
3:14	P6.1	Learn...	aorist
3:15-17	C	...additional corroboration for P6.2	

Issue is continuing in what has been learned as the thing that will enable withstanding (enduring through) persecution...hence utility of Scriptures (notice how the usefulness of Scripture uses the same language introduced in 2:20-25)

4:1-8            *Peroratio*

4:9-22          *Conclusio*

### Notes on *Propositio* and *Peroratio*

The placement of the first text (1:6-12) and the vocabulary suggest it is functioning as one would expect a *propositio* to function (introducing the main point and the arguments to be made). Notice, in particular, the vocabulary:

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power (δύναμις, cf. 3:5) and **love** (ἀγάπη, cf. 1:13, 2:22, 3:10) and self-control. Therefore do not be ashamed (ἐπαισχύνομαι, cf. 1:12, 1:16) of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, **but share in suffering** (συγκακοπαθέω, cf. 2 Timothy 2:3, 2:9, 4:5) for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us (σώζω, cf. 4:18) and called us to a holy calling, not because of **our works** (ἔργον, cf. 2:21, 3:17, 4:5) but because of his own purpose (πρόθεσις, cf. 3:10) and grace (χάρις, cf. 2:1), which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began (αἰώνιος, cf. 2:10), and which now has been manifested through **the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus** (ἐπιφάνεια, cf. 4:1, 4:8), who abolished **death** (θάνατος, cf. νεκρός in 4:1) and brought **life** (ζωή, cf. 4:1) and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a **preacher** (κῆρυξ, cf. 4:2) and apostle and **teacher** (διδάσκαλος, cf. 2:2 4:2, 4:3), which is why **I suffer** (πάσχω, cf. κακοπαθέω in 2:9, 4:5) as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know (οἶδα, cf. 3:14, 3:15) whom **I have believed** (πιστεύω, cf. 4:7), and I am convinced that he is able to guard (φυλάσσω, cf. 1:14) until **that Day** (ἡμέρα, cf. 1:18, 3:1) what has been entrusted (παραθήκη, cf. 1:14) to me.

The similarities in language with 4:1-8 suggest that the later passage is functioning rhetorically as the *peroratio*. The later passage also includes a noticeable shift in tone (highly elevated) and style, as you would expect with a *peroratio*. Notice the similarities in language with the *propositio* (bold):

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the **living** and the **dead**, and **by his appearing** and his kingdom: **preach** the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience (μακροθυμία, cf. 3:10) and **teaching**. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound (ὕγιαίνω, cf. 1:13) **teaching**, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves **teachers** to suit their own passions (ἐπιθυμία, cf. 2:22, 3:6), and will turn away (ἀποστρέφω, cf. 1:15) from listening to the truth (ἀλήθεια, cf. 2:15, 2:18, 2:25, 3:7, 3:8) and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, **endure suffering** (κακοπαθέω, cf. 2:9), do **the work** of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (διακονία, cf. 4:11). For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time (καιρός, tied

to 'the last days' in 3:1) of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight (cf. 2:3-4), I have finished the race (cf. 2:5, I have kept **the faith** (cf. 2:6?). Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness (δικαιοσύνη, cf. 2:22, 3:16), which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on **that Day**, and not only to me but also to all who have loved **his appearing**.

As such, I think there are two important arguments to be made. First, the passages are sufficiently similar (especially when you get to the level of tracing the arc of the personal pronouns and the relationship of the grammatical subjects to the similar verbs) as to indicate that they are functioning rhetorically as the *propositio* and the *peroratio*. Second, I think that from these two passages, you have an adequate summary of the whole book. That is, the vocabulary in 1:6-12 sufficiently launches the bulk of the arguments and 4:1-8 provides a direct connection and thematic conclusion to almost every other rhetorical unit in the text, functioning as a *peroratio* ought.