A MORAL DILEMMA?
THE EPISTOLARY BODY OF 2 TIMOTHY

Cynthia Long Westfall
McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON, Canada

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the body of the Greco-Roman letter in order to add to our understanding of epistolary theory in biblical studies. My preferred methodology for analyzing biblical texts has been discourse analysis, with a specialized interest in the relationship between the structure and content. Discourse analysis should be able to successfully integrate insights from other disciplines, so that an analysis could be enhanced by epistolary theory. However, the analysis of the body of the letter has been underdeveloped in epistolary theory in favor of the analysis of the letter opening and letter closing. This is primarily because the body of the letter is characterized by variety. As John White states, “The body offers more variety because it is the means whereby the occasion for writing unfolds and is, therefore, necessarily more personal and less stereotyped.”1 Perhaps epistolary analysis of the body of the letter could be enhanced by discourse analysis.

I have chosen to analyze the body of 2 Timothy because of its suitability for epistolary analysis: it arguably contains some of the most typical qualities of the Greco-Roman personal letter of all the epistles in the Pauline corpus with the possible exception of Philemon. On the other hand, it may seem to be unsuitable for several reasons. It belongs to the disputed deuto-Pauline corpus as it is classified as one of the so-called Pastoral Epistles. It is therefore considered to be a fictional letter by the majority of biblical scholars. It is often omitted or neglected in studies on the Pauline corpus, and overlooked in studies on the Pastoral Epistles because it is overshadowed by 1 Timothy and

Titus. Also, 2 Timothy is problematic because it is common to classify it as a literary letter intended for a large audience, even though it has the stereotypical features of a personal letter. Finally, in this volume and many other studies of the Pauline letter, exhortation is treated as a separate category from the letter body. However, the formal features of Greco-Roman parenetic letters demonstrate that exhortation is not invariably separate from the body in the structure of the letter. Luke Timothy Johnson has suggested that 2 Timothy is a moral exhortation, which appears to be substantiated by the pattern of the commands in the body of the letter. An epistolary analysis informed by discourse analysis of the body of 2 Timothy could be further enhanced by exploring an association with the register of moral exhortation. All in all, 2 Timothy is an intriguing subject for the body of the letter in light of both its suitability and its problematic features.

Epistolary theory in Greco-Roman antiquity is based on a few epistolary handbooks that have survived, some rhetoricians (though it was not originally part of their theoretical system), and orators such as Cic-